The IVP Bible Background COMMENTARY

Old Testament

An indispensable resource for all students of the Bible, accessibly providing the cultural background of every passage in the Old Testament

JOHN H. WALTON
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MARK W. CHAVALAS

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Preface

This book is an attempt to fill a particular niche in the vast field of one volume commentaries on the Bible. Rather than addressing all the varied elements of theology, literary structure, word meanings, history of scholarship, and so on, we have focused on the task of providing background information to the text.

Some might wonder what significance background information has for the interpretation of the text. What is it that we might expect to gain from knowing what this commentary seeks to make available? It has been rightly observed that the theological message of the Bible is not dependent on knowing where the places are or what the cultural background was. It is also correct to observe that one could gather all the proof from history and archaeology that, for instance, there actually was an Israelite exodus from Egypt, but that would still not prove that God orchestrated it—and it is God's involvement that is the most important point of the biblical author. So why should we spend so much time and effort trying to understand the background of Israelite culture, history, geography and archaeology?

The purpose of this book is not apologetics, though certainly some of the information we present could find use in apologetic discussions. Nevertheless, it was not an apologetic agenda that dictated our selection or presentation of the data. Instead, we are trying to shed light on the Israelite culture and worldview. Why? When we read the Bible as a community of faith, we want to draw as much theological content out of the text as possible. As a result people tend to read theological significance into the details. There is an inclination to read our own cultural biases and our own perspectives and worldview into the text as a basis for understanding theological significance if we are not alerted to the differences that existed in the Israelite way of thinking. The larger ancient Near Eastern world becomes significant in that many times it can serve as a window to the Israelite culture. In many cases, by offering insight into the Israelite or ancient Near Eastern way of thinking, this book can help the interpreter avoid erroneous conclusions. So, for instance, the theological significance of the pillar of fire, the scapegoat or the Urim and Thummim can be understood in new ways once we make connections to the general culture of the ancient Near East.

We have not limited our identification of similarities to precisely delineated time periods. We fully recognize that the occurrence of some cultural element in the town of Ugarit in the mid-second millennium may not have any relationship to the way Israelites of the mid-first millennium thought. Nevertheless, often our interest has been in merely indicating that certain ideas or concepts existed in the ancient Near Eastern cultures. It is not impossible that such ideas could have represented aspects of the general cultural matrix of the ancient world. We bring them up merely as examples of the kind of thinking that existed in the ancient

world. Such information must be used with caution, however, because we cannot assume a flat homogeneity across the eras, regions or ethnic groups of the ancient Near East. In our own day, for instance, it would be foolhardy to speak of "European culture" given our awareness of the significant differences between, for example, the Italians and the Swiss. We have attempted to show some sensitivity to these issues but have not imposed strict limitations on the information we offer.

The issue at hand is not a question of whether the Israelites "borrowed" from their neighbors or not. We are not seeking to discover a literary path and feel no need to establish that Israelites would have been familiar with this or that piece of literature in order to employ similar motifs. We have avoided terms like "influence" or "impact" to describe how information was shared. That is because we are trying to look at those elements that may simply be part of the cultural heritage of the ancient Near East. That heritage may be reflected in various pieces of literature, but the Israelites need not have had knowledge of, or been influenced by, those pieces of literature. They simply are a part of the common cultural matrix. God's process of revelation required that he condescend to us, that he accommodate our humanity, that he express himself in familiar language and metaphors. It should be no surprise then that many of the common elements of the culture of the day were adopted, at times adapted, at times totally converted or transformed, but nevertheless used to accomplish God's purposes. Indeed, we would be surprised if this were not the case. Communication requires a shared circle of common conventions and understandings. When we speak of "daylight-saving time" we assume the person we are speaking to understands this strictly cultural convention, and we do not explain it. Someone from a different era or culture that had no such practice of adjusting clocks would be absolutely clueless as to what was meant by the phrase. They would have to become familiar with our culture in order to understand. The same holds true as we try to penetrate Israelite literature. Therefore, if circumcision is to be understood in Israel's context, it is helpful to understand its ancient Near Eastern form. If sacrifice is to be appreciated for what it represented in Israel, it is helpful to compare and contrast what it represented in the ancient world. While sometimes this search for knowledge can result in problems that are difficult to resolve, maintaining ignorance of those problems would not mean they did not exist. And more often than not, our new knowledge has positive results.

Sometimes the information we provide is simply to satisfy curiosity. As teachers, however, we have found that much of our task is taken up with developing in our students a curiosity about the text and then attempting to satisfy, in some degree, that curiosity. In the process it is often possible to bring the biblical world to life—to help us become alert and informed readers. When information is presented in an entry, it is not necessarily being offered to help interpret the passage but perhaps only to provide data that may be pertinent to interpreting the passage. So information in Job 38 about mythological images of creation in the ancient Near East does not serve as a suggestion that the thinking in Job should be thought of in the same terms. The data are simply being provided for comparison.

This book is intended to serve a nonprofessional market rather than the academic and scholarly communities. If we were to footnote every piece of informa-

tion here so that our colleagues could find the resources and check out the original publications, we would end up with a multivolume work too detailed to be of any use to the lay people for whom we are seeking to provide a service. Though we often found it excruciating to omit references to journals and books, we here acknowledge our debt to our colleagues and hopefully the few bibliographic references we provide can lead the interested reader to them. We have additionally tried to be very careful with proprietary information and ideas so that a standard of integrity could be maintained. Another consequence of targeting the nonprofessional market is that our references to the primary literature have of necessity been somewhat vague. Rather than citing text reference and publication resource, we have had to be content to say, "Babylonian laws contain . . ." or "Hittite regulations include . . ." or "Egyptian reliefs show . . ." Knowing that the typical layperson would not have the opportunity or the inclination to go look up the text and that many of the citations would be obscure and inaccessible to nonspecialists, we concentrated our efforts on giving the pertinent information rather than on offering a research trail. We recognize that this will create some frustrations for those who would like to track the reference for further information. We can only recommend going back to some of the bibliography we have listed and tracing the information from there. As an aid to readers unfamiliar with certain terms that arise repeatedly, we have provided a glossary at the back of the book. Asterisks (*) in the text point readers to terms that can be found there.

For the lay reader, it is possible that the information will occasion some confusion. It was our objective to provide information, not to go into detail to show how that information should be used or what it proves or does not prove. The reader may well often ask, What am I to do with that information? In many cases there may not be anything that can be done with the information, but having that information may prevent one from doing something with the text that should not be done. For instance, information given concerning the "circle of the earth" in Isaiah 40:22 may not solve the readers quandaries concerning how to account theologically for Scripture's use of old-world ideas about the shape of the earth, but it will give the reader sufficient information to avoid the misconception that the text incorporated modern scientific ideas between its lines. More generally, it is hoped that even when the specific information may not be usable in one's context, there will be a greater appreciation developed for the many ways in which Israel and the Old Testament reflect the cultural heritage of the ancient Near East.

Other Resources for the Cultural Context of the Old Testament

This list provides the reader with some of the significant sources we found useful in developing the information we present. It is not a "beginning bibliography" in that some of the sources listed are fairly technical or advanced in nature. Neither is it a comprehensive bibliography—many fine works, even standard works, have been omitted. However, these would be the key works to refer to if the reader wants to find more information or discussion on the topics presented.

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PENTATEUCH

Introduction

Though there are many reasons to consider the Pentateuch as a single, unitary piece of literature, the background materials pertinent to the study of each book are vastly different. As a result, we offer here an introduction to each of the five books individually.

Genesis

Genesis is typically divided into two main sections (1—11, 12—50). The background material most helpful for understanding the first section is the mythological literature of the ancient Near East. Both Mesopotamian and Egyptian mythology provide a wealth of materials concerning contemporary perspectives on the creation of the world and of human beings. These works include the *Enuma Elish* and the Atrahasis Epic, as well as a number of *Sumerian myths from the region of Mesopotamia. From Egypt there are three main creation texts, one each from Memphis, Heliopolis (in the Pyramid Texts) and Hermopolis (in the Coffin Texts). Additionally, there are several flood stories available from the region of Mesopotamia, found in the Gilgamesh Epic and in the Atrahasis Epic. Examination of this literature helps us to observe many similarities and differences between ancient Near Eastern and Israelite concepts. Similarities will make us aware of the common ground that existed between Israel and her neighbors. Sometimes the similarity will be in the details of the narrative (such as sending out birds from the ark) or in aspects of the text we might not have noticed before (such as the naming of things in conjunction with their creation). Some similarities might lead us to question whether we have read too much theological signifi-

cance into certain elements in the text (e.g., the creation of woman from a rib), while in other cases we might find that we have not seen enough of the theological significance (e.g., God's coming to the garden in the "cool of the day"). In general such similarities help us to understand the biblical accounts in broader perspective.

The differences between the ancient Near Eastern and biblical literatures will help us to appreciate some of the distinctives of both the Israelite culture and the biblical faith. These will again include specific details (shape of the ark, length of the flood) as well as foundational concepts (the contrast between the biblical view of creation by the spoken word of God and the Mesopotamian view that the creation of the world was associated with the birth of the cosmic deities). In many cases the differences are related (either directly or indirectly) to the unique monotheistic faith of Israel.

It is not unusual for the similarities and the differences to come together in a single element. The concepts of humankind's being created (1) from clay and (2) in the image of deity are both familiar in the ancient Near East, but Israel puts a unique twist on the idea that moves it into an altogether different sphere.

We cannot always account for the similarities and the differences as clearly or as conclusively as we might wish. Different scholars will have varying opinions of the implications based on some of their own presuppositions. The issues are often complex, and any individual scholar's conclusions may be highly interpretive. For this reason it is easier to offer information than it is to offer satisfying answers.

Finally, the comparative literature not only provides parallel accounts to some of those found in Genesis 1—11 but also provides a parallel to the overall structure of this section. The Mesopotamian Atrahasis Epic, like Genesis 1—11, contains a summary of creation, three threats and a resolution. Such observations can help us to understand the literary aspects to how this portion of the Bible is pieced together. Additionally, if this parallel is legitimate, it can help us see the genealogies in a different light, because when the biblical text has genealogies it reflects the Genesis blessing of being fruitful and multiplying, while in the comparable sections of Atrahasis the gods are distressed by the growth of human population and try to curb it.

Finding literary parallels to Genesis 12—50 presents more of a challenge. Though scholars have attempted to attach various descriptive terms to the patriarchal narratives (such as "sagas" or "legends"), any modern terminology is inadequate to encompass the nature of the ancient literature and is bound to mislead as much as it helps. There is nothing in the literature of the ancient Near East to parallels the stories about the patriarchs. The closest material is found in Egypt in works such as the *Story of *Sinuhe,* but that account covers only the lifetime of one man, rather than following several generations, and has nothing to do with resettlement or relationship with God. Even the Joseph story, considered on its own, is difficult to classify and compare. Again comparisons could be made to the stories of Sinuhe, *Wenamon or *Ahiqar (all dealing with the life and times of royal courtiers), but the similarities are quite superficial.

The background information for understanding these narratives comes from a different set of materials. These chapters concern the lives of the patriarchs and

their families as they move from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt in the process of the formation of the covenant. A number of archives (*Nuzi, *Mari, *Emar, *Alalakh) that have been discovered in Syria and Mesopotamia have provided information about the history, culture and customs of the ancient Near East in the second millennium. Often these materials can shed light on the political events or settlement history of the region. They can also help us to see how families lived and why they did some of the things that appear odd to us. In the process we gain important information that can help us process the biblical materials. For instance, we commonly seek ethical guidance in the behavior of biblical characters (though this is not always a productive procedure). In order to understand why people do what they do and to understand the decisions they make, it is important to become familiar with the norms of culture. We may find, then, that some of the behavior of the patriarchs is driven by norms that we have misunderstood or that we could easily misconstrue. Corrective information can often be provided by the archives.

One of the interesting conclusions that can be drawn from this kind of analysis is the understanding that there was not much in the worldview of the patriarchs and their families that differentiated them from the common ancient Near Eastern culture of the day. Again, then, an understanding of the general culture may help us to sort out what elements in the text have theological significance and what elements do not. For instance, an understanding of the practice of *circumcision in the ancient Near East may provide helpful guidelines to our assessment of it in the Bible. Observations about the use of the torch and censer in ancient Near Eastern *rituals may open up the meaning of Genesis 15. Even Abraham's understanding of God can be illuminated by information from the ancient Near Eastern documents.

As we encounter all of this information, we must be impressed with how often God uses the familiar to build bridges to his people. As what was familiar to them becomes more familiar to us, we can understand more of the text. On the other hand it is important to realize that the purposes of the book of Genesis go far beyond any of the literature available in the ancient Near East. The presence of similarities does not suggest in any way that the Bible is simply a secondhand, second-class repackaging of ancient Near Eastern literature. Rather, the background material helps us understand Genesis as a unique theological product linked to people and events embedded in a specific cultural and historical context.

Exodus

The book of Exodus contains a virtual cornucopia of types of literature, from narrative to law to architectural instructions. All are skillfully woven together to narrate the sequence of events that led a people from feeling that God had abandoned them to understanding themselves to be God's elect people with his presence in their midst. As a result there are many different primary sources that may offer assistance.

As might be expected, Exodus has more connections to Egyptian sources than any other book. Unfortunately the uncertainty concerning the date of the events

and the sparsity of materials from some of the related periods of Egyptian history leave many questions unanswered. As a result it is not so much the historical literature of Egypt that we depend on but all the sources that give information about geography or culture. Locating the cities and places mentioned in the biblical text is very difficult and many uncertainties remain, yet one by one some of the gaps are being closed as archaeology continues to investigate significant sites.

The legal passages of Exodus are comparable to a wide range of law collections from Mesopotamia. These include *Sumerian legal texts such as the reform of Uruinimgina (or Urukagina), the laws of *Ur-Nammu and the laws of *Lipit-Ishtar. These are fragmentary texts that date from the late third millennium and early second millennium B.C. The more extensive texts are the laws of *Eshnunna and *Hammurabi (from the *Old Babylonian period, eighteenth century B.C.), the *Hittite laws from the seventeenth century and the Middle Assyrian laws from the twelfth century. These law collections, as indicated by the paragraphs that surround them, are intended to testify to the gods how successful the king has been at establishing and maintaining justice in his kingdom. As such, the laws are designed to reflect the wisest and fairest decisions the king could imagine. Like the candidate making a campaign speech who seeks to find every possible piece of legislation that he can claim responsibility for, the king wanted to show himself in the best possible light.

These laws help us to see that the actual legislation that determined the shape of Israelite society was not all that different on the surface from the laws that would have characterized Assyrian or Babylonian society. What was different was that for Israel the law was part of God's revelation of what he was like. The Babylonians had just as strong prohibitions of murder as the Israelites had. But the Babylonians would have refrained from murder because murder was disruptive to the smooth ordering of society and the principles of civilization. Israelites would have refrained from murder because of who God was. The laws may look the same, but the foundation of the legal system was remarkably different. For the Israelites, *Yahweh their God was the source of all law and the foundation of all societal norms. In Mesopotamia the king was entrusted with the authority to perceive what the law ought to be and to establish the law. The gods were not moral, nor did they require moral behavior, but they did expect humans to preserve the values of civilization and therefore to act in orderly and civilized ways.

The point is, then, that the law given at Sinai does not necessarily prescribe new laws. Its actual legislation may be very much like the laws that Israel had been living under in Egypt and is clearly similar to the laws that governed other societies of the ancient Near East. What is new is the revelation of God that is accomplished through the institutionalization of the law as part of the *covenant between God and Israel. Comparing the law of the Bible to the ancient Near Eastern law collections can help us to understand both the concept of law and order as well as the philosophical and theological underpinnings of the law.

When we get to the section of Exodus that has to do with the construction of the tabernacle, we may be well served by understanding the use and construction of shrines (portable and otherwise) in the ancient Near East. The detailed description of the materials that were used in the construction of the tabernacle, can be

understood as we become aware of the value that culture attached to those materials. For example, consider the value that our society places on a mink coat, an oak desk, a leather chair or a stone house. Alongside of materials, we also attach value to positioning, as in the penthouse apartment, the corner office or the house at the top of the hill. So as we become acquainted with the materials and positions that the ancient Israelites attached value to, we can appreciate the rationale behind certain details. Again, we will often find that the rationale is cultural rather than theological. Once we understand the cultural elements, we can avoid attaching a foreign theological significance to some of the features.

Leviticus

The book of Leviticus is filled with instructions concerning how to maintain the holy space that was set apart for God's presence. This includes details of the sacrificial system, instructions for the priests and laws concerning *purity. In the ancient world *impurity was believed to create an environment for the demonic, so *purity needed to be maintained. This generally involved *rituals as well as incantations. For Israel *purity was a positive value that included rules of ethical behavior as well as issues of etiquette.

The ancient Near Eastern material that is most helpful for understanding the book of Leviticus is that which gives information about sacrifices, rituals and instructions for priests and dealing with *impurity. This information usually must be gleaned in bits and pieces from many different sources. There are, however, a few major ritual texts available that serve as significant sources of information. While *Hittite literature contains many sorts of ritual texts, among the most helpful is the *Instructions for the Temple Officials* from the mid-second millennium. This text details the means that should be used to protect the sanctuary from sacrilege and trespass. Mesopotamian sources are also plentiful.

The *maqlu* texts contain eight tablets of incantations as well as one tablet of rituals connected to the incantations. Most of these incantations are attempts to counter the powers of witchcraft. Other important series would include the *shurpu* texts, which concerned purification, the *bit rimki* texts concerning royal ablutions and the *namburbu* rituals of undoing.

Most of these texts assume a background of magic and divination where witchcraft, demonic forces and incantations represented powerful threats in society. Israelite beliefs ideally did not accept this worldview, and their concepts of *purity and *impurity had noticeable differences. Nevertheless, studying this material can expose many facets of the ancient worldview that the Israelites shared. Even though the biblical literature purged the rituals of the magical element, the institutionalized practices and the terminology describing them at times still contained the trappings or vestiges of the broader culture.

Certainly Israelite beliefs and practices were closer to the ancient Near East than they are to our own concepts of ritual, magic and *purity. Since we understand so little concerning these aspects of their worldview, we are often inclined to read very foreign theological concepts or symbolism into some of the practices and rules. This often creates an erroneous view of the nature and teaching of the book. By acquainting ourselves with the ancient Near Eastern worldview, we can

avoid this type of error and understand the text a little more in the way that the Israelites would have understood it.

Numbers

The book of Numbers contains instructions for travel and setting up the camp, as well as records of the events that took place during the nearly forty years the Israelites spent in the wilderness. It also includes a number of ritual and legal passages. Many of the sources that contribute to an understanding of the books of Exodus and Leviticus also provide background for the book of Numbers. In addition, itineraries from Egyptian sources can help in locating various places listed in the Israelites' travels. These itineraries come from a number of different sources, including the *Execration Texts (where the names of certain cities were written on bowls and then shattered in connection with cursing rituals; Twelfth Dynasty, *Middle Bronze period) and the topographical lists carved on the walls of temples such as those at Karnak and Medinet Habu (*Late Bronze period). They preserve maps in a list form as they name each of the cities that would be encountered traveling along certain routes. It is interesting that some biblical sites, which archaeologists have considered suspect because no remains from a given period have been found there, are attested in the Egyptian itineraries for the same period.

Numbers, like several of the other books of the Pentateuch, contains information concerning Israel's ritual calendar. Information about feast days and ritual calendars is abundant in the ancient Near East because calendars were generally regulated by the priesthood. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ferret out many of the critical details of observances and especially to discover what is behind the formation of the traditions that are institutionalized in these calendars. It is a treacherous path that seeks to identify the links between the festivals of differing cultures even though there may be evidence of many areas of cultural exchange or dependence.

Deuteronomy

The book of Deuteronomy follows the format of agreements between nations, as described in the sidebar "The Covenant and Ancient Near Eastern Treaties." In these ancient covenants, the largest section was usually the stipulations section, which detailed the obligations of the vassal. These would include general expectations, such as loyalty, as well as specifics, such as paying tribute and housing garrison troops. There would also be prohibitions against harboring fugitives and making alliances with other nations. There were obligations to contribute to the defense of the suzerain nation and to treat envoys with respect.

In Deuteronomy the stipulations are in the form of laws that detail expectations and prohibitions. Some interpreters believe that the laws in chapters 6-26 (or 12-26) are arranged according to the Ten Commandments. Just as the ancient law collections have a prologue and an epilogue to give them a literary framework (see the introduction to Exodus), it is the covenant that provides the literary framework for the law. The literary framework of *Hammurabi's laws helps us to understand that the collection of laws was not for framing legislation but for demonstrating how just Hammurabi's reign was. Likewise the literary framework of

Deuteronomy gives us an idea of why these laws were collected. Deuteronomy is framing these laws not as legislation but as *covenant.

When the people of the ancient Near East agreed to a treaty and its stipulations, they were obliged to abide by the terms of the treaty. It is the same level of obligation that would be connected to the laws of the land, but it operates differently, not within a legal system. For example, in today's world each country has its own laws, enacted by its legislative bodies, that are binding on its citizens. But there is also international law, which in part has been established by multinational bodies, often by treaty-type agreements. This international law is binding on all of the parties involved in the agreement. The binding nature of Deuteronomy is tied to treaty rather than to law (that is, to the covenant rather than to legislation). What that means is that Israel's obligations were connected to sustaining the relationship outlined in the covenant. If they were to be God's people (covenant), they were expected to conduct themselves in the described ways (stipulations). We should therefore not look at the laws as laws of the land (though they may well have been). The Israelites were not supposed to keep the law because it was the law; they were to keep the law because it reflected something of the nature of God and of what he wanted them to be like in order to remain in relationship with him.

An additional characteristic of Deuteronomy is that it is presented as the exhortations of Moses to the people. In this way Moses is seen as the mediator of the covenant because as God's messenger or envoy he is establishing the terms of the treaty. The *Hittite treaties preserve only the treaties themselves and offer no insight into the envoy who delivered the treaty. Other texts, however, allow us to gain some insight into the role of the envoy. He often presented his message verbally but had a written copy for the documentation and for the records. The words of Moses admonishing the people to be loyal to the terms of the covenant are very much in line with what any royal envoy would have been expected to say. The vassal would have been reminded that it was a privilege to be brought into this agreement and that it would be prudent to refrain from any action that would jeopardize those privileges.

1:1—2:3

Creation

1:1. In the beginning. An Egyptian creation text from Thebes speaks of the god Amun who evolved in the beginning, or "on the first occasion." Egyptologists interpret this not as an abstract idea but as a reference to a first-time event. In the same manner, the Hebrew word translated "beginning" usually refers not to a point in time but to an initial period. This suggests that the beginning period is the seven days of chapter one.

1:2. formless and empty. In Egyptian views of origins there is the concept of the "nonexistent" that may be very close to what is expressed here in Genesis. It is viewed as that which has not yet been differentiated and assigned function. No boundaries or definitions have been established. The Egyptian concept, however, also carries with it the idea of potentiality and a quality of being absolute.

1:2. Spirit of God. Some interpreters have translated this as a supernatural or mighty wind (the Hebrew word translated "Spirit" is sometimes translated "wind" in other passages), which has a parallel in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish.* There the sky god, Anu, creates the four winds that stir up the deep and its goddess, Tiamat. There it is a disruptive wind bringing unrest. The same phenomena can be seen in Daniel's vision of the four beasts where "the four winds of heaven were churning up the great sea" (7:2), a situation that disturbs the beasts there. If this is correct, then the wind would be part of the negative description of verse 2, paralleled by the darkness.

1:1-5. evening and morning. The account of creation does not intend to give a modern scientific explanation of the origin of all natural phenomena, but rather to address the more practical aspects of creation that surround our experiences of living and surviving. In the course of this chapter the author relates how God set up alternating periods of light and darkness—the basis for time. The narrative speaks of evening first because the first time period of light is just coming to a close. The author does not attempt an analysis of the physical properties of light, nor is he concerned about its source or generation. Light is the regulator of time.

1:3-5. light. The people of the ancient world did not believe that all light came from the sun. There was no knowledge that the moon simply reflected the light of the sun. Moreover, there is no hint in the text that "daylight" was caused by sunlight. The sun, moon and stars were all seen as bearers of light, but daylight was present even when the sun was behind a cloud or eclipsed. It made its appearance before the sun rose, and remained after the sun set.

1:6-8. firmament. In a similar way the expanse (sometimes called "the firmament") set up in day two is the regulator of climate. The ancient Near Eastern cultures viewed the cosmos as featuring a three-tiered structure consisting of the heavens, the earth and the underworld. Climate originated from the heavens, and the expanse was seen as the mechanism that regulated moisture and sunlight. Though in the ancient world the expanse was generally viewed as more solid than we would understand it today, it is not the physical composition that is important but the function. In the Babylonian creation epic, *Enuma Elish,* the goddess representing this cosmic ocean, Tiamat, is divided in half by Marduk to make the waters above and the waters below.

1:9-19. function of the cosmos. Just as God is the One who set time in motion and set up the climate, he is likewise responsible for setting up all the other aspects of human existence. The availability of water and the ability of the land to grow vegetation; the laws of agriculture and the seasonal cycles; each of God's creatures, created with a role to play—all of this was ordered by God and was good, not tyrannical or threatening. This reflects the ancient understanding that the gods were responsible for setting up a system of operations. The functioning of the cosmos was much more important to the people of the ancient world than was its physical makeup or chemical composition. They described what they saw and, more important, what they experienced of the world as having been created by God. That it was all "good" reflects God's wisdom and justice. At the same time the text shows subtle ways of disagreeing with the perspective of the ancient Near East. Most notable is the fact that it avoids using names for the sun and moon, which to the neighbors of the Israelites were also the names of the corre-

sponding deities, and refers instead to the greater light and the lesser light.

1:14. signs and seasons. In a prologue to a Sumerian astrological treatise, the major gods, An, Enlil and Enki, put the moon and stars in place to regulate days, months and omens. In the famous Babylonian Hymn to Shamash, the sun god, reference is also made to his role in regulating the seasons and the calendar in general. It is intriguing that he is also the patron of divination. The Hebrew word used for "sign" has a cognate in Akkadian that is used for omens. The Hebrew word, however, has a more neutral sense, and again the author has emptied the elements of the cosmos of their more personal traits.

1:20. great creatures of the sea. In the Babylonian Hymn to Shamash, the sun god is said to receive praise and reverence even from the worst groups. Included in the list are the fearsome monsters of the sea. The hymn thus suggests that there is a total submission of all creatures to Shamash, just as the Genesis creation texts shows all creatures created by, and therefore submitted to, Yahweh. The Labbu Myth records the creation of the sea viper, whose length was sixty leagues.

1:20-25. zoological categories. The zoological categories include various species of (1) sea creatures, (2) birds, (3) land-based creatures, which are divided into domestic and wild animals and "creatures that move along the ground" (perhaps the reptiles and/or amphibians), and (4) humans. Insects and the microscopic world of creatures are not mentioned, but the categories are broad enough to include them.

1:26-31. function of people. While the organizational or functional focus of the account may have similarities with the ancient Near Eastern perspective, the reason for it all is quite different. In the ancient Near East, the gods created for themselves—the world was their environment for their enjoyment and existence. People were created only as an afterthought, when the gods needed slave labor to help provide the conveniences of life (such as irrigation trenches). In the Bible the cosmos was created and organized to function on behalf of the people that God planned as the centerpiece of his creation.

1:26-31. creation of people in ancient Near Eastern myths. In creation accounts from Mesopotamia an entire population of people is created, already civilized, using a mixture of clay and the blood of a slain rebel god. This creation comes about as the result of conflict among the gods, and the god organizing the cosmos had to overcome the forces of chaos to bring order to his created world. The Genesis account portrays God's creation not as part of a conflict with opposing forces but as a serene and controlled process.

1:26-27. image of God. When God created people, he put them in charge of all of his creation. He endowed them with his own image. In the ancient world an image was believed to carry the essence of that which it represented. An idol image of deity, the same terminology as used here, would be used in the worship of that deity because it contained the deity's essence. This would not suggest that the image could do what the deity could do, nor that it looked the same as the deity. Rather, the deity's work was thought to be accomplished through the idol. In similar ways the governing work of God was seen to be accomplished by people. But that is not all there is to the image of God. Genesis 5:1-3 likens the image of God in Adam to the image of Adam in Seth. This goes beyond the comment about plants and animals reproducing after their own kind, though certainly children share physical characteristics and basic nature (genetically) with their parents. What draws the idol imagery and the child imagery together is the concept that the image provides the capacity not only to serve in the place of God (his representative containing his essence) but also to be and act like him. The tools he provided so that we may accomplish that task include conscience, self-awareness and spiritual discernment. Mesopotamian traditions speak of sons being in the image of their fathers (**Enuma Elish*) but do not speak of humans created in the image of God; but the Egyptian *Instructions of Merikare* identifies humankind as the god's images who came from his body. In Mesopotamia a significance of the image can be seen in the practice of kings setting up images of themselves in places where they want to establish their authority. Other than that, it is only other gods who are made in the image of gods. (See comment on 5:3.)

2:1-3. seventh-day rest. In the Egyptian creation account from Memphis, the creator god Ptah rests after the completion of his work. Likewise the creation of humans is followed by rest for the Mesopotamian gods. In Mesopotamia, however, the rest is a result of the fact that people have been created to do the work that the gods were tired of doing. Nonetheless, the desire for rest is one of the motivating elements driv-

ing these creation narratives. The containment or destruction of chaotic cosmic forces that is often a central part of ancient creation narratives leads to rest, peace or repose for the gods. Likewise it is the gods' inability to find rest from the noise and disturbance of humankind that leads to the flood. In all it is clear that ancient ideologies considered rest to be one of the principal objectives of the gods. In Israelite theology, God does not require rest *from* either cosmic or human disturbances but seeks rest *in* a dwelling place (see especially Ps 132:7-8, 13-14).

2:1. sabbath divisions. Dividing time into seven-day periods was a practice that is so far unattested in the other cultures of the ancient Near East, though there were particular days of the month in Mesopotamia that were considered unlucky, and they were often seven days apart (that is, the seventh day of the month, the fourteenth day of the month, etc.). Israel's sabbath was not celebrated on certain days of the month and was not linked to the cycles of the moon or to any other cycle of nature; it was simply observed every seventh day.

2:4-25

Man and Woman in the Garden

2:5. botanical categories. Only the most general descriptions of plants are found. Trees, shrubs and plants are listed, but no specific species. We know, however, that the principal trees found in the Near East were acacia, cedar, Cypress, fig, oak, olive, date palm, pomegranate, tamarisk and willow. Shrubs included the oleander and juniper. The principal cultivated grains were wheat, barley and lentils. The description in this verse differs from day three in that it refers to domesticated or cultivated plants. The reference then is not to a time before day three but to the fact that agriculture was not taking place.

2:5. description of condition. A creation text from Nippur sets the scene for creation by saying that waters did not yet flow through the opening in the earth and that nothing was growing and no furrow had been made.

2:6. watering system. The word used to describe the watering system in verse 6 (NIV: "streams") is difficult to translate. It occurs elsewhere only in Job 36:27. A similar word occurs in *Babylonian vocabulary drawn from early *Sumerian in reference to the system of subterranean waters, the primordial underground river. The Sumerian myth of *Enki and Ninhursag likewise mentions such a watering system.

2:7. man from dust. The creation of the first man out of the dust of the earth is similar to what is found in ancient Near Eastern mythology. The Atrahasis Epic portrays the creation of humankind out of the blood of a slain deity mixed with clay. Just as dust in the Bible represents what the body becomes at death (Gen 3:19), so clay was what the body returned to in *Babylonian thinking. The blood of deity represented the divine essence in mankind, a similar concept to God's bringing Adam into being with the breath of life. In Egyptian thinking it is the tears of the god that are mixed with clay to form man, though the *Instructions of Merikare* also speak of the god's making breath for their noses.

2:8-14. location of Eden. Based on the proximity of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and the *Sumerian legend of the mystical, utopian land of *Dilmun, most scholars would identify Eden as a place in or near the northern end of the Persian Gulf. *Dilmun has been identified with the island of Bahrain. The direction that it is "in the east" merely points to the gen-

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN MYTHOLOGY AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

Mythology in the ancient world was like science in our modern world—it was their explanation of how the world came into being and how it worked. The mythological approach attempted to identify function as a consequence of purpose. The gods had purposes, and their activities were the causes of what humans experienced as effects. In contrast, our modern scientific approach identifies function as a consequence of structure and attempts to understand cause and effect based on natural laws that are linked to the structure, the composite parts, of a phenomenon. Because our scientific worldview is keenly interested in structure, we often go to the biblical account looking for information on structure. In this area, however, the biblical worldview is much more like its ancient Near Eastern counterparts in that it views function as a consequence of purpose. That is what Genesis 1 is all about—it has very little interest in structures. This is only one of many areas where understanding ancient Near Eastern culture, literature and worldview can help us understand the Bible.

Many parallels can be identified between ancient Near Eastern mythology and Old Testament passages and concepts. This is not to suggest that the Old Testament is to be considered simply as another example of ancient mythology or as being dependent on that literature. Mythology is a window to culture. It reflects the worldview and values of the culture that forged it. Many of the writings we find in

eral area of Mesopotamia and is fairly typical of primordial narratives. This, plus the direction of flow of the rivers (the location of the Pishon and Gihon being uncertain), has caused some to look in the Armenia region, near the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates. However, the characteristics of a well-watered garden in which humans do little or no work and in which life springs up without cultivation fits the marshy areas at the base of the Gulf and may even be an area now covered by the waters of the region.

2:8. The "garden of Eden." The word *Eden* refers to a well-watered place, suggesting a luxuriant park. The word translated "garden" does not typically refer to vegetable plots but to orchards or parks containing trees.

2:9. tree of life. The tree of life is portrayed elsewhere in the Bible as offering extension of life (Prov 3:16-18), which sometimes can be viewed as having rejuvenating qualities. Various plants with such qualities are known from the ancient Near East. In the *Gilgamesh Epic there is a plant called "old man becomes young" that grows at the bottom of the cosmic river. Trees often figure prominently in ancient Near Eastern art and on cylinder seals. These have often been interpreted as depicting a tree of life, but more support from the literature would be necessary to confirm such an interpretation.

2:11. Pishon. Analysis of sand patterns in Saudi Arabia and satellite photography have helped identify an old riverbed running northeast through Saudi Arabia from the Hijaz Mountains near Medina to the Persian Gulf in Kuwait near the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates. This would be a good candidate for the Pishon River.

2:11. Havilah. Perhaps because gold is mentioned in relation to Havilah, it is named in several other passages (Gen 10:7; 25:18; 1 Sam 15:7; 1 Chron 1:9). It has most often been placed in western Saudi Arabia near Medina along the Red Sea, an area that does produce gold, bdellium and onyx. Genesis 10:29 describes Havilah as the "brother" of Ophir, a region also known for its wealth in gold.

2:21-22. rib. The use of Adam's rib for the creation of Eve may find illumination in the *Sumerian language. The Sumerian word for rib is *ti*. Of interest is the fact that *ti* means "life," just as *Eve* does (3:20). Others have suggested that a connection should be seen with the Egyptian word *imw,* which can mean either clay (out of which man was made) or rib.

2:24. man leaving father and mother. This statement is a narrative aside, which provides a comment on the social world of the people in later times. It uses the story of Eve's creation as the basis for the legal principle of separate households. When a marriage was contracted, the wife left her parents' home and joined the household of her husband. New loyalties were established in this way. Furthermore, the consummation of the marriage is associated here with the idea of the couple becoming one flesh again, just as Adam and Eve come from one body. The statement here that the *man* will leave his family does not necessarily refer to a particular sociology, but to the fact that in this chapter it is the man who has been seeking a companion. It also may reflect the fact that wedding ceremonies, including the wedding night, often took place in the house of the bride's parents.

3:1-24
The Fall and the Pronouncement

3:1. significance of serpents in ancient world. From the very earliest evidence in ancient Near Eastern art and literature, the serpent is presented as a significant character. Perhaps

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the Old Testament performed the same function for ancient Israelite culture that mythology did for other cultures—they provided a literary mechanism for preserving and transmitting their worldview and values. Israel was part of a larger cultural complex that existed across the ancient Near East. There are many aspects of that cultural complex that it shared with its neighbors, though each individual culture had its distinguishing features. When we seek to understand the culture and literature of Israel, we rightly expect to find help in the larger cultural arena, from mythology, wisdom writings, legal documents and royal inscriptions.

The community of faith need not fear the use of such methods to inform us of the common cultural heritage of the Near East. Neither the theological message of the text nor its status as God's Word is jeopardized by these comparative studies. In fact, since revelation involves effective communication, we would expect that whenever possible God would use known and familiar elements to communicate to his people. Identification of similarities as well as differences can provide important background for a proper understanding of the text. This book has only the task of giving information and cannot engage in detailed discussion of how each individual similarity or difference can be explained. Some of that type of discussion can be found in John Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

because its poison was a threat to life and its lidless eyes provided an enigmatic image, the serpent has been associated with both death and wisdom. The Genesis account evokes both aspects in the wisdom dialogue between the serpent and Eve and with the introduction of death after the expulsion from Eden. Similarly, *Gilgamesh is cheated out of perpetual youth when a serpent consumes a magical plant the hero had retrieved from the sea bottom. The sinister image of the serpent is graphically displayed by the intertwining coils of a snake encompassing a *cult stand found at Beth-Shean. Whether as a representative of primeval chaos (*Tiamat or *Leviathan) or a symbol of sexuality, the serpent harbors mystery for humans. Of particular interest is the *Sumerian god Ningishzida, who was portrayed in serpent shape and whose name means "Lord of the Productive/Steadfast Tree." He was considered a ruler in the nether world and "throne-bearer of the earth." He was one of the deities that offered the bread of life to *Adapa (see next comment). Even when not related to a god, the serpent represented wisdom (occult), *fertility, health, chaos and immortality, and was often worshiped.

3:2-5. temptation to be like God. Aspiration to deity and lost opportunities to become like the gods figure prominently in a few ancient myths. In the tale of *Adapa an offer of the "food of life" is inadvertently refused. Adapa, the first of the seven sages before the flood, is attempting to bring the arts of civilization to the first city, Eridu. As a fisherman, he had an unfortunate escapade with the south wind one day that eventuated in an audience with the chief god, Anu. Under the advice of the god *Ea, when Anu offered him food he refused it, only to discover that it was food that would bring immortality. Eternal life also eludes *Gilgamesh. In the famous epic about him, the death of his friend Enkidu leads him in a search for immortality, which he discovers is unattainable. In both of these accounts, being like the gods is viewed in terms of achieving immortality, whereas in the biblical account it is understood in terms of wisdom.

3:7. fig leaf significance. Fig leaves are the largest found in Canaan and could provide limited covering for the shamed couple. The significance of the fig's use may lie in its symbolism of fertility. By eating the forbidden fruit, the couple have set in motion their future role as parents and as cultivators of fruit trees and grain.

3:8. cool of the day. *Akkadian terminology has demonstrated that the word translated "day" also has the meaning "storm." This meaning can be seen also for the Hebrew word in Zephaniah 2:2. It is often connected to the deity coming in a storm of judgment. If this is the correct rendering of the word in this passage, they heard the thunder (the word translated "sound" is often connected to thunder) of the Lord moving about in the garden in the wind of the storm. In this case it is quite understandable why they are hiding.

3:14. eating dust. The depiction of dust or dirt for food is typical of descriptions of the netherworld in ancient literature. In the Gilgamesh Epic, Enkidu on his deathbed dreams of the netherworld and describes it as a place with no light and where "dust is their food, clay their bread," a description also known from the *Descent of Ishtar.* These are most likely considered characteristic of the netherworld because they describe the grave. Dust fills the mouth of the corpse, but dust will also fill the mouth of the serpent as it crawls along the ground.

3:14-15. curses on serpents. The Egyptian Pyramid Texts (second half of third millennium) contain a number of spells against serpents, but likewise include spells against other creatures considered dangers or pests who threaten the dead. Some of these spells enjoin the serpent to crawl on its belly (keep its face on the path). This is in contrast to raising its head up to strike. The serpent on its belly is nonthreatening, while the one reared up is protecting or attacking. Treading on the serpent is used in these texts as a means of overcoming or defeating it.

3:14-15. all snakes poisonous. While it would have been observable that not all snakes were poisonous, the threat provided by some would, in the haste to protect oneself, attach itself to all. Of thirty-six species of snake known to the area, the viper *(Vipera palaestinae)* is the only poisonous snake in northern and central Israel. Snakes are associated occasionally with fertility and life (bronze serpent in the wilderness). However, they most often are tied to the struggle for life and the inevitability of death. The poisonous snakes would be the most aggressive, so an attack by a snake would always be viewed as a potentially mortal blow.

3:16. labor pains. Perhaps displaying the dual character of life, the joy of motherhood can be gained only through labor pain. Without modern medicine, these pains are described as the worst possible agony for humans (see Is 13:8; 21:3) and gods (note the *Babylonian goddess *Ishtar's cry in the *Gilgamesh flood

epic when she sees the horror of the flood unleashed). *Babylonians associated demons such as Lamashtu with the pain of childbirth and the tenuous condition of life for both mother and child in the birth process.

3:16. husband-wife relationship. Arranged marriages downplayed the role of romantic love in ancient Israelite society. However, in this labor-poor society men and women had to work together as a team. While pregnancy and child care periodically restricted the woman's work in the fields or the shop, a couple's survival was largely based on shared labor and the number of children they produced. Domination of the wife by her husband, while evident in some marriages, was not the ideal in ancient relationships. Both had their roles, although the legal rights with regard to making contracts, owning property and inheritance rights were primarily controlled by males. It is also a fact that concern over female chastity led to restrictions on associations by females and male control of the legal process.

3:17. toil. In Mesopotamian thinking people were created to be slaves and to do the work that the gods had tired of doing for themselves, much of it concerned with the agricultural process. In **Enuma Elish* the entire purpose for creating people was to relieve the gods of their toil, unlike the biblical account, in which people were created to rule and became burdened with toil only as a result of the Fall.

3:18. thorns and thistles. In the Gilgamesh Epic, a paradiselike place is described as featuring plants and trees that grow gems and precious stones instead of thorns and thistles.

3:20. significance of naming. Adam earlier had named the animals, which was a demonstration of his authority over them. Here his naming of Eve suggests Adam's position of rule, as referred to in verse 16. In the ancient world when one king placed a vassal king on the throne, a new name would often be given to demonstrate the overlord's dominion. Likewise, when God enters *covenant relationships with Abram and Jacob, he changes their names. A final example occurs in the *Babylonian account of creation, **Enuma Elish*, which opens with the situation before heaven and earth were named. The account proceeds to give names, just as God names the things he creates in Genesis 1.

3:21. skin garments. The long outer tunic is still the basic garment for many people in the Middle East. This replaces the inadequate fig leaf covering made by Adam and Eve. God provides them with these garments as the type of gift given by a patron to a client. Gifts of clothing are among the most common presents mentioned in the Bible (see Joseph in Gen 41:42) and other ancient texts. It also prepares them for the rigors of weather and work which await them. In the *Tale of Adapa* (see comment on 3:2-5), after *Adapa loses the opportunity to eat from the bread and water of life, he is given clothing by the god Anu before being sent from his presence.

3:24. cherubim. The cherubim are supernatural creatures referred to over ninety times in the Old Testament, where they usually function in the capacity of guardians of God's presence. From the guardian of the tree of life, to the ornamental representation over the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant, to the accompaniment of the chariot/throne in Ezekiel's visions, the cherubim are always closely associated with the person or property of deity. Biblical descriptions (Ezek 1, 10) agree with archaeological finds that suggest they are composite creatures (like griffins or sphinxes). Representations of these creatures are often found flanking the throne of the king. Here in Genesis the cherubim guard the way to the tree of life, now forbidden property of God. An interesting Neo-Assyrian seal depicts what appears to be a fruit tree flanked by two such creatures with deities standing on their backs supporting a winged sun disk.

4:1-16

Cain and Abel

4:1-7. sacrifices of Cain and Abel. The sacrifices of Cain and Abel are not depicted as addressing sin or seeking atonement. The word used designates them very generally as "gifts"—a word that is most closely associated with the grain offering later in Leviticus 2. They appear to be intended to express gratitude to God for his bounty. Therefore it is appropriate that Cain should bring an offering from the produce that he grew, for blood would not be mandatory in such an offering. It should be noted that Genesis does not preserve any record of God requesting such offerings, though he approved of it as a means of expressing thanks. Gratitude is not expressed, however, when the gift is grudgingly given, as is likely the case with Cain.

4:11-12. nomadic lifestyle. The wandering nomadic lifestyle to which Cain is doomed represents one of the principal economic/social divisions in ancient society. Once animals had been domesticated, around 8000 B.C., herding and pastoral nomadism became a major economic pursuit for tribes and villages. General-

ly, herding was part of a mixed village economy, including agriculture and trade. However, some groups concentrated more of their efforts on taking sheep and goats to new pasture as the seasons changed. These semi-nomadic herdsmen followed particular migration routes which provided adequate water for their animals as well as grazing. Contracts were sometimes made with villages along the route for grazing in harvested fields. These herdsmen occasionally clashed with settled communities over water rights or because of raiding. Governments tried to control nomadic groups within their area, but these attempts were not usually successful over long periods of time. The result is the composition of stories which describe the conflict between herders and farmers as they compete for use of the land.

4:14-15. blood vengeance. In areas where the central government had not gained full control, blood feuds between families were common. They were based on the simple principle of "an eye for an eye," which demanded the death of a murderer or the death of a member of his family as restitution. There was also an assumption that kinship ties included the obligation to defend the honor of the household. No hurt could be ignored, or the household would be considered too weak to defend itself and other groups would take advantage of them. Cain's comment assumes that there is a more extensive family in existence and that some from Abel's line would seek revenge.

4:15. mark of Cain. The Hebrew word used here does not denote a tatoo or mutilation inflicted on a felon or slave (referred to in the Laws of *Eshnunna and the Code of *Hammurabi). It best compares to the mark of divine protection placed on the foreheads of the innocents in Jerusalem in Ezekiel 9:4-6. It may be an external marking that would cause others to treat him with respect or caution. However, it may represent a sign from God to Cain that he would not be harmed and people would not attack him.

4:17-26

The Line of Cain

4:17. city building. Because the founding of a city is tied so intimately to the founding of a nation or people in the ancient world, stories about the founder and the circumstances surrounding its founding are a part of the basic heritage of the inhabitants. These stories generally include a description of the natural resources which attracted the builder (water supply, grazing and crop land, natural defenses), the special attributes of the builder (unusual strength and/or wisdom) and the guidance of the patron god. Cities were constructed along or near rivers or springs. They served as focal points for trade, culture and religious activity for a much larger region and thus eventually became political centers or city states. The organization required to build them and then to keep their mud-brick and stone walls in repair helped generate the development of assemblies of elders and monarchies to rule them.

4:19. polygamy. The practice of a man marrying more than one wife is known as polygamy. This custom was based on several factors: (1) an imbalance in the number of males and females, (2) the need to produce large numbers of children to work herds and/or fields, (3) the desire to increase the prestige and wealth of a household through multiple marriage contracts and (4) the high rate of death of females in childbirth. Polygamy was most common among pastoral nomadic groups and in rural farming communities, where it was important that every female be attached to a household and be productive. Monarchs also practiced polygamy, primarily as a means of making alliances with powerful families or other nations. In such situations the wives might also end up as hostages if the political relationship soured.

4:20. animal domestication. Raising livestock is the first stage in animal domestication, which involves human control of breeding, food supply and territory. Sheep and goats were the first livestock to be domesticated, with the evidence extending back to the ninth millennium B.C. Larger cattle came a bit later, and evidence for pig domestication begins in the seventh millennium.

4:21. musical instruments. Musical instruments were among the first inventions of early humans. In Egypt the earliest end-blown flutes date to the fourth millennium B.C. A number of harps and lyres as well as a pair of silver flutes were found in the royal cemetery at *Ur dating to the early part of the third millennium. Flutes made of bone or pottery date back at least to the fourth millennium. Musical instruments provided entertainment as well as background rhythm for dances and *ritual performances, such as processions or *cultic dramas. Other than simple percussion instruments (drums and rattles), the most common instruments used in the ancient Near East were harps and lyres. Examples have been found in excavated tombs and painted on the walls of temples and palaces. They are described in literature as a means of soothing

the spirit, invoking the gods to speak and providing the cadence for a marching army. Musicians had their own guilds and were highly respected.

4:22. ancient metal technology. As part of the account of the emergence of crafts and technology in the genealogy of Cain, it is appropriate that the origin of metalworking would be mentioned. *Assyrian texts mention Tabal and Musku as the early metalworking regions in the Taurus Mountains (of eastern Turkey). Copper tools, weapons and implements began to be smelted and forged in the fourth millennium B.C. Subsequently, alloys of copper, principally bronze, were introduced in the early third millennium as sources of tin were discovered outside the Near East and trade routes expanded to bring them to Egypt and Mesopotamia. Iron, a metal which requires much higher temperatures and skin bellows (portrayed in the Egyptian Beni Hasan tomb paintings) to refine and work, was the last to be introduced, toward the end of the second millennium B.C. *Hittite smiths seem to have been the first to exploit it, and then the technology spread east and south. Meteorite iron was cold-forged for centuries prior to its smelting. That would not represent as large an industry as the forging of terrestrial deposits, but it would explain some of the early references to iron prior to the *Iron Age.

5:1-32

The Line of Seth

5:1. the account of *(toledoth).* This chapter begins by introducing "the written account of Adam's line"—just as 2:4 had referred to the account of the heavens and earth. Genesis uses this label eleven times throughout the book. Earlier translations used the word "generations" in place of "account." In other places in the Bible this word is most often associated with genealogies. Some believe that in Genesis they indicate written sources that the author used in compiling the book. Alternatively, they could simply be understood as introducing the people and events that "eventuated" from the named individual. In any case they serve as convenient division markers between the sections of the book.

5:1-32. importance of genealogies. Genealogies represent continuity and relationship. Often in the ancient Near East they are used for purposes of power and prestige. Linear genealogies start at point A (the creation of Adam and Eve, for example) and end at point B (Noah and the flood). Their intention is to bridge a gap between major events. Alternatively they can be vertical, tracing the descendants of a single family (Esau in Gen 36:1-5, 9-43). In the case of linear genealogies, the actual amount of time represented by these successive generations does not seem to be as important as the sense of completion or adherence to a purpose (such as the charge to be fertile and fill the earth). Vertical genealogies focus on establishing legitimacy for membership in the family or tribe (as in the case of the Levitical genealogies in Ezra 2). Mesopotamian sources do not offer many genealogies, but most of those that are known are linear in nature. Most of these are either of royal or scribal families, and most are only three generations, with none more than twelve. Egyptian genealogies are mostly of priestly families and are likewise linear. They extend to as many as seventeen generations but are not common until the first millennium B.C. Genealogies are often formatted to suit a literary purpose. So, for instance, the genealogies between Adam and Noah, and Noah and Abraham, are each set up to contain ten members, with the last having three sons. Comparing biblical genealogies to one another shows that there are often several generations skipped in any particular presentation. This type of telescoping also occurs in *Assyrian genealogical records. Thus we need not think that the genealogy's purpose is to represent every generation, as our modern family trees attempt to do.

5:3. Adam's son in his likeness and image. This same type of comparison is made in **Enuma Elish* between the generations of the gods. Anshar begets Anu like himself, and Anu begets Nudimmud (Enki) in his likeness.

5:3-32. long lives. Although there is no satisfactory explanation of the long life spans before the flood, there are *Sumerian lists of kings who purportedly reigned before the flood with reigns as long as 43,200 years. The Sumerians used the sexagesimal number system (a combination of base six and base ten), and when the numbers of the Sumerian king list are converted to decimal, they are very much in the range of the age spans of the preflood genealogies of Genesis. The Hebrews, like most other Semitic peoples, used a base-ten decimal system as far back as writing extends.

5:21-24. God took Enoch. Seventh in the line, Enoch was the most outstanding individual in the line of Seth. As a result of walking with God (a phrase expressing piety) he was "taken"—an alternative to dying, the stated fate of all the others in the genealogy. The text does not say *where* he was taken, a possible indication that the author did not profess to know.

We can properly assume that he was believed to have been taken to a better place, for this fate was seen as a reward for his close relationship to God, but the text stops short of saying he went to heaven or to be with God. In the Mesopotamian lists of preflood sages, the seventh in the list, Utuabzu, is said to have ascended to heaven. In the Egyptian Pyramid Texts, Shu, the god of the air, is instructed to take the king to heaven so he does not die on earth. This simply represents the transition from mortality to immortality. Jewish writings after the time of the Old Testament offer extensive speculation about Enoch and portray him as an ancient source of revelation and apocalyptic visions (*1, 2* and *3 Enoch*).

5:29. comfort us. The name Noah means "rest," bringing out again the importance of this motif in the ancient Near East (see comment on 2:1-3). The Mesopotamian gods sent the flood because the disturbances of the human world were preventing them from getting rest. So in that case, the flood provided rest for the gods. Here Noah is rather associated with bringing rest for people from the curse of the gods.

6:1-4
The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men

6:2. sons of God. The term "sons of God" is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to angels, but the idea of sonship to God is also portrayed corporately for the Israelites and individually for kings. In the ancient Near East kings were commonly understood as having a filial relationship to deity and were often considered to have been engendered by deity.

6:2. marrying whom they chose. The practice of marrying "any of them they chose" has been interpreted by some to be a reference to polygamy. While it is not to be doubted that polygamy was practiced, it is difficult to imagine why that would be worthy of note, since polygamy was an acceptable practice even in Israel in Old Testament times. It is more likely that this is a reference to the "right of the first night," cited as one of the oppressive practices of kings in the *Gilgamesh Epic. The king could exercise his right, as representative of the gods, to spend the wedding night with any woman who was being given in marriage. This presumably was construed as a *fertility rite. If this is the practice referred to here, it would offer an explanation of the nature of the offense.

6:3. 120 years. The limitation of 120 years most likely refers to a reduction of the life span of humans, since it is in the context of a statement about mortality. While the verse is notoriously difficult to translate, modern consensus is moving toward translating it "My spirit will not remain in man forever," thus affirming mortality. Just as the offense can be understood in light of information from the Gilgamesh Epic, so this statement may refer to the never-ending quest for immortality; a quest such as is at the core of the Gilgamesh Epic. Though Gilgamesh lived after the flood, these elements of the narrative resonate with universal human experience. A wisdom text from the town of Emar cites 120 years as the most years given to humans by the gods.

6:4. Nephilim. *Nephilim* is not an ethnic designation but a description of a particular type of individual. In Numbers 13:33 they are identified, along with the descendants of Anak, as some of the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. The latter are described as giants, but there is no reason to consider the Nephilim to be giants. It is more likely that the term describes heroic warriors, perhaps the ancient equivalent of knights errant.

6:5—8:22
The Flood

6:13. violence as cause of flood. In the Atrahasis Epic's account of the flood the reason that the gods decide to send the flood is the "noise" of mankind. This is not necessarily different from the biblical reason in that "noise" can be the result of violence. Abel's blood cries out from the ground (4:10) and the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great (Gen 18:20). The noise could be generated either by the number of petitions being made to the gods to respond to the violence and bloodshed or by the victims who cry out in their distress.

6:14. gopher wood. *Gopher* is the Hebrew word translated "cypress wood" in the NIV. This is an unknown type of material, although it undoubtedly refers to some sort of coniferous tree thought to possess great strength and durability. Cypress was often used by shipbuilders in the ancient Near East. Similarly, the cedars of Lebanon were prized by the Egyptians for the construction of their barques for transport on the Nile, for instance in the eleventh century B.C. *Diary of *Wenamon.*

6:14. boats in the ancient world. Prior to the invention of seaworthy vessels that could carry sailors and cargo through the heavy seas of the Mediterranean, most boats were made of skin or reeds and were designed to sail

through marshes or along the river bank. They were used for fishing or hunting and would not have been more than ten feet in length. True sailing ships, with a length of 170 feet, are first depicted in Old Kingdom Egyptian art (c. 2500 B.C.) and are described in *Ugaritic (1600-1200 B.C.) and Phoenician (1000-500 B.C.) texts. Remains of shipwrecks from the mid-second millennium (*Late Bronze Age) have also been found in the Mediterranean. They still generally navigated within sight of land, with trips to Crete and Cyprus as well as the ports along the coasts of Egypt, the Persian Gulf and Asia Minor.

6:14-16. size of the ark. Based on a measurement of one cubit equaling eighteen inches or forty-five centimeters, the ark Noah constructs is approximately 450 feet (135 meters) long, 75 feet (22 meters) wide, and 45 feet (13 meters) deep. If it had a flat bottom, the total surface capacity would be about three times that of the tabernacle (100 by 50 cubits in Ex 27:9-13), with a displacement of 43,000 tons. In comparison, the ark constructed by *Utnapishtim in the *Babylonian version of the *Gilgamesh Epic is either a cube or ziggurat-shaped (120 by 120 by 120 cubits), with a displacement of three or four times that of the Genesis ark. Noah's ark was not designed to be navigated—no rudder or sail is mentioned. Thus the fate of the company aboard was left in the hands of God. Although *Utnapishtim does employ a navigator, the shape of his ark may be magical, since he could not depend on the gods to preserve him.

6:15-16. length measurements. The standard measurement unit for length was the cubit, which was eighteen inches (forty-five centimeters). This was based on the length of a man's forearm, from his fingertips to his elbow. Other units include the span, the handbreadth/palm and the finger. Use of a "four-finger equals one palm" and of a "twenty-four-finger equals one cubit" measure is common throughout the ancient Near East. Some variations do occur, such as seven palms equals one cubit in Egypt and thirty fingers equals one cubit in *Babylonia until the *Chaldean period (perhaps based on their use of a sexagesimal mathematics system).

6:17. archaeological evidences of flood. There is presently no convincing archaeological evidence of the biblical flood. The examination of silt levels at the *Sumerian cities of *Ur, Kish, Shuruppak, *Lagash and *Uruk (all of which have occupation levels at least as early as 2800 B.C.) are from different periods and do not reflect a single massive flood that inundated them all at the same time. Similarly, the city of Jericho, which has been continuously occupied since 7000 B.C., has no flood deposits whatsoever. Climatological studies have indicated that the period from 4500 to 3500 B.C. was significantly wetter in this region, but that offers little to go on. The search for the remains of Noah's ark have centered on the Turkish peak of Agri Dagh (17,000 feet) near Lake Van. However, no one mountain within the Ararat range is mentioned in the biblical account, and fragments of wood that have been carbon-14 dated from this mountain have proven to come from no earlier than the fifth century A.D.

7:2-4. seven of every kind. Though Noah

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN FLOOD ACCOUNTS

The most significant ancient Near Eastern flood accounts are found in the Atrahasis Epic and the Gilgamesh Epic. In these accounts the chief god, Enlil, becomes angry at mankind (the Atrahasis Epic portrays him as disturbed over the "noise" of mankind, see next comment) and, after trying unsuccessfully to remedy the situation by reducing the population through things like drought and disease, persuades the divine assembly to approve a flood for the total elimination of mankind. The god Ea manages to forewarn one loyal worshipper, a king who is instructed to build a boat that will preserve not only him and his family, but representatives skilled in the various arts of civilization. The other people of the city are told that the gods are angry with the king and he must leave them. The pitch-covered boat has seven stories shaped either as a cube or, more likely, a ziggurat (see comment on 11:4). The storm lasts seven days and nights after which the boat comes to rest on Mt. Nisir. Birds are sent out to determine the time of leaving the ark. Sacrifices are made for which the gods are very thankful since they have been deprived of food (sacrifices) since the flood began.

The Atrahasis Epic is dated to the early second millennium B.C. The Gilgamesh Epic came into its present form during the second half of the second millennium, but used materials that were already in circulation at the end of the third millennium. From the short summary above one can detect a number of similarities as well as a number of differences. There is no reason to doubt that the ancient Near Eastern accounts and Genesis refer to the same flood. This would certainly account for the similarities. The differences exist because each culture is viewing the flood through its own theology and worldview.

takes two each of most animals into the ark, he is instructed in verse 2 to take seven pairs of every clean animal and of every bird. Additional clean animals would be needed both for the sacrifice after the flood and for quicker repopulation for human use. In some sacrificial *rituals seven of each class of designated animal are offered (cf. 2 Chron 29:21), but, of course, Noah is not going to sacrifice all of them.

7:2. clean and unclean before Moses. The distinction between clean and unclean animals was not an innovation established at Sinai but is seen as early as Noah. Evidence from Egypt and Mesopotamia offer no system equivalent to the Israelite system of classification. While there are dietary restrictions in those cultures, they tend to be much more limited, that is, certain animals restricted only to certain classes of people or on certain days of the month. Even here one cannot assume that the classification has implications for their diet. Up to this time no permission had been granted to eat meat (see 1:29). When meat was granted to them as food after the flood (9:2-3), there were no restrictions along the lines of clean and unclean. As a result it appears that the classification concerned sacrifice, not diet, in this period.

7:11. floodgates opened. The text uses the poetic phrase "windows of heaven" to describe the openings through which the rain came down. This is not scientific language but reflects the perspective of the observer, much as we would speak of the sun "setting." The only other occurrence of such a term in ancient Near Eastern literature is in the Canaanite myth of *Baal building his house, where the "window" of his house is described as a rift in the clouds. But even here it is not associated with rain. Alternate terminology occurs in the Mesopotamian texts, where gates of heaven are in the east and west for the sun to use in its rising and setting. Clouds and winds, however, also enter by these gates.

7:11—8:5. time periods of flood. The total elapse of time in the flood narrative can be viewed in different ways depending on how the given information is merged. From the information given in 7:11 and 8:14 it can be determined that Noah and his family were in the ark for twelve months and eleven days. The exact number of days would depend on how many days were counted in a month and whether any adjustments were being made between lunar and solar reckonings. The eleven days has been found interesting by some, since the lunar year of 354 days is eleven days shorter than the solar year.

8:4. Ararat. The mountains of Ararat are located in the Lake Van region of eastern Turkey in the area of Armenia (known as Urartu in *Assyrian inscriptions). This range of mountains (the highest peak reaching 17,000 feet) is also mentioned in 2 Kings 19:37, Isaiah 37:38 and Jeremiah 51:27. The *Gilgamesh epic, however, describes the flood hero's ark coming to rest on a specific mountaintop, Mount Nisir in southern Kurdistan.

8:6-12. use of birds in ancient Near East. One of the enduring pictures of the Noah account is that of Noah sending out the birds to gain information about the conditions outside the ark. The flood stories in the *Gilgamesh Epic and the Atrahasis Epic feature a similar use of birds. Rather than a raven and three missions for the dove, we find a dove, swallow and raven sent out. The dove and swallow return without finding a place, while the raven is pictured, as in 8:7, as flying about cawing and not returning (Gilg. 11.146-54). Ancient navigators were known to use birds to find land, but Noah is not navigating, and he is on land. His use of the birds is not for purposes of finding direction. It is also known that the flight patterns of birds sometimes served as omens, but neither Genesis nor Gilgamesh make observations from the flight of the birds sent out.

8:7. habits of ravens. Unlike pigeons or doves, which will return after being released, a raven's use to seamen is based on its line of flight. By noting the direction it chooses, a sailor may determine where land is located. The most sensible strategy is to release a raven first and then use other birds to determine the depth of the water and the likelihood of a place to land. A raven, by habit, lives on carrion and would therefore have sufficient food available.

8:9. habits of doves. The dove and the pigeon have a limited ability for sustained flight. Thus navigators use them to determine the location of landing sites. As long as they return, no landing is in close range. The dove lives at lower elevations and requires plants for food.

8:11. olive leaf significance. The olive leaf retrieved by the dove suggests the amount of time it would take for an olive tree to leaf out after being submerged—a clue to the current depth of the flood waters. It is also symbolic of new life and fertility to come after the flood. The olive is a difficult tree to kill, even if cut down. This freshly plucked shoot shows Noah that recovery has begun.

8:20-22. use of altars. Altars are a common element in many religions, ancient and modern. In the Bible altars were usually constructed of stone (hewn or unhewn), but in certain cir-

cumstances even a large rock would suffice (Judg 13:19-20; 1 Sam 14:33-34). Many believe that the altar would have been understood as the table for the deity, since sacrifices were popularly understood as providing a meal for the god, though that imagery is not easily recognized in the Old Testament.

8:20. purpose of Noah's sacrifice. The purpose of Noah's sacrifice is not stated. The text calls them "burnt offerings," which served a broad function in the sacrificial system. It may be more important to note what the text does not call the sacrifice. It is not a sin offering, nor specifically designated a thank offering. The burnt offerings are usually associated with petitions or entreaties set before God. In contrast, the sacrifice offered after the flood in the *Gilgamesh Epic and in the earlier *Sumerian version of the flood story feature libations and grain offerings as well as meat sacrifices in order to provide a feast for the gods. The general purpose for sacrifice in the ancient world was to appease the anger of the gods by gifts of food and drink, and that is probably the intention of the flood hero in the Mesopotamian accounts.

8:21. pleasing aroma. Sacrifice here, as well as throughout the Pentateuch, is said to produce a pleasing aroma—terminology that was retained from the ancient contexts in which sacrifice was viewed as food for deity. This account falls far short of the graphic description in the *Gilgamesh Epic, where the famished gods (deprived of food for the duration of the flood) gather around the sacrifice "like flies," glad to find reprieve from starvation.

9:1-17
The Covenant with Noah

9:2-4. meat eating in ancient world. Meat was not a common dish on ancient dinner tables. Animals were kept for their milk, hair and wool, not specifically for their meat. Thus meat was only available when an animal died or was killed as a sacrifice. While meat is now put on the list of acceptable foods, there is still a restriction on eating meat with the blood. In ancient times blood was considered a life force (Deut 12:23). The prohibition does not require that no blood at all be consumed, but only that the blood must be drained. The draining of the blood before eating the meat was a way of returning the life force of the animal to the God who gave it life. This offers recognition that they have taken the life with permission and are partaking of God's bounty as his guests. Its function is not unlike that of the blessing said before a meal in modern practice. No comparable prohibition is known in the ancient world.

9:5-6. capital punishment. Human life, because of the image of God, remains under the protection of God. The accountability to God for preserving human life is put into humanity's hands, thus instituting blood vengeance in the ancient world and capital punishment in modern societies. In Israelite society blood vengeance was in the hands of the family of the victim.

9:8-17. covenant. A *covenant is a formal agreement between two parties. The principal section of a covenant is the stipulations section, which may include requirements for either party or both. In this covenant God takes stipulations upon himself, rather than imposing them on Noah and his family. Unlike the later covenant with Abraham, and those that build on the covenant with Abraham, this covenant does not entail election or a new phase of revelation. It is also made with every living creature, not just people.

9:13. rainbow significance. The designation of the rainbow as a sign of the *covenant does not suggest that this was the first rainbow ever seen. The function of a sign is connected to the significance attached to it. In like manner, *circumcision is designated as a sign of the covenant with Abraham, yet that was an ancient practice, not new with Abraham and his family. In the *Gilgamesh Epic the goddess *Ishtar identified the lapis lazuli (deep blue semiprecious stones with traces of gold-colored pyrite) of her necklace as the basis of an oath by which she would never forget the days of the flood. An eleventh-century *Assyrian relief shows two hands reaching out of the clouds, one hand offering blessing, the other holding a bow. Since the word for rainbow is the same word as that used for the weapon, this is an interesting image.

9:18-28
Noah's Pronouncement Concerning His Sons

9:21. drinking wine. The earliest evidence of winemaking comes from neolithic Iran (Zagros region), where archaeologists discovered a jar dated to the second half of the sixth millennium with a residue of wine in the bottom.

9:24-27. patriarchal pronouncements. When Noah discovered that Ham had been indiscreet, he uttered a curse on Canaan and a blessing on Shem and Japheth. In the biblical material the patriarchal pronouncement generally concerns the destiny of the sons with re-

gard to the fertility of the ground, the fertility of the family and relationships between family members. Other examples in Genesis can be seen in 24:60; 27:27-29, 39-40; 48:15-16; 49:1-28. From this practice we can draw several conclusions concerning this passage. First of all, Ham's indiscreet action need not be seen as the "cause" for the curse, only the occasion that evoked it. Compare, for example, when Isaac asked Esau to prepare a meal so that he could bless him; the meal was not the cause of blessing, it only created a suitable environment for it. Second, we need not be concerned that Canaan appears to be singled out without cause. We could well assume that the pronouncement was much more comprehensive, including some unfavorable statements about Ham. The biblical writer has no need to preserve the whole—he merely chooses those sections that are pertinent to his point and relevant to his readers, since the Canaanites were the Hamites with whom Israel was most familiar. Third, we need not understand these as prophecies originating from God. There is no "Thus says the Lord . . ." They are the patriarch's pronouncement, not God's (cf. the use of the first person in 27:37). Even so, they were taken very seriously and considered to have influence in the unfolding of history and personal destiny.

10:1-32

The Table of Nations

10:1. criteria of division. The genealogy of Noah's family provides information on the future history and geographical distribution of peoples in the ancient Near East. Clues are given about the settlement of the coastal areas, northern Africa, Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia. All of the major regions are thus represented, as well as most of the nations who will in some way interact with the Israelites, among them Egypt, Canaan, the Philistines, the Jebusites, *Elam and Asshur. This suggests the political division of the "world" at the time this list was written and provides a definite indication that the roots of the Israelites are in Mesopotamia. There is no attempt, however, to link these peoples to racial divisions. Ancient peoples were more concerned with distinctions based on nationality, linguistics and ethnicity.

10:2-29. names: personal, patronymic, political. The names of Noah's descendants listed in the "Table of Nations" are designed to reflect the totality of humanity and to give at least a partial sense of their geopolitical divisions and affiliations. A total of seventy peoples are listed, a number found elsewhere in the text for the number of Jacob's family to enter Egypt (Gen 46:27) and as the representatives of the nation (seventy elders, Ex 24:9; Ezek 8:11). Other examples of seventy representing totality are found in the number of gods in the *Ugaritic pantheon and the number of sons of Gideon (Judg 8:30) and of Ahab (2 Kings 10:1). The kinship ties established in the list of peoples have been considered by some to reflect political affiliation (lord-vassal relationships) rather than blood tie. Kinship language is sometimes used in the Bible to reflect political associations (1 Kings 9:13). Some of the names in the list appear to be the names of tribes or nations rather than of individuals. In *Hammurabi's genealogy a number of the names are tribal or geographical names, so this would not be unusual in an ancient document. As a vertical genealogy, this list is simply trying to establish relationships of various sorts.

10:2-5. Japhethites. Although not all of the descendants of Japheth are tied to contiguous regions, they could all be defined from an Israelite perspective as coming from across the sea (NIV: "maritime peoples" in v. 5). A *Babylonian world map from the seventh or eighth century illustrates the geographical worldview that there were many peoples considered on the outskirts of civilization beyond the sea. Many named here can be identified with sections or peoples in Asia Minor (Magog, Tubal, Meshek, Tyras, Togarmah) or the Ionian islands (Dodanim), as well as Cyprus (Elisha and Kittim). There are also several that seem, based on *Assyrian and *Babylonian records, to originate in the area to the east of the Black Sea and in the Iranian plateau—Cimmerians (Gomer), Scythians (Ashkenaz), Medes (Madai), Paphlagonians (Riphat). Tarshish presents the most problems, since it has generally been identified with Spain and that takes it out of the geographic sphere of the others. However, the theme of Greek or Indo-European peoples for these "nations" would make a tie to Sardinia or perhaps Carthage possible.

10:6-20. Hamites. The common theme in the genealogy of the Hamites is their close geographical, political and economic importance to the people of Israel. These nations serve as major rivals and literally surround Israel (Egypt, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Syro-Palestine). Most important here is the political placement of groups within the Egyptian sphere (Cush, Put, Mizraim and his descendants) and the Canaanite sphere (various peoples like the Jebusites and Hivites), and, interestingly, sever-

al are classified ethnically as Semitic peoples (Canaanites, Phoenicians, *Amorites). The list is also marked by brief narratives (Nimrod and Canaan) which break up the stereotypical genealogical framework and tie in areas (*Babylon, *Nineveh, Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah) which will be significant in later periods of Israelite history.

10:8-12. Nimrod. Interpreters over the years have attempted to identify Nimrod with known historical figures such as Tukulti-Ninurta I (an *Assyrian king during the period of the biblical judges), or with Mesopotamian deities such as Ninurta, a warrior god and patron of the hunt, who in one myth hunts down a number of fantastic creatures and defeats or kills them. In Genesis, however, Nimrod is clearly a human hero rather than divine or even semidivine. Late Jewish tradition picked up occasionally by church fathers envisioned him as the builder of the Tower of Babel and the originator of idolatry, but these ideas have no basis in the text. The extension of his kingdom from southern Mesopotamia (v. 10) to northern Mesopotamia (v. 11) corresponds to the growth of the first known empire in history, the dynasty of Agade ruled by Sargon and Naram-Sin (about 2300 B.C.), among the greatest of the heroic kings of old. Nimrod's kingdom included Erech (=*Uruk), the city where *Gilgamesh reigned and one of the oldest and greatest centers of *Sumerian culture.

10:21-31. Semites. Even though Shem is the oldest son of Noah, his genealogy appears last, as is typical in Genesis for the son the text seeks to follow most closely. There is a mixture of Semitic and non-Semitic nations (by our ethnic criteria) in this list. For instance, *Elam (east of the Tigris) and Lud (Lydia in southern Asia Minor) are considered non-Semitic, but there are close historical ties to both areas in later periods. Sheba, Ophir and Havilah are all part of the Arabian region, and *Aram originated east of the Tigris and north of Elam but came to be associated with the Aramaeans, who dominated Syria and northwest Mesopotamia at the end of the second millennium B.C.

10:25. dividing of the earth. While this has traditionally been taken to refer to the division of the nations after the Tower of Babel incident (Gen 11:1-9), other possibilities exist. It could, for instance, refer to a division of human communities into sedentary farmers and pastoral nomads; or, possibly a migration of peoples is documented here that drastically transformed the culture of the ancient Near East—perhaps one represented in a break-off group traveling southeast in Genesis 11:2.

11:1-9
The Tower of Babel

11:1. common language tradition. The account of a time when all mankind spoke a single language is preserved in *Sumerian in the epic entitled *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta.* It speaks of a time when there were no wild beasts and only harmony among people: "The whole universe in unison spoke to *Enlil in one tongue." It then reports that speech was changed and "contention" was brought into it. There is nothing else in this account that parallels the Tower of Babel, but confusion of language by deity can be seen as an ancient theme.

11:2. Shinar. Shinar is one of the biblical designations for the lower region of the Tigris-Euphrates basin. It has long been identified as linguistically equivalent to "Sumer," the designation for the same region that witnessed the earliest development of civilization. The principal cities of the region in earliest times were *Ur, Eridu, *Uruk and Nippur.

11:3. brick technology. The passage speaks of using kiln-baked bricks in place of stone. In Palestine readily available stone was used for the foundations of important buildings and sun-dried brick for the superstructure. Kiln-fired brick was unnecessary and is not attested in this region. In the southern plains of Mesopotamia, however, stone would have to be quarried some distance away and transported. The technology of baking brick was developed toward the end of the fourth millennium, and the resulting product, using bitumen as a mastic, proved waterproof and as sturdy as stone. Since it was an expensive process, it was used only for important public buildings.

11:4. urbanization. Urbanization in southern Mesopotamia was pioneered by the *Sumerians in the early centuries of the third millennium B.C. The "cities" of this period were not designed for people to live in. They housed the public sector, for the most part religious buildings and storage facilities enclosed by a wall. Since the government of these early cities was made up of elders connected to the temple, there would not even have been separate government buildings, though there may have been residences for these public officials. The determination to build a city suggests a move toward urbanization, which can easily be understood as a course of action that would prevent scattering. The cooperative living available through urbanization would al-

low more people to live together in a defined region, as it would allow for large-scale irrigation and excess grain production. The need for nonurbanized peoples to scatter is well demonstrated in the story of Abraham and Lot in Genesis 13.

11:4. tower. The central feature of these early cities in southern Mesopotamia was the temple complex. Often, the temple complex *was* the city. The temple complex in this period would have been comprised of the temple itself, where the patron deity was worshiped, and, most prominently, by the ziggurat. Ziggurats were structures designed to provide stairways from the heavens (the gate of the gods) to earth so that the gods could come down into their temple and into the town and bring blessing. It was a convenience provided for the deity and his messengers. These stairways were featured in the mythology of the *Sumerians and also are portrayed in Jacob's dream (Gen 28:12). The ziggurats were constructed of a sun-dried brick frame filled with dirt and rubble and finished off with a shell of kiln-baked brick. There were no rooms, chambers or passageways of any sort inside. The structure itself was simply made to hold up the stairway. At the top was a small room for the deity, equipped with a bed and a table supplied regularly with food. In this way the deity could refresh himself during his descent. None of the festivals or *ritual acts suggest that *people* used the ziggurat for any purpose. It was for the gods. The priests certainly would have to go up to provide fresh supplies, but it was holy ground. The ziggurat served as the architectural representation of the pagan religious developments of this period, when deity was transformed into the image of man.

11:4. head in the heavens. This phrase is reserved almost exclusively for the description of ziggurats in Akkadian usage. Additionally, there are some intriguing omens in the series entitled *Summa Alu* ("If a city . . .") that indicate an impending doom that hangs over cities or towers built high. If a city lifts its head to the heaven, it will be abandoned, or there will be a change on the throne. A city that rises like a mountain peak will become a ruin, and if it goes up like a cloud to heaven there will be calamity.

11:4. making a name. The people were interested in making a name for themselves. This is a desire that God recognized as legitimate in other contexts, saying that he will make a name for Abraham and David. Having descendants was one way of making a name. While there need not be anything evil or sinful about wanting to make a name for oneself, we must also acknowledge that this desire may become obsessive or lead one to pursue wicked schemes.

11:4. avoiding scattering. Likewise, it is logical that the people would want to avoid scattering. Though God had blessed them with the privilege of multiplying so much that they would fill the earth, that did not obligate them to scatter. The filling was to be accomplished by multiplying, not by spreading out. Economic conditions would have eventually forced the breakup of any group of people, which was why they embarked on the course of urbanization. God scattered them not because he did not want them to be together, but because their united efforts were causing mischief (as we separate children who misbehave).

11:5. came down to see. The ziggurat would have been built so that God could come down into their midst to be worshiped and bring blessing with him. God indeed "came down" to see. But rather than being pleased at their provision of this convenience, he was distressed by the threshold of paganism that had been crossed in the concepts represented by the ziggurat.

11:8. settlement patterns of *Uruk phase. Many of the features of this account point to the end of the fourth millennium as the setting of the narrative. This is the period when receding water allowed settlement of the southern Tigris-Euphrates basin. Many settlements on native soil show that the occupants brought the northern Mesopotamian culture with them. It is likewise in the period known as the Late *Uruk phase (toward the end of the fourth millennium) that the culture and technology known from these settlements in southern Mesopotamia suddenly starts showing up in settlements throughout the ancient Near East. Thus both the migration referred to in verse 2 and the dispersion of verse 9 find points of contact in the settlement pattern identified by archaeologists for the end of the fourth millennium. Urbanization, ziggurat prototypes and experimentation with kiln-baked brick also fit this time period.

11:9. ancient Babylon. The ancient history of *Babylon is difficult to recover. Excavations at the site cannot go back further than the beginning of the second millennium because the water table of the Euphrates has shifted over time and destroyed the lower levels. In the literature of Mesopotamia there is no significant mention of Babylon until it is made the capital

of the *Old Babylonian empire in the eighteenth century B.C.

11:10-32

The Line of Shem, the Family of Abraham

11:28. Ur of the Chaldees. Abraham's family is from *Ur of the Chaldees. For many generations the only *Ur that has been known to modern scholars is the famous *Sumerian city on the southern Euphrates. It has been somewhat of a mystery why this southern city would be referred to as *Ur of the Chaldees—since at this time the Chaldeans were settled primarily in the northern section of Mesopotamia. An alternative was provided when textual evidence from Mesopotamia began to produce evidence of a smaller town by the name of *Ur in the northern region, not far from Haran (where Terah moves his family). This town could logically be referred to as *Ur of the Chaldees to differentiate it from the well-known *Ur in the south. This would also explain why Abraham's family is always seen as having its homeland in "Paddan *Aram" or "Aram Naharaim" (24:10; 28:2, descriptions of northern Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates).

11:30. barrenness in the ancient Near East. Failure to produce an heir was a major calamity for a family in the ancient world because it meant a disruption in the generational inheritance pattern and left no one to care for the couple in their old age. Thus legal remedies were developed which allowed a man whose wife had failed to provide him with a son to impregnate a slave girl (Code of *Hammurabi; *Nuzi texts) or a prostitute (Lipit-Ishtar Code). The children from this relationship could then be acknowledged by the father as his heirs (Code of Hammurabi). Abram and Sarai employ the same strategy when they use the slave girl Hagar as a legal surrogate to produce an heir for the aged couple (see comments on Gen 16:1-4).

11:31. Haran. The city of Haran was located 550 miles northwest of the southern *Ur, on the left bank of the Balikh River (a tributary of the upper Euphrates). Today it is in modern Turkey about ten miles from the Syrian-Turkish border. It is mentioned prominently in the *Mari texts (eighteenth century B.C.) as a center of *Amorite population in northern Mesopotamia and an important crossroads. It was known to feature a temple to the moon god, Sin. There has been very limited excavation at the site due to continuing occupation.

12:1-9

Abraham Travels to Canaan

12:1. father's household. A man was identified in the ancient world as a member of his father's household. When the head of the household died, his heir assumed that title and its responsibilities. It is also identified with ancestral lands and property. By leaving his father's household, Abram was thus giving up his inheritance and his right to family property.

12:1. The *covenant promises. Land, family and inheritance were among the most significant elements in ancient society. For farmers and herdsmen land was their livelihood. For city dwellers land represented their political identity. Descendants represented the future. Children provided for their parents in old age and enabled the family line to extend another generation. They gave proper burial to their parents and honored the names of their ancestors. In some of the ancient Near Eastern cultures these were considered essential to maintaining a comfortable existence in the afterlife. When Abram gave up his place in his father's household, he forfeited his security. He was putting his survival, his identity, his future and his security in the hands of the Lord.

12:6. tree of Moreh. Most likely this was a great Tabor oak *(Quercus ithaburensis)*, which served as a landmark at Shechem and perhaps could have functioned as a point where a teacher (the literal meaning of *Moreh*) or judge would come to hear legal cases or provide instruction (such as Deborah's palm tree in Judg 4:5 and Danil's judgment tree in the *Ugaritic epic of *Aqhat). Besides being valued for their shade, such trees also served as evidences of *fertility and were therefore often adopted as places of worship (not often as objects of worship).

12:6. Shechem. The site of Shechem has been identified with Tell Balatah, east of modern Nablus and thirty-five miles north of Jerusalem. Perhaps because of its proximity to two nearby peaks, Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, it has had a long history as a sacred site. The strategic position of Shechem, at the east entrance to the pass between these mountains, also made it an important trading center. As early as the *Middle Bronze I period, Shechem is mentioned in the Egyptian texts of Pharaoh Sesostris III (1880-1840 B.C.). Excavations have revealed an apparently unwalled settlement in *Middle Bronze IIA (about 1900 B.C.) with the development of fortifications in Middle Bronze IIB (about 1750).

12:6-9. significance of altars. Altars function as sacrificial platforms. Their construction can also mark the introduction of the worship of a particular god in a new land. Abram's setting up of altars in each place where he camped defines areas to be occupied in the "Promised Land" and establishes these places as religious centers in later periods.

12:10-20
Abraham in Egypt

12:10. famine in the land. Syria-Palestine has a fragile ecology that is based on the rains which come in the winter and spring months. If these rains fail to come at the appropriate time, are less or more than is expected, or fail to come at all, then planting and harvests are negatively affected. It was not uncommon for drought and resulting famine to occur in this region. Egyptian Papyrus Anastasi VI reports of an entire clan going down into Egypt during a drought. Modern archaeologists and geologists have found evidence of a massive three-hundred-year drought cycle that occurred during the end of the third millennium and the beginning of the second millennium—one of the time periods to which Abraham is dated.

12:11-12. wife as sister. The wife/sister theme appears three times in Genesis. It functions as (1) a protective strategy by migrants against local authorities, (2) a contest between God and the god-king Pharaoh in Genesis 12 and (3) a literary motif designed to heighten tension in the story when the promise of an heir to the *covenant is threatened. The logic is possibly that if an individual in power desired to take a woman into his harem he might be inclined to negotiate with a brother, but he would be more likely to eliminate a husband. In each case, the ancestral couple are reunited and enriched and the local ruler is shamed. On a personal level this does not speak well of Abram, but it does make him appear more human than in other stories.

12:11. the beauty of aged Sarah. Sarah is described as a beautiful woman, though by this time she is between sixty-five and seventy years of age. The phrase used to describe Sarah here is sometimes used to describe a woman's beauty (2 Sam 14:27), but it does not necessarily refer strictly to feminine allure or attractiveness. It is sometimes used to describe male good looks (1 Sam 17:42), but it may be important to note that the phrase is also used to describe a fine specimen of cow (Gen 41:2). We need not therefore assume that Sarah has miraculously retained the stunning beauty of youth. Her dignity, her bearing, her countenance, her outfitting could all contribute to the impression that she is a striking woman.

12:10-20. Beni Hasan tomb painting. The Twelfth Dynasty (nineteenth century B.C.) tomb painting of Khnumhotep III at Beni Hasan (near Minya in Middle Egypt) depicts one of many caravans of "Asiatics" that brought raw materials and exotic items (frankincense, lapis lazuli). These traders wear multicolored robes, bring their families with them and travel with their weapons and donkeys laden with "ox-hide," ingots of bronze and other trade goods. Their garb and the ease with which they were able to travel to Egypt may well reflect the look of Abram's household. Egypt served as both a market as well as a source of food and temporary employment for many groups driven by war or famine from the rest of the Near East.

12:17. nature of disease. The assumption in the ancient world is that all disease is a reflection of the displeasure of a god or gods. Infectious disease could be coped with through purification and sacrifice and might be treated with herbal medicines, but the root cause was viewed as divine, not physical. Thus disease was considered the direct result of sin or some violation of custom, so the ancients would seek to determine which god might be responsible and how he might be appeased. Medicinal remedies would be augmented by magical remedies and incantations.

13:1-18
Abraham and Lot

13:1-4. Abram's itinerary. Since the household is depicted as pastoral nomads, they would have had to stop periodically to find pasture and water for the herds and flocks. The Negev was more heavily populated in the early second millennium and might have provided specific staging points for this journey (see Ex 17:1). The return to the vicinity of Bethel marks the resumption of the *covenantal narrative and sets the stage for the separation from Lot. From the border of Egypt to the area of Bethel/Ai would be a journey of about two hundred miles.

13:5-7. herding needs and lifestyle. The primary requirements for a successful herding group are pasturage and water sources. The hot, dry months from April through September require movement of herds to higher elevations where grass remains and streams and springs can be found. In the colder, wet months of October through March, the ani-

mals will be brought back to the plains for grazing. This seasonal movement necessitates long separations of herders from their villages or the establishment of an unconnected, seminomadic lifestyle in which whole families travel with the herds. The knowledge of natural resources along their routes of travel would be their primary lore. Disputes over grazing land and water rights would be the most frequent cause of quarrels between herdsmen.

13:7. Canaanites and Perizzites. See comment on Exodus 3:7-10.

13:10. the plain of the Jordan. It would be possible to get a good view of the Jordan Valley and the northern area of the Dead Sea from the hills around Bethel. While the area around the Dead Sea is not a particularly hospitable region today, this verse makes it clear that prior to the Lord's judgment the area had a far different quality. It should be noted that there are extensive areas along the Jordan Plateau that do provide ample grazing, and this may also be represented in this narrative.

13:12. the boundaries of Canaan. The eastern boundary of Canaan is everywhere identified as the Jordan River (see especially Num 34:1-12 and the comments on it). Thus it becomes clear that by moving to the vicinity of the cities of the plain Lot has gone outside the land of Canaan, leaving it entirely to Abram.

13:18. Hebron. The city of Hebron is located in the Judean hill country (c. 3,300 feet above sea level) approximately nineteen miles southwest of Jerusalem and twenty-three miles northeast of Beersheba. Ancient roadways converge on this site coming east from Lachish and connecting with the road north to Jerusalem, indicating its importance and continuous settlement. Its springs and wells provide ample water for olive and grape production and would have supported a mixed agricultural-pastoral economy such as that described in Genesis 23. Hebron is said to have been founded "seven years before Zoan" (Avaris in Egypt), dating it to the seventeenth century B.C. (see comment on Num 13:22). The construction of an altar here, as at Bethel, transforms this into an important religious site, and its subsequent use as a burial place for the ancestors established its political importance (reflected in the Davidic narrative—2 Sam 2:1-7; 15:7-12).

14:1-16
Abraham Rescues Lot

14:1-4. the kings of the East. The kings of the East have remained stubbornly obscure despite numerous attempts to link them to historically known figures, though the geographical areas they represent can be identified with some confidence. Shinar refers elsewhere in the Bible to the southern Mesopotamian plains known in earliest times as *Sumer and later connected to *Babylonia. Ellasar corresponds to an ancient way of referring to *Assyria (a.la$_5$.sar). *Elam is the usual name for the region, which in this period comprised the whole of the land east of Mesopotamia from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf (modern Iran). Goiim is the most vague, but it is generally associated with the *Hittites (who were located in the eastern section of present-day Turkey), mostly because the king's name, Tidal, is easily associated with the common Hittite royal name, Tudhaliyas. As a reference to a group of people, Goiim would most likely refer to a coalition of "barbaric" peoples (like the *Akkadian designation, *Umman Manda*). In *Mari it is a designation used to refer to the Haneans. While there were many periods in the first half of the second millennium when the Elamites were closely associated with powers in Mesopotamia, it is more difficult to bring the Hittites into the picture. We do know that *Assyrian merchants had a trading colony in the Hittite region, but there is no indication of joint military ventures. Early Hittite history is very sketchy, and we have little information concerning where the Hittites came from or precisely when they moved into Anatolia. The names of the kings of the East are authentic enough, but none of them have been identified or linked to the kings of these respective regions at this period. So, for instance, there is an Arioch who was prince of Mari in the eighteenth century. We certainly have no information of Elamite control of sections of Palestine as suggested in verse 4, but it must be admitted that there are many gaps in our knowledge of the history of this period. None of the five kings of Canaan are known outside the Bible, for even these cities are yet unattested in other ancient records, despite occasional claims of possible references to Sodom.

14:5-7. the itinerary and conquests of the kings of the East. The itinerary of conquest is given as is common in chronographic texts. The route goes from north to south along what is known as the King's Highway, the major north-south artery in Transjordan, just east of the Jordan Valley. Ashtaroth,

neighboring the capital later called Karnaim, was the capital of the region just east of the Sea of Galilee inhabited by the Rephaim. Virtually nothing is known of these peoples, or of the Zuzites and Emites, though all of them are identified with the giants of the land at the time of the conquest under Joshua (cf. Deut 2). The next stop was Ham in northern Gilead. Shaveh, also known as Kiriathaim, was in Reubenite territory when the land was divided among the tribes and bordered on the Moabite region. The Horites were the people living in the region later known as Edom, the next region south. After reaching the area of the gulf of Aqaba (the town of El Paran= Elath?), the invaders turn northwest to confront the Amalekites in the region of Kadesh Barnea (at that time called En Mishpat) and the *Amorites in the southern hill country. This route then brings them around to the cities of the plain in the region south and east of the Dead Sea. The towns of Sodom and Gomorrah have not been located with any certainty, though some think that their remains are beneath part of the Dead Sea (see comments on Gen 19). After the battle in the Valley of Siddim, the four kings traveled along the west side of the Jordan and got as far as Dan, in the very north of the land of Canaan, before being overtaken by Abraham and his men.

14:10. tar pits. Tar pits are common in this area that is so rich in bitumen that large amounts bubble to the surface and even float on the Dead Sea. The word translated "pits" is the same word used for wells of water throughout the Old Testament and therefore generally refers to a spot that has been dug out. The Valley of Siddim, then, had many pits that had been dug to extract bitumen, and these provided refuge for the kings (they "lowered themselves into them" rather than "they fell into them").

14:13. "the Hebrew." Abram is referred to as "Abram the Hebrew." Typically the designation "Hebrew" in early times was used only as a point of reference for foreigners. Besides the use here, it is used to identify Joseph in Egypt (e.g., 39:14-17), the Israelite slaves in reference to the Egyptian masters (Ex 2:11), Jonah to the sailors (Jon 1:9), the Israelites to the Philistines (1 Sam 4:6), and other such situations. Some have thought that "Hebrew" is not in these cases an ethnic reference but a designation of a social class of people known as the "Habiru" in many ancient texts, where they are typically dispossessed peoples.

14:14-16. 318 trained men. Here we discover that Abram has a household of significant size (318 recruits or retainers). The word used to describe these men occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament, but does occur in an *Akkadian letter of the fifteenth century B.C. Whether Abram is placed within the early part of the *Middle Bronze Age, when the area was predominantly occupied by herdsmen and villagers, or within the later *Middle Bronze Age when there were more fortified settlements, this army would have been a match for any other armed force in the region. Even as late as the *Amarna period the armies of any particular city state would not have been much larger.

14:15. battle tactics. Abram caught up to the eastern army at the northern border of the land, Dan. Abram uses the strategy of nighttime ambush, which is attested in texts as

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THE RELIGION OF ABRAHAM

It is important to notice that Abraham comes from a family that is not monotheistic (see Josh 24:2,14). They would have shared the polytheistic beliefs of the ancient world at that time. In this type of system the gods were connected to the forces of nature and showed themselves through natural phenomena. These gods did not reveal their natures or give any idea of what would bring their favor or wrath. They were worshipped by being flattered, cajoled, humored and appeased. Manipulation is the operative term. They were gods made in the image of man. One of the main reasons that God made a covenant with Abraham was in order to reveal what he was really like—to correct the false view of deity that people had developed. But this was projected to take place in stages, not all at once.

The Lord, Yahweh, is not portrayed as a God that Abraham already worshiped. When he appears to Abraham he does not give him a doctrinal statement or require rituals or issue demands; he makes an offer. Yahweh does not tell Abraham that he is the only God there is, and he does not ask him to stop worshiping whatever gods his family was worshiping. He does not tell him to get rid of his idols nor does he proclaim a coming Messiah or salvation. Instead, he says that he has something to give Abraham if Abraham is willing to give up some things first.

In the massive polytheistic systems of the ancient Near East the great cosmic deities, while respected and worshiped in national and royal contexts, had little personal contact with the common people. Individuals were more inclined to focus their personal or family worship on local or family deities. We can best understand this through an analogy to politics. Though we respect and recognize the

early as the Judges period in Egyptian as well as in *Hittite documents.

14:17-24
Abraham and Melchizedek

14:17-20. Melchizedek. Melchizedek is introduced as the king of Salem and is portrayed as the principal king of the region in that he receives a portion of the booty. Salem is generally considered to be Jerusalem, though early Christian evidence and the Madeba map associate it with Shechem. (The Madeba map is the earliest map of Palestine. It is a mosaic on the floor of a sixth-century A.D. church.) Often one city-state would gain predominance over the others in the region, as is seen in the book of Joshua where kings of Jerusalem and Hazor put the southern and northern coalitions together. Whether Melchizedek is Canaanite, *Amorite or Jebusite cannot be easily determined. The name of God that he uses to bless Abram, *El Elyon* ("God Most High"), is well known as a way of referring to the chief Canaanite god, *El, in Canaanite literature.

14:18-19. meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek. Their meeting takes place in the Valley of Shaveh. The designation of it as the King's Valley connects it to the valley just south of Jerusalem, most likely where the Kidron and Hinnom valleys come together. In a later period, Absalom built a monument here (2 Sam 18:18). The communal meal that they share would typically indicate a peaceful agreement between them. *Hittite treaties refer to the provision of food in wartime by allies. Melchizedek is anxious to make peace with such a proven military force, and Abram submits by paying the tithe, thereby acknowledging Melchizedek's status.

14:21-24. agreement between Abraham and kings of Sodom. The king of Sodom acknowledged that Abram had a right to the booty, but asks that the people be returned to him. Abram refuses the booty with the explanation that he is under oath to *El Elyon (whom he identifies as *Yahweh) not to profit from his military action. It is possible that this agreement would have occasioned the formulation of a document to formalize the terms. Such a document could easily have taken the form that this chapter takes and may have even served as a source for this chapter.

15:1-21
Ratification of the Covenant

15:1. visions. Visions were a means used by God to communicate to people. All of the other visions of this category in the Old Testament were given to prophets (the writing prophets as well as Balaam) and often resulted in prophetic *oracles which were then delivered to the people. Visions may be experienced in dreams but are not the same as dreams. They may be either visual or auditory. They may involve natural or supernatural settings, and the individual having the vision may be either an observer or a participant. Visions are likewise part of the prophetic institution in other cultures in the ancient Near East.

15:2-3. inheritance by servant. In those instances where the head of a household had no male heir, it was possible for a servant to be legally adopted as the heir, as particularly demonstrated in an *Old Babylonian text from *Larsa. This would most likely be a course of last resort, since it would mean transference of property to a person (and his line) who was (1) originally a servant or

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authority of our national leaders, if we have a problem in our community we would pursue it with our local government rather than write a letter to the president. In Mesopotamia in the first part of the second millennium an important religious development can be observed that parallels this common sense approach to politics. The people began to relate to "personal gods" who were often then adopted as family gods from generation to generation. This was usually the function of minor deities and was at times no more than a personification of luck. The personal god was one that was believed to have taken special interest in the family or an individual and became a source of blessing and good fortune in return for worship and obedience. While the personal god was not worshipped exclusively, most of the worship by the individual and his family would be focused on him.

It is possible that Abraham's first responses to Yahweh may have been along these lines—that Abraham may have viewed Yahweh as a personal god that was willing to become his "divine sponsor." Though we are given no indication that Yahweh explained or demanded a monotheistic belief, nor that Abraham responded with one, it is clear that the worship of Yahweh dominated Abraham's religious experience. By making a break with his land, his family and his inheritance, Abraham is also breaking all of his religious ties, because deities would be associated with geographical, political and ethnic divisions. In his new land Abraham would have no territorial gods; as a new people he would have brought no family gods; having left his country he would have no national or city gods; and it was Yahweh who filled this void becoming the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

bondsman, and (2) not a blood relative. It signals the frustration of the childless Abram that he tells God that he has designated Eliezer of Damascus as his heir, though it is not clear whether he has actually adopted Eliezer or is simply referring to that as the only remaining course of action.

15:9-10. the ritual of dividing animals. As in the case in Jeremiah 34:18, where a *covenant *ritual is represented by passage between the severed body of a sacrificial animal, here Abram is given the "sign" of the covenant promise for which he asked. Each "three-year old" animal (calf, goat, ram, dove, pigeon, the same animals featured in the sacrificial system described in Leviticus) is cut in half, although the body sections of the birds are not separated. Second-millennium *Hittite texts use a similar procedure for purification, while some first-millennium *Aramaic treaties use such a ritual for placing a curse on any violation of the treaty. Texts from *Mari and *Alalakh feature the killing of animals as part of the ceremony of making a treaty. Walking through this sacrificial pathway could be seen as a symbolic action enacting both the covenant's promise of land and a curse on the one who violates the promise, though interpreters have wondered what significance a self-curse could possibly have for God. Abram's driving away the birds of prey further symbolizes the future protection from their enemies when they take possession of the land.

15:17. smoking firepot and blazing torch. The firepot is made of earthenware and could be of various sizes. It functioned as an oven principally for baking, including the baking of grain offerings (Lev 2:4). The torch could certainly be used to provide light, but it is also used in military contexts or to speak of God's judgment (Zech 12:6). Mesopotamian *rituals of this period usually featured a sacred torch and censer in the initiation of rites, particularly nocturnal rites of purification. Purification would be accomplished by the torch and censer being moved alongside of someone or something. While in Mesopotamia the torch and oven represented particular deities, here they represent *Yahweh, perhaps as the purifier. This would be one of many instances where the Lord used familiar concepts and motifs to reveal himself.

15:18. river of Egypt. The usual designation of Israel's southwestern border is the "brook [wadi] of Egypt," identified with Wadi el 'Arish in the northeastern Sinai (Num 34:5). It is unlikely that it refers to the Nile River. Another possibility is that it refers to the eastern-most delta tributary that emptied into Lake Sirbonis.

15:19-21. occupants of Canaan. This is the longest (including ten groups) of seventeen such lists of Canaan's pre-Israelite peoples (see Deut 7:1; Josh 3:10; 1 Kings 9:20). Each of these lists, which usually comprise six or seven names, ends with the Jebusites (perhaps tied to David's conquest of Jerusalem), but the list in Genesis 15 is the only one to exclude the Hivites. For the *Hittites, Perizzites, *Amorites, Canaanites and Jebusites, see the comments on Exodus 3:7-10 and Numbers 13. The Kenites are often associated with the Midianites and appear as a seminomadic people from the Sinai and Negev region. The name suggests that they were metalworkers, tinkerers or smiths. The Kenizzites, Kadmonites and Girgashites are little known, though the latter is also attested in the *Ugaritic texts. The Rephaim are considered to be Anakites in Deuteronomy 2:11, who in turn appear as giants in Numbers 13:33. Aside from these associations, nothing is known of this ethnic group.

16:1-16
The Birth of Ishmael

16:1-4. maidservants. Slave women or bondswomen were considered both property and legal extensions of their mistress. As a result it would be possible for Sarai to have Hagar perform a variety of household tasks as well as to use her as a surrogate for her own barren womb.

16:2. contractual arrangements for barrenness. *Concubines did not have the full status of wives but were girls who came to the marriage with no dowry and whose role included childbearing. As a result concubinage would not be viewed as polygamy. In Israel, as in most of the ancient world, monogamy was generally practiced. Polygamy was not contrary to the law or contemporary moral standards but was usually not economically feasible. The main reason for polygamy would be that the first wife was barren. In the Bible most cases of polygamy among commoners occur prior to the period of the monarchy.

16:3-4. surrogate mothers. Surrogate mothers appear only in the ancestral narratives: Hagar and the two maidservants of Rachel and Leah (Gen 30). There is no contract mentioned here, since these women were all legal extensions of their mistress and any children they bore could be designated as the children of their mistress. The eighteenth century B.C. *Babylo-

nian Code of *Hammurabi does contain surrogate contracts for priestesses who were not allowed to conceive children. As in the biblical examples, these surrogates had a lower legal standing than the wife.

16:5-6. relationship of Sarah and Hagar. Women in the ancient world obtained honor through marriage and children. Although Hagar was a servant, the fact that she had conceived a child and Sarai had not gave her cause to hold her mistress in contempt. Sarai's reaction in abusing Hagar may be based on both jealousy and class difference.

16:7-10. angel as messenger. The word translated "angel" simply means "messenger" in Hebrew and can be used for either human or supernatural messengers. Since these messengers represent God, they do not speak for themselves, but only for God. It is therefore not unusual for them to use the first person, "I." Messengers were granted the authority to speak for the one they represented and were treated as if they were the one they represented.

16:13-14. "seeing God." Hagar affirms a supernatural identity for the messenger and may well believe that the messenger was indeed a deity, but the fact that she expresses incredulity about the likelihood of having seen a deity does not mean that she actually has seen one (additionally the text is very difficult to translate and may not even suggest this much). Most likely Hagar is expressing surprise that she has encountered a deity who is inclined to show favor to her in such an unlikely place.

16:13. naming God. The text identifies the deity as the LORD (*Yahweh) but gives no indication that Hagar knew it was Yahweh. This is the only example in the Old Testament of someone assigning a name to deity. Usually naming someone or something is a way of affirming authority over the one named. Here it is more likely that since she does not know the name of the deity that has shown her favor, she assigns a name to him as an identification of his nature and so that she might invoke him in the future.

16:14. Kadesh and Bered. The location of the well of Beer Lahai Roi, where Hagar experienced a *theophany and was told of her son's future, is most likely in the Negev between Kadesh Barnea and Bered. The oasis of Kadesh Barnea is in the northeast section of the Sinai, on the southern border of the Wilderness of Zin (see comment on Num 13). Since Bered does not appear elsewhere in the text, its location is uncertain, though Jebel umm el-Bared to the southeast is as good a guess as any.

17:1-27

Circumcision, the Sign of the Covenant

17:1-2. El Shaddai. *El Shaddai ("God Almighty") in verse 1 is a relatively common name used for the Lord in the Old Testament (48 times), though the conventional translations are little more than guesses. It appears only once outside the Old Testament in the name "Shaddai-Ammi" on an Egyptian statue from the Judges period, though there may be a reference to Shaddai-beings in the Deir Allah inscription. One of the most frequent suggestions understands Shaddai as related to the *Babylonian *sadu,* "steppe, mountain," but evidence is sparse.

17:3-8. name changing. Names had power in the ancient world. By naming the animals, Adam demonstrated his mastery over them. In a similar way, God's changing Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah signifies both a reiteration of the *covenant promise and the designation of these people as God's chosen servants.

17:4. covenanting with God. There are no parallels in the ancient world to *covenants between deity and mortal, though certainly gods are known to make demands and promise favorable treatment. In most of these cases kings report their care of the sanctuaries of the god and then tell how the deity responded with blessing. But these fall far short of a covenant relationship initiated by deity for his own purposes.

17:9-14. circumcision. *Circumcision was practiced widely in the ancient Near East as a rite of puberty, fertility or marriage. Although the Israelites were not the only people to circumcise their sons, this sign was used to mark them as members of the *covenantal community. When used in relation to marriage, terminology suggests it was performed by the new male in-laws, indicating that the groom was coming under the protection of their family in this new relationship. Performed on infants, it is more a ritual scarring than something done for health reasons. The fact that blood is shed also signifies that this is a sacrificial *ritual and may function as a substitution for human sacrifice, which was practiced by other people. Waiting until the eighth day to perform this ritual may reflect the high infant mortality rate and the desire to determine if the child was viable. The *Hittites also had a ritual for the seventh day of the newborn's life. Circumcision can be seen as one of many cases where God transforms a common practice to a new (though not necessarily unrelated) purpose in

revealing himself and relating to his people.

17:15-22. divine announcement of sons. The divine announcement of a son to be born is a common motif found throughout ancient Near Eastern literature. Perhaps most notable is the announcement by the Canaanite deity *El to King Danil that he would finally have a son in his old age, in the *Ugaritic story of *Aqhat. Additional examples are found in the *Hittite tale where the sun god tells Appu he will have a son, and in Mesopotamian literature where the god Shamash advises *Etana, king of Kish, how to procure a son. Also notable in this text is the statement that Sarah will be the mother of kings. This would be an indication of long survival of the line and great success for the line.

18:1-15
Abraham's Visitors

18:1. entrance to tent at heat of day. The goatskin tents of pastoral nomadic people were designed to hold in heat at night with the flaps down and to allow a breeze to pass through during the day, when the flaps were up. Sitting at the entrance during the heat of the day would provide needed shade while a person enjoyed the breeze and guarded the tent's contents.

18:2-5. hospitality (meals). Hospitality customs required that all strangers who approached a dwelling were to be offered the opportunity to rest, refresh themselves and eat a meal. This was done to transform potential enemies into at least temporary friends. Protocol required that the meal served to the guest exceed what was first offered. Thus Abraham simply offers a meal, but what he orders prepared is freshly baked bread, a calf and a mixture of milk and yogurt. What is particularly generous here is the fresh meat, an item not usually found in their daily diet. This meal is similar to that offered by Danil to the representative of the gods, Kathar-wa-Hasis (when he comes traveling through town), in the Ugaritic epic of Aqhat.

18:4. foot washing. Washing the feet of guests was a standard act of hospitality in the dry, dusty climate that characterized much of the ancient Near East. Open leather sandals were common, as were enclosed soft leather boots. Neither style succeeded in keeping out the dirt of the road.

18:6-8. flour and baking. The three seahs of flour (c. twenty quarts) used to make bread again reflects Abraham's generosity to his guests. The method of baking, since nomadic people lacked ovens, would be placing the dough on the sides of a heated pot or dutch oven. This produced a slightly raised, circular loaf of bread. Curds (yogurt) and milk are served along with the meal as customary side dishes and normal byproducts of the herd. The fact that Sarah remains in the tent may reflect a custom of women not eating with men.

18:16-33
Discussion of God's Justice and Mercy

18:20-21. judge collecting evidence. There is a combination of anthropomorphism (God being given humanlike qualities) and theodicy (explanation of divine action) in this story and in the Tower of Babel episode (Gen 11). In both cases, to demonstrate divine justice and fairness, God "comes down" to investigate a situation before taking action.

18:22-33. Abraham's bargaining. Haggling is a part of all Middle Eastern business transactions. In this case, however, Abraham's determination of the exact number of righteous persons needed to prevent the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah provides a repeated demonstration of God's just actions. A just God will not destroy the righteous without warning or investigation. Even the unrighteous, in this early period, can be spared for the sake of the righteous. On the other hand, however, justice is not served by overlooking wickedness. The discussion of the number of righteous people may concern not whether they can balance the wickedness of the rest but whether, given time, they might be able to exert a reforming influence.

19:1-29
The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

19:1, 24. Sodom and Gomorrah. The "cities of the plain" along the eastern shore of the Dead Sea have not been positively located. Their association with Zoar (Zoara on the sixth-century A.D. Madaba map) and the bitumen pits "in the Valley of Siddim" (Gen 14:10) both point to the southern end of the Dead Sea. Arguments for their identification with the north end are based on the distance to travel from Hebron (eighteen miles versus forty miles to the southern location) and the mention of the "plain of the Jordan" in Genesis 13:10-12. Cities located in this arid region survived and prospered on the salt, bitumen and potash deposits around the Dead Sea and as trading centers for caravans traveling the road north

and south. There are five sites of *Early Bronze Age cities on the southeast plain of the Dead Sea, demonstrating that fairly large populations once existed here (occupied from 3300 to 2100 B.C.): Bab-edh Dhra' (Sodom?), Safi (Zoar), Numeira (Gomorrah?), Feifa and Khanazir. Only Bab-edh Dhra and Numeira have been excavated, and the destruction of these cities has been set by archaeologists at about 2350 B.C., too early for Abraham (though chronological reckoning of this period is difficult).

19:1-3. sitting at the gate. In ancient cities the gate area functioned as a public square. Its constant flow of people made it the ideal place for businessmen to set up their booths and for judges to hear cases. The fact that Lot is sitting in the gate suggests he was doing business there and had been accepted in the community of Sodom.

19:1. bowing to the ground. One way to show respect to superiors and to demonstrate peaceful intentions was to bow to the ground. Some Egyptian texts from *El Amarna (fourteenth century B.C.) exaggerate this gesture by multiplying it seven times.

19:2. hospitality (lodging). When a host offered a guest the opportunity to spend the night, he was also accepting responsibility for the safety and well-being of his guest. The offer generally extended for a total of three days.

19:3. bread without yeast. As in the case of the unleavened bread eaten on Passover prior to the exodus (Ex 12) from Egypt, Lot's "bread without yeast" was made quickly. It was evening when his guests arrived, and he did not have time to let his bread rise before baking it.

19:4-10. behavior of men at Sodom. The angels' visit to Sodom was to determine if there were ten righteous men there. The legal formula in verse 4 makes it clear that all of the men of the city confronted Lot about his guests. In addition to the fact that homosexuality was considered a capital offense, their refusal to listen to reason and their unanimous insistence on violence as they rushed toward his house confirmed the fate of the city.

19:8. Lot's offer of his daughters. When Lot offers his virgin daughters to the men of Sodom as a substitute for his guests, he is playing the consummate host. He is willing to sacrifice his most precious possessions to uphold his honor by protecting his guests. He was saved from making this sacrifice by the refusal of the mob and the actions of the angels.

19:11. blindness. The word for blindness here is used elsewhere only for the Aramean army at Dothan (2 Kings 6:18). It is a term related to an Akkadian word for day-blindness (pertinent to 2 Kings 6) and also serves in Hebrew (as in Aramaic) to refer to night-blindness. Both of these conditions are seen in Akkadian texts as requiring magical remedies. Day-blindness and night-blindness have vitamin A deficiency as their principal cause, and vitamin B deficiency may contribute to the sense of confusion evident in both passages. It is therefore of interest that liver (rich in vitamin A) figures prominently in the magical procedures to correct the condition.

19:24. burning sulfur. The scene is one of divine retribution. Brimstone appears here and elsewhere as an agent of purification and divine wrath upon the wicked (Ps 11:6; Ezek 38:22). The natural deposits of bitumen and the sulfurous smell attached to some areas around the Dead Sea combine to provide a lasting memory of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction. One can only speculate about the actual manner of this destruction, but perhaps the combustion of natural tars and sulfur deposits and the release of noxious gases during an earthquake are a part of the story (Deut 29:23).

19:26. pillar of salt. The story of the punishment of Lot's wife is often illustrated by some grotesquely humanlike, salt-encrusted objects that have become landmarks in the Dead Sea area (alluded to in the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon 10:4). This phenomenon is a result of the salt spray that blows off the Dead Sea. Huge salt nodules still appear in the shallow sections of the lake. The mineral salts of the region include sodium, potash, magnesium, calcium chlorides and bromide. An earthquake in the area could easily have ignited these chemicals, causing them to rain down on the victims of the destruction.

19:30-38. origins of Moabites and Ammonites. One primary intent of the ancestral narrative is to demonstrate the origin of all of the peoples that inhabited Canaan and Transjordan. Archaeological survey of the area indicates a resettlement between the fourteenth and twelfth centuries B.C., and the language of both the Moabites and Ammonites is similar to Hebrew. Although both are considered enemy nations for most of their history, it is unlikely that their "birth" as a result of the incestuous union between Lot and his daughters (see Deut 2:9; Ps 83:5-8) is simply a political or ethnic slur. The initiative taken by Lot's daughters in the face of likely childlessness and the extinction of Lot's household may have appeared to them as the only feasible option in their desperate plight.

20:1-18

Abraham and Abimelech

20:1. Kadesh and Shur. Again a story begins with the itinerary of Abraham's travels, this time taking him south on a line between Kadesh (an oasis forty-six miles south of Beersheba in the northeastern Sinai) and Shur. The latter site probably refers to the "wall" *(shur)* of Egyptian fortresses in the eastern Delta region. The Egyptian story of *Sinuhe (twentieth century B.C.) mentions this "Wall of the Ruler" as a barrier to the incursions of Asiatics into Egypt.

20:1. Gerar. Although it is not within the range of the Kadesh-Shur line, Gerar may not have been too far of a journey for pastoral nomads such as Abraham's household. Its exact location, beyond the general area of the western Negev, is uncertain (Gen 10:19), and it may in fact be the name for a territory rather than a city. Most archaeologists, noting strong Egyptian influence in this region between 1550 and 1200 B.C., point to Tell Haror (Tell Abu Hureireh), fifteen miles northwest of Beersheba, as its probable location.

20:3. God speaking to non-Israelite in dream. There are few instances of messages being given in dreams by the Lord to Israelites, but dreams are one of the most common forms divine revelation was believed to take for the uninitiated. In the *Mari texts it is usually those who are not among the professional temple personnel who receive messages by means of dreams. In most places in the Bible where significant dreams are given to individuals the text does not explicitly state that God spoke to the individual in the dream (Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar).

20:7. prophet's intercession. Abraham is identified by God as a prophet who is capable of intercession on Abimelech's behalf. The role of prophet was well understood in the ancient Near East, as evidenced by over fifty texts found in the town of *Mari that report messages given by various prophets. Generally the prophet offered a message from deity, but here Abraham is praying for healing (cf. v. 17). This reflects the broader view of a prophet as one who has powerful connections to deity such that he can initiate curses or remove them. A similar prophetic role can be seen in Scripture in 1 Kings 13:6. In the ancient Near East this role would typically be played by an incantation priest.

20:11-13. relationship of Abraham and Sarah. In this repetition of the wife/sister motif, Abraham reveals that Sarah is actually his half sister. There was no incest taboo against such marriages in the ancestral period, and it was a way of insuring that female children from second marriages were cared for by a household. Abraham's deception of Abimelech is reinforced by Sarah's willingness to repeat the half-truth.

20:16. 1000 shekels. A thousand shekels of silver is a sizable sum. In *Ugaritic literature it is the amount of the bride price paid among the gods. In weight it would equal about twenty-five pounds of silver. In value it would be more than a worker could expect to make in a lifetime. The king's generosity should be understood as his guarantee that Sarah had been untouched, but also as appeasing the deity who had virtually cut off all fertility in his family.

20:17. plague on Abimelech's house. The plague of barrenness or sexual dysfunction is placed on Abimelech's house until he returns Sarah to Abraham. Abraham's intercession causes God to open their wombs. The irony is that Abimelech is denied children as long as Abraham is denied his wife (for information on barrenness in the ancient Near East see comment on 11:30).

21:1-21

The Birth of Isaac and the Expulsion of Ishmael

21:4. 8 days. Initially the eight-day waiting period distinguishes Isaac from Ishmael, who was *circumcised at age thirteen. Subsequently, it serves as a determination of the infant's viability and may be tied to the period of uncleanness after the birth (Lev 12:1-3).

21:14. desert of Beersheba. The southern Negev region around Beersheba, Tell es-Seba', is steppe land and would have been inhospitable enough to be described as a desert. Hagar's wanderings after being expelled from Abraham's camp took her southeast through a relatively flat portion of the Negev toward northern Arabia.

21:8-21. expulsion of wife. There is a contract in the *Nuzi documents that contains a clause prohibiting the expulsion of the children of the secondary wife by the primary wife. The situation in Genesis is different on two counts: first, it is Abraham who sends them away; and second, Hagar is given her freedom, which, according to one ancient law code (Lipit-Ishtar) would mean that her children would forfeit any inheritance rights.

21:20. archer. The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael and their subsequent life in the desert of Paran would require them to acquire survival skills. As a skilled archer, Ishmael could provide food for his family and perhaps could find occupation as a mercenary (see Is 21:17

for reference to the bowmen of Kedar, Ishmael's son).

21:21. desert of Paran. The arid wilderness of the northeastern Sinai desert was given the name of Paran. Situated west of Edom, it figures prominently in the wilderness period (Num 13:3, 26; Deut 1:1) and is the area where Kadesh is located. Its associations with Egypt are probably based on caravan trade and Egypt's military interest in the Sinai.

21:22-33

Abraham and His Neighbors

21:25-31. wells and water rights. In the semiarid region around Beersheba, water would have been a precious resource. Disputes between herdsmen and farmers over wells and springs would have arisen. To prevent this, treaties like that between Abraham and Abimelech would have established firm ownership or right of usage to wells. Note that Abraham's payment of seven ewe lambs provides the basis for the name Beersheba (well of seven) and serves as a gesture of goodwill toward the people of Gerar.

21:32. land of the Philistines. The first known mention of the Philistines outside the Bible is in the records of Pharaoh Rameses III (1182-1151 B.C.). As part of the invading *Sea Peoples, they settled in five city-states along the southern coast of Canaan and were employed by the Egyptians as mercenaries and trading partners. The picture of Abimelech (a Semitic name) as "king of Gerar" in the land of the Philistines does not match the known history of this people. This story may thus represent contact with an earlier group of Philistines who settled the area prior to the Sea Peoples' invasion, or this may simply be the *anachronistic use of the name Philistines for the area rather than the people Abraham encountered.

21:33. tamarisk tree. The tamarisk grows in sandy soil. It is deciduous and may reach over twenty feet in height, with small leaves that excrete salt. Its bark is used for tanning and its wood for building and making charcoal. Bedouin commonly plant this hearty tree for its shade and the branches which provide grazing for animals. Abraham's action probably signifies the sealing of the treaty with Abimelech—a life-giving plant symbolizing a fertile and prosperous future.

22:1-24

Abraham Requested to Sacrifice Isaac

22:2. region of Moriah. The only indication of Moriah's location given here is that it is three days' journey from Beersheba. That may simply be a conventional number of a completed journey, but in any case no direction is provided. The only other reference to Moriah is in 2 Chronicles 3:1, which refers to the site of the temple in Jerusalem but makes no mention of Abraham or this incident. Since the wooded hills around Jerusalem would not have required the transport of firewood for the sacrifice, it is most likely a coincidence of the same name rather than a reference to the same place.

22:1-2. child sacrifice. In the ancient Near East, the god that provides *fertility (*El) is also entitled to demand a portion of what has been produced. This is expressed in the sacrifice of animals, grain and children. Texts from Phoenician and Punic colonies, like Carthage in North Africa, describe the *ritual of child sacrifice as a means of insuring continued fertility. The biblical prophets and the laws in Deuteronomy and Leviticus expressly forbid this practice, but that also implies that it continued to occur. In fact, the story of Abraham's "sacrifice" of Isaac suggests that Abraham was familiar with human sacrifice and was not surprised by *Yahweh's demand. However, the story also provides a model for the substitute of an animal for a human sacrifice that clearly draws a distinction between Israelite practice and that of other cultures.

22:3. donkey domestication. The wild ass was domesticated about 3500 B.C. Its primary function from the beginning was as a pack animal because of its ability to tolerate heavy loads and to survive for long periods on little water. As a result it was often relied upon for long-distance travel and transport.

22:13-19. sacrifice as replacement. In this section the ram is offered as a sacrifice in the place of Isaac. The concept of substitution in sacrifice is not as common as we might think. In the ancient Near East the sympathetic magic of incantation *rituals would often include substitution of an animal that would be killed to remove a threat to the human subject. But the concept behind the regular institution of sacrifice was generally either to offer a gift to deity or to establish communion with deity. Even in Israel there is little to suggest that the sacrificial institution was understood to have a principally vicarious or substitutionary element. Redemption of the firstborn and Passover would be notable exceptions on the fringe of the sacrificial institution.

22:19. Beersheba. This important city, often identified as the southern limit of Israel's territory (Judg 20:1; 1 Sam 3:20), is traditionally lo-

cated in the northern Negev at Tell es-Seba' (three miles east of the modern city). Its name derives from its association with the wells dug to provide water for the people and flocks in this area (see Gen 26:23-33). Archaeological evidence has been found of occupation during the monarchy through the Persian periods. The lack of archaeological evidence for the patriarchal period may suggest that the city by this name changed location, but more important is the observation that there is no suggestion here in the text that there was a walled settlement at Beersheba. There are evidences of early settlement under the modern town (Bir es-Saba') about two miles from the *tell, where some now suspect the ancient city of Beersheba was located.

23:1-20

Sarah's Death and Burial

23:2. variant place names. Place names change as new people enter a region or events occur which provide the reason to memorialize them with a name change (see Jebus and Jerusalem, 1 Chron 11:4; Luz and Bethel, Gen 28:19). Hebron's association with the name Kiriath Arba ("village of four") is unclear, but it may be related to either the joining of four villages into a single settlement or the convergence of roads at the site.

23:3-20. Hittites in Palestine. The origin of the *Hittite presence in Canaan is uncertain, although Genesis 10:15 identifies them as descendants of Canaan through their eponymous ancestor Heth. The use of Semitic names and the ease with which Abraham deals with them in Genesis 23 suggest that this particular group of Hittites was either part of the indigenous population or a trading colony that had partially assimilated to the Canaanite culture (see Gen 26:34). The Hittite empire of Asia Minor (Anatolia, modern Turkey) was destroyed during the invasion of the *Sea Peoples around 1200 B.C. A successor kingdom of Neo-Hittites continued to exist in Syria until the seventh century B.C. and is mentioned in *Assyrian and *Babylonian records. These records often refer to Palestine as the "Land of Hatti," confirming an association with these people. The groups known as Hittites occupying sections of Syria and Canaan may or may not be related to these well-known Hittites. The Hittites in Canaan have Semitic names, while the Hittites of Anatolia were Indo-European.

23:4-5. burial practices. Burial practices vary in the ancient Near East. Nomadic groups often practiced secondary burial—transporting the skeletal remains to a traditional site long after death. Burial chambers were used by village cultures. These could be natural or hand-carved caves, or subterranean, multichambered tombs. Most often these tombs were used by several generations. A body would be laid in a prepared shelf, along with grave goods (food, pottery, weapons, tools), and then the skeletal remains were removed and placed in another chamber or an ossuary box or simply swept to the rear of the tomb to accommodate the next burial.

23:7-20. ownership of land. Arable land was so precious a possession that it was not supposed to be sold to anyone outside the kinship group. The lack of a buyer within the family and/or the practicalities of business sometimes required a sale to an unrelated person. This could be legally sidestepped through the adoption of the buyer or the intercession of village elders on his behalf with the owner. The designation of Abraham as "a prince" suggests he would be a desirable neighbor. The offer to receive the land as a gift was refused by Abraham because that would have enabled Ephron's heirs to reclaim the land after Ephron's death.

23:14. 400 shekels of silver. Four hundred shekels of silver was a substantial price. It would be equal to about seven and a quarter pounds of silver. In comparison, Omri bought the site of Samaria for six thousand shekels (1 Kings 16:24), and David bought the site of the temple for six hundred gold shekels (1 Chron 21:25), with the threshing floor itself fetching fifty shekels (2 Sam 24:24). Jeremiah bought property, at greatly deflated prices, for seventeen shekels (Jer 32:7). Abraham's payment would be more likely viewed as exorbitant rather than discounted, for rather than negotiating, he paid the inflated initial quote. It is likely that he was anxious to pay full price because a discounted price could be later connected to family debt problems that would allow the heirs of Ephron to reclaim the land. A laborer or artisan at ten shekels per year would not expect to make this much in a lifetime.

23:5-16. bargaining procedures. Haggling and staged bargaining are typical business procedures in the Middle East. They are both entertaining and competitive. However, when it is clear that the potential buyer is in a situation where a purchase is necessary or highly desired, the seller will use the bargaining to his advantage.

23:16. weight current among merchants. Terminology from roughly contemporary Old Assyrian trade letters suggests that this phrase concerns conformity to the standard for silver that was used in overland trade.

24:1-67

A Wife for Isaac

24:1-9. swearing oaths. An oath is always sworn in the name of a god. This places a heavy responsibility on the one who swears such an oath to carry out its stipulations, since he would be liable to divine as well as human retribution if he did not. Sometimes, as in this case, a gesture is added to the oath. The gesture usually is symbolic of the task to be performed by the oath taker. For instance, by placing his hand inside Abraham's thigh (in the vicinity of or on the genitals), the servant ties his oath of obedience to the acquisition of a wife for Isaac and thus the perpetuation of Abraham's line.

24:4. marrying from same tribe. The practice of marrying within one's own tribe or family is called endogamy. Endogamy could be the result of religious, social or ethnic concerns. In this text it appears to be ethnic in that there are no suggestions that the family of Laban, Rebekah and Rachel shares the religious beliefs of Abraham and his family. Likewise social standing is usually an issue only when nobility and commoners are involved or certain classes of urban society are seen as necessarily distinct. Ethnic concerns usually center around clan traditions or family land holdings. At times they represent long-established hostilities between two groups. In this text the endogamy seems motivated by the *covenant that seeks to prevent Abraham and his family from simply being assimilated into the ethnic melting pot in Canaan.

24:10-11. camel domestication. Although camel remains in Arabia date back to 2600 B.C., domesticated camels were not common in Palestine until 1200 B.C. The occasional references to them in Genesis are authenticated by evidence of domestication in an *Old Babylonian text from *Ugarit from the early second millennium. Evidence that the camel was used as a beast of burden in Arabia dates to the end of the third millennium. The stages of domestication may be traced by the development of the saddles. Camels were extremely valuable animals capable of carrying heavy loads through hostile desert terrains. Thus they were seldom used for food and would have been a sign of wealth.

24:10. Aram Naharaim. *Aram Naharaim (Aram of the two rivers), containing Haran on the Balikh River, includes the general area between the Euphrates River and the Habur River triangle in northern Mesopotamia. The name also appears in Deuteronomy 23:4, in the superscription of Psalm 60 and in 1 Chronicles 19:6. It may be the same as *Nahrima* in the fourteenth-century B.C. *El Amarna letters between the Egyptian Pharaoh and the rulers of Canaanite city-states.

24:11. well at evening time outside of town. The cool of the early morning and evening would have been the best times for women to go to the village well for water. Since the well was often outside the town to accommodate watering of animals, women would normally travel in groups for protection. Strangers could be expected to use the well, but it may be assumed that they would ask permission of the villagers. Hospitality custom would have necessitated offering them a drink.

24:12-21. mechanistic oracle. Abraham's servant is using an *oracular approach to identifying Isaac's bride-to-be. In an oracle a yes-no question is posed to deity, and a mechanism of some binary nature is used so that deity can provide the answer. In post-Sinai Israel the priest carried the Urim and Thummim to use in oracular situations. Abraham's servant must be more creative and uses a natural mechanism for the oracle. His yes-no question is whether the girl that he is about to approach is the right wife for Isaac. His oracular mechanism is based on a question that he will pose to the girl. When asking for a drink, one would normally expect that a drink would be offered. That would be normal behavior in the context of etiquette and hospitality. In this case such a response would indicate a "no" answer to his oracular question. For the alternative the servant chooses something far out of the range of expectation: that prompted by such a common, unimposing request, the girl would volunteer to water all his camels. This unbelievable offer would indicate a "yes" answer to his oracular question. The thought behind this process is that if deity is providing the answer, he can alter normal behavior and override natural instinct in order to communicate his answer. For similar mechanistic oracles, see Judges 6:36-40 and 1 Samuel 6:7-12. The prophets occasionally approach this type of oracular situation from the other side when they provide signs to verify that they represent God, as in Numbers 16:28-30 or 1 Samuel 12:16-17.

24:11, 13. spring versus well. The difference in terminology between verse 11 ("well") and verse 13 ("spring") may reflect a variety of water sources available. There are examples where a water source originated from a spring but as the water table shrank it became necessary to dig down, thereby forming a well. This is the case at Arad, where a deep well now replaces the original spring.

24:19-20. how much camels drink. Camels drink only as much water as they have lost and do not store it in the hump. The concentration of fat and the coat of hair allows dissipation of heat, less sweating and a wider range of body temperature during the day and night. The camel also is able to maintain a constant amount of water in its blood plasma and thus sustain higher water loss than most animals. A camel that has gone a few days without water could drink as much as twenty-five gallons. In contrast, the jars that were used for water would usually hold no more than three gallons.

24:22. nose rings. Nose rings were especially popular during the *Iron Age (1200-600 B.C.), though there are examples from earlier periods. Made of silver, bronze and gold, and often tubular in design, they were round with two ends for insertion and sometimes included a tiny pendant. The beka is the half-shekel measure of weight, equal to one-fifth of an ounce.

24:22. jewelry. The bracelets would have been bands worn around the wrist as bangles. They were very popular items and are often found on the arms and wrist of females in tombs. By placing them on her arms, the servant may be symbolizing the marriage contract. A ten-shekel bracelet would weigh about four ounces. Legal materials from the first half of the second millennium suggest a worker might expect to make at most ten shekels per year and often less. These would typically be shekels of silver—gold would be more valuable.

24:28. mother's household. It would be natural for a young, unmarried woman to refer to her home as her mother's house until she was wed (see Song 3:4).

24:50-59. presents of betrothal. For a marriage to be arranged, the groom's family must provide a bride price, while the bride's family provided a dowry. The silver and gold objects and the garments presented to Rebekah are part of her transformation into a member of Abraham's household. The word used in the text denotes metal worked into useful items, whether jewelry or plates and other utensils. The presents given to her brother Laban and her mother demonstrate Abraham's wealth and the desirability of the marriage.

24:57-58. Rebekah making decision. It was unusual in the ancient world for the woman to have any part in major decisions. Rebekah was not consulted with regard to the marriage (vv. 50-51), but when the servant asked to leave right away the men looked to Rebekah for consent. Marriage contracts of this general period show a great concern for maintaining the woman's security within her husband's family. The presence of her family was one of the guarantees that she would be cared for and treated properly. The ten days that Rebekah's family requested (v. 55) would have given them a little more opportunity to make sure that everything was as it appeared to be. It is likely that she was consulted because of the substantial risk that was involved in leaving the family protection under such unusual circumstances.

24:59. accompanying nurse. It would have been suitable for a woman betrothed to a wealthy man to have an entourage of servants. The nurse, however, would have higher status as the nurturer of the child who would now remain as part of her new household and serve as a chaperon on the return journey.

24:62. Beer Lahai Roi. The place name means "well of the living who sees me" and is first associated with Hagar's *theophany in Genesis 16:14. It would have been southwest of Hebron in the Negev. Either Isaac and Abraham have moved their encampment south or Isaac is now living separately.

24:62-66. use of veil. Since she had gone unveiled during the journey, Rebekah's veiling herself once Isaac is identified to her suggests that this is her way of demonstrating to him that she is his bride. Brides were veiled during the wedding but went unveiled as married women. Veil customs differed in various locations and times. Asiatic women on the Beni Hasan tomb painting (early second millennium) are not veiled, but in the Middle *Assyrian laws (late second millennium) all respectable ladies went about veiled in public.

24:67. tent of his mother. Sarah's tent, due to her status of mistress of the household, would have been empty since her death. By taking Rebekah into his mother's tent, Isaac demonstrates that she is now the mistress of the household. This is similar to the importance placed on entering the house of the bridegroom in *Ugaritic texts.

25:1-11

The Death of Abraham

25:1-4. descendants of Abraham from Keturah. Not all of these sixteen names can be identified, although most are associated with the Syro-Arabian desert to the east of the Jordan and may represent a confederation of tribes involved in the lucrative spice trade. Of the six sons born to Abraham and Keturah, the name of Midian is the most prominent in later narrative as a people living on the fringe of Israelite territory in the Negev and Sinai re-

gion. Some of the names appear in the *Assyrian annals (Medan is Badana, south of Tema; Ishbak is the northern Syrian tribe of Iasbuq; Sheba is in the southwestern part of Arabia). Shuah also appears in *cuneiform texts as a site on the middle Euphrates near the mouth of the Habur River (see Job 2:11).

25:1-4. concubines. The *concubines, or secondary wives, of Abraham were Hagar and Keturah. Concubines were usually women who did not possess a dowry, and thus their children did not have primary rights to inheritance. The father may choose to designate one of them as his heir if his primary wife has not produced a son. However, if he does not do so, then any claims they may have on his property would be based on the stipulations of the marriage contracts.

25:2, 4. Midianite origins. Midian is one of the children born to Abraham and Keturah, and the reference to him shows the writer's continued interest in establishing links between Abraham and all of the peoples of Palestine, Transjordan and Arabia. The Midianites are most frequently mentioned as a pastoral nomadic group of tribes living in the Negev and the Sinai deserts. Midianite traders carry Joseph to Egypt (Gen 37:28). Moses marries the daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian, after fleeing Egypt (Ex 2:16-21). During the conquest narrative, Midianites are allied with Moab and are targeted as enemies of the Israelites (Num 25:6-18). There is no extrabiblical information about their history or origins.

25:5-6. giving gifts. It is the prerogative of the father to designate his heir. However, he must also provide for his other children. Thus by giving his other sons gifts and sending them away he shares his wealth with them but also protects Isaac's position as heir of the household.

25:6. land of the east. The Hebrew *qedem* in this unique phrase may indicate a direction, "east," or an actual place name. The twentieth-century B.C. Egyptian story of the political exile *Sinuhe mentions the land of Qedem as lying near Byblos. In other biblical texts it refers to the peoples who inhabit the desert region on the eastern edges of Israel (Judg 6:3; 7:12; Is 11:14).

25:8. gathered to his people. In the worldview of ancient peoples the past was less like a train moving toward them and more like a village spread out in the valley. They saw themselves as facing the past (rather than the future). Being gathered to their ancestors not only expressed the idea of being buried in the family tomb but of joining the ranks of the ancestors in the "ancestral village" that comprised the past. This is more a view of history than of the afterlife per se.

25:12-18
Ishmael's Line

25:12-16. Ishmael's descendants. Continuing the listing of those descendants of Abraham who inhabited neighboring regions are the sons of Ishmael. The term son sometimes represents political affiliation rather than blood ties, but whatever the case, this list comprises a confederation of tribes living in the Syro-Arabian desert. The occurrence of these names in *Assyrian records, intermixed with names from the Keturah list, suggests both shifts in tribal affiliation and allegiance. Most prominent among the names are Nebaioth, probably the Nabaiati of Ashurbanipal's campaigns against the Arab tribes and possibly to be associated with the later Nabateans of Petra; Tema, an oasis northeast of Dedan on the caravan route between southern Arabia and Mesopotamia; and Kedar, a people mentioned elsewhere as pastoral nomads (Ps 120:5; Is 42:11, 60:7).

25:18. area of Ishmael's descendants. The region from Havilah (see Gen 2:11; 10:7) to Shur (see Gen 16:7) probably represents migration and caravan routes for the descendants of Ishmael. This area is not suitable for large, sedentary populations, but it could support pastoral nomadic groups, and it was the center of the spice trade from southern Arabia traveling west to Egypt and east to Mesopotamia and Syria. Asshur, in this context, would not be the Mesopotamian kingdom of the upper Tigris region, but rather one of the northern Arabian areas (see Gen 10:22; 25:3).

25:19-26
The Birth of Jacob and Esau

25:21. barrenness. Barrenness is used in the ancestral narratives to heighten tension, as the element of the *covenantal promise of descendants (12:2) is thereby endangered. It also marks the son who is eventually born as special, because only God could relieve this infertility.

25:22-23. oracular response. Rebekah's concern about her pregnancy leads her to ask for an *oracle. The text gives no indication of what means Rebekah uses to inquire of the Lord. She is not using a mechanistic oracular device, for that only provides yes/no answers. There is no mention of a prophet, oracular priest, or angel delivering the oracle. In Egypt and Mesopotamia oracles such as this

were almost always provided by a priest. Another alternative is that the oracle could be sought in a dream. This usually involved sleeping in a holy place. The text is less interested in the means and more concerned about the content of the oracle. The oracle does not concern the children themselves as much as it addresses the ultimate destiny of the family lines that each will establish. Such an oracle would not have suggested any particular treatment of the children by the parents.

25:24-26. naming children. The giving of names in the ancient world was a significant act. A name was believed to affect a person's destiny; so the person giving the name was exercising some degree of control over the person's future. Often names expressed hopes or blessings. At other times they preserved some detail of the occasion of the birth, especially if the occasion appeared significant. Here Esau is named by a physical characteristic, whereas Jacob is named for his peculiar behavior during birth. The names need not mean the word associated with them, but are often linked by wordplay. So the Hebrew word Jacob does not mean "heel"—it only sounds like the word for heel. The name was expected to play a role in the unfolding destiny of the individual and to take on additional significance and appropriateness throughout his life, though the direction of that appropriateness was impossible to foresee.

25:27-34

Esau Trades His Birthright

25:28. mother's role in inheritance decisions. A Canaanite contract from *Ugarit contains a situation in which the father allows the mother to choose which son receives preferential treatment in the inheritance.

25:29-30. Jacob cooking stew. The incident with the stew appears to take place away from home, otherwise Esau could have appealed to his parents. Jacob is not the hunting type, so it would be unusual for him to be out in the countryside alone. He has been described as a man "staying among the tents," which may indicate he was more closely associated with the shepherding business. The shepherds moved their camps over a broad area of land in order to find water and grazing for the flocks. It is most likely that Jacob would be out supervising some of the shepherds at such a camp when Esau stumbled upon them. Jacob would be the one in charge at the camp, so the decision would be his, and there would therefore be witnesses to the agreement made between Jacob and Esau.

25:31-34. birthright. The birthright concerned only the material inheritance from the parents. The inheritance was divided into the number of sons plus one. The eldest son then received a double share. This was a customary practice throughout the ancient Near East. The stew buys from Esau that additional share (probably not his entire inheritance). There are no examples in the known literature from the ancient Near East of such a deal being made. The closest is in the legal materials from *Nuzi, where one brother sells some already inherited property to one of his brothers.

26:1-16

Isaac and Abimelech

26:1-6. recurrent famine. The uncertainties of rainfall in season and in the proper amount made drought and famine fairly common occurrences in ancient Palestine. The writer here notes this frequent disaster and differentiates between the famine in Abraham's day (Gen 12) and that of Isaac.

26:1. Philistines in Palestine. Large numbers of Philistines entered Canaan after the invasion of the *Sea Peoples (1200 B.C.) broke Egyptian control over the area. In this context they are mentioned in the records of Ramses III (1182-1151 B.C.). They established a pentapolis of five major city-states (Gaza, Gath, Ashdod, Ekron, Ashkelon) along the southern coastal plain and quickly gained political control over nearby regions as well (Judg 15:11). Their mention in Genesis may reflect an earlier group that settled in Canaan prior to 1200 B.C., or it may be an *anachronism based on their presence in the Gerar region in later periods (see Gen 21:32), earlier people of the vicinity being referred to by the name known to later readers. Archaeological evidence of their presence is found in the introduction of new pottery types, grave goods (such as the sarcophagi with human features) and new architectural designs.

26:7-11. wife as sister. The wife/sister theme is used three times in the ancestral narratives (see also chaps. 12 and 20). Here Abimelech (either a throne name or a dynastic name meaning "My father is king") is tricked by Isaac and Rebekah. The result is their obtaining royal protection and the right to farm and to graze his herds in Gerar.

26:12-16. planting crops. It is not unusual for pastoral nomadic tribes to plant a crop or to harvest date palms along their usual line of march. This may be a step toward settling into a village life, but that is not necessarily the case. Generally sedentarism (settling of no-

mads) is more directly related to the actions of governments or changes in the political boundaries through which they drive their herds. Wealth may also cause them to settle down, but this is not a major factor.

26:17-35

Isaac's Wells

26:17-22. well rights and disputes. Wells are generally dug and protected by villages. The likelihood that they will silt up or collapse requires at least occasional oversight. The labor involved and the necessity of water for humans, crops and animals makes it likely that disputes will arise between villages and/or herdsmen who also wish to claim and use the wells.

26:20. naming wells. One way to designate ownership of a well or other natural resource is to give it a name. Once this has become its traditional name, title is not difficult to establish. It thus prevents later disputes or settles any that may arise. Naming is also part of the traditional lore of a tribe which is passed on to later generations.

26:23-25. build altar, call, pitch tent, dig well. The three acts of verse 25 are all related to possession of the land and are therefore a suitable response to the *covenant promise of verse 24. The altar gave recognition to the holiness of the place where the Lord spoke to him. Pitching a tent and digging a well are generally accepted means by which to establish a right to unclaimed land.

26:26-33. peace treaty. The peace treaty of verses 28-30 would constitute recognition by Isaac's neighbors that his presence in that area was acceptable. The agreement was validated by the sharing of a meal and by the swearing of oaths. Just as Abraham had built altars (chap. 12) and established recognized rights to land (chap. 23), so Isaac is now doing the same.

26:33. folk etymology of town names. Beersheba was named earlier by Abraham (in 21:31). The designation of significance to a name is not necessarily a suggestion that the name originated at that time. Just as people's names can be reinterpreted (for instance, Jacob in 27:36), so a place name can be reinterpreted. The ancients were less concerned with the origin of a name than they were with the significance the name acquired. This town at the southern extreme of the land becomes the home base for Isaac. The site identified by archaeologists as Beersheba has no remains prior to the Judges period (*Iron Age, 1200), but there is no suggestion in the story of Isaac that there was a town on the site in his day, so this is not a problem.

27:1-40

Isaac's Pronouncement on His Sons

27:1-4. deathbed blessings. Blessings or curses pronounced by the patriarch of the family were always taken seriously and considered binding. Such pronouncements from a patriarch's deathbed would be even more momentous. In this text, however, Isaac is not portrayed as being on his deathbed, merely aged enough that he wants to put his house in order by providing the traditional blessing.

27:4. proper atmosphere for blessings. While the feast that Esau is to prepare may provide a pleasant atmosphere and appropriate mood for the blessing, it also provides the context of celebration that would accompany significant events, much as we might go out to dinner at a fancy restaurant.

27:11-13. curse appropriation. Rebekah responds to Jacob's fears of bringing a a curse on himself by appropriating to herself any curse that may result. Can she do that? As this chapter demonstrates, a blessing is not transferable, and neither is the pronouncement of a curse. But in this case Rebekah is most likely referring to the consequences of the curse rather than the curse itself. Since deity is the enforcer of the curse, this acknowledgment that she has forced Jacob to deceive his father would target her if a curse was to result.

27:14. food preparation. Food preparation was done by both men and women. One way to provide variation of taste to meals (which were often monotonous and meatless) was to hunt wild game. This meat might be tough and gamey-tasting, and thus it would be stewed to tenderize it and mixed with herbs to improve the flavor.

27:27-29. nature of blessing. The blessing that Isaac bestows on Jacob (whom he mistakes for Esau) grants him fertility of the ground, dominion over other nations, including those descended from siblings, and a boomerang effect for curses and blessings. These are typical elements for the patriarchal blessing and have no relationship to either material inheritance or to the *covenant, though some of these features are also present in the covenant benefits that the Lord promises to Israel. They constitute the foundational elements of survival and prosperity.

27:34-40. no negation of blessing. The power of the spoken word was such that it could not be "unsaid"—this is true even outside the realm of superstition in that many words spoken do the benefit or damage they intend re-

gardless of any second thoughts the speaker may have. The pronouncement regarding Esau's destiny thus reflects the realities of the previously uttered blessing on Jacob. It would not be considered a curse because it assumes continuing existence and eventual freedom.

27:37. "I have made." Isaac explains to Esau, "I have made him lord . . . I have sustained him." The first-person forms show that Isaac is not suggesting that this blessing is a prophetic proclamation from deity. Neither does Isaac call on deity to perform it. Similar formulas in Mesopotamia regularly invoke deity in such blessings and curses.

27:41-46

The Outcome of the Deception

27:45. lose both in one day. Rebekah expresses the concern that she might lose both in one day. This could either refer to losing both Isaac and Jacob, that is, Isaac dies and Jacob is killed by Esau; or losing both Jacob and Esau, that is, Jacob would be killed and Esau, as his murderer, would either have to flee or end up the victim of blood vengeance.

27:46. Hittite women. The *Hittite women that Esau married were part of the indigenous culture of Canaan at this time. While it is possible that this group is related to the well-known Hittites of Anatolia, our knowledge of the culture and history of the Canaanite Hittites in the patriarchal period is insufficient to allow informed conclusions. There is a well-established Anatolian Hittite presence in Canaan during the monarchy period, and even as early as the middle of the second millennium the *Amarna texts contain Hittite and *Hurrian personal names.

28:1-22

Jacob's Dream and Vow

28:2. Paddan Aram. This place name only appears in Genesis. It is either a designation for the general area of northern Mesopotamia (= *Aram Naharaim in 24:10) or perhaps another name for Haran. In *Akkadian, both *padanu* and *harranu* mean "path" or "road." In either case, Jacob is instructed to return to his ancestors' homeland to seek a bride as part of their practice of endogamy (marrying within a select group).

28:5. Aramean. The origin of the *Arameans is problematic. They do not actually appear in Mesopotamian records until the end of the second-millennium *Assyrian annals of Tiglath-Pileser I (1114-1076 B.C.). In the ninth century Shalmaneser III mentions kings of Aram in Damascus (including Hazael and Ben-Hadad III). However, this is many centuries after the setting of the ancestor narratives. The mention of Arameans in relation to Abraham and Jacob is likely a reference to scattered tribes of peoples in upper Mesopotamia who had not yet coalesced in the nation of Aram, which appears in later texts. Based on other examples from *cuneiform literature, the name Aram may in fact have originally been that of a region (cf. Sippar-Amnantum of the *Old Babylonian period) and was later applied to people living there. Current evidence suggests that the Arameans inhabited the upper Euphrates throughout the second millennium, first as villagers and pastoralists, then as a political, national coalition.

28:10-12. Jacob's itinerary. Jacob takes the central ridge road that goes through the hill country from Beersheba through Hebron, Bethel and Shechem to join the main artery, the Great Trunk road, in Beth Shan. It would have taken a couple of days to get from Beersheba to Bethel (about 60 miles), and the trip to Haran would have taken over a month (about 550 miles).

28:13-15. stairway. The ladder or stairway that Jacob sees in his dream is the passageway between heaven and earth. The comparable word in *Akkadian is used in Mesopotamian mythology to describe what the messenger of the gods uses when he wants to pass from one realm to another. It is this mythological stairway that the *Babylonians sought to represent in the architecture of the ziggurats. These had been built to provide a way for the deity to descend to the temple and the town. Jacob's background would have given him familiarity with this concept, and thus he would conclude that he was in a sacred spot where there was a portal opened between worlds. Though he sees the stairway in his dream, and the messengers (angels) are using it to pass between realms (embarking on and returning from missions, not a procession or parade), the Lord is not portrayed as having used it, but as standing beside it (this is the proper translation of the Hebrew idiom).

28:16-17. house of God, gate of heaven. When Jacob awakes he identifies the sacred place as the house of God *(beth-el)* and the gate of heaven. In *Akkadian mythology the stairway used by the messengers went up to the gate of the gods, while the temple of the deity was located at the bottom. In this way the patron deity could leave the assembly of the gods and descend to the place of worship.

28:18-19. pillars and anointing. The sacred pillars or standing stones are well known in

the religious practice of the ancient Near East predating the fourth millennium B.C. They are featured prominently in Canaanite *cultic installations such as the high place at Gezer and were also used in the Israelite temple at Arad. Other standing stones were simply set up as memorials. From basins sometimes found near the foot of such pillars, it is inferred that libations (liquid offerings) were poured over them, as we see Jacob doing in 35:14. The anointing of the pillar would constitute the dedication of it.

28:19. Bethel/Luz. As noted in Genesis 23:2, place names change based on the appearance of new peoples or significant events. Bethel was an important town located in the central hill country just north of Jerusalem. An important east-west road lay just south of the town, making it a crossroads for travelers and a likely place for the establishment of a *cultic site. There is some speculation that Luz was the original city site and that Bethel (literally "house of God") was a separate cultic site located outside the town. Once the Israelites had established themselves in the region, however, the site's association with Abraham (12:8) and Jacob would have caused the older name to be superseded.

28:20-22. vows. Vows are promises with conditions attached, almost always made to God. In the ancient world the most common context for a vow was when a request was being made to deity. The condition would typically involve God's provision or protection, while that which was vowed was usually a gift to deity. This would most commonly take the form of a sacrifice but could refer to other types of gifts to the sanctuary or priests. Fulfillment of a vow could usually be accomplished at the sanctuary and was a public act. In Jacob's vow the conditions actually extend through the end of verse 21. Jacob promises a tithe upon the fulfillment of the conditions.

28:22. tithe. In the ancient world tithing was often a means of taxation. There were tithes paid to the temple as well as those paid to the king. Since income and personal wealth was often not primarily in money, all goods were included in the calculations of the tithe, as indicated here by Jacob in the phrase "all that you give me." Jacob's tithe is clearly voluntary rather than imposed and therefore would not be associated with taxation of any sort. There is no temple or priesthood at Bethel, so to whom would Jacob give his tithe? It is likely that Jacob anticipates that any wealth coming to him would be in the form of flocks and herds. In such a case the tithe would be represented in sacrifices at Bethel.

29:1-14

Jacob Finds Laban and His Family

29:2, 3, 10. stone over well mouth. The stone served a double function, as a guard against contamination or poisoning of the well and as a social control mechanism, preventing any of the herdsmen in the area from drawing more water than was their right. Apparently water was scarce in this "open country" and thus the right to use the well was a jealously guarded one. Bedouin herders seldom wish to even divulge the location of wells within their territory, so this degree of security is not out of place. The stone may even have served to disguise the location of the well from the casual passerby. Wells of this time were not surrounded by protective walls, so the stone would also have prevented animals (or people) from inadvertently stumbling into it.

29:3. watering agreements. In regions where water sources were scarce, it would have been necessary to make agreements between herdsmen for use of the local well or spring. A lack of trust, however, could result in a scene like the one in the text, where all of the herds had to be assembled before any could drink.

29:6. female shepherd. While it is not uncommon today for women and small children to herd Bedouin flocks, in antiquity women would have done so only when the household had no sons. It was a dangerous practice since they might be molested, but it was also a way of attracting a husband.

29:11. kiss of greeting. The traditional form of greeting for friends and relatives in the Middle East is a warm hug and a kiss on each cheek. This is done with both male and female relatives.

29:15-30

Jacob Works for His Wives

29:17. Leah's eyes. In the comparative description of Rachel and Leah, the only comment about Leah concerns her eyes. The term used is generally considered positive and speaks of fragility, vulnerability, tenderness or a delicate quality (NIV note). Although eyes were a principal component of beauty in the ancient world, Leah's positive features paled in comparison to Rachel's loveliness.

29:18-20. seven years' labor. Typical marriage customs would have included a payment made to the bride's family by the groom or his family. This could provide a sort of trust fund to provide for the wife should the husband die, desert her or divorce her. Alternatively it was at times used by the family to pay the

bride price for the bride's brothers. In some cases it was even returned to the bride in the form of an indirect dowry. In the *Nuzi texts a typical bride price is thirty or forty shekels of silver. Since ten shekels of silver is a typical annual wage for a shepherd, Jacob is paying a higher price. That can be understood, however, given the circumstances: Jacob is in no position to negotiate, and the payment is being made in labor.

29:21-24. wedding feast. Since a wedding is based on a contract between two families, it is similar to treaties and to business transactions. Like them, the marriage would have been consummated with a *ritual meal (a sign of peace between the parties). There would also be a procession to a designated "first home" (usually within the house or tent of the groom's father, although not in Gen 29) and sexual intercourse between the couple. The bride would be veiled during these public festivities, and it may be assumed that the high spirits would have led to drunkenness, both factors in Jacob's inability to recognize the substitution of Leah for Rachel at the feast.

29:24. gift of maidservant. It was quite common for the bride to receive a gift of a maidservant on the occasion of her marriage. In this way she obtained her own personal household or entourage, providing her with both greater prestige and help in performing her duties.

29:26-30. custom of older married first. It is the practice of people of the ancient Near East, and still a tradition today in that area, for the oldest daughter to be married first. This prevents a younger sibling from shaming a sister who may not be as beautiful and also prevents the financial drain on the family caused by spinsters. Females were used, through marriage contracts, to obtain wealth and prestige for the family. If an older sister was bypassed and then never married, her family would be left with the responsibility to support her.

29:27. bridal week. The relationship between the seven-day story of creation and the idea of creating new life through marriage may be the origin of the bridal week. Diverting the bride and groom from other tasks was also designed to insure a pregnancy early in the marriage.

29:31—30:24
Jacob's Children

29:33. naming of children. The naming of children was a significant act and typically represented some circumstance or sentiment at the time of birth. It rarely addressed the supposed fate or destiny of the child directly and was not thought to determine the child's destiny, but it was believed that the name was directly related to a person's essential self and therefore could be expected to find significant associations with the person's nature and experiences.

30:3-13. maidservant as surrogate wife. Just as Sarah gave Abraham her maid Hagar as a surrogate wife (16:1-4), so too the wives of Jacob give him their maids. The object is for a barren (or unloved) wife to have children by means of this legal surrogacy. Provision for this custom is also found in the *Lipit-Ishtar Code and in the Code of *Hammurabi from Mesopotamia.

30:14-15. mandrake plants. *Mandragora officinarum* is a stemless, perennial root in the potato family found growing in stony ground. It resembles the human figure and has narcotic and purgative properties, which explain its medicinal use. Its shape and pungent fragrance may be the origin of its use in *fertility rites and as an aphrodisiac (see Song 7:13-14). It has dark green, wrinkled leaves from which rise a violet, bell-shaped flower. Its fruit is a yellowish berry, approximately the size of a small tomato, which can be consumed. The mandrake is native to the Mediterranean region but is not common in Mesopotamia.

30:25-43
Jacob Employed by Laban

30:22-25. Jacob's request. A woman's status in the family would be very tenuous if she had not borne children. A barren woman could be and often was discarded, ostracized or given a lower status and would find protection in her relatives. Now that Rachel's status in Jacob's family is established, Jacob feels free to request permission to leave.

30:27. divination of Laban. An Israelite reader would have been struck by Laban's suggestion that *Yahweh has given information by means of *divination. There is no mention of what type of divination Laban used, but all divination was later forbidden under the law. Divination assumed that there was knowledge to be gained about the activities and motives of the gods through the use of various indicators (such as entrails of sacrificed animals). It operated in a worldview that was contrary to that promoted in the Bible. Nevertheless, God occasionally chooses to use such methods, as the Bethlehem star attests.

30:32-33. sheep breeding. The coloring chosen by Jacob (dark lambs and variegated goats) generally made up a very small proportion of

the herd. Jacob seems to be settling for a share that was far smaller than usual, in that contracts of the day designated sometimes as much as 20 percent of new births for the shepherd (Bedouin studies today suggest that 10 percent is common). Byproducts (wool, milk products) are not mentioned here, but a percentage of those were also often part of the shepherd's compensation.

30:37-43. use of rods. Jacob's solution to Laban's treachery contains elements of scientific breeding and folklore tradition. Clearly, shepherds would have been aware of the estrus cycle of their sheep (which runs from June to September), and observation would have demonstrated that breeding healthy animals would produce vigorous lambs. What is not scientific, however, is the principle that certain characteristics (coloration in this case) can be bred for through visual aids. The stripped rods which Jacob places before the troughs of the sheep cannot genetically affect the sheep. This type of sympathetic magic is found in many folk traditions (including modern tales of colors worn by a mother determining the sex of her child). It plays a part in the trickster theme of this narrative and is reflective of a culture which depended on a mixture of magical and commonsense methods to produce results.

31:1-21

Jacob's Flight

31:1. Laban's sons' complaint. Jacob's success in Laban's employ would naturally result in the reduction of Laban's assets and therefore the depletion of the inheritance his sons could expect to receive. It is no wonder then that they nurse a grudge against their brother-in-law.

31:13. God of Bethel. By identifying himself as the God of Bethel, the Lord has reminded Jacob of the vow of Jacob in 28:20-22. Though it is true that Canaanites would have viewed sacred sites as each having their own separate deities, there is no suggestion in the text that Jacob considers the God of Bethel to be distinct from *Yahweh, and certainly the author of the Pentateuch sees them as one (compare vv. 3 and 13).

31:14-16. Rachel and Leah's complaint. Rachel and Leah express willingness to leave with Jacob because of the way Laban has treated them in his financial dealings. It has been suggested that they are referring to assets that were generally held in escrow for the care of the woman should her husband die or divorce her. Such assets would have been part of the bride price, which, in this case, Jacob had paid in labor rather than tangible assets. If Laban never put aside the value of Jacob's fourteen years of labor, there would be nothing in reserve to provide for the women. As a result they would not enjoy any additional protection in economic terms by staying in the vicinity of their family. They identify this as treating them as foreigners, because Laban had gained from Jacob's labor but had not passed the gain on to them—it is therefore just as if he had sold them.

31:18. Paddan Aram. Paddan Aram seems to refer to the region of northern Mesopotamia and northeast Syria (see comment on 28:2). The inclusion of *Aram suggests connections with the Arameans (see comment on 28:5).

31:19-20. sheep shearing. Shearing domestic sheep of their woolly fleece occurs in the spring a few weeks prior to lambing. This allows wool to grow back during the summer to help protect against extreme temperatures. Shepherds would bring their animals to a central location where the wool was also processed, dyed and woven into cloth. Archaeological excavations at Timnah (see 38:12) have produced large numbers of loom weights, suggesting that this was a center for shearing and weaving. Because this involved a journey, provisions would have had to be made to protect the villagers left behind. There would also be a celebration associated with the event after the hard work of shearing was completed.

31:19. household gods. The *teraphim* or "household gods" were associated with luck and prosperity of the family. One suggestion is that, like the *lares* and *penates* of Roman tradition, these small images guarded the threshold and hearth. They were passed from one generation to the next as part of the inheritance. The fact that Rachel was able to hide them under a saddle suggests their tiny size, though some were larger (see 1 Sam 19:13). Many of these small figurines have been found in Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine. They were a part of the popular or local religion, not associated with temples or national *cults for the major deities. One recent study has suggested they were figurines of the ancestors, but others see them as more generally related to the family's patron deity. Laban's frantic desire to retrieve these images suggests their importance to his family, in contrast to Jacob's disposal of them before he departs for Canaan.

31:21. hill country of Gilead. Jacob's departure from the area of Haran takes him south and west across the Euphrates River and into the Transjordanian region known as Gilead.

This area comprises most of the Jordanian plateau between the Yarmuk River near the Sea of Galilee and the northern end of the Dead Sea.

31:22-55

The Settlement of Jacob and Laban

31:27. musical instruments. Tambourines and harps were the common musical instruments associated with celebrations in the village culture. They were used to mark major events, such as military victories (Ex 15:20), celebratory and religious dances (1 Sam 10:5), and, as in this case, feasts of departure.

31:35. Rachel's excuse. Rachel's excuse that she had her period would have been sufficient to warn off Laban, for in the ancient world a woman in menstruation was considered a danger because menstrual blood was widely believed to be a habitat for demons.

31:38-42. shepherd's responsibility. Herding contracts have been discovered in excavations in Mesopotamia which spell out the responsibilities and the wages of herdsmen. They describe activities in much the same way as in this passage: taking animals to proper grazing areas and water sources, birthing of lambs, treatment of sick and injured animals, protection from wild predators and retrieval of lost sheep. It was expected that losses through neglect or failure to protect the flock would be deducted from the shepherds' wages. Plus, only animals that had been killed or died of natural causes could be eaten by the shepherds.

31:42. ancestral Deity. Jacob's use of the terms the "God of my father, the God of Abraham" and the "Fear of Isaac" provide a sense of kinship based on the worship of an ancestral deity by these tribal people (see 28:12; Ex 3:6; 4:5). "The Fear of Isaac" appears only in Genesis and may represent a cognomen (nickname) for the patron God as well as an implied threat against any violence by Laban (see 31:29). The reference to divine patrons, "Ashur, the god of your fathers," is also found in Old *Assyrian texts (early second millennium B.C.).

31:45-53. pillar as witness. The use of a heap of stones as a boundary marker or a memorial to an event or to bear witness to a *covenant appears several places in the biblical text (see 28:18; 35:20; Josh 24:27). In Canaanite religion, the massebah, or standing stone, was erected and considered as a guardian or a dwelling place of a god (see Deut 16:21-22; 1 Kings 14:23). The fact that two are erected here and each is given a name is suggestive of an invoking *ritual in which the god(s) of each party are called to witness the treaty-making ceremony and to enforce its stipulations. One possible parallel to this may be the twin pillars, Jachin and Boaz, placed in front of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 7:15-22).

31:48-53. nature of agreement. Like other treaty documents in the ancient Near East (such as the seventh-century B.C. *Assyrian vassal treaties of Esarhaddon and the thirteenth-century B.C. treaty between Rameses II and Hattusilis III), the gods of each party are invoked as witnesses, a set of exact stipulations is spelled out and a sacrifice and *ritual meal conclude the agreement. While the only explicit charge here is that Jacob not take any more wives, it is suggested by the setting up of the pillars that this is also a boundary agreement and territory is now marked. Parallels to this restriction on taking another wife are found in *Nuzi legal documents (fifteenth century B.C.). The stipulation is intended to protect the rights and status of the current wife/wives, especially in this context where the wives' family would not be there to assure fair and equitable treatment.

31:54. sacrificial meal. It was apparently standard procedure to use a meal to seal an agreement (see 14:18; 26:30; Ex 24:5-11). Just as food is a part of the hospitality *ritual (18:2-5), here it functions as a means of drawing each party into a familial, nonhostile relationship. By adding the element of sacrifice, it also insures the participation of the gods and heightens the solemnity of the occasion.

32:1-21

Jacob's Return to Canaan

32:1. met by angels. Just as Jacob experienced an angelic *theophany as he left the Promised Land (28:12), so too he is met by angels on his return. This forms an *inclusio* (a literary device in which the same events or lines occur at the beginning and the end of a literary segment) in the narrative and signals both divine sanction for the treaty just concluded and a reestablishment of direct contact with the *covenantal heir.

32:2. naming places. Applying names to sites where specific events occur, especially *theophanies, is fairly common in the ancestral narratives (see 16:14; 21:31; 26:20, 33; 28:19). In this way the presence of the deity is established at that site. For instance, Bethel, the location of one of Abraham's altars and the place where Jacob experienced a theophany, later became a major religious site. The name of the place in this passage, Mahanaim, means "two camps," but the reference is ob-

scure. Although it has not been located, this is a fairly important city in the tribal territory of Gad (see Josh 13:26; 21:38; 2 Sam 2:8-9).

32:3. Seir. The land of Seir is generally considered to be the mountainous central region of Edom (elevations generally over 5,000 feet) between Wadi al-Ghuwayr on the north and Ras en-Naqb on the south.

32:3-5. Jacob's communication. Jacob's communication to Esau is intended to make several points. First, he has not been in hiding or sneaking around the land behind Esau's back. Second, and more importantly, he has not come to lay claim to inheritance rights. By describing his success and wealth, he insinuates that he has not returned because he is broke and looking to demand what is due him.

32:13-21. gifts for Esau. The generosity of Jacob's gifts can be understood when compared to tribute paid by one nation to another. So, for instance, in the ninth century B.C. the town of Hindanu paid to *Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta II some silver, bread, beer, thirty camels, fifty oxen and thirty donkeys. This gift would be sufficient for Esau to get a good start on a herding operation of his own or, alternatively, to reward any mercenaries in his employ who may have been anticipating booty.

32:13-21. Jacob's strategy. Jacob's gifts to Esau demonstrate that he is as shrewd as ever. Besides being an attempt to gain Esau's favor through generosity, the continuous arrival of the herds of animals will wear out any schemes for ambush and deflate any degree of military readiness that Esau might be planning in his encounter with Jacob. Additionally, traveling with the animals will slow Esau down and make his company much noisier. Finally, the plan adds Jacob's servants to Esau's retinue—a decided advantage if there is to be fighting.

32:22. river fords. River crossings or fords function in much the same way as gates. Both are entranceways giving access in and out of territory. Both have strategic value for armies (see Judg 3:28; 12:5; Jer 51:32). As such, they are tied to power, both physical and supernatural. Thus it is not difficult to imagine a link between Jacob's entrance into the Promised Land and a struggle with a supernatural being beside the fast flowing waters at the ford of the Jabbok River.

32:24-26. detaining for blessing. A *Hittite *ritual text envisions a struggle between the goddess Khebat and the king in which the goddess is detained and there is discussion of who will prevail over whom, leading to a request for blessing by the king.

32:24. leaving at daybreak. The reference to time indicates both the length of the struggle between Jacob and the divine being and serves as an indicator of Jacob's lack of perception during the fight. Daybreak or "cock's crow" are often found in folklore as the moment when powers and creatures of the dark lose their power to affect humans, though this is not a familiar element in ancient Near Eastern literature. In this case the issue is not one of potency, but one of supremacy (as indicated by the naming) and discernment (see v. 29).

32:28-30. name changing. There is, of course, an etiological (explaining how things came to be) aspect to name changes (e. g., Abram to Abraham in 17:5, which reenforces the *covenantal promise of fathering many nations). When the angel asks Jacob his name, this provides the opportunity to highlight the change to Israel. Thus the change serves both an etiological purpose (memorializing this event at Peniel), but it also marks the Jacob/Israel shift from an outcast and usurper to the heir of the covenant and the chosen leader of God's people. Name changing was also a way to exercise authority over an individual. When a suzerain put a vassal on the throne, he sometimes gave him a new name, demonstrating his power over that vassal.

32:31-32. etiological comments. An etiological comment is one that provides an origin for a name, characteristic or practice. In folklore etiological comments are often fanciful (how the camel got its hump), while in ethnic or national traditions they tend to be legendary. While such fanciful or legendary accounts can often be entirely fabricated, etiological comments need not be only the consequence of a creative imagination but may preserve an accurate story of a tradition. The naming of the place where Jacob/Israel wrestled with God draws its name from his exclamation of surprise at "seeing God face to face" (a clear parallel to his earlier encounter at Bethel, 28:16-19). The final notation in this episode provides an explanation for a unique dietary law, which does not appear elsewhere in Jewish law. However, the legal value in forbidding the consumption of the "tendon attached to the socket of the hip" (possibly the sciatic nerve) is found in its memorializing of Jacob/Israel's struggle at the Jabbok—in that sense comparable to the institution of *circumcision (17:9-14)—marking a significant *covenantal reaffirmation.

33:1-20
Jacob's Reunion with Esau

33:1-3. bowing seven times. One way that a

person showed respect for a superior in the ancient world was by bowing to the ground. To magnify the honor being given and the subservience of the person who bowed, this gesture could be repeated seven times. Some Egyptian texts from El Amarna (fourteenth century B.C.) portray vassals bowing seven times to Pharaoh.

33:16. Seir. This region comprises the hill country stretching to the southeast of the Arabah, between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqabah, in territory later inhabited by the Edomites (see 36:20; Judg 5:4). Because of its relatively high annual rainfall and elevation, the area has sufficient water and snow melt to support scrub forests and brushes. This may be the origin of the name Seir, which means "hairy."

33:17. Succoth. A town situated east of the Jordan River near its confluence with the Jabbok River (Judg 8:5). A number of archaeologists have identified it with the site of Tell Deir 'Alla, based on Egyptian records (the stele of Shishak) and cultural remains which date from the *Chalcolithic to *Iron Age II. The name, which means "booths," would be appropriate for the temporary housing of this region's mixed population of pastoral nomads and miners (evidence of smelting has been found in Iron I levels).

33:18-19. Shechem. Identified with Tell Balata in the central highlands, about thirty-five miles north of Jerusalem, Shechem is known from many ancient sources, including the Egyptian records of Sen-Usert III (nineteenth century B.C.) and the *El Amarna tablets (fourteenth century B.C.). Nearly continuous occupation is evidenced through the second and first millennia, demonstrating the importance of this strategic city on the highway network running north from Egypt through Beersheba, Jerusalem and on to Damascus. It was Abram's first stop in Canaan (see comment on 12:6). The fertile soil in this area promoted agriculture as well as good grazing.

33:19. purchase of land. As in the case in Genesis 23, this land transaction includes an exact price (one hundred pieces of silver), thereby marking this as a deeded sale rather than a fee for usage of the property. Since he is settling within the landed territory of the town, Jacob must purchase the property he settles on. The amount he pays is uncertain because the value of the unit of money referred to here is unknown. As in Genesis 23 the eventual use of this land is for burial (see Josh 24:32).

33:20. altar significance. Altars function as sacrificial platforms. Their construction can also mark the introduction of the worship of a particular god in a new land. One tie between the generations of *covenantal leaders is their construction of altars in order to worship *Yahweh in the Promised Land (12:7-8; 13:18; 26:25). The name given to Jacob/Israel's altar, "El Elohe Israel," is an acknowledgment of his own name change and his acceptance of the role of covenantal heir that had been promised at Bethel (28:13-15). For another example of naming an altar, see Exodus 17:15.

34:1-31

Dinah and Shechem

34:2. Hivites. Based on their appearance in various narratives, the Hivites apparently inhabited an area in the central hill country of Canaan, ranging from Gibeon, near Jerusalem (Josh 9:1-7), to Shechem and on north to Mount Hermon (Josh 11:3; Judg 3:3). The origin of the Hivites is unknown (descendant of Ham in Gen 10:17), but it is possible that they are related to either *Hurrian or *Hittite peoples settling in Canaan during the period from the mid-second to early first millennium B.C.

34:2. ravishing women. Rape as a means of obtaining a marriage contract was apparently one stratagem used in the ancient Near East. Laws regulating this practice are found in Exodus 22:16-17, Deuteronomy 22:28-29, the Middle *Assyrian Laws and the *Hittite laws. These often require the rapist to pay an especially high bride price and sometimes forbid any possibility of divorce. *Sumerian Law 7, like Genesis 34, deals with a case where a young, unbetrothed woman leaves her parents' home without permission and is raped. The result is an option by the parents to marry her to the rapist without her consent.

34:7. concept of universal law. Ancient Near Eastern literature contains law collections of this time and earlier that make it clear that prohibitions concerning illicit and violent sexual behavior were not innovations at Sinai. The codes of conduct by which people lived in this time show great similarity to the laws enshrined at Sinai and demonstrate a common universal sense of morality and justice. Laws and less formal standards often sought to protect the honor and integrity of the family, the dignity of the individual and security within society.

34:11-12. bride price and gift. The bride price and gift paid by the groom's family was often dependent on the desirability of the marriage. A higher price could be expected if the bride's family was socially superior to that of the groom or there were other factors (such as the bride's beauty) which made her value rise. In

the *Nuzi texts a typical bride price is thirty to forty shekels of silver.

34:13-17. circumcision. At the time that *circumcision was introduced (Gen 17), adult males as well as infants underwent this procedure as a mark of their membership in the community. Circumcision was practiced widely in the ancient Near East as a rite of puberty, fertility or marriage, but was not practiced by all peoples. The men of Shechem agree to submit to this in order to become acceptable as husbands to Jacob's daughters. The procedure performed on adults is quite painful and would have virtually debilitated the adult male population for several days.

34:20. gate of the city. The city gate was a place of assembly for legal and business transactions. It could also be used for public meetings that affected all of the city's citizens. In the small towns that were the ancient cities the houses were close together and the streets were narrow. The only open areas would be the market place (if the town had one) and the area of the gate. The former would have been unsuitable for matters of public business.

34:25-29. plundering the city. The negotiation between the parties had concerned appropriate recompense (bride price) for Dinah in the circumstances of her having been taken forcibly. As it turns out, the compensation that Dinah's brothers considered appropriate was the forfeiture of the life and goods of the entire city. Such was also attempted by the Greeks in the *Iliad* as they laid siege to Troy to recover Helen.

35:1-15

Jacob's Return to Bethel

35:1. building an altar. When Abram built altars during his journeys (12:6-8), it was not for the purpose of sacrifice but for calling on the name of the Lord. This also seems to be the case with Jacob, since no reference is made to offering sacrifices on the altar. Some have suggested that the altars served to mark the territory of the deity. Alternatively they were memorials to the name of the Lord.

35:2-5. ridding of foreign gods. The call to rid themselves of foreign gods is a call to commit themselves exclusively to *Yahweh. This does not mean that they understood or accepted philosophical monotheism, but that they accepted Yahweh as their family patron deity. The belief in a personal god who gave protection and provision to the family was common in early second-millennium Mesopotamia. This deity was not understood to replace the great cosmic gods but was the principal object of worship and religious devotion for the individual.

35:2. purification. Purification would have accompanied *ritual procedures but also may be a response to the bloodshed of chapter 34. It typically involved bathing and changing garments. Preparation for worship and *ritual also includes the disposal of any signs of loyalty to other gods. All of this took place at Shechem, where the events of chapter 34 took place, some twenty miles north of Bethel. The worship act is portrayed as a pilgrimage, as indicated by the terminology of verse 1. The relationship of earrings to worship of other gods is unclear. While the use of earrings to fashion idols is attested (Ex 32:2; Judg 8:24), and they are often part of the plunder of looted cities, neither of these appear to offer an explanation. It has been suggested that perhaps the earrings were *amulets of some sort, even stamped with an image of deity, though there is no evidence of earrings serving such a purpose. There is, however, an earring with an inscription of dedication to a goddess from the *Ur III period (about 2000 B.C.).

35:4. buried under the oak. The objects were buried under a special tree in Shechem, which possibly figures also in 12:6, Joshua 24:23-27 and Judges 9:6, 37. Sacred trees played a significant role in popular religion of the day, which would have viewed stone and tree as potential divine dwellings. In Canaanite religion they are believed to be symbols of *fertility (see Deut 12:2; Jer 3:9; Hos 4:13), though there is very little in the archaeological or literary remains of the Canaanites that would clarify the role of sacred trees.

35:14. anointed pillar. Just as Jacob had set up a stone at Bethel and anointed it in 28:18, so now another is set up and a libation (liquid offering) performed to commemorate the *theophany (God's appearance). It would not be unusual to have several standing stones erected in the same vicinity.

35:16-29

The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac

35:16-18. midwifing. Midwives, who were generally older women, served as resources to teach young women about sexual activity and to aid in the birth of children. They were also a part of the naming *ritual and may have helped teach new mothers about nursing and child care.

35:16-18. death in childbirth. Death in childbirth was not an uncommon occurrence in the ancient world. The incantation literature of *Babylon contains a number of examples of

spells to protect the mother and child in the birthing process; particularly incantations against Lamashtu, the demon who was believed to attack women and children.

35:18. naming children. Rachel names her child as she dies, giving a name that reflects her misery. It was customary for circumstances surrounding the birth to serve as the occasion for the name. In this case Jacob changes the name, as was the father's right. *Benjamin* can mean either son of the right (hand), signifying a place of protection, or son of the south (since Israelites oriented themselves toward the east, the south was on their right).

35:19-20. Rachel's tomb. Rachel's death in childbirth is placed on the way to Ephrath, north of Bethlehem, on the border of the later tribal territories of Judah and Benjamin (see 1 Sam 10:2), some twelve miles north of Bethlehem. Another example of raising a memorial pillar for the dead is found in 2 Samuel 18:18. The late mention of Rachel's tomb in Jeremiah 31 suggests that it was a well-known pilgrimage site down to the end of the monarchy period. More recent traditions demonstrate some confusion between a site for Rachel's tomb in Bethlehem and another north of Jerusalem.

35:21. Migdal Eder. The name of this place means "herding tower," a installation used by pastoralists to protect their animals from predators. Based on Jacob's itinerary, journeying south after burying Rachel, Migdal Eder would be near Jerusalem. This identification may be strengthened by mention in Micah 4:8 of "watchtower of the flock." Later traditions, however, place it closer to Bethlehem.

35:21-22. son with father's concubine. *Concubines are women without dowry who include among their duties providing children to the family. Childbearing was an important function in the ancient world, where survival of the family, and often survival at all, was tenuous at best. Since a concubine has been a sexual partner, a son who used his father's concubine was seen not only as incestuous but as attempting to usurp the authority of the family patriarch.

36:1-30
The Line of Esau

36:1-43. Esau's descendants. The genealogy of Esau unfolds in stages, beginning with his first three wives (two *Hittite and one the daughter of Ishmael). In the subsequent levels of the list twelve tribal names are identified (vv. 9-14, excluding Amalek, who is the son of a *concubine), which matches the genealogical lists of Nahor (22:20-24), Ishmael (25:13-16) and Israel. A third tier of descendants (vv. 15-19) appear to be clan names, with some repetition from the previous level. The final grouping contains the names of eight kings who reigned in Edom prior to the establishment of the Israelite monarchy (vv. 31-39). Among the best known of the names in the entire genealogy are Teman, identified with the southern region of Edom, and Uz, named as the homeland of Job.

36:12. Amalekite origins. The Amalekites wandered through vast stretches of land in the Negev, Transjordan and Sinai peninsula. They are unattested outside the Bible, and no archaeological remains can be positively linked to them. However, archaeological surveys of the region have turned up ample evidence of nomadic and seminomadic groups like the Amalekites during this period.

36:15-30. chiefs. The inclusion of many chiefs of different regions makes this list as much a king list as a genealogy in that these Bedouin groups had a chieftain form of government. The *Sumerian king list similarly features brief lines of kings connected to various geographical regions.

36:24. hot springs. One way of distinguishing persons with the same name in a genealogy is to provide a brief comment based on their career (see Lamech in 4:19-24; 5:25-31). Here Anah is distinguished from his uncle by the additional information that he discovered a "hot springs"—a natural phenomenon that could have benefited the clan. The translation here is based solely on the Vulgate. Jewish tradition translates it as "mules" and gives Anah credit for learning to crossbreed horses and donkeys.

37:1-11
Joseph's Dreams

37:3. Joseph's coat. The special coat provided to Joseph by his father signified a position of authority and favor. Though such coats may have been colorful, they were often distinguished by material, weave or length (of either hem or sleeve). Since the Hebrew word describing it is used only here, it is difficult to be certain which type of quality characterizes the coat. Egyptian paintings of this period depict well-dressed Canaanites as wearing long-sleeved, embroidered garments with a fringed scarf wrapped diagonally from waist to knee.

37:5-11. importance of dreams. Dreams in the ancient world were thought to offer information from the divine realm and were therefore taken very seriously. Some dreams, given to prophets and kings, were considered a means

of divine revelation. Most dreams, however, even the ordinary dreams of common people, were believed to contain omens that communicated information about what the gods were doing. Those that were revelation usually identified the deity and often involved the deity. The dreams that were omens usually made no reference to deity. Dreams were often filled with symbolism necessitating an interpreter, though at times the symbols were reasonably self-evident. The information that came through dreams was not believed to be irreversible. Dreams of a rise to power like the ones Joseph had are known in the ancient Near East, notably one concerning Sargon, king of Akkad, half a millennium earlier than Joseph.

37:12-36

Joseph Sold into Slavery

37:12-13. shepherds grazing. The lush vegetation produced by the winter rains would have allowed shepherds to remain in pastures near their villages and camps. Once the rains ended, the herds would graze in harvested fields and then would be taken into the hill country, where vegetation remained through the summer months.

37:17. Dothan. Located at Tell Dothan, this is an imposing site covering twenty-five acres. It is situated fourteen miles north of Shechem, on the main route used by merchants and herdsmen going north to the Jezreel Valley. It developed into a major city site in the *Early Bronze Age (3200-2400 B.C.) and would have served as a natural landmark for travelers. The area around the city provided choice pasture land, thus explaining the presence of Joseph's brothers.

37:19-24. cisterns. Cisterns were hollowed out of the limestone bedrock or were dug and then lined with plaster to store rain water. They provided water for humans and animals through most of the dry months. When they were empty, they sometimes served as temporary cells for prisoners (see Jer 38:6).

37:25-28. slave trade. The slave trade existed from earliest times in the ancient Near East. Slaves were generally war captives or persons taken in raids. Traders often accepted slaves, whom they transported to new areas and sold. These persons seldom obtained their freedom.

37:25. spice trade and caravan routes. Caravans brought incense from south Arabia to Gaza on the Palestinian coast and to Egypt, using various routes through the Sinai Peninsula. It would have been along one of these northern Sinai routes that the Midianites met Joseph's brothers and purchased him for resale in Egypt along with the rest of their trade goods.

37:25-36. Midianite/Ishmaelite. The interchange of these two names in the story probably reflects a close affinity between the two groups. Some suggest that the Ishmaelites were considered a subtribe of the Midianites. Others suggest the Midianites simply purchased Joseph from the Ishmaelites. However, based on the intermingling of the names in Judges 8:24, it would appear that the biblical writer either assumed they were related or is reflecting a known kin tie between them.

37:28. twenty shekels. The twenty shekels paid for Joseph was about normal for a slave in this time period, as attested in other literature of this time (for instance, the laws of *Hammurabi). It would constitute approximately two years of wages.

37:34-35. mourning practices. Mourning practices generally included tearing one's robe, weeping, putting dust and ashes in the hair and wearing sackcloth. Sackcloth was made of goat or camel hair and was coarse and uncomfortable. In many cases the sackcloth was only a loin covering. The official period of mourning was thirty days but could continue for as long as the mourner chose to continue to grieve.

38:1-30

Judah's Sons

38:1. Adullam. Located in the Shephelah, Adullam has been identified with Tell esh Sheikh Madhkur northwest of Hebron (see 1 Sam 22:1; Mic 1:15). It would have been at a lower elevation than Hebron (3,040 feet above sea level), and thus the statement that Judah "went down" is appropriate.

38:6-26. levirate marriage. One remedy for the disruption of inheritance caused by the premature death of a man before he had produced an heir was the custom of levirate marriage. As outlined in Genesis 38, the dead man's brother was required to impregnate the widow so that his brother's name (his inheritance share) would be passed on to the child born of this obligatory act. A similar statute is found in *Hittite Law 193 and some form of it may be represented in Ruth 4. The law is detailed in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, where the levir is allowed to refuse his obligation by participating in a public ceremony in which the widow shames him. This was probably made necessary by situations like the one Judah faces here, in which

a greedy brother (Onan) refuses to impregnate Tamar because it would decrease his eventual inheritance share.

38:11. widows. In a society that is subject to disease and warfare, it is not uncommon to find widows. Ancient Israel dealt with this problem through levirate marriage (to insure an heir for the deceased husband) and remarriage of young widows as soon as possible after the mourning period. They wore special garments which designated them as widows. Since a widow had no inheritance rights, special provisions were made for widows under the law allowing them to glean in harvested fields (Ruth 2) and protecting them from being oppressed (Deut 14:29; Ps 94:1-7). Only the widowed daughter of a priest could honorably return to her father's house (Lev 22:13).

38:13. Timnah. The exact location of the town in this narrative is uncertain. It is a fairly common place name in the allotment list and in the Samson epic (see Josh 15:10, 56; Judg 14:1-2; 2 Chron 28:18), with connections to the tribal territory of Judah in the southern hill country (possibly Tell el-Batashi, three and a half miles east of Tel Miqne-Ekron).

38:13-14. widow's clothes. A widow, like a married woman, did not wear a veil. She did wear a special garment which set her apart as a widow. These clothes entitled her to the privileges provided for widows in the law, such as gleaning and a portion of the tithe.

38:14, 21. Enaim. The two references to this place in the narrative argue for a place name rather than the more traditional translations of "an open place" (KJV) or "a fork in the road" (Vulgate, Targums). It may be the same as Enam (Josh 15:34) and may take its name from local springs. However, other than a general reference to the territory of Judah, its exact location is unknown.

38:15-23. prostitution. The Canaanite culture utilized *cult prostitution as a way of promoting *fertility. Devotees of the mother goddess *Ishtar or *Anat would reside at or near shrines and would dress in a veil, as the symbolic bride of the god *Baal or *El. Men would visit the shrine and use the services of the cult prostitutes prior to planting their fields or during other important seasons such as shearing or the period of lambing. In this way they gave honor to the gods and reenacted the divine marriage in an attempt to insure fertility and prosperity for their fields and herds.

38:18, 25. seal, cord and staff. One distinctive means of signing a document in the ancient Near East was to use a cylinder seal, which contained a mirror-image incision that could be rolled onto a clay tablet or pressed into sealing wax or clay bullae. Cylinder seals, many carved from precious and semiprecious stones, have been discovered from nearly every period post-*Early Bronze by archaeologists. The seal was often threaded onto a leather cord and worn around the neck of the owner. In Palestine it is more common to find stamp seals engraved on the flat side. Another form of identification mentioned here is the staff, an aid to walking as well as an animal goad and weapon. Since this was a personal item, it may well have been carved and polished, and thus known to belong to a particular person.

38:24. prostitution as capital crime. Prostitution or harlotry was generally punished by stoning to death (Deut 22:23-24). Tamar's sentence of death by fire is exceptional. This sentence is prescribed elsewhere only in cases

MAJOR TRADE ROUTES IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Trade was the lifeblood of the major cultures of the ancient Near East. As early as 5000 B.C. there is evidence of trade in obsidian from northern Anatolia throughout the Near East. Although land travel was time consuming (fifteen to twenty miles a day) and dangerous, the desire for exotic as well as functional products was so great that merchants and governments were willing to take the risk in order to obtain the very high profits involved (a minimum of 100 percent). For instance, business documents from the Old Assyrian period (2100-1900 B.C.) and from the Mari archive (1800-1700 B.C.) mention commercial caravans of as many as 200-300 donkeys traveling in Asia Minor and northern Syria. They followed the trade route from the Assyrian capital at Asshur on the Tigris River west to Habur region to the Taurus mountains and on to the commercial center of Kanish in west central Asia Minor. The route then continued west through Cilicia to Antioch in Pisidia, Philadelphia, Sardis, Pergamum and Troy on the Ionian coast. Each city provided shelter, supplies, and a ready market for these enterprising merchants.

The actual routes taken were dictated by the topography of the various regions (avoiding disease-infected swamps, uneven and deeply cut hill country) as well as political situations and potential markets. They radiated out from major population centers. Thus from Egypt the major trade route, known as the Great Trunk Road, started in Memphis on the Nile, crossed the northern Sinai Peninsula, turned north up the coastal plain of Canaan, the jogged east through the Valley ofJezreel at Megiddo and

where a daughter of a priest engages in harlotry and in cases of incest (Lev 20:14).

39:1-23

Joseph in Potiphar's House

39:1-20. Egyptian tale of two brothers. The Nineteenth Dynasty (c. 1225 B.C.) Egyptian tale of Anubis and Bata has many similarities to the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. In both cases a younger man is seduced by his master's wife and then falsely accused of rape when he refuses to give in to her desires. What may have made this Egyptian story so popular (the surviving papyrus is written in a cursive style [hieratic] rather than the more formal *hieroglyphic characters) is the common tale of rivalry between brothers (like Jacob and Esau), the high suspense and the use of folklore techniques (talking animals, intervention of the gods). Aside from the common general setting, the Joseph story has little else in common with this Egyptian tale.

39:16. keeping the cloak. Besides the interesting parallel to Joseph's brothers' taking his cloak, it should be noted that here again the cloak is to serve to identify Joseph. Garments often contained indications of status, rank or office and therefore could be used in such ways.

39:20. imprisoned with the king's prisoners. One indication of Potiphar's understanding of the affair between Joseph and his wife may be in the choice of prison. Rather than being executed for rape (as dictated in, for instance, the Middle *Assyrian laws), Joseph was put into a royal prison holding political prisoners. This may have been a bit more comfortable (as prisons go), but more importantly it will put him in contact with members of Pharaoh's court (Gen 40:1-23).

40:1-23

Pharaoh's Cupbearer and Baker

40:1-4. cupbearer's role. The cupbearer was a high-ranking member of a monarch's court (see Neh 1:11). He would have to be a trusted individual, since his primary responsibility was to taste all of his lord's food and drink and thus prevent his lord from being poisoned.

40:1-2. offenses against Pharaoh. Offenses against Pharaoh certainly could have taken many forms. Whether these officials were suspected of involvement in a conspiracy or just guilty of displeasing Pharaoh in the disposition of their duties is impossible to tell. It may be that they are under house arrest awaiting the investigation of charges against them.

40:5-18. interpretation of dreams. Dream interpretations were usually carried out by experts who had been trained in the available dream literature. More information is available from Mesopotamia than from Egypt. Both the Egyptians and the *Babylonians compiled what we call dream books, which contain sample dreams along with the key to their interpretation. Since dreams often depended on symbolism, the interpreter would have to have access to these documents preserving the empirical data concerning past dreams and interpretations. It was believed that the gods communicated through dreams but not that they revealed the meanings of dreams. If they were going to reveal the meaning, why use a dream in the first place? But Joseph held a different view. He did not consult any "scientific" literature, but consulted God. Nevertheless, he interprets along the same lines as some of the dream literature would have suggested. As in Mesopotamian literature he draws a time indication from a number that

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then north to Hazor. From there the route went northeast to Damasca passed Ebla and Aleppo in Syria and then came to the northwestern spur of the Euphrates River, which then served as a guide southward into the major cities of Mesopotamia. The other major route, known as the King's Highway, joined by the caravans coming north through Arabia, traversed the Transjordanian region from the Red Sea port of Ezion-geber north through Edom, Moab, and Ammon and joining the Trunk Road at Damascus.

Since the northern and central deserts of Arabia were so inhospitable, trade routes skirted them to the north, traveling up the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys, west to Palmyra and Damascus, and then south along either the coastal highway through Palestine or down the King's Highway in Transjordan. Caravans transporting spices (myrrh, frankincense) and indigo traced the western coast of Arabia, transshipped to Ethiopia and further north to Egypt and traveled up the Nile. Eventually these merchants reached deep water sea ports (various ports used between 2500-100 B.C.: Byblos, Tyre, Sidon, Acco, Ugarit, Aqaba, Alexandria), which gave them access to markets and sources of natural resources (such as the copper mines of Cyprus) in the Mediterranean (Crete, Cyprus, the Aegean and Ionian Islands, the coast of Turkey and North Africa) as well as along the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa. The carrying trade was dominated by Ugarit (1600-1200 B.C.) and by the Phoenicians (1100-600). The fleets would have hugged the coasts or navigated between islands in the Mediterranean or Red Sea, traveling about forty miles a day.

features in the dream. The symbols in these dreams are similar to some of those found in the dream books. A full goblet, for instance, is indicative of having a name and offspring. Carrying fruit on one's head is indicative of sorrow.

40:22. execution. Hanging was a way of dishonoring the corpse of an executed person (see Josh 8:29; 2 Sam 4:12). It may involve suspension from a rope by the neck or impalement on a stake. The actual form of execution may be stoning or beheading.

41:1-32

Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams

41:1-55. the identity of Pharaoh. The name of the Pharaoh of the Joseph story is unknown. Elements of the story have suggested to some a setting in either the *Hyksos period (1750-1550 B.C.) or the *Amarna Age (fourteenth century B.C.), when large numbers of Semites were either settled in Egypt or mentioned in Egyptian sources as serving in government positions. Our current knowledge of Egyptian history and practice would support this as the most logical and feasible choice. Biblical chronological information, however, suggests to some an earlier time in the Middle Kingdom Twelfth Dynasty (1963-1786). Without specific, historical references in the story it is impossible to associate the narrative with a particular reigning king. It is the practice of the author(s) of the book of Genesis to not mention any Pharaoh by name. This may have been intentional, since the Pharaoh was considered by his people to be a god and the Israelites did not wish to invoke that name.

41:1-7. double dreams. In the ancient Near East, dreams were generally assumed to be communications from the gods. Some were quite simple and straightforward (see Jacob's dream at Bethel, 28:10-22), but in cases where the king or Pharaoh was involved special emphasis was sometimes added through the experience of a double dream. Thus here Pharaoh has two visions that warn of the coming famine in Egypt. Similarly, the *Sumerian king Gudea is said to have had a double dream in which he was instructed to build a temple. In both cases their dreams were interpreted by magicians or representatives of a god. In a Mari text the same dream on consecutive nights added weight to the message of the dream. In both the Gilgamesh Epic and a poem about a righteous sufferer, a threefold repetition of a dream confirms its reliability.

41:8-16. magicians and wise men. Egypt, as well as the Mesopotamian and *Hittite kingdoms, developed guilds of magicians whose task was to interpret signs and dreams and to concoct remedies for various types of medical problems through magical means. These specialists used *exorcism to frighten away demons and gods and incantations and curses to transmit evil into some one or some place (seen in the Egyptian *execration texts and Jer 19:10-13). Thousands of texts have been discovered throughout the ancient Near East which contain protection spells as well as recipes for the manufacture of *amulets to ward off evil and for the construction of dolls, incantation bowls and miniature figures designed to bring destruction on one's enemies. Mesopotamian magic distinguished between black and white magic, and thus practitioners were divided into sorcerers and magicians or wise men. Egypt, however, did not draw this distinction among its guild of magicians. Although their major task was medical, Egyptian magicians seemed to have employed a less respectful manner toward the gods, including providing spells for souls to escape punishment in the underworld (Book of the Dead). It is very unusual in Egypt for the Pharaoh to be in need of an interpreter of his dreams. Since the Pharaoh was considered divine, the gods would communicate to him through dreams, and the meaning was typically presented as transparent to him. The Hebrew word used to describe the specialists Pharaoh sends for is from a technical Egyptian term sometimes thought to describe dream interpreters. It is used to describe the famous official Imhotep in a late inscription (second century B.C.) where he is portrayed giving advice to Pharaoh concerning a seven-year famine.

41:14. shaved. As a way of making himself more presentable to the Pharaoh, Joseph shaves. This may have involved shaving the head (Num 6:9) as well as the face (Jer 41:5). He would have thereby changed his appearance to look more like an Egyptian. Egyptian wall paintings demonstrate that the Egyptians were typically clean-shaven.

41:27-32. famine in Egypt. Although Egypt was one of the most consistent grain-producing areas in the ancient Near East because of the regularity of the Nile floods, it was occasionally plagued with famine. Such a disaster is mentioned in *Visions of Neferti*, an Egyptian document dating to the reign of Amenemhet I (1991-1962 B.C.). Here, as in Joseph's narration, a vision is interpreted and a national calamity predicted.

41:33-57

Joseph's Advice and Elevation

41:33-40. food rationing. In the face of the coming famine, Joseph's advice is to store one-fifth of the grain from each of the years of good harvest, which can then be distributed to the people when it becomes necessary. The building of storehouses accompanies this sensible advice (see Ex 1:11; 1 Kings 9:19).

41:35. storage cities. Egypt's management of the Nile River and its predictability made that land a breadbasket for the rest of the ancient Near East. Storage cities were a hallmark of a prosperous people who thought in terms of the long run and realized that famine was always a possibility that needed to be planned for. There would typically be storage cities centrally located in each geographical region.

41:40. second to Pharaoh. Many Egyptian nobles could make the claim of being second only to Pharaoh, and several different titles imply this position: "Great Favorite of the Lord of the Two Lands," and "Foremost among his Courtiers" are two that have been identified from inscriptions.

41:41-45. Joseph's position. The job description and investiture ceremony detailed here give Joseph a position in Egyptian government comparable to "Grand Vizier" or "Overseer of the Royal Estates," both of which appear in Egyptian documents (see 1 Kings 16:9; Is 22:15, 19-21, for use of this latter title in Israel's bureaucracy). Such a position is detailed in Egyptian tomb paintings, showing the entire sequence of events from the granting of the title to the placing of robes and rings on the appointee by the Pharaoh. Joseph functions much the same as the "Overseer of the Granaries of Upper and Lower Egypt" would have done. Such a position for a non-Egyptian is uncommon prior to the *Hyksos period (1750-1550 B.C.), when a greater number of Semites served in Egypt. From the *El Amarna reign of Akhenaten comes a tomb of the Semitic official Tutu, who was appointed "highest mouth in the whole country," a position with powers comparable to Joseph's. Biographies in Egyptian tombs and literature from Egypt such as the *Story of *Sinuhe* give us ample information about the details of the life of officials of Pharaoh. It is not unusual to find accounts of officials who were elevated from lowly status to high positions of authority. In Sinuhe's story he fled the royal court and lived in exile for many years, finally returning and being honored. As a result the description of Joseph's elevation and honors can be seen as typical against the Egyptian background of the time.

41:42. signet ring. Kings and royal administrators used a signet ring to seal official documents. This ring would have been distinctive and would have contained the name (cartouche in Egypt) of the king. Anyone using it thus acted in the name of the king (see Num 31:50; Esther 3:10; Tobit 1:20; 1 Maccabees 6:15). The chains and linen garment are given in a ceremony of investiture providing him with the accessories that will signify his status, rank and office.

41:43-44. Joseph's perquisites. Riding in a chariot with a set of guardsmen to clear his path and proclaim his position as "second in command" gave Joseph extremely high status (see 2 Sam 15:1; Esther 6:7-9). The title of second only to Pharaoh, or viceroy (*Akkadian *terdennu*; Is 20:1 *tartan*), gave Joseph extraordinary powers and would have required all but the king to bow to him. Furthermore, since Joseph had been given the king's favor or protection, no one was permitted to "raise a hand or foot" against him or oppose his orders (compare the powers granted in Ezra 7:21-26).

41:45. Egyptian name. The intent of giving Joseph an Egyptian name is to complete the transformation process of the investiture ceremony. Egyptianized, he is more likely to be accepted at court and by the Egyptian people (see the Egyptian tale of *Sinuhe's return to Egypt and his consignment of his barbarian clothing to the "sand crawlers"). This practice of renaming a Semite official is also found in the reign of Pharaoh Merenptah (1224-1208 B.C.). The meaning of Joseph's Egyptian name is uncertain, but may be "the God has spoken and he will live" or "the one who knows."

41:45. priest of On. The marriage arranged for Joseph allied him with one of the most powerful priestly families in Egypt. During the period from 1600 to 1100 B.C., only the priests of Ptah of Memphis were more influential. The priest of On officiated at all major festivals and supervised lesser priests who served the sun god Re in the temple city of Heliopolis (ten miles northeast of Cairo).

42:1-38

The Brothers' First Encounter with Joseph

42:6-17. spying. Just as the Israelites later send out spies to reconnoiter the land of Canaan, so

Joseph's brothers are accused of working on behalf of another country. Traders and merchants would have been commonly employed for such business, as they could move around the country unnoticed or unsuspected. Some governments are naturally suspicious of foreigners, and the charge of spying is always difficult to disprove.

42:25-28. trading of silver. Coined money was not invented and put into common use until the sixth century B.C. Thus precious metals, gems, spices, incense and other luxury items were bartered by weight. Their relative value would also depend on scarcity. Silver was used throughout antiquity as a common item of exchange. Since Egypt lacked native silver deposits, this metal was particularly desirable as a standard for business transactions

43:1-34

The Brothers' Second Encounter with Joseph

43:11. products of the land. The gifts that were sent by Jacob to Joseph represent the costliest and thus the most pleasing items available. Only the balm, honey/syrup and nuts would have been actual products of Canaan. The spices and myrrh were imported and thus were precious gifts intended to buy favorable treatment from Pharaoh's representative.

43:16. steward of the house. A high status and large household, such as Joseph's, would have required a staff of servants headed by a chief butler or steward. This person would have been in charge of the maintenance of the house, kept track of financial obligations and supervised the other servants. Joseph's use of this man as his confidant (see Gen 44:1, 4) suggests it was a position of high trust. Apparently, he was also a person to whom supplicants could go to intercede with his master (see Gen 43:19-23).

43:26. bowing to honor. The standard method of demonstrating obeisance in the ancient Near East was to bow to the ground. Egyptian tomb art is filled with examples of servants and royal officials prostrating themselves before the Pharaoh. In the *El Amarna tablets (fourteenth century B.C.), the format of each letter contains a greeting, followed by a set formula of honoring the Pharaoh by bowing seven times forward and backwards.

43:32. eating procedures. The Egyptians considered all other peoples barbarians. Thus they would not associate with them directly by eating at the same table. Joseph's meal was also separated from both the Egyptians and the sons of Jacob because of his high rank.

44:1-34

Joseph's Plot Is Hatched

44:5. divination cup. The cup that Joseph plants in Benjamin's sack is identified as being used for *divination. Just as tea leaves are read today, the ancients read omens by means of liquid in cups. One mechanism involved the pouring of oil onto water to see what shapes it would take (called lecanomancy). More popular methods of divination used everyday occurrences, configurations of the entrails of sacrificed animals or the movements of the heavenly bodies. Lecanomancy was used in the time of Joseph, as is attested by several *Old Babylonian omen texts concerned with the various possible configurations of the oil and their interpretations. Another technique, hydromancy, made its observations from the reflections in the water itself. Not enough is known about Egyptian divination techniques to offer more specific information, but in these early periods typically only people of status had access to divination procedures.

45:1-28

Joseph Reveals His Identity

45:8. titles of Joseph. The use of the title "father of Pharaoh" most likely is related to the Egyptian title *it-ntr,* "father of the god," used to refer to a variety of officials and priests who serve in the Pharaoh's court. "Father" represents an advisory relationship, perhaps to be equated with the role of the priest hired by Micah in Judges 17:10 or the role of Elisha as the king of Israel's counselor in 2 Kings 6:21.

45:10. Goshen. This Semitic place name most likely refers to the delta region of Lower Egypt in the area of the Wadi Tumeilat (from the eastern arm of the Nile River to the Great Bitter Lake). Egyptian texts from *Hyksos period make reference to Semites in this region, and it is an area which provides excellent pasturage for herds. Also arguing in favor of its location in Egypt proper is the use of the phrase "in the district of Rameses" (47:11) as an equation for Goshen.

45:19. carts. The provision of carts does not contrast Egyptian carts to Canaanite carts but is simply a thoughtful gesture so that the women and children will not have to walk, for seminomadic people would not usually keep carts.

45:22. provision for Benjamin. Joseph's role as administrator of Egypt was to ration out food and clothing to the people (a common feature in ancient Near Eastern texts from

*Babylon and *Mari). He does this with his family as well (an ironic turn of events, since his story begins with his receiving a piece of clothing, 37:3). Just as Jacob has singled out Joseph for special favor, now Joseph shows his favor to his full brother Benjamin by giving him five times the amount as his other half brothers, as well as a large quantity of silver.

46:1-34

Jacob and His Family Travel to Egypt

46:1. sacrifice at Beersheba. Though the patriarchs build many altars, there is little reference to their offering sacrifices. The only previous one mentioned was connected to Jacob's agreement with Laban (31:54). Isaac had built an altar at Beersheba (26:25), but no record is made of his offering of sacrifices on that altar. Jacob is taking advantage of this trip to the south to make a pilgrimage to the place where he grew up and the shrine where his father worshiped.

46:29. chariots. Chariots in Egypt during this period were light, constructed of wooden frames and leather with two spoked wheels. The ornamental chariots of pharaohs (and undoubtedly their high officials) are often depicted in the art of the New Kingdom period.

46:34. shepherds in Egypt. It is unlikely that native Egyptian herdsmen would be detested by other Egyptians. Joseph's advice to his father is both a warning about Egyptian attitudes toward strangers and a piece of diplomacy in that they would claim independent status (they had their own herds to support them) and show they were not an ambitious group who wished to rise above their occupation as shepherds.

47:1-12

Jacob's Family Settles in Egypt

47:11. district of Rameses. An equation is made here between the "district of Rameses" and the land of Goshen (see 45:10). This northeastern section of the Delta region was known to be inhabited by Semites and it is the center of *Hyksos activity during the eighteenth to sixteenth centuries B.C. It will also be equated with the Tanis district, where the storehouse cities of Pithom and Rameses were said to be constructed by the Hebrew slaves (Ex 1:11). Pharaoh Rameses II, who did build and expand cities in this region during the mid-thirteenth century B.C., may be *anachronistically referred to in this phrase.

47:13-31

Joseph's Economic and Agrarian Strategies

47:16-17. bartering. Bartering has been a means of exchange from earliest times. The mutually beneficial exchange of property, goods or manufactured items was the basis of the ancient nonmonetary economy. In this case, livestock is used as payment for grain during the famine.

47:20-26. government ownership of land. Government acquires land through forfeiture of debt, through failure to pay taxes and because a family lacks an heir. With nothing else to pay for grain during the famine, the Egyptians must sell their land to the government and become tenant farmers for Pharaoh.

47:21-25. debt slavery. Debt slavery was fairly common throughout the ancient Near East. Peasants who had lost their land and would sell themselves into short-term servitude to support themselves and their families. This might be for a day (Ex 22:26-27) or a period of years. In Israel the term of debt servitude could not exceed six years (Ex 21:2). The Egyptian example in this text, however, suggests perpetual servitude as tenant farmers for Pharaoh. Their rent was paid with one-fifth of the harvest.

47:22. priests' exemption. The observation that the priests had an allotment of food from Pharaoh and therefore did not have to sell their land reflects a common situation of priestly privileges in Egypt. The priesthood often accumulated significant political power to itself and used its sometimes extensive economic resources to wield that power. Many pharaohs found it advantageous to curry favor with them. In contrast, the Israelite system granted no land holdings to the tribe of Levi.

47:24. 20 percent to Pharaoh. Taxation of 20 percent would not be unusual in the ancient world, but too little is known of taxation in Egypt to shed specific light on the levy imposed by Joseph.

47:28-31. burials of ancestors. Once a family tomb was established, it would have become traditional for each family member to be entombed with all of the others. This tied the generations together and further strengthened a family's claim to the land where the tomb was located.

48:1-22

Jacob's Blessing on Ephraim and Manasseh

48:5-6. Ephraim and Manasseh as firstborn. While Jacob does not disinherit Reuben and

Simeon, he adopts Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and gives them prioritized standing in inheritance. The adoption practice and formula here are very similar to those attested in the Code of *Hammurabi. Additionally, one *Ugaritic text features a grandfather adopting his grandson. In one sense this adoption could be seen as the means by which Joseph is given the double portion of the inheritance due to the firstborn, since two of his sons receive shares from Jacob's inheritance.

48:7. Rachel's tomb. Jacob's reminiscence about the death of his wife Rachel places her tomb in the vicinity of Bethlehem and Ephrath (see the discussion of this in 35:19-20).

48:12-19. reversed blessing. The younger son has received privileged treatment in each generation of the patriarchal narratives. Isaac received inheritance over Ishmael, and Jacob over Esau; Joseph was favored over his brothers, and now Ephraim is favored over Manasseh. In most ancient civilizations the firstborn had certain privileges in the division of the inheritance, and Israel was no different. Nevertheless, exceptions could be made for various reasons. For comments about deathbed pronouncements see 27:1-4.

48:22. the land of the Amorites. It appears that **Amorite* is being used here as a generic term for all of the peoples of presettlement Canaan (see 15:19-21) and specifically those in the vicinity of Shechem where Jacob had purchased a piece of land (33:18-19). Although this does not detail the ethnic diversity of that region, certainly the Amorites, whose primary area of influence was in northern Mesopotamia and Syria, had a profound effect on the customs and religious practices of Canaan.

49:1-33

Jacob's Pronouncement Concerning His Sons

49:1. patriarchal blessing. In the biblical material the patriarchal pronouncement generally concerns the destiny of the sons with regard to fertility of the ground, fertility of the family and relationships between family members. Blessings or curses pronounced by the patriarch of the family were always taken seriously and considered binding, even though they were not presented as prophetic messages from God.

49:8-12. hand on the neck. Jacob's blessing of his son Judah is reflective of the great importance attached to the tribe of Judah in later history. One sign of its power is found in the phrase "your hand will be on the neck of your enemies," which signifies control or subjugation of Judah's foes. The difficult term *Shiloh* in the third line of verse 10 (NIV: "to whom it belongs") has been most plausibly explained as reference to a gift offering (Hebrew *shay*) paid in tribute, thus "until one brings him tribute."

49:11. washing robes in wine. In this blessing of Judah, the future prosperity of that tribe is symbolized by abundant fertility. Wine will be so plentiful that they will be able to wash their clothes in it. It is also possible this is a reference to the dyeing industry, but that would figure into future economic prosperity.

49:13. haven for ships. As the coastline was lacking natural harbors, the sea was generally little more than a boundary to Israelites. Only in the northern coastal regions would there have been any inclination to develop seafaring skills.

49:14-15. donkey habits. The blessing of Issachar contains this characterization of a strong animal, which is sometimes stubborn and lazy and may sit down unexpectedly in an inconvenient place. The idea may also be suggestive of a tribe that allies itself with outsiders or is forced to serve others (contra Judg 5:15).

49:17. horse domestication. Reference to a rider on the horse assumes an advanced level of domestication of the horse. This was achieved in the third millennium. In Mesopotamia horseback riders are depicted in the middle of the third millennium, but in Egyptian materials not until a millennium later. Horses were usually used for pulling chariots, and horseback riding was not common.

50:1-14

Jacob's Burial

50:1-3. embalming. Although it was the usual practice in Egypt for everyone who could afford it, embalming of Israelites is found only in this passage. This was an elaborate and *ritual-filled procedure performed by a trained group of mortuary priests. It involved removing the internal organs and placing of the body in embalming fluids for forty days. The idea behind this is based on the Egyptian belief that the body had to be preserved as a repository for the soul after death. The bodies of Jacob and Joseph are embalmed, and while this may have been done to soothe the feelings of the Egyptians, it also served the purpose of preserving their bodies for later burial in Canaan.

50:3. mourning period. This period of mourning may include the forty days required to embalm the body plus the traditional thirty-day mourning period (see Deut

34:8). Since the Egyptians are also described as mourning Jacob's death, it would appear he was accorded royal honors as a visiting dignitary.

50:10-11. threshing floor of Atad. No exact location has been identified for this site, said to be east of the Jordan. It is strange that Jacob's remains would be taken east through Transjordan instead of on a more direct route to Hebron. Having the seven-day mourning ceremony on a threshing floor is quite appropriate. This is a place associated with business, law and life and thus suitable as a place for memorializing a tribal leader (see Num 15:20; Ruth 3; 2 Sam 24:16-24).

50:11. Abel-mizraim. The renaming of the threshing floor of Atad provides a lasting memorial to Jacob and the remarkable seven-day mourning ceremony conducted there. The name itself contains a familiar element: abel means "stream" and appears in several other place names (Num 33:49—Abel Shittim; Judg 11:33—Abel Keramim). Here, however, there is a pun on the Hebrew word ebel, "mourning."

50:15-26

The Last Years of Joseph

50:26. Joseph's age. Joseph dies at the age of 110, considered the ideal age for an Egyptian. Examination of mummies has demonstrated that the average life expectancy in Egypt was between forty and fifty years. The use of the coffin or sarcophagus in mummification was an Egyptian, not an Israelite, practice.

EXODUS

1:1-22

Israelite Slavery in Egypt

1:8-14. king who didn't know Joseph. The book of Exodus maintains the anonymity of the Pharaohs who have dealings with the Israelites. Since Egyptian records have preserved no accounts of the Israelite presence, enslavement or exodus, identifying these Pharaohs can only be attempted by using the vague hints contained in the narrative. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries B.C. a group known as the Hyksos, who were not native Egyptians, ruled the land. It is usually thought that the Pharaoh referred to in this verse represents either the first of the *Hyksos rulers or the first of the native Egyptian rulers after the *Hyksos were driven out. The difference would be at least one hundred years (c. 1650 or 1550 B.C.), or up to two hundred years if some of the early *Hyksos rulers with only partial control subjected the Israelites to slavery.

1:10. reason for enslaving Israel. The argument for enslaving the Israelites is that if they are not enslaved they will join the enemy and leave the country. This would suggest the period when the *Hyksos are being driven from the land. The Egyptians would have wanted to keep the Israelite presence for economic reasons.

1:11. forced labor. The sheer number of man-hours needed for the massive engineering and construction projects undertaken in the ancient world made the use of forced labor not infrequent. It was used as a form of taxation (for instance, the common people might work one month out of the year without pay on government building projects). When the government projects proved too ambitious to staff with native people and prisoners of war, and too expensive to hire labor for, vulnerable groups of people would be targeted for forced labor.

1:11. Pithom. Pithom has been identified as the Egyptian Pi(r)-Atum, "real-estate of Atum," currently known as Tell el-Rataba, along the Ismalia Canal, approximately sixty miles northeast of Cairo. The text's identification of the building projects as store cities does not suggest they were only for storage of grain. The store cities were centrally located hubs in the region and could be capital cities.

1:11. Rameses. The location of the city of Rameses, disputed for many years, has now been positively identified as Tell ed-Dab'a, about twenty miles north of Pithom. The site has been extensively excavated by M. Bietak. It served as the *Hyksos capital, Avaris, and was rebuilt by Rameses II as his capital, Pi-Ramesse, in the thirteenth century. It was dismantled to build Tanis (about twelve miles to the north) as the Delta capital in the Twentieth Dynasty during the twelfth century B.C. (Judges period). Rameses II used various peoples as slave labor for building the city, including the

Apiru (a term used in the second millennium to describe dispossessed peoples), a designation that would have been applied to the Hebrews as well as to other people.

1:14. brick making. The ancient records agree that brick makers had a filthy job. A work known as the *Satire on the Trades* attests to an existence that is perpetually muddy and miserable. Houses, public buildings, walls around cities and even pyramids were at times constructed of brick. Literally millions of bricks were needed, and daily individual quotas would vary depending on how many were assigned to a crew. Crews operated by division of labor, with tasks such as fetching and breaking up straw, hauling mud and water, shaping the bricks by hand or using molds, setting the bricks to dry in the sun and several days later hauling them to the building site. The bricks for a large building would be over a foot long and half as wide, and perhaps six inches thick.

1:15-22. delivery stools. In the ancient world women normally gave birth in a crouching or kneeling position. Small stools, stones or bricks could be used to support the mother's weight as she gave birth. Midwives did not just aid in parturition but were advisers through the whole process of conception, pregnancy, birth and child care.

2:1-10
The Birth of Moses

2:1-10. heroes spared at birth. In the ancient world there are other accounts of heroes being miraculously spared at birth or being raised in unlikely circumstances. The most intriguing such literary work is the *Legend of Sargon's Birth* (probably eighth century B.C.). Rather than sacrificing her child (as priestesses were supposed to do), Sargon's mother hid him in a reed basket by the bank of the Euphrates. After being carried down the river, he was found and raised by the royal gardener. He grew up to become the founder of the dynasty of *Akkad in the twenty-fourth century B.C. But there are important differences. Most of these stories feature a royal personage discarded to his fate and raised by commoners, while Moses, under careful supervision, is rescued by royalty and raised in privileged circumstances. There is no reason to assume that this daughter of Pharaoh would have been in a position of power or influence. Harem children by the score existed in every court, and daughters were considered less highly than sons.

2:3. reed basket coated with tar. The Hebrew word used for Moses' basket is the same as that used for Noah's ark. The papyrus used to make the floating cradle was also used in the construction of light boats in Egypt and Mesopotamia, a practice the biblical writers were aware of (Is 18:2). The reed bundles overlapped in three layers, and the pitch would make it watertight (Gen 6:14 uses a different word but shows the same concept). In a Hittite myth titled *A Tale of Two Cities: Kanesh and Zalpa,* the queen of Kanesh is said to have given birth to thirty sons in a single year and placed them in caulked baskets and sent them down the river. The myth reports that the gods took them out of the sea and raised them.

2:8. wet nurse. Procurement of a wet nurse to nurse and care for the child until it was weaned was a normal procedure in wealthy or aristocratic households. Though Egyptian literature has provided little information, Mesopotamian legal texts speak of the adoption procedures for an abandoned child who has been found. The wet nurse serves as the paid legal guardian, with adoption taking place after weaning.

2:10. the name Moses. The name Moses is from the Egyptian *ms(w),* meaning "to beget." It is a common element in names, often connected to a god's name, so Thutmosis ("Thoth begets" or "Thoth is born") or Rameses ("Ra begets" or "Ra is born"). Alternatively, since *ms* in Egyptian means "boy," Moses may simply have been called by a generic name. Wordplay occurs in that the closest Hebrew root means "to draw out."

2:10. growing up in Pharaoh's court. Growing up in the household of Pharaoh would have involved certain privileges in terms of education and training. This would have included training in literature and scribal arts as well as in warfare. Foreign languages would have been important for any work in diplomacy and probably were included. One of the qualities that Egyptians prized most was rhetoric (eloquence in speech and argumentation). Literary works such as *The Eloquent Peasant* show how impressed they were with someone who could speak well. Though Moses would have been trained in rhetoric, he did not consider himself skilled in this area (4:10-12).

2:11-25
Moses' Flight from Egypt to Midian

2:12-15. Moses' crime. Egyptians maintained a substantial sense of ethnic pride that caused them to consider foreigners inferior. For a foreigner to kill an Egyptian was a great crime.

2:15. flight from Egypt: Sinuhe. In one of the most well-known Egyptian tales, *The Story of *Sinuhe,* the main character fears disfavor from a new pharaoh early in the second millennium B.C. and flees through Canaan to Syria. There he marries the daughter of a Bedouin chieftain and becomes a powerful leader among those people.

2:15. Midian. The Midianites were a seminomadic people who are located in various regions in different stories and sources, from the Transjordan and the Negev in the region of Palestine to the northern Sinai. But the region east of the Gulf of Aqaba in northwest Arabia has the strongest claim to being the central location of the Midianite people.

2:16-19. shepherdesses. Normally women would have been shepherdesses only when there were no sons in the family. The disadvantages of this situation are highlighted in this account, where the other shepherds bully the girls.

2:23. Pharaoh's identity. Again the identity of this Pharaoh is not given. Most conclude that he is either Thutmose III or Rameses II.

3:1—4:17
The Burning Bush and the Call of Moses

3:1. name differences: Reuel (2:18); Jethro (3:1). In the previous chapter Moses' father-in-law was called Reuel, while here he is referred to as Jethro and in Numbers 10:29 as Hobab (see Judg 4:11). The difficulty can be resolved once the ambiguity of the terminology is recognized. The term designating male in-laws is nonspecific. The term referred to a woman's male relatives and could be used for her father, brother or even grandfather. Most solutions take account of this. Perhaps Reuel is the grandfather head of the clan, Jethro is the father of Zipporah and technically the father-in-law of Moses, and Hobab is the brother-in-law of Moses, Jethro's son. Alternatively, Jethro and Hobab could both be brothers-in-law, and Reuel the father.

3:1. mountain of God. The mountain of God is here designated Horeb and elsewhere Sinai, though either one of those names could refer to the general area, a particular range or a single peak. Moses most likely calls it the mountain of God in recognition of the status it is going to achieve in the following chapters rather than because of any prior occurrences or superstitions. In the ancient and classical world deities normally were believed to have their dwelling places on mountains.

3:2-4. burning bush. Natural explanations for the burning bush have been plentiful, from bushes that exude flammable gas to those covered with brightly colored leaves or berries. In the late Egyptian Horus texts at the temple of Edfu the sky god is envisioned as a flame manifest in a particular type of bush, but this is a full millennium after Moses.

3:2-7. Yahweh, God of your father. God's identification of himself with the "God of your father" suggests that the concept of patron deity may still provide the most accurate understanding of how the Israelites thought about *Yahweh. This title ceases to be used once Yahweh becomes the national deity at Sinai. It also serves to identify him as the God of the *covenant.

3:5-6. taking off sandals. It was common practice for priests to enter temples barefoot to prevent bringing in dust or impurities of any sort.

3:7-10. land of milk and honey. The land of Canaan is described as a land "flowing with milk and honey." This refers to the bounty of the land for a pastoral lifestyle, but not necessarily in terms of agriculture. Milk is the product of herds, while honey represents a natural resource, probably the syrup of the date rather than bees' honey. A similar expression to this is found in the *Ugaritic epic of *Baal and Mot that describes the return of fertility to the land in terms of the wadis flowing with honey. Egyptian texts as early as the *Story of *Sinuhe* describe the land of Canaan as rich in natural resources as well as in cultivated produce.

3:8. peoples of Canaan. In the list of the six people groups that inhabited Canaan, the first three are well known while the latter three are barely known at all. Canaan is mentioned as early as the Ebla tablets (twenty-fourth century B.C.), and the Canaanite people were the principal inhabitants of the fortified cities of the land, though they do not seem to have been native to the land. The *Hittites were from Anatolia, modern Turkey, but groups had migrated south and occupied sections of Syria and Canaan. *Amorites (known in Mesopotamia as *Amurru* or *Martu*) are known from written documents as early as the middle third millennium B.C. Most scholars think that they occupied many areas in the Near East from their roots in Syria. There is still debate as to whether the term *Perizzites* is ethnic or sociological (those living in unwalled settlements). The Hivites are sometimes connected to the Horites, in which case they may be *Hurrians. The Jebusites occupied the region later associated with the tribe of Benjamin, notably the city of Jerusalem, and are often related to the Perizzites who were located in the

same region. There is no mention of the Perizzites, Hivites or Jebusites outside the Bible.

3:11. Moses' objection. Moses' objection carried little persuasiveness, given the training provided for him in the household of Pharaoh (see comment on 2:10).

3:13. revelation of divine name. Names in the ancient world were believed to be intimately connected to the essence of the individual. Knowledge of a person's name gave knowledge of their nature and, potentially, power over them. As a result, the names of gods were at times carefully guarded. For instance, Egypt's sun god, Re, had a secret, hidden name that only Isis, his daughter, knew. See comment on 20:7.

3:13-15. I AM. The personal name of Israel's God, *Yahweh (usually rendered LORD, v. 15), is built from the Hebrew verb "to be." Verse 14 uses an alternate form of the verb in the first person, "I am." The name Yahweh for the Israelite God is attested outside the Old Testament in the Mesha Inscription, the Arad Ostraca, the Lachish letters and inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qom and Kuntillat Ajrud, to name a few of the more prominent places. There are a number of possible occurrences of Yahweh or Yah as a deity's name outside of Israel, though all are debatable. One of the most intriguing is the reference to "*Yhw* in the land of the Shasu," mentioned in some Egyptian inscriptions in Nubia (modern Sudan) from the mid-second millennium. The Shasu are Bedouins related in the same inscriptions to the area of Seir (see Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4). This might find confirmation in the biblical indication that Jethro the Midianite was a worshiper of Yahweh (chap. 18). We must remember, however, that Midian was also a descendant of Abraham (Gen 25:2-4), so this may not be unrelated to the Israelite God.

3:16-17. elders. The elders here are the clan leaders of Israel. Elders typically served as a ruling assembly overseeing the leadership of a village or community. The people would look for the endorsement of Moses by the elders before they would accept his leadership.

3:18-20. God of the Hebrews. "God of the Hebrews" is a title that is used only in the context of the exodus. Since the Israelites generally only refer to themselves as Hebrews to foreigners, some have related the term *Hebrew* to the Apiru/*Habiru known from ancient texts from this period. Apiru/Habiru is not an ethnic designation but a sociological one, referring to displaced peoples.

3:18. three-day journey to sacrifice. The request to Pharaoh is for a three-day religious pilgrimage into the wilderness. This would generally consist of one day for travel each way and one full day for the religious ceremonies. The refusal adds religious oppression to the crimes of Pharaoh.

3:19-20. mighty hand of God. The image of an outstretched or mighty hand or arm is common in Egyptian inscriptions to describe the power of Pharaoh. It is used throughout the exodus narratives to describe God's power over Pharaoh. See comment on Deuteronomy 26:8.

4:1-9. the three signs of Moses. The three signs the Lord gave to Moses each most likely had symbolic significance. The rod was the symbol of authority in Egypt, and Pharaoh was represented by the serpent figure, the uraeus, featured prominently on his crown. The first sign then suggests that Pharaoh and his authority are completely in the power of God. The second sign inflicts a skin disease, often translated "leprosy," on Moses' hand. In fact, however, the Hebrew term used describes many dermatological conditions, most far less severe than Hansen's disease (leprosy; see comment on Lev 13). Nonetheless, when inflicted in the Bible it is consistently a punishment for hubris—when an individual in pride presumptuously assumes a divinely appointed role (Num 12:1-12; 2 Kings 5:22-27; 2 Chron 26:16-21), thus demonstrating God's intention to punish Pharaoh. Its result is to drive the individual from God's presence, since it rendered the afflicted unclean. The third, turning water to blood, shows God's control of the prosperity of Egypt, which was entirely dependent on the waters of the Nile. It also anticipates the plagues that God will send.

4:17. Moses' staff. Moses' staff becomes the symbol of God's power and presence with Moses. It is carefully distinguished from instruments of magic in that Moses never uses it in connection with incantations or words of power. It is not used to manipulate God so, except in one unfortunate incident (Num 20), Moses does not wield it but only employs it as instructed.

4:18-26
Moses' Bloodguilt

4:19. Moses' standing. The fact that Egyptians are no longer seeking to kill Moses for his act of murder does not mean that he has been absolved of all guilt in the matter.

4:20-23. hardening Pharaoh's heart. This section contains the first reference to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart—a motif that occurs twenty times over the next ten chapters (during the plagues and up to the crossing of the

sea). Several different verbs are used, and Pharaoh sometimes hardens his own heart, while other times it is hardened by the Lord. The concept has parallels to similar Egyptian expressions that convey perseverance, stubbornness, persistence and an unyielding nature. These can be good qualities or bad, depending on what type of behavior or attitude one is persisting in.

4:22. Israel, the firstborn of God. The passage artfully develops the issue of jeopardy to the firstborn: God's first-born, Israel; Pharaoh's firstborn; and Moses' firstborn. Israel is God's first-born in the sense that they are the first nation to enter into a relationship with him.

4:24-26. the Lord was about to kill him. The text has told us that there was no one in Egypt seeking to kill Moses (v. 19), but Moses still stood guilty of bloodshed before God. Later, cities of refuge were established to provide shelter for someone who felt there were mitigating circumstances in a homicide, but Moses had sought refuge in Midian. By leaving his place of refuge, Moses became vulnerable to being called to account for his crime. Others in the Old Testament whom the Lord called on to go somewhere but then accosted on the way include Jacob (Gen 31—32) and Balaam (Num 22). In each instance God did indeed want the individual to make the journey but had an issue to settle before he could proceed.

4:25. flint knife. A flint flake was used for to perform *circumcision in Israel and Egypt even after metal tools and weapons were readily available. They were very sharp, easily accessible and the traditional instrument for age-old *rituals.

4:25. bridegroom of blood. One recent study has plausibly suggested that *circumcision in many cultures was done by the man's in-laws and extended the protection of the family over the man and his children. If such was the Midianite practice, this could serve as an extension of the refuge that Moses had in Midian. From the Israelite side, the dabbing of the blood (v. 25) is seen also in the Passover *ritual (12:7) and offers protection from the slaughtering angel (12:44-48). Zipporah's comment that Moses was a bridegroom of bloodshed would indicate both his need for protection by the family and his need for expiating blood.

4:27-31
Moses' Return to Egypt

4:29. elders. The elders here are the clan leaders of Israel. Elders typically served as a ruling assembly overseeing the leadership of a village or community. The elders here accept the legitimacy of Moses' role and mission and acknowledge that he carries the authority of God.

5:1-21
Moses Confronts Pharaoh

5:1-5. festival in the desert. Festivals in the ancient world centered around cycles of nature (new year's or *fertility festivals), mythological events (enthronement or deity conquering chaos), agricultural events (harvest), or historical memorials (dedications or deliverances). They celebrate what deity has done and seek to perpetuate deity's action on their behalf. Often these elements were combined. They usually are celebrated at a holy place and therefore often require pilgrimage.

5:6-14. straw for bricks. Straw serves as a bonding agent in the brick as it is heated. Without sufficient straw or with poor-quality stubble, the bricks would not form as easily and a higher proportion would fall apart, thus making the quota harder to achieve. Quotas found in Egyptian literature often do not clarify the number in the crew or the time period involved, but we do know that the quotas were often not met.

5:22—6:12
God's Determination to Deliver

6:3-8. LORD. A casual reading of verse 3 might lead one to conclude that the name *Yahweh (LORD) was unfamiliar to the patriarchs, though Genesis 15:7 and 28:13 clearly suggest otherwise. It is true that El-Shaddai (God Almighty) was known to the patriarchs, and in Genesis 17:1 and 35:11 it is El-Shaddai who is connected to the aspects of the *covenant that were realized during the lifetimes of the patriarchs. In contrast, "Yahweh" is connected to the long-term promises, particularly that of the land, so it can rightfully be said that the patriarchs did not experience him (that is, he did not make himself known in that way). The patriarchs probably did not worship God by the name Yahweh, but the text does not require the conclusion that the name was foreign to them.

6:6. outstretched arm. The Egyptians were used to hearing of the outstretched arm of Pharaoh accomplishing mighty deeds. Now Yahweh's outstretched arm is going to overwhelm Pharaoh. He is confirming this in fulfillment of the oath he made to Abraham, represented by the gesture of raising a hand (toward heaven). Here we can see that naming

the gesture is simply another way of referring to the oath, for there is no higher power for God to swear by. See comment on Deuteronomy 26:8.

6:28—7:13
Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh

7:9. serpent. The serpent was considered a wise and magical creature in Egypt. Wadjet, the patron goddess of lower Egypt, is represented as a snake (uraeus) on Pharaoh's crown. This came to symbolize the power of Pharaoh. But additionally Apopis, the enemy of the gods, in the form of a snake, represented the forces of chaos. It is therefore not arbitrary that the sign featured a serpent (whether cobra or crocodile, see below), for in Egyptian thinking there was no other creature so ominous.

7:11-13. magicians of Pharaoh. Pharaoh's magicians would have been specialists in spells and incantations as well as being familiar with the literature for omens and dreams. They would have practiced sympathetic magic (based on the idea that there is an association between an object and that which it symbolizes; for example, that what is done to a person's picture will happen to the person) and would have used their arts to command the gods and spirits. Magic was the thread that held creation together, and it was used both defensively and offensively by its practitioners, human or divine.

7:11-12. staffs turning into serpents. Some have reported that there is a type of cobra that can be immobilized in rigid form if pressure is applied in a certain way to the neck, perhaps allowing the Egyptian magicians to appear to have rods that turned into snakes. This procedure is portrayed on Egyptian scarab *amulets and is practiced even today. It must be noted, though, that the word translated "serpent" in this section is not the same as the one used in 4:3-4. The creature referred to here is usually considered a sizable monster (see Gen 1:21), though it is used parallel to "cobra" in two places (Deut 32:33; Ps 91:13). This same creature is equated to Pharaoh in Ezekiel 29:3 and is thought by some to be a crocodile. There is no need to attribute a mere sleight of hand to Pharaoh's magicians—these were masters of the occult.

7:12. Aaron's staff swallowing magicians' staffs. When Aaron's serpent swallowed the magicians' serpents, the symbolism would clearly imply an Israelite triumph over Egypt. So, for instance, an Old Kingdom Pyramid Text uses the portrayal of one crown swallowing another to tell of Upper Egypt's conquest of Lower Egypt. In Egyptian Coffin Texts swallowing is a magical act that signifies absorption of the magical powers of that which was swallowed. Thus the Egyptian magicians would have concluded that the power of their rods had been absorbed into the rod of Moses.

7:13. hardening of heart. This second mention of Pharaoh's hardened heart (see comment on 4:20-23) reflects his resolve to pursue the course he has chosen.

7:14—11:10
The Ten Plagues

7:14—11:10. plagues as attack on Egypt's gods and as natural occurrences. The plagues have been viewed by many as specific attacks on the gods of Egypt (see 12:12). This is certainly true in the sense that the Egyptians' gods were unable to protect them and that areas supposedly under the jurisdiction of their gods were used to attack them. Whether individual gods were being singled out is difficult to confirm. In another vein, some have suggested that a sequence of natural occurrences can explain the plagues from a scientific point of view, all originating from an overflooding in the summer months and proceeding through a cause-and-effect process into March. Those who maintain such a position will still sometimes admit to the miraculous nature of the plagues in terms of timing, discrimination between Egyptians and Israelites, prior announcement and severity. For each plague we will cite the natural explanations that have been offered as well as indicating which gods have been considered targets of the plague. It will be for the reader to decide what role either of these explanations should play in the understanding of the text.

7:14-24. water to blood. The Nile was the lifeblood of Egypt. Agriculture and ultimately survival were dependent on the periodic flooding that deposited fertile soils along the river's 4,132 miles. The obese Hapi, one of the children of Horus, was technically not the god of the Nile but the personification of the inundation of the Nile. The blood-red coloring has been attributed to an excess of both red earth and the bright red algae and its bacteria, both of which accompany a heavier than usual flooding. Rather than the abundant life usually brought by the river, this brought death to the fish and detriment to the soil. Such an occurrence is paralleled in an observation in the *Admonitions of Ipuwer* (a few centuries before Moses) that the Nile had turned to blood and was undrinkable. The biblical comment about

the Egyptians digging down (v. 24) would be explained as an attempt to reach water that had been filtered through the soil.

7:19. buckets and jars. In verse 19 most translations make reference to wood and stone vessels, suggesting that water in such vessels was also changed. The Hebrew text says nothing of vessels. The combination of "sticks and stones" is used in *Ugaritic literature to refer to outlying, barren regions. The text also includes canals, which suggests the artificial channels used for irrigation.

8:1-15. frog plague. It is natural that the frogs would desert the waters and banks clogged with decomposing fish. The goddess Heqet was envisioned as a frog and assisted with childbirth, but it is difficult to imagine how this was seen as a victory over her. The Egyptian magicians could not remove the plague, only make it worse.

8:11. hardening heart. Here a different verb is used than in the previous references (see comments on 4:20-23; 7:13). This verb means "to make heavy" and therefore is associated with very familiar Egyptian imagery. In the judgment scene from the Book of the Dead, the heart of the deceased is weighed in the balance against a feather (representing Maat, truth and justice) to determine whether the individual will be ushered into an afterlife of happiness or be devoured. Increasing the weight of Pharaoh's heart is a way of expressing that his afterlife doom is being sealed. The expression is most similar to the English cliche "driving another nail into his coffin." It represents simply accelerating the inevitable.

8:16-19. gnat plague. The type of insect (NIV: "gnats") involved in this plague is not clear, since the Hebrew word is used only in this context. Most studies have favored either the mosquito or the tick as the likeliest identification. The former would breed in all the stagnant pools of water left from the flooding. "Finger of God" may be an Egyptian expression referring to Aaron's rod. The failure of the magicians and their admission that God is at work begins to fulfill the Lord's purpose: They will know that I am *Yahweh.

8:20-32. land ruined by flies. The insect featured in the fourth plague is not named. Instead the text speaks of swarms, using a word known only in relation to this context. Flies are logical both to the climate and to the conditions that exist with rotting fish and frogs and decaying vegetation. Because it is a carrier of skin anthrax (associated with later plagues), the species *Stomoxys calcitrans* has been the most popular identification. As both pests and carriers, these insects brought ruination on the land.

8:22. Goshen. This is the first plague that does not afflict the Israelites living in Goshen. The precise location of Goshen is still unknown, though it is certainly in the eastern part of the Delta region of the Nile.

8:26. sacrifice detestable to Egyptians. When Pharaoh offers to let them make their sacrifices in the land, Moses does not claim the need to conduct the *rituals at a holy site but objects that their rituals are unacceptable because they sacrifice that which is detestable to the Egyptians. Slaughter of animals to provide food for the gods was prevalent in Egyptian religious practice, as many reliefs portray, but blood sacrifices of animals played little role in the sun worship, king worship and *funerary observances that constituted much of Egyptian religion. Often the animal being slaughtered was considered to represent an enemy of the god.

9:1-7. livestock plague. The plague on the cattle is regularly identified as anthrax that was contracted from the bacteria that had come down the Nile and infected the fish, the frogs and the flies. The Egyptian goddess of love, Hathor, took the form of a cow, and the sacred Apis bull was so highly venerated that it was embalmed and buried in a necropolis with its own sarcophagus at death.

9:8-12. handful of soot. While some have concluded the ashes are taken from a brick kiln (symbolizing the labor of the Israelites), the Egyptians generally used sun-dried brick rather than kiln-fired. The furnace spoken of here is sizable and alternatively could be viewed as the place where the carcasses of the dead animals have been burned. The scattering of ashes is sometimes used as a magical *ritual in Egypt to bring an end to pestilence. Here it may bring an end to the cattle plague, but it translates into human misery.

9:10-12. boils plague. Skin anthrax would be carried by the bites of the flies which had had contact with the frogs and cattle, and would produce sores, particularly on the hands and feet.

9:13-35. effects of hail. Hail is destructive to crops as well as to humans and animals. The text's designation of which crops were affected (vv. 31-32) indicates that it was January or February.

10:1-20. locust plague. Locusts were all too common in the ancient Near East and were notorious for the devastation and havoc they brought. The locusts breed in the region of the Sudan and would have been more plentiful than usual in the wet climate that initiated the entire sequence. Their migration would strike

in February or March and would follow the prevailing winds to either Egypt or Palestine. The east wind (v. 13) would bring them into Egypt. A locust will consume its own weight each day. Locust swarms have been known to cover as many as four hundred square miles, and even one square mile could teem with over one hundred million insects. Certainly anything that had survived the hail was now destroyed, and if they laid their eggs before being blown out to sea, the problem would recur in cycles. The economy in Egypt was destroyed, but the principal gods had yet to be humiliated.

10:19. west wind. The plague was ended by a "wind from the sea." In Israel this is a west wind, but in Egypt it would come from the north or northwest and therefore drive the locusts back to the sea.

10:21-29. darkness plague (that can be felt). The comment that it was darkness that could be felt (v. 21) suggests that the darkness was caused by something airborne, namely, the *khamsin* dust storms known in the region. There would be excessive dust from all of the red earth that had been brought down and deposited by the Nile, as well as from the barren earth left behind in the wake of the hail and locusts. The three-day duration is typical for this type of storm, which is most likely to occur between March and May. The fact that the text emphasizes the darkness rather than the dust storm may indicate that the sun god, Amon-Re, the national god of Egypt, the divine father of Pharaoh, is being specifically targeted.

11:1-10. tenth plague and Pharaoh. In Egypt Pharaoh was also considered a deity, and this last plague is directed at him. In the ninth plague his "father," the sun god, was defeated, and now his son, presumably the heir to the throne, will be slaughtered. This is a blow to Pharaoh's person, his kingship and his divinity.

11:2. ask for gold and silver. The instructions for the Israelites to ask for gold and silver articles and clothing (mentioned in other passages) from the Egyptians would most likely have correlated with the idea that the Israelites were going to have a feast for their God. Finery would be natural for such occasions, and it would not be odd to think that the Israelite slaves would not possess such luxuries. By now the people of Egypt would have been in despair from the plagues, and the thought that Israel's God might be appeased by a feast would make them very cooperative.

11:4. the Lord going throughout Egypt. In Egypt the most notable and anticipated event of the major festivals was the god coming forth among the people. Here, however, the going forth of Israel's God throughout the land will be for the purposes of judgment.

11:4. hand mill. The slave girl at her hand mill is portrayed as the lowest on the social ladder. The hand mill, or saddle-quern, was made up of two stones: a lower stone with a concave surface and a loaf-shaped upper stone. The daily chore of grinding grain into flour involved sliding the upper stone over the grain spread on the lower stone.

11:7. not a dog will bark. Dogs were not kept as pets but were considered undesirable and a general nuisance, perhaps as a rat would be viewed today. The statement that no dog would bark suggests unusual calm, for these roaming curs were easily antagonized by the slightest irregularity.

12:1-28
Passover

12:1-28. roots of Passover. According to the biblical account the Feast of Passover is instituted in association with the tenth plague, but that does not mean that its institution did not build on a previously existing festival of some sort. We should recall that God instituted *circumcision as a sign of the *covenant using a practice that previously existed with other purposes. Many elements of the Passover *ritual suggest that it may be adapted from a nomadic *ritual that sought to protect herdsmen from demonic attack and insure the *fertility of the herd. Even if this is so, each of the elements is suitably "converted" to the new context of the tenth plague and the exodus from Egypt. If such a conversion of a nomadic festival took place, it would be similar to the early western European Christians' superimposing Christmas on their pagan winter solstice festivals, with tokens such as holly, mistletoe and evergreen trees carried over.

12:1-11. calendar. This event established Abib (later called Nisan) as the first month in the religious calendar of Israel. By the civil calendar, Tishri, six months later, was the first month, and thus the month that "New Year's Day" was celebrated. The Israelite calendar was a lunar calendar with periodic adjustments to the solar year. Abib began with the first new moon after the spring equinox, generally mid-March, and went through mid-April.

12:5. year-old males without defect. As a yearling, the male would have survived the vulnerable period of early life (mortality rates were between 20 and 50 percent) and would be preparing to take on its role as a productive member of the flock. A flock needs fewer male

members, however, and particularly among goats many of the males were slaughtered as yearlings for their coats and their meat. The females were kept until about age eight for bearing young and producing milk.

12:6. slaughtered at twilight. In Egypt's civil calendar each month was thirty days in length and divided into three periods of ten days each. The Egyptian religious calendar, including festivals, remained in a lunar sequence. The occurrence of the feast and the plague corresponded to the eve of what Egyptians called "half-month day." More importantly, since the month in lunar reckoning began at the new moon, the feast occurred at the time of the full moon, always the first after the spring equinox. The slaughter would take place at twilight, when the first full moon of the Israelite year rose.

12:7. function of blood. In primitive religions blood is often used to ward off evil powers, whereas in Israelite *ritual the blood served as a purifying element. While the former could certainly have been superstitiously believed by Israelites who retained these primitive elements in their religious thought and practice, the latter was the intended function. Door frames of Mesopotamian houses were often painted red because the color was believed to ward off demons.

12:8. menu. The menu for the Passover meal is one that would have been common in nomadic herding communities. The prohibition of yeast may additionally carry symbolic value. In later rabbinic literature and the New Testament it is associated with *impurity or *pollution. It is difficult to discern whether it carried such a connotation this early. The bitter herbs are identified in later rabbinic literature as lettuce, chicory, eryngo, horseradish and sow thistle, all easily prepared. It is uncertain, however, whether these are the ones included in the biblical terminology. Lettuce is known to have been cultivated in Egypt, and the Hebrew word translated "bitter herbs" corresponds to an *Akkadian (Babylonian) word for lettuce. The command to roast avoids two other possibilities. On the one hand, it has been thought to contrast to pagan spring feasts that sometimes included raw meat. On the other hand, those in haste would not boil the meat, for that would necessitate greater preparation time to butcher, gut and dress the meat. Since this is a sacral meal, the meat, may not be eaten at any other time and must be properly disposed of.

12:11. Passover. The English translation "Passover" does not do justice to the Hebrew terminology *(pesah)*. That the verb has to do with protection can be seen in Isaiah 31:5, where it is parallel to shielding and delivering. The Lord is not portrayed as "passing over" the door but as protecting the entrance from the slaughtering angel (see 12:23). The blood on the doorposts and lintel can now be seen as purifying the doorway in preparation for the Lord's presence.

12:12-30

The Tenth Plague

12:12-13. Egyptian kingship festival. There may be some echo here of the famous Egyptian Sed festival, which represented a renewal of royal authority. Its celebration was intended for all the gods to affirm the kingship of Pharaoh, while here, as a result of the plagues, all the gods must acknowledge the kingship of *Yahweh—not a new enthronement, but a recognition of his ongoing power. In the Sed festival the king asserted his dominance of the land by going throughout the land (symbolically) as he desired. Pharaoh's kingship is being mocked even as Yahweh's is being asserted, for God goes throughout the land to establish his dominance by the plague.

12:14-20. Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is celebrated during the seven days after Passover. As a commemoration of the exodus from Egypt, it conveys that in their haste the Israelites were not able to bring any leaven and therefore had to bake their bread without it. Leaven was produced from the barley content of the dough that fermented and served as yeast. Small amounts would be kept from one batch, allowed to ferment, then used in another. With no "starter" set aside to ferment, the process would have to begin again, taking seven to twelve days to reach the necessary level of fermentation.

12:16. sacred assembly. Sacred assemblies or proclamations were an important part of most religious practice in the ancient world. They were local or national gatherings for public, corporate worship. The people were summoned together away from their normal occupations.

12:19. unleavened bread and barley harvest. The Feast of Unleavened Bread also coincided with the barley harvest and is the beginning of the harvest season. In this context the significance of the unleavened bread is that a new beginning is being made, and the first fruits of the barley harvest are eaten without waiting for fermentation.

12:22. use of hyssop. The blood is spread on the door frame with hyssop, a marjoram plant that came to be associated with purification,

probably because of its use in *rituals such as these. Its consistency made it very adaptable for brushes and brooms.

12:23. the destroyer. The blood on the door frame would signal the Lord to protect those in that house from the destroyer. In Mesopotamia the demon Lamashtu (female) was seen as responsible for the death of children, while Namtaru (male) was responsible for plague. Egyptians likewise believed in a host of demons who threatened life and health at every level. In this passage, however, this is no demon operating independently of the gods, but a messenger of God's judgment. In Jeremiah the same term is used for a destroyer and plunderer of the nations (Jer 4:7).

12:29-30. firstborn. In Israel the dedication of the firstborn was a means of acknowledging the Lord as the provider of life, fertility and prosperity. By taking the firstborn of both man and beast, Yahweh is again asserting his rights to be viewed as the deity responsible for life in Egypt—a role usually attributed to Pharaoh.

12:31-42
Leaving Egypt

12:34. kneading troughs. The easiest way to transport the dough already mixed for the next day's bread was, as described, in the troughs used for kneading, covered with a cloth to keep the dust out.

12:37. route of journey. Rameses is Tell el-Dab'a in the eastern Delta (see comment on 1:8-14), where the Israelites were working to build a city for Pharaoh. Succoth has been identified as Tell el-Maskhuta toward the eastern end of the Wadi Tumilat. This would be a normal route to take to leave Egypt going east, as several Egyptian documents demonstrate. It is approximately one day's journey from Rameses to Succoth. (For the route of "The Exodus," see map 1 on p. 87.)

12:37. number of Israelites. The size of the Israelite population has been considered problematic for several reasons. If there were six hundred thousand men, the total group would have numbered over two million. It is contended that the Delta region of Egypt could not have supported a population of that size (estimates suggest the entire population of Egypt at this time was only four or five million). The modern population of the area of the Wadi Tumilat is under twenty thousand. Egyptian armies of this time period comprised under twenty thousand. Indeed, for the battle of Qadesh (thirteenth century) the *Hittites amassed an army of thirty-seven thou-

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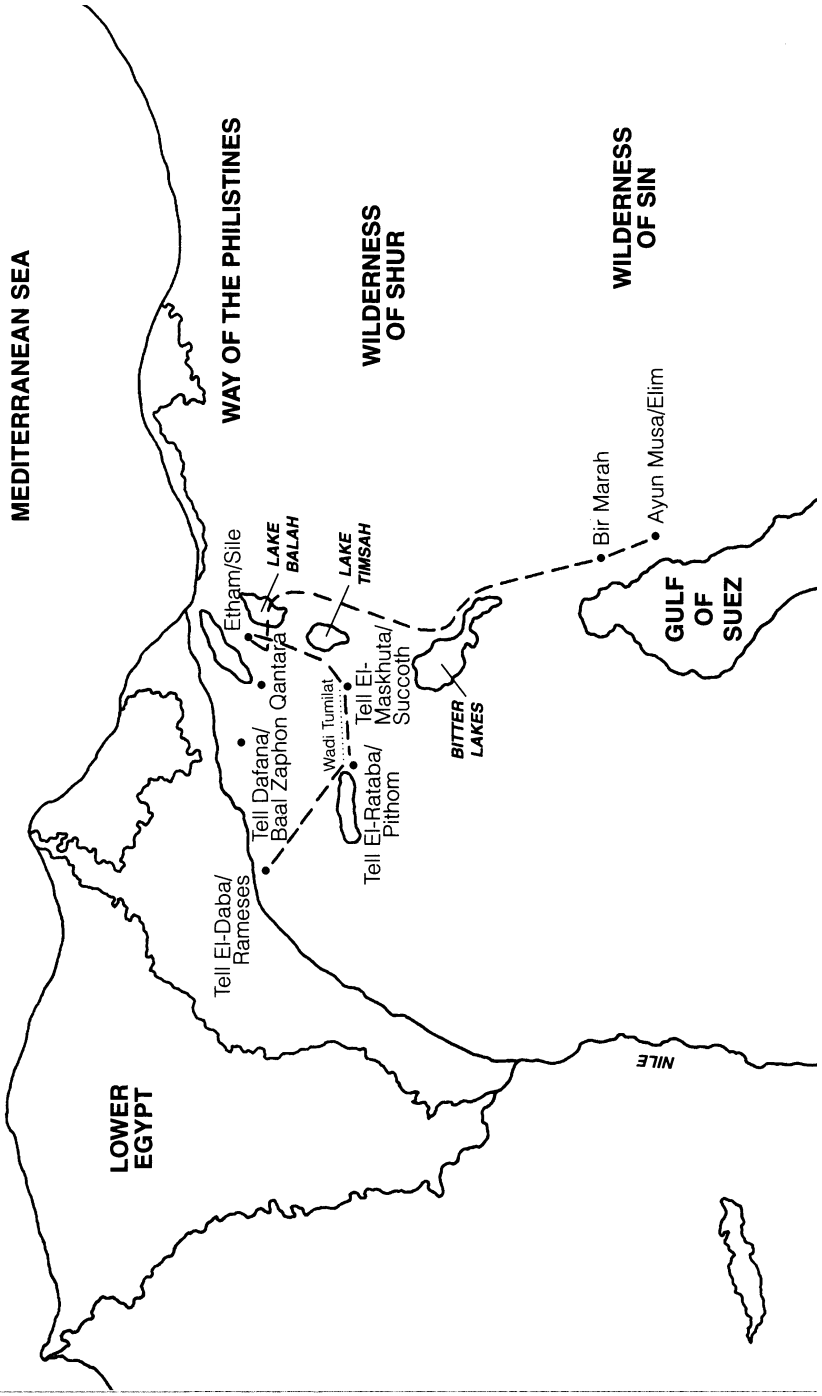
THE DATE OF THE EXODUS

Assigning a date to the exodus has proven to be a difficult task over the years. Since neither of the Pharaohs in the account are named, scholars have had to seek out other more circumstantial pieces of data in order to make a case. These pieces of data can be divided into *internal* data (from the biblical text) and *external data* (pieced together from archaeological and historical research).

The internal evidence, comprised primarily of genealogical or chronological time spans given in the text (e.g., 1 Kings 6:1), suggests a date in the middle of the fifteenth century B.C. If this date is adopted as having the support of the biblical text, it can be defended in historical/archaeological terms, but has to assume that a number of the conclusions that archaeologists have reached are either suffering from lack of data or are the result of misinterpretation of the data. For instance, if the Exodus took place around 1450, the conquest would be assigned to the Late Bronze Age in Canaan. Unfortunately, archaeologists excavating the sites of the Israelite conquest have found no remains of walled cities in Late Bronze Age Canaan. Many of the sites show no evidence of occupation at all in the Late Bronze Age. In response it has been suggested that the destruction of the great fortified cities of Middle Bronze Age Canaan should be associated with the Conquest. However, archaeologists have usually dated the end of the Middle Bronze to about 1550, and it is quite complex to try to shift the whole system of dating one hundred years.

The external evidence is usually considered to be more supportive of a thirteenth century date, during the time of Rameses the Great. This view has to assume that some of the numbers given in the biblical text need to be read differently. For instance, the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 would have to be viewed as suggesting twelve generations (12x40) which may be significantly less than 480 years. Additionally, while it has been claimed that the historical/archaeological data of the thirteenth century fits better with the Exodus, there are a number of difficulties that remain. Among them is the inscription of Pharaoh Merenptah toward the end of the thirteenth century that mentions Israel as a people group in Canaan.

Both dates have their difficulties and it is likely that there are still certain presuppositions that are being held that prevent us from seeing how all the pieces fit together. It is likely that historical and archaeological research will eventually be able to bring greater clarity to the issue. Until that time we will have to be content with our uncertainty.



Map 1. The Exodus
This map traces the possible route of the exodus from Egypt.

sand (thought to be exaggerated) that was believed to be one of the largest fighting forces ever assembled. Shamshi-Adad (1800 B.C. Assyria) claimed to have amassed an army of sixty thousand for the siege of Nurrugum. If Israel had a fighting force of six hundred thousand, what would they have to fear?

As it traveled, the line of people would stretch for over two hundred miles. Even without animals, children and the elderly, travelers would not expect to make twenty miles a day (though caravans could make twenty to twenty-three). When families and animals move camp, the average would be only six miles per day. Whatever the case, the back of the line would be at least a couple of weeks behind the front of the line. This would create some difficulties in the crossing of the sea which seems to have been accomplished overnight, though certainly some have calculated how it could be done. The line, however, would be long enough to stretch from the crossing of the sea to Mount Sinai.

Furthermore, if a couple of million people lived in the wilderness for forty years and half of them died there, archaeologists expect they would find more traces of them—especially in places like Kadesh Barnea where they stayed for some time. When we turn our attention to their arrival in Canaan, the situation is no better. The population of Canaan during this period was far less than this Israelite force, and all archaeological evidence suggests there was a sharp decline in the population of the region in the *Late Bronze Age, when the Israelites took possession. Some estimates for the eighth century B.C. suggest there were still not a million people in the entire land of Israel even by that time. The modern population of Israel, even given the extensive metropolitan regions, is only about twice what the exodus population would have been. Yet the text is consistent in its reports of the size of the group (see Num 1:32; 11:21; 26:51). Many solutions have been offered, but all have problems. All of the above suggests that it is unlikely the numbers should be read the way that they traditionally have been. Studies of the use of numbers in Assyrian inscriptions have suggested the possibility that numbers were understood and used within an ideological framework rather than to offer a strict accounting. But it is very difficult to step out of our own cultural expectations. The most promising approach comes through a recognition that the Hebrew word translated "thousand" can also be translated "military troop," in which case there would be six hundred military troops. For more information see comments on Joshua 8:3 and Numbers 2:3-32.

12:40. 430 years. The chronology of this period is very difficult. First Kings 6:1 reports that 480 years separated the exodus from the dedication of the temple in 966. This would place the exodus in the mid-1400s. Adding the 430 years of this verse would suggest that the Israelites came to Egypt in the first half of the nineteenth century B.C. All sorts of variations exist, and several different options are defensible from both biblical and archaeological evidence. For a longer discussion see "The Date of the Exodus," p. 86.

12:43-51

Passover Regulations

12:43. Passover regulations. Verse 38 mentions many non-Israelites who have joined the exodus, and so three additional regulations for the Passover are addressed in this section. First, only those who have been circumcised may participate. This indicates that it is a festival only for the community of Israel. Second is the command that none of the meat be taken outside the house, and third is that no bones be broken. Both of these concern ways that the meal might be shared with other noncommunity members, which is disallowed. The lamb must be cooked whole, in the house.

13:1-16

The Firstborn

13:1-3. consecration. The first male offspring born to any mother is considered as belonging to deity. In the ancient Near East this concept sometimes led to child sacrifice to insure *fertility. Alternatively, in ancestor worship the firstborn would have inherited the priestly function for the family. In Israel it leads to consecration—transferring the firstborn to the domain of deity for cultic service or to the temple for holy use. From that status the son may be redeemed, and Israelite law sees his place being taken by the Levites (Num 3:11-13).

13:4. Abib. The month of Abib spans our March and April. It is the ancient name for what was later called Nisan in the Israelite calendar.

13:5. peoples of Canaan and land of milk and honey. For the peoples of Canaan and the land flowing with milk and honey, see comments on 3:7-10 and 3:8.

13:6-10. Feast of Unleavened Bread. See comment on 12:14-20.

13:9. amulets. *Amulets were often worn in the ancient Near East as protection to ward off evil spirits. Precious metals and gems were considered particularly effective. At times amulets would include magical words or spells. Israelite practice disapproved of amulets, but the concept was converted to reminders of the law (such as this feast served), or at other places (see Deut 6:8) consisted of physical reminders that contained prayers or blessings such as the small silver scrolls that were found in a preexilic tomb just outside Jerusalem in 1979. These contain the blessing of Numbers 6:24-26 and represent the oldest copy of any biblical text now extant.

13:11-16. sacrifice of firstborn. First-born livestock were sacrificed in thanks to the Lord, but donkeys were not approved for sacrifice. In Canaanite practice donkeys were occasionally sacrificed and a covenant confirmation ceremony in the *Mari texts also features the sacrifice of a donkey. The importance of the donkey as a pack animal is probably responsible for this exclusion. Therefore donkeys, like sons, were to be redeemed—that is, another offering given in their place.

13:17—14:31

The Crossing of the Sea

13:17. road to the Philistines. The road through the Philistine country is a reference to the major route that ran through the Fertile Crescent from Egypt to Babylonia and is known as the Great Trunk road. It went along the coast of the Mediterranean, which took it through Philistine territory in southern Palestine before moving inland through the valley of Jezreel just south of the Carmel range. Along the north of the Sinai peninsula the Egyptians referred to it as the Way of Horus, and it was heavily defended since it was the route used by armies as well as trade caravans.

13:18. Red Sea. The body of water referred to in translations as the "Red Sea" is termed in Hebrew the "Reed Sea"—a term that can be used for a number of different bodies of water. The reeds it refers to are probably papyrus, which used to proliferate along the marshy section that extended from the Gulf of Suez to the Mediterranean, now largely obliterated by the Suez Canal. Such reeds grow only in fresh water. Proceeding north from the Gulf of Suez, one would have encountered the Bitter Lakes, Lake Timsah, Lake Balah and finally, right by the Mediterranean, Lake Menzaleh. The Wadi Tumilat through which Israel is traveling would have led to Lake Timsah, so that is often identified as the Sea of Reeds in this context, though each of the other lakes has its supporters. If the Israelites originally headed northwest, they may have turned back and found themselves by Lake Balah. If they were heading toward the region of Sinai, they certainly would not have gone down the west side of the Gulf of Suez, and, in any case, that is further away than the narrative suggests (about 120 miles from Succoth). So though the translation "Red Sea" has led to that being the popular identification, it is the least likely. An alternative to "Reed Sea" as a geographical distinction is the suggestion that the translation should be "Sea of Extinction." In this case the waters that are being parted are identified by imagery referring to a common ancient Near Eastern creation motif of the waters of chaos being harnessed and the enemies of God being overthrown.

13:20. Succoth. Succoth is generally identified as Tell el-Maskhuta toward the eastern end of the Wadi Tumilat. In Egyptian literature this is the area known as *Tjeku,* the Egyptian equivalent of Hebrew *succoth.* Etham is the equivalent of Egyptian *htm,* "fort," and could refer to any number of fortresses in this area. Since God turns them back in 14:2, they may still be following the way of the Philistines on this first leg. If so, Etham would most likely be Sile, modern Tell Abu Sefa, where the first fortress guarding the passage onto the frontier was located in ancient times. It was the normal point of departure for expeditions to Canaan. In this case, 13:17-18 is described in detail in 14:1-3. The problem is that this is some fifty miles from Succoth and would have taken several days to reach. There is also a fortress of Pharaoh Merenptah (end of thirteenth century) mentioned near Tjeku in Papyrus Anastasi VI. (For a possible route of the exodus, see map 1 on p. 87.)

13:21-22. pillar of cloud/fire. Some have thought the pillar of cloud and fire is best explained as the result of volcanic activity. An eruption on the Island of Thera (six hundred miles northwest) in 1628 B.C. brought an end to Minoan civilization, and it is possible that its effects could have been seen in the delta. But the date is far too early (see "The Date of the Exodus," p. 86), and this theory would offer no explanation of the movements of the pillar nor of the location described for it in the biblical account (they are moving southeast). The text does not suggest that the pillar was supernaturally generated, only that it was the means of supernatural guidance. For this reason some have suggested that it was the result of a brazier of some sort carried on a pole that

would be used by the vanguard scouts. This was a method often used by caravans. On the other hand, the pillar is always portrayed as acting (coming down, moving) rather than being operated (no human is ever said to move it), so the vanguard theory is difficult to support. In the ancient world a bright or flaming aura surrounding deity is the norm. In Egyptian literature it is depicted as the winged sun disk accompanied by storm clouds. *Akkadian uses the term *melammu* to describe this visible representation of the glory of deity, which in turn is enshrouded in smoke or cloud. In Canaanite mythology it has been suggested the *melammu* concept is expressed by the word *anan,* the same Hebrew word here translated "cloud," but the occurrences are too few and obscure for confidence. In any case, the pillar here would then be one: smoke being visible in the daytime, while the inner flame it covered would glow through at night.

14:1-4. Pi Hahiroth. Pi Hahiroth is not otherwise known, but many interpret it as meaning "mouth of the diggings," possibly referring to canal work. It is known that a north-south canal was being constructed during this period (Seti I) and that it passed through the region near Qantara, a few miles west of Sile.

14:2. Migdol. *Migdol* means "tower" or "fort" in Hebrew and was a term borrowed from Semitic languages into Egyptian. There were several locations so designated, and one is known near Succoth in this period.

14:2. Baal Zephon. Baal Zephon is connected to Tahpanhes in Jeremiah 44:1; 46:14, in turn identified as Tell Dafana, about twenty miles west of Sile. If they camped near here, Lake Balah would be the closest sea.

14:5-9. Egypt's army. Most chariot units of this period range between 10 and 150, so 600 is a large muster, and this represents only Pharaoh's unit. When Rameses II fought the *Hittites at the battle of Qadesh, his enemy boasted 2,500 chariots.

14:19-20. hidden by cloud. Annals from the *Hittite king Murshili report that the storm god provided a cloud to hide them from their enemy, a claim also made by Priam, king of Troy, as well as others in Homer's *Iliad*.

14:21-22. sea driven back with east wind. Any sea shallow enough to be dried up by an east wind and shifting tides would not be sufficient to drown the Egyptians or to make walls of water. It is therefore difficult to devise any natural scenario to account for the facts reported by the text. This wind would not be the same as the *khamsin* (sirocco) that we associated with the ninth plague. That is a phenomenon drawn by a strong low-pressure system in North Africa, usually accompanied by thermal inversion. The east wind referred to here drives out of a high-pressure system over Mesopotamia and—opposite to a tornado, which rotates around a low-pressure system—features a sharp rise in barometric pressure.

14:23-25. the morning watch. The morning watch was from two to six a.m. The image of deity as flaming brilliance in the midst of a cloud is common throughout the Near East as well as in Greek mythology as early as Homer's *Iliad*, where Zeus sends forth lightning and causes horses to stumble and chariots to break. The Mesopotamian warrior god, Nergal, and the Canaanite *Baal each asserts his superiority in combat by means of his dazzling brilliance and fire.

15:1-21

The Song of Moses and Miriam

15:3. the Lord as warrior. The book of Exodus has been developing the idea of *Yahweh fighting for the Israelites against the Egyptians and their gods, so here the Lord is praised as a warrior. This is a concept that remains significant throughout the Old Testament and even into the New Testament. It is especially prominent in the books of Samuel, where the title "Yahweh of Armies" (Lord of Hosts) is common. Yahweh is the king and champion of the Israelites and will lead them forth victoriously in battle. Ancient mythologies often portrayed gods in battle, but these depictions generally concerned the harnessing and organizing of the cosmos. Both *Marduk (Babylonian) and *Baal (Canaanite) subdue the sea, which is personified in their divine foe (*Tiamat and Yamm respectively). In contrast, this hymn recognizes how Yahweh harnessed the natural sea (not representing a supernatural being) to overcome his historical, human foes. Nevertheless, bringing secure order out of conflict, being proclaimed king and establishing a dwelling are common themes both here and in the ancient Near Eastern literatures concerning cosmic battle.

15:4. Red Sea. Here the reference to the Reed Sea does not suggest further discussion of its identity (see comment on 13:18) but may well include a pun. The Hebrew word *suph* not only means "reed" but also means "end" as a noun and "swept away" as a verb (see Ps 73:19).

15:6-12. right hand. The right hand is the one that holds the weapon, so that it is the one that brings victory. In verse 12 the right hand is not

seen as literally causing the earth to open up. In Hebrew the term for earth can occasionally also mean "netherworld," and that seems likely here. To say that the netherworld swallowed them is to say that they were sent to their graves. It should also be remembered that in Egyptian concepts of afterlife the wicked are devoured by the "Swallower" when they fail to convince the judges of their goodness.

15:13-16. terrified peoples. The terror of the peoples becomes a standard theme in the account of the conquest. While the peoples of Canaan may have previously been terrified of the Egyptians (as the *Amarna correspondence from this period suggest some were), it is now not the arm of Pharaoh, but the arm of Yahweh, who has defeated Pharaoh, that poses a threat to them.

15:17-18. mountain of your inheritance. The combination of mountain, inheritance, dwelling and sanctuary suggests that Mount Zion (Jerusalem) is being referred to.

15:18. Yahweh as king. *Yahweh is not portrayed as a mythological king, a king of the gods who has subdued the cosmos and reigns over the subordinate gods of the pantheon. Rather he rules in the historical realm over his people, whom he has delivered by means of the forces of nature that he controls. This hymn does not exalt his defeat of other gods or of chaotic cosmic forces but his power over historical peoples.

15:20-21. prophetess. Miriam, here hailed as a prophetess and sister of Aaron (no mention of Moses), takes up the song. This is the only mention of Miriam by name in the book, and the only place she is referred to as a prophetess. The only other account that she is named in is the challenge to Moses' authority in Numbers 12. Other prominent prophetesses in the Old Testament include Deborah (Judg 4) and Huldah (2 Kings 22). There is no reason to think that it was odd for women to be found in this role. In fact, the prophetic texts from *Mari feature women in this role as often as men. It was also common for musical troupes to feature women. Music and prophecy also were associated, since music was commonly used to induce the trances from which prophetic utterances proceeded (1 Sam 10:5; 2 Kings 3:15).

15:22—17:7
God's Provision in the Wilderness

15:22-27. Desert of Shur. The wilderness of Shur is located in the northwest region of the Sinai peninsula. An east-west route runs through the region that connects Egypt to the King's Highway in Transjordan at Bozrah, or leads up into Palestine through Beersheba, but the Israelites did not take this route. Shur means "wall" in Hebrew, so it is possible that this term refers to the well-known Egyptian line of fortresses in this region. This is supported by Numbers 33:8, where it is called the wilderness of Etham (*etham* means "fort"). Built a few centuries earlier to protect the northeastern frontiers of Egypt, this series of garrisons was known as the Wall of the Ruler. This marked *Sinuhe's point of departure as he fled from Egypt in the *Story of Sinuhe.*

15:22. archaeological evidence in the Sinai. Although archaeological remains from the Bedouin population that has inhabited Sinai for ten thousand years have been found throughout the peninsula, archaeology has produced no evidence of the Israelites' passage through this region.

15:23. Marah. They traveled for three days before reaching Marah ("bitter"). If they crossed at Lake Balah, this would place them by what are well known today as the Bitter Lakes. If they crossed further south, Marah could be identified with an oasis called Bir Marah, where the water is saline with heavy mineral content.

15:25. wood turning water sweet. It is not uncommon for commentators to cite local traditions about a type of thorn bush native to the region that will absorb salinity, but no scientific investigation has provided identification or confirmed the existence of such a bush. In a later period Pliny reported that there was a type of barley that could neutralize saline content.

15:27. Elim oasis. The oasis at Elim with twelve springs and seventy palm trees is often identified as Wadi Gharandal, about sixty miles down the coast of the Gulf of Suez. It features tamarisks *(elim)* as well as palms and springs. It remains a major resting place for modern Bedouin. Closer to Marah is the site of Ayun Musa, just a few miles south of the tip of the Gulf of Suez. Besides having the appropriate groves of tamarisks and palms, it also features twelve springs and is probably to be preferred.

16:1-3. Desert of Sin. The Desert of Sin is an area in the west-central region of the peninsula. Here the main route moves inland five to ten miles for about the next seventy-five miles until it rejoins the coast at Abu Zenimah and the El Markha plain. This may be where they camped by the sea (Num 33:10-11). From there they moved east and northeast across the wilderness of Sin by way of the Wadi Ba'ba and

Rod el 'Air to the region of Serabit el-Khadim, which is likely where Dophkah was (Num 33:11).

16:1. time of journey. Thus far the journey has taken about a month (the Israelites came out the fifteenth day of the first month).

16:3. pots of meat. In their exaggerated recollection of the situation in Egypt they refer to large pots filled with meat—we might say "meat by the bucketload."

16:4-9. bread from heaven/manna. The bread from heaven was called "manna" in verse 31, where it is described (see also Num 11:7). The fact that it came with the dew (v. 4) suggests that God's miraculous provision used a natural process. The most frequent identification is with the secretion of small aphids that feed on the sap of tamarisk trees. When it hardens and falls to the ground, it can be collected and used for a sweetener. The problem is that this occurs only during certain seasons (May to July) and only where there are tamarisk trees. A full season would normally produce only about five hundred pounds, in contrast to the biblical account that has the people gathering about half a pound per person per day. Alternatively, some would favor the sweet liquid of the hammada plant, common in southern Sinai, which is used to sweeten cakes. As with the plagues, it is not necessarily the occurrence of this phenomenon that is unnatural but the timing and magnitude. Nevertheless, these natural explanations seem to fall far short of the biblical data. The comparison to what most translations identify as the seed of the coriander (rarely found in the desert) is more likely to refer to a wider generic category of desert plants with white seeds.

16:10-11. glory of the Lord in the cloud. "The glory of the LORD" refers to the brightness that was evidence of his presence. The concept of deity appearing in this way was not limited to Israelite theology, for in Mesopotamia the gods displayed their power through their *melammu*, their divine brilliance.

16:13. quail. Small, plump migratory quail often come through the Sinai on their way north from the Sudan to Europe, generally in the months of March and April. They generally fly with the wind and are driven to ground (or water) if caught in a crosswind. In their exhaustion it is not unusual for them to fly so low that they can be easily caught. Quail looking for a place to land and rest have been known to sink small boats, and in the Sinai they have been noted to cover the ground so densely that some landed on the tops of others.

16:14-36. omer. An omer is a daily ration of bread or grain and represents about two quarts.

16:20. spoilage. If manna is the secretion of aphids (see above on 16:4-9), ants are responsible for carrying it off each day once the temperature rises. They would also be the bugs that got into any additional manna the people tried to collect and save. The Hebrew word translated "maggots" can refer to any number of scale insects, but there is a different word for ants. Furthermore, the insect secretions are not subject to spoilage.

16:34. in front of the testimony. The testimony in verse 34 can only refer to the ark of the covenant, which has not been built at this point in the narrative. This appendix (vv. 31-36) is from the end of the wilderness wanderings (see v. 35), and therefore the manna sample was put in the ark later in the wilderness experience.

17:1. Rephidim. If the theory that Mount Sinai is toward the south of the peninsula is accepted, the journey to Rephidim begins the move inland to follow the most attractive route to the mountain. Wadi Refayid intersects Wadi Feiran a few miles north of the mountain and has been often identified as the site of Rephidim.

17:5-7. rock at Horeb. The location of this provision of water is identified with the rock at Horeb, but Horeb most likely refers to the region in the vicinity of Mount Sinai (Mount Horeb) rather than to a specific location.

17:6. water from rock. Sedimentary rock is known to feature pockets where water can collect just below the surface. If there is some seepage, one can see where these pockets exist and by breaking through the surface can release the collected water. Again, however, we are dealing with a quantity of water beyond what this explanation affords.

17:7. Massah and Meribah. Massah and Meribah do not represent new places but refer to this particular site at Rephidim.

17:8-15
The Attack of the Amalekites

17:8. Amalekites. The Amalekites, who were descended from Abraham through Esau (Gen 36:15), were a nomadic or seminomadic people who inhabited the general region of the Negev and the Sinai during the second half of the second millennium B.C.

17:11-12. battle signals. Signals were often used to deploy the various divisions in battle. It is possible that Moses used the staff in just such a way. When he was unable to relay divine guidance through the signals, the Israel-

ites were not able to succeed. Alternatively, it has been noticed that Egyptian texts speak of the uplifted arms of Pharaoh to bring protection as well as to signal the attack.

17:15. altar: "Lord my banner." The altar Moses builds is one of commemoration of the victory. The name given it, "Yahweh is my standard," reflects the theology of Yahweh as the leader of the armies of Israel. In the Egyptian army the divisions were named for various gods (e.g., the division of Amun, division of Seth) and the standards would identify the division by means of some representation of the god.

18:1-27

Jethro and Moses

18:1-2. priest of what god? Jethro is identified as a priest of Midian rather than as a priest of a particular deity. Little is known of which god or gods the Midianites of this period worshiped. Priests were not necessarily affiliated to only one god, and therefore Jethro's recognition of *Yahweh's superiority does not suggest he was a priest or worshiper of Yahweh. Priests serving a sanctuary would be viewed as servants of the god of that sanctuary, but even these individuals were not monotheistic, so they would acknowledge the power of other deities when manifested.

18:5. mountain of God. "Mountain of God" is used to describe Mount Sinai. At Rephidim they are in the general vicinity of Sinai, but this chapter probably records events that took place after they had set up camp at the foot of the mountain itself.

18:7. respectful greeting. Moses' greeting of Jethro follows standard practice. Bowing down is a greeting to one who is of higher social standing and is an act of respect. The kiss on the cheek is the greeting of friendship. This is the only recorded incident where both are performed.

18:9-12. Yahweh and the gods. Jethro's acknowledgment of the superiority of *Yahweh does not suggest that he was a worshiper of Yahweh or that he became a worshiper of Yahweh. The polytheism of the ancient world allowed for the recognition of the relative strengths of various deities and would expect each deity to be praised in superlative terms when there was evidence of his activity or displays of his power. Regardless of Jethro's religious persuasions, Yahweh was accomplishing his purpose that through his mighty acts "all the world will know that I am Yahweh."

18:12. sacrificial meal. Sacrifices in the ancient world were often opportunities for communal meals. Though communal meals were used to ratify formal agreements, they were also a part of offerings of thanksgiving, more suitable to this context. This is like a banquet with *Yahweh as the guest of honor.

18:13-27. Moses' seat. The seat of the judge is a designated seat of authority when the judge's "court" was "in session." In cities this seat was usually at the entrance to the gate. Jethro advises Moses to establish a hierarchical judiciary with Moses at the top, as a king would have been in a monarchy, and as a priest or family patriarch would have been in tribal societies. In this structure it is recognized that some disputes can be settled on point of law or by objective discretion (for information concerning the judiciary system in the ancient Near East, see comment on Deut 1:9-18). Such cases can be settled in the lower levels. In the absence of sufficient evidence in complex or serious cases, the matter was handled "prophetically"—that is, it was brought before God. This was where Moses' involvement was essential. It separates the "civil" aspects of the judiciary, in which Moses did not have to be involved, from the "religious" aspects. This system is not unlike that found in Egypt, where Pharaoh guaranteed justice but set up a system headed by the vizier, who was the "Prophet of Ma'at" (Ma'at is the goddess of truth and justice) and occupied the judgment chair. The establishment of this system formalized a sociological, if not political, role for Moses that moved Israel beyond being a purely tribal society to being a quasi-centralized government.

19:1-25

The Israelites at Mount Sinai

19:1-2. desert of Sinai. The Israelites reach the wilderness surrounding Sinai three months after leaving Egypt, though it is unclear whether "to the day" refers to the new moon or the full moon. Nevertheless, it is in the month of June. The location of Mount Sinai is far from certain, and at least a dozen different alternatives have been suggested. The three strongest contenders are Jebel Musa and Jebel Serbal in the south, and Jebel Sin Bishar in the north. Jebel Musa (7,486 feet) is in the cluster of mountains in central southern Sinai. As one of the highest peaks in the range it has enjoyed traditional support as far back as the fourth century A.D. It also features the er-Raha plain to its north that would have been suitable for the Israelite camp (providing about four hundred acres), though it lacks ready access to water. Jebel Serbal (6,791 feet) is about

twenty miles northwest of Jebel Musa and separated from the range so that it rises isolated above the Wadi Feiran. Its location near an oasis and on the main road passing through the region makes it an attractive choice, though the area available for the camp is much smaller than that at Jebel Musa. Some have favored a northern location, assuming that Moses' initial request of Pharaoh for a three-day pilgrimage (5:3) would take them to Mount Sinai. They also point out that a northern route is more directly linked to Kadesh Barnea and the vicinity of Moses' time in Midian.

19:4. carried on eagles' wings. Though the eagle cannot be ruled out, the bird named here is more usually taken to be the griffin vulture, with a wingspan of eight to ten feet. While Bible reference books often report how the eagle carries its young on its wings when they grow weary of flying, or catches them on their wings when they are fluttering in failure (see Deut 32:11), this behavior has been difficult for naturalists to confirm through observation. In fact most eagles and vultures do not take their first flight until they are three or four months old, at which time they are nearly full grown. Furthermore, observations by naturalists have consistently confirmed that the first flight is usually taken while the parents are away from the nest. Alternatively, if the metaphor here concerns a vulture, it may be political in nature. In Egypt the goddess Nekhbet is the vulture goddess who represented Upper Egypt and served as a protecting deity for Pharaoh and the land. Israel was protected in Egypt until Yahweh brought them to himself.

19:5-6. kingdom of priests. The phrase "treasured possession" uses a word common in other languages of the ancient Near East to describe accumulated assets, whether through division of spoils or inheritance from estate. That people can be so described is evident in a royal seal from *Alalakh, where the king identifies himself as the "treasured possession" of the god Hadad. Likewise in a *Ugaritic text the king of Ugarit's favored status as a vassal is noted by naming him a "treasured possession" of his *Hittite overlord. Additionally, the Israelites are identified as a "kingdom of priests," which identifies the nation as serving a priestly role among the nations, as intermediary between the peoples and God. Additionally there is a well-attested concept in the ancient Near East that a city or group of people may be freed from being subject to a king and placed in direct subjection to a deity. So Israel, freed from Egypt, is now given sacred status (see Is 61:5).

19:7. elders. The elders here are the clan leaders of Israel. Elders typically served as a ruling assembly overseeing the leadership of a village or community. They represent the people in accepting a *covenant arrangement, now a national agreement with commitment expected beyond the family covenant made with Abraham centuries earlier.

19:10-15. consecration. Consecration consisted of steps taken to make oneself ritually pure. This process primarily entailed washing and avoiding contact with objects that would render one unclean. The mountain was designated holy ground, so much so that even touching it would constitute desecration punishable by death. Stoning was the most common means of execution. In this way the entire community took responsibility for the penalty, though no single individual could be considered to have brought about the death of the criminal.

19:13. ram's horn. The ram's horn in verse 13 is referred to by a different word from that used for the shofar (trumpet) in verse 16, though it may be used for the same instrument. The shofar is capable of a variety of tones but cannot play a tune, so it is used primarily for signals either in worship or in warfare. The ram's horn was softened in hot water, bent and flattened to produce its distinctive shape.

20:1-17
The Ten Commandments

20:1-17. apodictic law. A number of collections of legal material have been found from ancient times, including *Sumerian, *Babylonian, *Hittite and *Assyrian collections. The most famous is the Code of *Hammurabi, dating from several hundred years earlier than Moses. These collections consist primarily of sample rulings in particular types of cases. As case law they present what penalties were assigned to a wide range of offenses, rather than indicating certain behavior to be right or wrong or telling people what they should or should not do. The type of law found in the Ten Commandments that prohibits or requires certain types of behavior is called *apodictic law and is rarely found in the legal collections of the ancient Near East.

20:1-17. Decalogue as covenant (not law). The Ten Commandments not only are connected to law but are also a part of the *covenant. The literary formulation of the covenant is quite similar to the formulations of international treaties in the ancient Near East. In the stipu-

lations of these treaties, one often finds certain behavior either required or prohibited. In this sense it could be understood that the *apodictic form of the Ten Commandments puts them more in the category of covenant than in the category of law.

20:3. first commandment. When the text says that there should be no other god "before me," it does not refer to others having a higher position than *Yahweh. The introduction in verse 2 has already indicated as a preexisting assumption that *Yahweh is their God. The phrase "before me" means "in my presence" and therefore prohibits other gods from being considered to be in the presence of Yahweh. This prohibits several concepts that were a standard part of ancient beliefs. Most religions of that day had a pantheon, a divine assembly that ruled the realm of the gods, the supernatural, and, ultimately, the human world. There would typically be a deity who was designated head of the pantheon, and he, like the other gods, would have at least one consort (female partner). This commandment forbids Israel to think in these terms. Yahweh is not the head of a pantheon, and he does not have a consort—there are no gods in his presence. The only divine assembly that is legitimate for their thinking is made up of angels (as in 1 Kings 22:19-20), not gods. This commandment also then effectively bans much mythology that deals with the interactions of the gods with one another.

20:4. second commandment. The second commandment concerns how *Yahweh is to be worshiped, for the idols that it prohibits are idols of him (the previous commandment already dismissed the thought of other gods). The commandment has nothing to do with art, though the graven images of the ancient world were indeed works of art. They were typically carved of wood and overlaid with hammered sheets of silver or gold, then clothed in the finest attire. But the prohibition is more concerned with how they are employed, and here the issue is power. Images of deity in the ancient Near East were where the deity became present in a special way, to the extent that the *cult statue became the god (when the god so favored his worshipers), even though it was not the only manifestation of the god. As a result of this linkage, spells, incantations and other magical acts could be performed on the image in order to threaten, bind or compel the deity. In contrast, other rites related to the image were intended to aid the deity or care for the deity. The images then represent a worldview, a concept of deity that was not consistent with how Yahweh had revealed himself. The commandment also prohibits images of anything in heaven, earth or under the earth. In contrast to Egypt, it was not the practice in Syria-Palestine to worship animals or to have gods in the form of animals. Nevertheless, there were animals that were believed to represent the attributes of deity, such as bulls and horses, that would be portrayed in art and sculpture to stand in the place of deity.

20:5-6. punishing third and fourth generations. Punishment to the third or fourth generation is not granted to human judges but to God. It expresses the fact that *covenant violation brings guilt on the entire family. The third and fourth generation is then a way to refer to all living members of the family. But there is also a contrast here in the loyalty that extends over thousands of generations as over against the punishment that extends only three or four.

20:6. corporate solidarity. In the ancient Near East a person found his or her identity within a group such as the clan or family. Integration and interdependence were important values, and the group was bound together as a unit. As a result, individual behavior would not be viewed in isolation from the group. When there was sin in a family, all members shared the responsibility. This concept is known as *corporate identity.

20:7. third commandment. As the second commandment concerned the issue of exercising power over God, the third turns its attention to exercising God's power over others. This commandment does not refer to blasphemy or foul language. Rather it is intended to prevent the exploitation of the name of Yahweh for magical purposes or hexing. It also continues the concerns of the second commandment in that someone's name was believed to be intimately connected to that person's being and essence. The giving of one's name was an act of favor, trust and, in human terms, vulnerability. Israel was not to attempt to use Yahweh's name in magical ways to manipulate him. The commandment was also intended to insure that the use of Yahweh's name in oaths, vows and treaties was taken seriously.

20:8-11. fourth commandment. Sabbath observation has no known parallel in any of the cultures of the ancient Near East and is distinctive in that it is independent of any of the patterns or rhythms of nature. A similar term was used in *Babylonian texts as a full moon day when the king officiated at rites of reconciliation with deity, but it was not a work-free day and has little in common with the Israelite

sabbath. The legislation does not require rest as much as it stipulates cessation, interrupting the normal activities of one's occupation.

20:12. fifth commandment. Honoring and respecting parents consists of respecting their instruction in the *covenant. This assumes that a religious heritage is being passed on. The home was seen as an important and necessary link for the covenant instruction of each successive generation. Honor is given to them as representatives of God's authority for the sake of covenant preservation. If parents are not heeded or their authority is repudiated, the covenant is in jeopardy. In this connection, notice that this commandment comes with covenant promise: living long in the land. In the ancient Near East it is not the religious heritage but the fabric of society that is threatened when there is no respect for parental authority and filial obligations are neglected. Violations would include striking parents, cursing parents, neglecting the care of elderly parents and failing to provide adequate burial.

20:12-17. commandments and community. Commandments five to nine all deal with issues of *covenant in community. They affect the transmission of the covenant in the community and the standing of individuals within the covenant community. Injunctions concern those things that would jeopardize the covenant's continuity from generation to generation or that would jeopardize the family line or reputation. The covenant must be passed on in the family, and the family must be preserved. In the ancient Near East the concerns were similar, but the focus on preservation of the community was viewed more in social and civil terms. Lists of ethical violations are found in Egypt in the Book of the Dead, where the individual denies that he has committed any of a long list of crimes. In Mesopotamia the incantation series known as *Shurpu* contains a list of crimes the individual confesses to in order to absolve himself of unknown offenses and thus appease an angry deity. But in neither of these works are these actions prohibited. They also include a wide range of other types of offenses.

20:13. sixth commandment. The word used here is not technically restricted to murder, but it does assume a person as both subject and object. It has been observed that it is used only in the context of homicide (whether accidental or intentional, premeditated or not, judicial, political or otherwise) within the *covenant community. Because of the nature of the term used, this verse cannot easily be brought into discussions of pacifism, capital punishments or vegetarianism. Some law collections of the ancient Near East do not treat murder, while in others the punishment only entails monetary compensation. Nevertheless the murderer still ran the risk of being targeted for execution by the victim's family in a blood feud.

20:14. seventh commandment. The purpose of the legislation was to protect the husband's name by assuring him that his children would be his own. The law does not insure marital fidelity; its focus is paternity, not sexual ethics. The integrity of the family is protected rather than the integrity of the marriage. If a married man had an affair with an unmarried woman, it was not considered adultery. The offender had to pay damages to the father (22:16-17). This is a natural result of a polygamous society. Promiscuous behavior is not acceptable (Deut 22:21; 23:2), but it is not called adultery if the woman is not married. In the Bible the wife is an extension of the husband, and his name is damaged through adultery. In other cultures the wife was considered property, and this would merely have been a case of damaged goods. Nonetheless, in Egypt (marriage contracts), Mesopotamia (hymns to Ninurta and Shamash) and Canaan (king of *Ugarit extradites and executes his wife), adultery was regularly referred to as "the great sin" and was considered extremely detrimental to society in that it was characteristic of anarchy. *Hittite laws, Middle *Assyrian laws and the Code of *Hammurabi all contain legislation against adultery. The protection of the integrity of the family unit was important because the family was the foundation of society. Compromise or collapse of the family meant compromise or collapse of society.

20:15. eighth commandment. Property theft is prevented by the tenth commandment one step before the act. Though the verb used here in the eighth commandment can be used of stealing property, the command is much broader in its focus. Issues such as kidnapping (cf. Deut 24:7) as well as stealing intangibles (dignity, self-respect, freedom, rights) are all important. The word is also used for stealing in the sense of cheating—by cheating someone out of something, you are stealing from him.

20:16. ninth commandment. The terminology indicates the main focus is on formal slander and libel and is concerned primarily with the legal setting. The maintenance of justice was dependent on the reliability of the witness. Nevertheless, character assassination in any of its forms, legal or casual, would constitute false witness and would

be a violation of this commandment.

20:17. tenth commandment. In the ancient Near East the concept of coveting occurs in expressions such as "to lift the eyes"—but it is a crime that can be detected and punished only when the desire is translated into action. Ancient Near Eastern literature shows that offenses such as theft and adultery can be described generally in terms of the desire that triggered the chain of events. Whatever action it spawns, this illegitimate desire for something that belongs to someone else is the core of the problem and a threat to the community; any action taken to fulfil such a desire is sin.

20:18. thunder and lightning. Thunder and lightning were considered to regularly accompany the presence of a deity in the ancient Near East, though that is often in a battle setting, not a revelation setting, since the gods of the ancient Near East were not accustomed to revealing themselves.

20:24-26

Altars

20:24. altar of earth. Some altars of this period were made of mud bricks, and that is perhaps what the text refers to when it speaks of altars of earth. Another possibility is that it refers to altars that had outer walls of stone but were filled with earth. No altars in the Bible are said to have been built of earth, and no altars of earth have been found by archaeologists.

20:25. altar of stones. Stones, if used, were not to be hewn. Unhewn stone was used for the Israelite altar uncovered by archaeologists at Arad, though altars at sites such as Dan and Beersheba feature ashlar masonry (a type of worked stone).

20:26. priestly modesty. Ritual nudity was widespread in the ancient Near East, whereas here every precaution is taken to assure modesty. Early Canaanite altars with steps are known from sites such as Megiddo. Israelite law also preserved modesty by legislating longer tunics and prescribing undergarments for the priests.

21:1—23:19

The Book of the Covenant

21:1—23:19. casuistic law. The principal form of law found throughout the ancient Near East was case or *casuistic law. It is characterized by an "if . . . then" clause, which is based on the idea of cause and effect. In the Israelite law codes, case law assumes the equality of all citizens, and thus punishment for crime is not hindered or magnified by class or wealth. This is not the case, however, in ancient Mesopotamia, where in *Hammurabi's code (c. 1750 B.C.) different degrees of punishments (from fines to execution) were prescribed for slaves, citizens and members of the nobility. Case law can be traced in its origins to *apodictic (command) laws, such as those found in the Ten Commandments. As persons committed crimes under varying circumstances, it became necessary to go beyond the simple statute "Do not steal" to take into account such things as time of day and the value of what had been stolen.

21:1—23:19. nature of the book of the covenant. The law code found in Exodus 21—23 is referred to as the "book of the *covenant" and is probably the oldest example of *casuistic law in the Bible. It deals with a wide variety of legal situations (slavery, theft, adultery) and tends to impose fairly harsh sentences (nine require execution), many of which are based on the principle of lex talionis, "an eye for an eye." The laws anticipate the range of life situations that would be faced in the village culture of the settlement and early monarchy period. They regulate business, marriage practice and personal responsibility. Their tone is less theological than the law collections in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

21:2. Hebrew. The term *Hebrew* is used to designate an Israelite who has become landless and destitute. Although this person may be forced to sell himself or his family into debt slavery, he retains his rights as a member of the community and cannot be held in perpetual servitude. He is to be released, debt-free, after six years of labor.

21:2-6. debt slavery. Because of the fragile nature of the environment in much of the ancient Near East, farmers and small landowners often found themselves in debt. Their problems could magnify if a drought and resulting poor harvests continued over more than one year, and they could be forced to sell their land and property and eventually even their family and themselves. Israelite law takes this situation into account by providing a fair period of labor service to the creditor as well as a time limit on servitude for the debt slave. No one could serve more than six years, and when they were freed they went out debt-free. This would have been a good solution for some, but without their land to return to, many may have chosen to remain in the service of their creditor or to move to the cities to find jobs or join the military.

21:2-6. slave laws compared to ancient Near East. Israelite slave laws tend to be more hu-

mane than those found elsewhere in the ancient Near East. For instance, no slave could be kept in perpetual servitude without the permission of the slave. Escaped slaves did not have to be returned to their masters. In Mesopotamia a slave (generally obtained through warfare) could be freed by his master or he could purchase his freedom. Hammurabi's laws set a time limit of three years on a debt slave, compared to six years in Exodus 21:2. Slaves were not given equal rights, and their punishment for injuring a free man was much more severe than if a free man injured him.

21:5-6. ear pierced on doorpost. Entrance ways are sacred and legally significant spots. When a slave chose to remain in slavery in order to preserve a family that he had established while in servitude, it would be appropriate to bring him to his master's doorway and then symbolically attach the slave to that place by driving an awl through his earlobe into the doorpost. It is possible that a ring was then placed on the ear to mark him as a perpetual slave.

21:7-11. sale of daughter into slavery. When a daughter was sold into slavery by her father, this was intended both as a payment of debt and as a way of obtaining a husband for her without a dowry. She has more rights than a male in the sense that she can be freed from slavery if her master does not provide her with food, clothing and marital rights. Selling children into slavery is attested across Mesopotamia in nearly every time period.

21:10. minimum provision. Since perpetual slavery was generally reserved for foreigners and prisoners of war, those persons who sold themselves into slavery because of debt were protected by law from being abused by their creditors. The law determines that six years is sufficient to pay off any debts and that the debt slave is to be released in the seventh year (a clear parallel with the seven-day creation cycle). *Hammurabi's law requires that a debt slave be released after three years of service, thus providing a Mesopotamian precedent for this procedure.

21:10-11. wife's provisions. Provision for a woman in one's charge throughout the ancient Near East consisted of food, clothing and oil. The third in the series here (NIV: "marital rights") is an attempt to translate a word that occurs only here in the Old Testament. The frequent occurrence of "oil" in that position in numerous ancient Near Eastern documents has led some to suspect that the word in the Hebrew text might also be an obscure term for oil (compare Hos 2:7; Eccles 9:7-9).

21:12. capital punishment. Capital punishment is required in those cases where the culprit is a threat to the well-being and the safety of the community. Thus murder, disrespect for parents (abuse), adultery and false worship are capital crimes, because they injure persons and corrupt the fabric of society. The principle involved assumes that leniency would encourage others to commit these crimes. Stoning is the usual form of execution. In this way no one person is responsible for the culprit's death, but the entire community has participated in the elimination of evil.

21:13. place of sanctuary. In those instances where unintentional homicide is committed, the person involved is given a chance to claim sanctuary in an appointed place, usually an altar or a shrine (see Num 35:12; Deut 4:41-43; 19:1-13; Josh 20). This protects him from the deceased's family and gives the authorities time to hear witnesses and make a judgment. The continued grant of sanctuary would then depend on whether the killing was judged a murder or an accidental death. Eventually, the number of places of sanctuary had to be increased as the size of the nation grew.

21:15, 17. cursing parents. Contrary to the NIV translation, studies have demonstrated that the infraction here is not cursing but treating with contempt. This is a more general category and would certainly include the prohibition of 21:15 that forbids striking a parent and would be the opposite of the fifth commandment to "honor your father and your mother" (20:12). Each injunction is designed to protect the cohesion of the family unit as well as insure that each subsequent generation provide their parents with the respect, food and protection they deserve (see Deut 21:18-21). Mesopotamian law codes and legal documents are also clear on the issue of treating parents with contempt. The *Sumerian laws allow a son who disowns his parents to be sold as a slave. *Hammurabi requires the amputation of the hand of a man who strikes his father. A will from *Ugarit describes a son's behavior using the same verb used in this verse and stipulates disinheritance.

21:16. kidnapping (slave trade). Kidnapping occasionally occurred because of the failure to pay a debt, but more often it was simply a part of the illicit slave trade. Mesopotamian and biblical law both require the death penalty for this crime. Such a harsh penalty reflects concern for individual freedom as well as protection against the raiding of weak households.

21:18-19. personal injury laws compared to ancient Near East. Liability for personal injury done as a result of a quarrel and not due to

premeditated action is similar in the Bible and the codes of the ancient Near East. In both cases the injured party is entitled to compensation for medical expenses. There are some additions to this provision in each of the codes. The Exodus passage hinges on whether the injured person recovers enough to walk without a staff. *Hammurabi deals with the subsequent death of the injured person and the fine to be paid, based on social status. The *Hittite code requires that a man be sent to manage the injured person's house until he recovers.

21:20-21. human rights (slave as property). The basic human right to life means that no death can go unpunished. Thus when a slave's owner beats him to death, an unspecified penalty is imposed. Such an assurance of punishment is designed to prevent such extreme abuse. However, there is no penalty if the slave recovers from his beating. The assumption is that the owner has the right to discipline his slaves, since they are his property. Their human rights are restricted, in this respect, because of their status.

21:22. miscarriage. Several ancient law codes include this statute penalizing a man for causing a woman to have a miscarriage. The variation between them generally depends on the status of the woman (*Hammurabi's laws indicate a small fine for injuring a slave woman; *Middle Assyrian laws specify a large fine, fifty lashes and a month's labor service for injuring a citizen's daughter), or the intent behind the injury (*Sumerian laws prescribe a fine for accidental injury and impose a much larger fine for deliberate injury). The Exodus law hinges on whether there is any further harm to the mother beyond the loss of the fetus and imposes a fine based on the claim of the husband and the pronouncement of the judges. The object of the fine is to compensate for the injury to the mother rather than the death of the fetus. However, Middle Assyrian law demands compensation for the death of the fetus with another life.

21:23-25. lex talionis. The legal principle of lex talionis, "an eye for an eye," is based on the idea of reciprocity and appropriate retaliation (see Lev 24:10-20). Ideally, when an injury is done to another person, the way to provide true justice is to cause an equal injury to the culprit. Although this may seem extreme, it in fact limits the punishment which can be inflicted on the person accused of the injury. It cannot exceed the damage done. Since most personal liability laws involve the payment of a fine rather than a retaliatory body injury, it is most likely that the talion statement is a designated limit on compensation, with a value assigned to each item injured (see the laws of *Eshnunna, which set fines for the nose, finger, hand and foot). The talion is also found in its basic form in *Hammurabi's code 196-97, but the laws following that section contain variations based on the social status (free or slave or member of nobility) of the persons involved. In most cases the talion is applied when there is premeditated intent to do harm.

21:22-36. personal liability. There is a great emphasis placed on personal liability in the ancient Near East. In order to protect the person and that person's ability to work, very detailed statutes are written to deal with every conceivable injury done by human hand or by a person's property. The classic example is the case of the goring ox. In addition to Exodus, it is found in the laws of *Eshnunna and *Hammurabi, where the penalty for allowing a known gorer to run loose is a fine. The biblical example, however, requires that both the ox and his owner be stoned to death. Similar laws involving failure of an owner to deal with a known danger, include vicious dogs (Eshnunna), building code violations (Eshnunna; Ex 21:33-34), and injury to valuable animals by another animal or a human (*Lipit-Ishtar; Hammurabi—veterinary malpractice). Generally, these crimes are punishable by fines based on the degree of injury and the value of person or animal injured.

21:26-36. penalties for personal liability. The penalties imposed in cases of personal liability generally depend on who or what was injured. If a slave owner abuses his slaves to the point that he mutilates them—destroying an eye or knocking out a tooth—then the slave is freed in compensation. In cases where a death occurs, the circumstances decide the punishment. If an owner is aware of a dangerous situation and fails to do anything, then his life is forfeited if someone is killed due to his negligence. Similarly, if valuable animals are harmed or destroyed, then the owner who is responsible must provide equal compensation. There is latitude in the law, however, in cases where an owner is unaware of a potential danger and is thus not fully responsible for loss or injury.

22:1-4. theft in the ancient Near East. Theft can be defined as appropriation of goods or real property without legal consent. The number and specificity of the laws regarding theft in the ancient Near East suggest that it was a real problem. There are cases of burglary (22:2-3; *Hammurabi), robbery (Hammurabi), looting during a fire (Hammurabi), and use of property or natural resources without permis-

sion (e.g., illegal grazing in 22:5 and Hammurabi). The "paperwork-oriented" Mesopotamian culture placed a great deal of importance on contracts, bills of sale and the corroboration of witnesses to the sale (Hammurabi). These business practices, which were designed to prevent fraud, are also mentioned in the biblical text, but more often in narrative (Gen 23:16; Jer 32:8-15) than in the law codes. There are also instances where an oath is taken in cases where physical evidence is unavailable or responsibility for loss is uncertain (22:10-13; Hammurabi). In this way, God is solicited as a witness and the person taking the oath is laying himself open to divine justice.

22:1-4. penalties for theft. Prescribed punishments for theft vary based on the identity of the owner and the value of the property stolen. In *Hammurabi's laws the death penalty is required for persons who steal from the temple or the palace. However, this is reduced to a fine of thirty times the value of the property stolen if the victim is a government or temple official and ten times the value for property of a citizen. This same law imposes the death penalty for a thief who fails to pay the fine. Exodus 22:3 tempers this by having the thief sold as a slave to compensate for the loss. These penalties, with their heavy fines or death sentences, suggest how seriously the society took this crime.

22:2-3. burglary. It is assumed that people have a right to defend themselves and their property from theft. Thus when a burglar enters a house at night and is killed by the homeowner, this is considered a case of self-defense (for instance in *Ur-Nammu's laws). That changes, however, if the break-in occurs during the day, because the homeowner could more clearly see the degree of threat and could call for help. *Hammurabi's laws add a symbolic deterrent to its burglary injunction by having the body of an executed burglar walled up in the hole he had dug in the mud-brick wall of his intended victim.

22:5-15. property liability. In most cases, liability for property damage or loss was based on circumstances or contracts. Restitution was generally based on the loss of real property (animals, grain, fruit) or the loss of productivity, if fields or orchards were damaged or taken out of production. There was also a clear sense of responsibility in cases based on negligence. Examples include the unchecked spread of fire, rampaging animals or the failure to maintain dams or irrigation systems. In each of these cases the person who allowed dangerous defects to persist or who did not keep a rein on the movement of his animals was required to pay restitution for any loses incurred (as in *Hammurabi and *Ur-Nammu). Not all loss was covered, however. In some cases, claims for loss were dismissed due to unforeseeable events or because they were included in rental agreements (22:13, 15).

22:5-15. penalties for property liability. Since loss of or damage to property can be computed in real terms, penalties in cases involving property liability were designed to provide just restitution of monetary value. According to the biblical statutes, this would sometimes be left up to the judges to determine. In other cases a set amount of double the value of the lost item is imposed. There is more specificity in the Mesopotamian codes, where the exact nature of the damage to a rental animal is listed with the appropriate compensation (as in *Lipit-Ishtar) and the exact amount of grain per acre in a flooded field is prescribed (*Hammurabi).

22:16. marriage pledge. Families negotiated marriage contracts that provided a bride price from the groom's family and a dowry from the bride's household. Once the couple was betrothed or pledged to each other, they were considered legally bound to the contract. Thus the penalty for rape depended on whether the woman was (1) a virgin and (2) pledged to be married.

22:16-17. bride price. The groom's household paid the bride price as part of the marriage agreement. This price would vary based on whether the woman was a virgin or had been married before. In this case the price for a virgin is required even though she has been raped.

22:16-17. premarital sex perspective. Premarital sex was discouraged for several reasons: (1) it usurped the authority of the father to arrange the marriage contract, (2) it diminished the potential value of the bride price, and (3) it prevented the husband from being assured that his first child was indeed his offspring. This law regulated illicit premarital sex by imposing a forced marriage on the culprit and/or a fine equal to the bride price for a virgin. In this way the father would be spared the embarrassment and loss of revenue when negotiating a contract for a daughter who is no longer a virgin.

22:18. sorceress. Practitioners of magic were outlawed on pain of death within the Israelite community (see Lev 19:31; 20:27). Each law concerning them is in *apodictic or command form. This total intolerance may be due to their association with Canaanite religion or simply because their arts represented a challenge to God's supremacy over creation.

22:19. bestiality. Also written in command form are the laws forbidding sexual relations with animals (see Lev 21:15-16; Deut 17:21). Bestiality, like homosexuality, violates the basic injunction to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28; 9:1). It also blurs the categories of creation by intermixing species. Such acts are also forbidden in the *Hittite laws.

22:21. vulnerability of aliens. The injunction to protect the "alien" is always based on the remembrance of the exodus and the alien status of the Israelites before they settled in Palestine (see Deut 24:17-22). It is also based on the image of God as the ultimate protector of the weak—whether that be the entire nation or the most vulnerable members of society. Humane treatment of aliens follows the spirit of the hospitality code, but it also recognizes a class of persons who are not citizens and who could be subject to discrimination or abuse if special provision were not made for them.

22:22-24. vulnerability of orphans. Orphans, aliens and widows formed the three classes of powerless persons in ancient society. God took special care of these people because of their basic vulnerability, requiring that they not be oppressed and cursing those who did oppress with the threat of becoming orphans themselves. The frequency of war, famine and disease insured that there would always be a large number of orphans. Although they could contribute to the general work force, they would have had to be adopted for them to inherit property or to learn a skill as an apprentice (as in *Hammurabi's laws).

22:22-24. vulnerability of widows. Like aliens and orphans, widows were often dependent on charity for survival. All three groups needed protection under the law because they were powerless to protect themselves. They were allowed to glean in fields, orchards and vineyards (Deut 24:19-21), and they retained their dignity as a protected class through divine statute. They could not inherit their husband's property, and their dowry would have been used to support their children (as in *Hammurabi's laws). In some cases they were owed levirate obligation by their deceased husband's family (see Deut 25:5-10; *Hittite laws), but otherwise they would be forced to seek employment or attempt to arrange a new marriage (see Ruth).

22:22-24. treatment of vulnerable classes. Based on the statements in the prologues of the *Ur-Nammu code and the Code of *Hammurabi, it is clear that kings considered it part of their role as "wise rulers" to protect the rights of the poor, the widow and the orphan. Similarly, in the Egyptian *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant,* the plaintiff begins by identifying his judge as "the father of the orphan, the husband of the widow." Individual statutes (seen in several Middle *Assyrian laws) protect a widow's right to remarry and provide for her when her husband is taken prisoner and presumed dead. In this way the vulnerable classes are provided for throughout the ancient Near East. Only the "alien" is not specifically mentioned outside the Bible. This is not to say that hospitality codes did not apply elsewhere, but this category is tied in the Bible to the unique exodus experience.

22:25. charging interest. Two principles are evident in the restriction on charging interest on loans: (1) a village-based, agricultural people realize they must depend on each other to survive, and (2) interest payments are a phenomenon of the city-based merchants with whom farmers sometimes had to deal and who were not concerned with the village community (see Hos 12:7-8). Thus to maintain their sense of the equality of all Israelites and to prevent growing antagonism between rural and urban citizens (see Neh 5:7, 10-11 and Ezek 22:12 for violations of the law), charging interest of Israelites had to be outlawed (see Lev 25:35-38; Deut 23:19). Only loans to non-Israelites could accrue interest (Deut 23:20). This stands in contrast to the more familiar business practices employed elsewhere and to the systematic listing of interest that can be charged on loans in the laws of *Eshnunna and *Hammurabi.

22:25. moneylending practices. Just as is the case today, farmers, craftsmen and businessmen borrowed amounts from moneylenders to finance the next year's planting, an expanded working area or a new business venture. All of these loans were made at interest, and, if the law codes are to be taken as community standards, the interest rates were set by law. The laws of *Eshnunna provide technical details on the rate of exchange on interest payments in either barley or silver. The produce of a field could be given as collateral on a loan (*Hammurabi), but if a natural disaster occurred, provision was made to cancel interest payments (Hammurabi). To prevent fraudulent practices, moneylenders were not allowed to harvest fields or orchards to claim what was owed to them. Instead the owner did the harvesting and thus insured that only the proper amount was paid; interest could not exceed 20 percent (Hammurabi).

22:26-27. cloak as pledge. Day laborers regularly pledged their garment as collateral against a full day's work. In many cases it was their only extra covering besides their loin-

cloth. Thus the law requires it to be returned at the end of the day so that they are not left without protection against the night's chill (see Deut 24:12-13; Amos 2:8). If it were not returned to them, they would have to give up their free status and sell themselves as slaves. A late-seventh-century B.C. Hebrew inscription from Yavneh-Yam contains a plea by a field worker that his garment had been unjustly taken. He asks that his rights and his free status be returned to him along with the robe.

22:28. blasphemy of God or ruler. The Hebrew here allows for a translation of either "God" or "the judges," neither of whom should be ignored or slighted. Both judges and rulers (a chieftain was elected by the elders and certified in the position by God prior to the monarchy) were to be respected. Failure to do so cast doubt on the authority of the elders and God to chose a ruler and thus was punishable by death (see 2 Sam 19:9; 1 Kings 21:10). Blasphemy, the rejection of God's divine presence and power, is also a capital offense (Lev 24:15-16).

22:29. offerings from granaries. Cities stored the harvest in huge, stone-lined granary pits, and villagers had smaller versions cut out of the native limestone near their houses. A portion of every harvest was to be set aside as an offering to God. This injunction reminds the people to provide that offering before they filled and sealed their storage containers.

22:29. sacrifice of firstborn. The common belief was that fertility could be assured only if the firstborn of the flock and of every family was sacrificed to God (see 13:2; Lev 27:26). Israelite religion forbade human sacrifice, substituting an animal in place of the child (see Gen 22), and the service of the Levites in place of the dedicated firstborn (Num 3:12-13).

22:30. eighth day. The requirement that animals not be taken from their mothers and sacrificed until the eighth day after birth (see Lev 22:27) may be (1) a parallel with the *circumcision of sons on the eighth day (Gen 17:12), (2) a sign of humane treatment of animals or (3) an attempt to key sacrifice to the completion of a seven-day creation cycle.

22:31. meat from dead animal. As a sign that they are "set apart" as a people of God, the Israelites are restricted from eating food which may ritually contaminate them. Thus an animal that has been killed by other beasts may not be eaten because of the contact of the flesh with predators, which may be impure, and the uncertainty that its blood has been completely drained (see Lev 17:15).

22:31. dogs. Packs of feral dogs are often associated with eating carrion (Ps 59:6; 1 Kings 14:11). They scavenged in the streets and in the refuge piles on the outskirts of towns and villages. Dogs are often identified as impure, and the word is used in taunting an enemy or taking an oath (1 Sam 17:43; 2 Sam 16:9).

23:1-9. preserving integrity in justice system. Any justice system is subject to abuse when its officials are corrupt. To preserve the integrity of the legal process in Israel, judges are admonished to provide equal justice to all, not execute judgment on the guiltless and not take bribes. Witnesses are warned against giving false testimony and thus contributing to the conviction of the innocent. All Israelites are reminded of their responsibility to help their neighbor and to treat the alien with hospitality and fairness. In this way persons will feel confident in speaking to judges and can be assured of getting a fair hearing. Additionally everyone can rest easier knowing that their person and their property are the concern of all citizens.

23:1-9. vulnerability of the poor in ancient Near East. Because most cultures of the ancient Near East were class conscious, the poor were not always treated with the same equity as the rich and powerful. *Hammurabi did describe himself as a "devout, god-fearing prince" who brought justice to the land and protected the weak, but there are sufficient suggestions of abuse in the law codes and in wisdom literature to suggest that all was not well. The Egyptian *Teachings of Amenemope* includes admonitions against stealing from the poor, cheating the cripple and poaching on a widow's field. The speech of the "eloquent peasant" (Middle Kingdom Egypt, 2134-1786 B.C.) reminds a magistrate that he is to be a father to the orphan and a husband to the widow.

23:8. bribes in ancient world. Bribes include any income which is acquired by government officials and judges through illegal means. They are generally received in support of a legal claim and are designed to influence the decision on that claim. Because this is a subversion of justice, this practice is universally and officially condemned in the ancient world. The Code of *Hammurabi disbars a judge who changes a sealed judgment, and Hammurabi's royal correspondence refers to the punishment of an official who received a bribe. The biblical text includes legal prohibitions (23:8; Deut 16:19), and bribery of judges is condemned in the prophets (Is 1:23; Mic 3:11).

23:10-11. fallow year. Leaving the land fallow in the seventh year follows the pattern of the

creation story and God's rest on the seventh day. It is likely that Israelite farmers set aside as fallow one-seventh of their fields each year rather than leaving all of their land fallow for an entire year. In Mesopotamia fields were left fallow even more frequently to limit the impact of the salt in the water used for irrigation. The practice also helps to prevent exhaustion of the nutrients in the soil. The social welfare aspect of the law (more directly explained in Lev 25:1-7, 18-22; see comments there) provides one more expression of concern for the poor.

23:13. invoking the names of other gods. In making sacrifices and participating in everyday activities like plowing or building a house, it was common practice in the ancient Near East to invoke the name of a god to bless their actions. To prevent the Israelites from practicing polytheism, it was necessary to ban the use of the names of other gods or to acknowledge their existence (see 20:3). Only Yahweh could be called upon for help and blessing.

23:15. Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of Unleavened Bread signals the beginning of the barley harvest (March-April). Unleavened bread was made from the newly harvested grain and celebrated as the first sign of coming harvests that year. What was probably originally a Canaanite agricultural celebration was associated with the exodus and the Passover festival by the Israelites.

23:16. Feast of Harvest. This second of the three harvest festivals comes seven weeks after the harvest of the early grain (34:22; Deut 16:9-12) and is better known as the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost. In the agricultural cycle it marks the end of the wheat harvest season, and by tradition it is tied to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. It is also associated with *covenant renewal and pilgrimage. Celebration includes the bringing of a "wave offering" of two loaves of bread and a basket of ripe fruit in thanksgiving for a good harvest.

23:16. Feast of Ingathering. The final harvest of the year occurred in the autumn prior to the onset of the rainy season and marked the beginning of a new agricultural year. At this time the last of the ripening grain and fruits were gathered and stored. The seven-day event is also known as the Feast of Tabernacles and is symbolized by the construction of booths for the harvesters. The festival was tied into Israelite tradition as a commemoration of the wilderness wanderings. It was also the occasion for the dedication of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:65).

23:17. pilgrimage obligation. The requirement that all Israelite families (see Deut 16:11, 14) appear before God at the temple three times a year is tied to the agricultural calendar and the three major harvest festivals: Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Harvest and Feast of Ingathering. This religious obligation would have been the occasion for fairs, the adjudication of legal disputes, the contracting of marriages and the rites of purification for those who had been physically or spiritually contaminated.

23:18. no yeast mixed in blood sacrifice. Yeast and leavened dough were strictly prohibited from use in animal sacrifice. This is based on the association of yeast with the process of corruption. Sacrificial blood, associated with life, might therefore be debased or corrupted if brought into contact with leaven.

23:18. handling of fat. The fatty portions of the animal sacrifice which were attached to the stomach and intestines were reserved for God's portion (29:12-13; Lev 3:16-17). They were not to be saved or put aside for the night, because they, like blood, contained the essence of life.

23:19. first fruits. The first produce of the harvest, associated with the Feast of Harvest, was to be brought to God as a sacrifice. This represented both thanksgiving as well as a symbolic portion of what was to come in the autumnal harvest (see Deut 26:2-11).

23:19. goat in mother's milk. The prohibition against cooking a young goat (perhaps symbolic of all young animals) in its mother's milk has been interpreted as a reaction against Canaanite or other foreign religious practices (see 34:26 and Deut 14:21). The regular birth of goats near the Feast of Ingathering and their inclusion in celebratory meals may be the basis of this law. It may also be based on an injunction to treat animals humanely, since an animal still nursing may have mother's milk in its stomach. There is also the consideration that mother's milk contains blood and would therefore corrupt either sacrificial meat or meals.

23:20-33
Bringing Israel to the Land

23:20. angel preparing way. The promise of an angel preparing the way for the people follows the narrative pattern of divine presence and guidance that is first set by the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire in the exodus event (13:21-22).

23:21. my Name is in him. The "messenger" or angel sent by God is an extension of God himself, representing a continuous presence

with the people of Israel. Since names and naming (see Gen 2:19; 17:5) were considered powerful in the ancient world (see 9:16; Lev 19:12), to say that Yahweh has invested his Name in this angel is to say that it is to be obeyed just as God is to be obeyed. All of God's presence and power is to be found in this messenger. He is to be trusted to do what God has promised.

23:23. peoples of Canaan. The list of peoples who inhabit Canaan is representative of the diverse ethnic character of that area. Because Canaan serves as a land bridge between Mesopotamia and Egypt, it has always attracted settlers from many different groups.

23:24. sacred stones. Among the objects that were erected at cultic sites in Canaan were altars, sacred poles and sacred stones. The latter were huge standing stones that represented the power of a local god. They occur alone as well as in groups.

23:28. hornet. The term which is translated "hornet" (see Deut 7:20; Josh 24:12) may be a form of divine "terror" like the plagues in Egypt. Egyptian and *Assyrian texts and reliefs portray the god as a winged disk terrifying the enemy before the arrival of their own armies. It may also be a pun based on its similarity to the word for Egypt *(zirah* and *mizraim)* and thus reflect Yahweh's use of Egyptian military campaigns in Canaan that weakened the area and made the Israelite settlement possible.

23:31. borders of the land. The limits of the Promised Land are set at the Red Sea (Gulf of Aqaba) or the border of Egypt to the southwest, the coast of the Mediterranean Sea on the west, and the Euphrates River and Mesopotamia on the east. At no time, even during Solomon's reign, did the nation actually include this much territory. However, given an ideal image, which includes all of the land between the two superpowers of the time, these borders are logical.

24:1-18

Ratification of Covenant

24:1. seventy elders. These men are the appointed representatives of the tribes. Their place here with Moses, Aaron and Aaron's sons is as *covenantal representatives. Their voice, like their number (seventy), stands for the nation as a whole accepting the covenant.

24:4. writing. Evidence of writing systems does not appear until about 3100 B.C. in the ancient Near East. Both Egyptian hieroglyphic and Mesopotamian *cuneiform scripts were syllabic and complex, thus creating the need for professional scribes who would read and write for the illiterate majority. The earliest examples of alphabetic script in the world are found in the region of Sinai (Serabit el-Khadim) during the mid-second millennium (these inscriptions are designated proto-Sinaitic; the Canaanite counterparts are called proto-Canaanite). Every alphabet in the world derives from this early script. The invention of alphabetic writing dramatically increased the literacy rate. Writing was used from its inception for business documents, treaties, histories, literature and religious works. The medium for writing was baked clay tablets in Mesopotamia and papyrus scrolls in Egypt. Monumental inscriptions were carved into stone in both areas. Unfortunately most of the documents written on papyrus or animal skins have decayed or been destroyed over the centuries. Writing something down was not only a way of preserving the memory of a transaction but also represented the conclusion of a treaty or *covenant (as in the case of this verse), and the act itself initiated the terms of the agreement.

24:4. altar and twelve pillars. The erection of an altar and pillars is part of the *covenant-making ceremony. They represent the presence of God and the twelve Israelite tribes who have come together to solemnly pledge their allegiance to each other through written treaty and sacrificial act (see Gen 31:45-54 and Josh 24:27 for similar commemorative pillars).

24:5. fellowship offering. This type of offering fits well into a *covenant ceremony, since it is designed to be shared with the participants. Only a portion was completely burned on the altar while the rest served as a meal consummating the treaty agreement between the people and God.

24:6. sprinkling blood on the altar. Blood, as the essence of the life force, belongs to God the Creator. Thus the blood drained from sacrificial animals was nearly always poured back on the altar. In this way the people were reminded of the sanctity of life and the giver of life.

24:7. book of the covenant. A public reading of the terms of the *covenant was a part of every covenant-renewal ceremony (see Josh 24:25-27; 2 Kings 23:2; Neh 8:5-9). In this way the law which had been given to them was recited, acknowledged and put into effect from that point on for the people of Israel. A number of *Hittite treaties from this time also stipulate that the agreement should be read aloud periodically.

24:8. sprinkling blood on the people. The use

of sacrificial blood to sprinkle the people is unusual and occurs elsewhere only in the ordination ceremony of Aaron and his sons (Lev 8). A special bond is established through these symbolic acts marking the people as God's own. It may be that the twelve standing stones actually received the shower of blood, since they represented the people and could all be sprinkled at once.

24:10. saw the God of Israel. Seeing God face to face (a *theophany) is always described as dangerous (Gen 16:7-13; 28:16-17; 32:24-30; Judg 6:22-23). Here the representatives of the Israelites conclude the *covenant ceremony with a meal. God's presence, in this instance, however, raises no danger to them. They are there at God's bidding and under divine protection.

24:10. sapphire pavement. Since the blue gemstone sapphire was unknown in the ancient Near East, this richly decorated pavement was most likely made of lapis lazuli (brought by traders from Afghanistan). It was used to trim royal audience chambers and thrones (see Ezek 1:26). Some first-millennium Mesopotamian texts whose traditions are thought to go back to the Kassite period speak of three heavens. Each level of heaven is described as having a particular type of stone as its pavement. The middle heavens are said to be paved with *saggilmud*-stone, which has the appearance of lapis lazuli. This was believed to give the sky its blue color. The middle heavens were where most of the gods had their residence.

24:12. tablets of stone. It was common practice in the ancient Near East to record important documents, law codes and the heroic military campaign annals of kings on stone (see comment on 32:15-16 for more on stone tablets). The stone tablets given to Moses by God on Mount Sinai follow this pattern. Unfortunately, there is no certainty about what was written on them, although the tradition that it is the Ten Commandments is very old. The original tablets are destroyed (32:19) and then replaced by God (34:1). The second set were housed in the ark of the *covenant (Deut 10:5).

24:18. 40 as approximation? The number forty appears many times as a number of completion, signifying the passage of the appropriate amount of time: a generation (Gen 25:20), the age of a mature man (2:11), the period in the wilderness (16:35; Num 14:33), the rule of a judge or chief (Judg 3:11; 13:1). The regularity with which this symbolic number is used suggests it has both cultural and literary significance and is therefore not to be taken precisely in most instances.

25:1—27:21

The Tabernacle and Its Furniture

25:3. precious metals. Gold, silver and bronze represent the most important metals and alloys available to the Israelites in the premonarchic period. They were commodities of exchange and were used to fashion jewelry, cultic objects and incense altars. In this instance they represent the willingness of the people to contribute their most precious items to the construction and furnishing of the tabernacle.

25:4. colored yarns. Only the most precious items were to be used to decorate the tabernacle. Dyes, some made from the glandular fluid of sea mollusks and certain plants, were extremely expensive and were generally imported. The colors listed here are in descending order of expense and desirability: blue, purple, scarlet.

25:4. linen. Like other fabrics, the linen made from beaten flax was produced in various grades of fineness. Coarser linen was used for sailcloth, headgear and tunics. The term used here is for the "finest linen," which was used to garb Egyptian officials (Joseph in Gen 41:42) and in this case is to be used to furnish the tabernacle (see 26:31, 36; 38:9).

25:5. red dye. The tanning process is not often mentioned in the biblical text. It involved the use of lime, tree bark and plant juices, and required a ready water supply. In this case, it is possible that the ram skins were either tanned or dyed red or both through the manufacturing process.

25:5. sea cows (dolphins?). Both sea cows (a herbivorous mammal—dugong) and dolphins are found in the Red Sea, and their hides could have been tanned and used for decoration. These creatures had been hunted for their hides along the Arabian Gulf for millennia. This word may also be compared to an *Akkadian word which refers to a semiprecious yellow or orange stone and thus to the color of dye used.

25:5. acacia wood. A variety of desert tree found in the Sinai with extremely hard wood, suitable for use in the construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings. The word used here may be an Egyptian loan word, since acacia was widely used in Egypt.

25:6. anointing oil. The spices which were to be used for anointing purposes were myrrh, cinnamon, cane and cassia (see recipe in 30:23-25). Their purpose was to remove all trace of secular odors and to transform the interior of the tabernacle into a sanctuary suitable for worship and God's presence.

25:7. onyx stones. Although translated "onyx" here, the exact identity of this precious gemstone is unknown. It is also mentioned in Genesis 2:12 as native to the land of Havilah near or in the Garden of Eden. Among the possibilities for this engravable stone are lapis lazuli and onyx, a chalcedony with milky-white bands alternating with black.

25:7. ephod. A priestly vestment reserved for the high priest (see chap. 28). It is constructed of gold and elaborately decorated with gemstones and is attached to the breastplate and one of the priest's outer garments (28:25, 31). It is associated with both the authority of the high priest and the presence of Yahweh.

25:8. temple ideology. The temple was not a structure for corporate worship but a place for God to dwell in the midst of the people. It had to be maintained in holiness and purity so that God's continuing presence could be vouchsafed. The priests existed to maintain that purity and to control access. The temple idea was not invented so that there would be a place to offer sacrifices. Rather, several of the sacrifices existed as a means of maintaining the temple. God's presence was the most important element to preserve. The sacrifices such as the purification offering (see comment on Lev 4:1-3) and the reparation offering (see comment on Lev 5:14-16) were designed for that purpose.

25:10-22. the ark (size, design, function). The ark was a wooden box, open at the top, approximately 3 feet in length and 2 feet in both width and height based on eighteen inches to the cubit. It was overlaid inside and out with sheets of the finest gold and had four rings (also gold-covered) attached to the sides for the insertion of two gold-encrusted poles, which were used to carry the ark and to protect it from the touch of all but the high priest. A golden cover, decorated with two winged cherubim, sealed the ark, securing the tablets of the law within it. Its primary function was to store the tablets and to serve as a "footstool" for God's throne, thereby providing an earthly link between God and the Israelites. In Egypt it was common for important documents that were confirmed by oath (e.g., international treaties) to be deposited beneath the feet of the deity. The Book of the Dead even speaks of a formula written on a metal brick by the hand of the god being deposited beneath the feet of the god. Therefore the footstool/receptacle combination follows known Egyptian practice. In Egyptian festivals the images of the gods were often carried in procession on portable barques. Paintings portray these as boxes about the size of the ark carried on poles and decorated with or flanked by guardian creatures. A similar-sized chest with rings (for carrying with poles) was found in Tutankhamen's tomb.

25:10. cubit. The standard dimension for the Israelite cubit was measured from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. Using the measure of the Siloam tunnel, which is described as 1,200 cubits, and its actual length of 1,732.6 feet, this places the length of the cubit as between 17.5 and 18 inches. Since no cubit markers have been discovered by archaeologists, the actual length of a cubit is still uncertain.

25:16. the testimony. This term refers to the tablets of the law which were given to Moses. It was common practice in the ancient Near East to house law codes in specially constructed containers to represent their presentation before deity.

25:17. the kapporet (size, design, function). The kapporet, "atonement cover," is a sheet of solid gold which served as the lid of the ark (with the same dimensions specified in the text), but because it appears as a separate item from the ark, it has special significance. Decorating the kapporet were two facing cherubim, whose uplifted wings nearly met above the ark and served to symbolically uphold the invisible throne of God. Thus with the ark as the "footstool" and the kapporet as the support for the throne, God's presence is demonstrated to the people.

25:18-20. cherubim. Biblical descriptions as well as archaeological discoveries (including some fine ivory pieces from Nimrud in Mesopotamia, Arslan Tash in Syria and Samaria in Israel) suggest the cherubim are composite creatures (having features of a number of different creatures, like the Egyptian sphinx), often four-legged animal-bodies with wings. The cherubim appear in ancient art with some regularity flanking the thrones of kings and deities. The combination of cherubim as throne guardians, chests as footstools and statements in the Old Testament concerning Yahweh being enthroned on the cherubim (e.g., 1 Sam 4:4) supports the concept of the ark as representing the invisible throne of Yahweh. The use of empty thrones was widespread in the ancient world. They were provided for use by deities or royal personages when they were present.

25:23-30. table of bread of the Presence. The table of the Presence was a gold-encrusted, four-legged table, also carried by poles slipped through rings on each side. It held the twelve loaves of "show bread" (see Lev 24:5-9), which were perpetually displayed and replaced at the end of each week.

25:31-40. lampstand. The seven-branched golden menorah, or lampstand, stood in the outer sanctum of the tabernacle opposite the table of the Presence. Although its dimensions are not given, the lampstand was to be hammered from a single block of gold. Its function was to illumine the sacred precinct, and only Aaron and his sons were allowed to tend it. Numerous reliefs and even mosaics of menorahs have been found from New Testament times, when it had come to be used as a symbol for Judaism and for eternal life, but it is generally believed that these do not take the same form as the menorah of the Old Testament period. The earliest representation of the menorah is on a coin from the first century B.C., which depicts a very plain-looking seven-branched lampstand with a sloping base. Some believe that the lampstand represented the Tree of Life—a popular symbol in artistic work.

26:1-6. linen curtains with cherub design. Of the four layers which cover the tabernacle, this is the innermost. It consists of ten multicolored sheets of fine linen, decorated with a cherubim design. Each sheet measures twenty-eight cubits by four cubits (42 feet by 6 feet). They are sewn together in paired sets of five, producing two longer sheets, which are in turn clipped together with blue loops and gold clasps (total measurement, 60 feet by 42 feet).

26:7-13. goat-hair curtains. The layer of goat-hair curtains served as a protective covering over the linen curtains that cover the tabernacle. Like the linen curtains, they consisted of eleven separate sheets sewn together and then connected with loops and bronze clasps (measuring 66 feet by 45 feet).

26:14. ram-skin covering. No measurement is given for this third layer covering the top of the tabernacle, which was made of tanned ram's skin. These two middle layers may serve the dual purpose of protecting the tabernacle and of symbolizing the two animals most important to the economy (sheep and goats).

26:14. sea cow covering. The progression of coverings over the tabernacle is from finest fabric to strongest leather, thus providing an impermeable seal to the sacred precinct within. No measurements are given for the fourth layer of "sea cow" or dolphin hide (this would have served best as waterproofing; see 25:5).

26:15-30. the frame. The skeletal structure which held up the drapes screening the tabernacle was made of acacia wood. It consisted of three walls of upright planks connected by tenons and crossbars, which were inserted into gold or silver-lined slots. The entire structure measured thirty cubits (45 feet) in length and ten cubits (15 feet) in height and width.

26:31-35. the veil. The veil curtained off a cube-shaped section of the tabernacle, creating an inner sanctum known as the Holy of Holies where the ark of the covenant was housed. It measured ten cubits (15 feet) on each side, was hung from four gold-inlaid posts standing in silver bases and was made of multicolored yarns and fine linen. A cherubim design was stitched into it, as on the innermost hanging over the tabernacle.

26:1-36. design, size and layout of tabernacle. The tabernacle was a rectangular structure (50 cubits wide and 100 cubits long, or 75 feet by 150 feet) divided into two equal, sacred squares (75 feet by 75 feet), comprising three separate zones of holiness: the holy of holies containing the ark; the holy place, outside the veil, which housed the lampstand, the altar of incense and the table of the bread of presence; and the outer court, where the sacrificial altar was placed. Both the ark and the sacrificial altar were located at the exact center of their respective sacred squares. The entrance to the outer court was located at the eastern end and was 20 cubits (30 feet) wide. The most sacred zones of the tabernacle (oriented on an east-west axis) could only be reached through the outer court. Portable structures of similar design (curtains hung over gold-gilded beams or poles) are found in Egypt as early as the mid-third millennium in both sacred and secular use. Egyptian royal tents of the nineteenth dynasty were a two-roomed tent with the outer chamber twice the length of the inner.

26:1-36. portable sanctuaries in ancient Near East. Although there is no evidence of a portable sanctuary quite as elaborate as the tabernacle, it is clear that Bedouin groups (both ancient and modern) do carry sacred objects and portable altars with them from one encampment to another. Ancient Near Eastern texts also describe the itineraries of priestly processions that took the images of gods, along with their various divine accoutrements, from one town to another within a kingdom. This allowed the god to visit shrines, make inspection tours of facilities owned by the principal temple community and participate in annual festivals outside the capital. Canaanite religious texts also speak of pavilions used for the dwelling of the gods. Archaeologists have found the remains of a Midianite tent shrine at Timnah that dates to the twelfth century B.C. It too was composed of curtains draped over poles, though it was not portable.

26:1-36. direct axis design of sanctuaries. The architectural symmetry of ancient sanctuaries suggests the importance placed in antiquity on the geometry of sacred space. The divine being was considered the center of power in the universe. Therefore the sanctuary, at least symbolically, should reflect this central role by mapping the sacred precinct into zones of progressive holiness and placing both the altar and the object associated with the god's presence at the exact center of the most holy spot within the sanctuary. In this way a nexus of power and majesty was created that made the prayers, sacrifices and invocations to the god more effective. Temples are typically classified by archaeologists on the basis of the arrangement of the chambers through which one gains access to the inner recesses and by the orientation of the main chamber, where the presence of the god is represented. "Direct axis" architecture allowed one to walk in a straight line from the altar to the inner shrine (cella). "Bent axis" required a ninety-degree turn between the altar and the place where the image stood. The door through which one entered the rectangular cella in the direct access arrangement could either be on the short wall ("long room") or the long wall ("broad room"). The tabernacle was of the "direct axis" style, but it was neither long room nor broad room because the holy of holies (cella) was square, not rectangular.

27:1-8. altar. The altar was the place for the burning of sacrifices. Because it had to be portable, it was constructed as a hollow square (5 cubits by 5 cubits; 3 cubits high) made from acacia logs, with horns at each corner, and overlaid with a bronze sheath and a bronze grate. A variety of utensils (firepans, shovels, meat forks and sprinkling bowls) were used in dealing with sacrificial meat and ash. Like the ark it had attached rings and poles for easy transport. Although not as sacred as the ark, the altar also served as a touch point with God, placed at the I-axis of the outer court of the tabernacle. Its service was restricted to Aaron's priestly family, and its function tied the people to the *covenant promise of fertility and the Promised Land. Through sacrifice the people acknowledged the bounty provided by God. Thus the altar brought them into communion with the power that protected and blessed them.

27:9-19. courtyard. Temple architecture demands that the most sacred precincts be separated from the profane world of everyday life by an area of enclosed space—in the case of the tabernacle, by the courtyard. This area was marked off by linen screen walls (7 feet high), enclosing an area of approximately 11,250 square feet (100 cubits by 50 cubits). Since the inner portion of the tabernacle was fifteen feet high, these walls only screened the view from ground level and left the symbol of God's presence clearly visible. The draperies of the courtyard were held up by fifty-six columns placed in copper sockets. The use of these less valuable materials is reflective of the progression from precious to commonplace in the construction of the tabernacle.

27:21. the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons are to place olive oil lamps before the "tent of meeting," which was the "holy place" immediately outside the veil separating that area from the Holy of Holies. Here God's presence was to be made manifest to Moses, and instruction was to be given to the people through these oracular messages (see 39:32; 40:2, 6, 29). The function of this space is therefore symbolic as well as utilitarian. The presence of God is acknowledged with the perpetually burning lamps. Aaron's servicing of the lamps provides a role for the priestly community here, and the assumption of guidance, first promised to Moses and thus to the people, is implicit in its name.

27:20-21. continually burning lamps. The clearest refined olive oil was to be used to provide a perpetual light before the entrance to the Holy of Holies. These lamps, serviced by Aaron and his sons, symbolized the presence of God. The continuation of this priestly function is seen in 1 Samuel 3:3.

28:1-43

The Priests' Garments

28:1. priesthood. The creation of a professional priesthood is a mark of a maturing religious system. By singling out Aaron and his sons, God designates who is worthy to serve in the tabernacle and establishes a hereditary succession for future generations of high priests in Israel. Their lineage derives from the tribe of Levi and specifically through Aaron. Because their task will be to perform sacrifices for the people and officiate at major religious festivals, the priests have certain rights and responsibilities that no other Israelite will have. Special garments are worn only by priests. A portion of the sacrifice is set aside for them. They are not allowed to own land or to perform nonpriestly functions. They are held to a higher standard of obedience and are subject to swift punishment for failure to perform their duties or to provide the proper example to the people.

28:1. priests in ancient Near East. Every cul-

ture in the ancient Near East developed a priesthood. Only the Bedouin tribes did not set these individuals aside to perform priestly duties exclusively. Their role was to function as a part of a priestly community, serving temples, performing sacrifices, conducting religious services and staging festivals. Priests would have been educated within the temple from an early age, and their position in the priestly class was hereditary in some cases. They would have been among the few literate persons in their society and thus were relied upon to keep records of major events and tie them to the will of the gods. This process was known as *divination, and it, along with *ritual sacrifice, was the chief source of priestly power and authority. There was a distinctive hierarchy among priests—ranging from a chief priest, who sometimes rivaled the king in power, to midlevel individuals who performed daily *rituals and sacrifices, to musicians, and on down to temple servants, who performed the mundane housekeeping and custodial tasks necessary in any large community.

28:6-14. ephod. The most important of Aaron's priestly garments is the ephod, which was either a linen robe covering the upper body or a frontal piece attached to the shoulders and sashed at the waist. The use of all five colored yarns indicates its importance, as does the use of gold filigree and engraved stones. Placing the names of six tribes on each stone provided a continual reminder to all that he was representing the nation before God. The fact that the ephod is related to idols and false worship in later passages (Judg 17:5 and 8:24-27) suggests that it was a garment borrowed from Mesopotamian society—perhaps worn by priests or used to clothe idols. The breastpiece (28:15), the Urim and Thummim (28:30), and the ephod are used in *divination (1 Sam 23:9-11). Thus the high priest is clothed in garments that aid in the discernment of God's will.

28:15-30. breastpiece. Using a piece of the same multicolored linen as in the ephod, a nine-inch square pouch is created by doubling it over. This breastpiece is then securely attached to the ephod by means of gold braid and blue cords which attach to the rings on the breastpiece, the shoulder pieces of the ephod and the sash of the ephod. Embedded in gold settings on the breastpiece are twelve semiprecious stones in four rows of three stones (compare the list of precious stones in Ezek 28:13). Each stone is engraved with the name of one of the tribes of Israel and thus provides an additional reminder to all (including God) of the priest's responsibility as the people's representative. In the pouch, lying against the priest's heart, are placed the Urim and Thummim. Both these objects and the breastpiece itself are to be used as oracular devices to discern God's will. In the ancient Near East stones (including gemstones of various sorts) were believed to have *apotropaic value (offering protection from spirit forces). A seventh-century B.C. *Assyrian handbook preserves a list of various stones and what they "do"—possibilities range from appeasing divine anger to preventing migraine headaches. One ritual text lists twelve precious and semiprecious stones that are to be used to make a phylactery to be worn as a necklace.

28:30. Urim and Thummim. Unlike most of the other objects in this passage, there is no mention of "making" the Urim and Thummim. This suggests that they were already in use prior to this time and now were to be housed in the breastpiece and used by the high priest (see Lev 8:8 and Deut 33:8). No description of these objects is found in Scripture, although traditions from the Hellenistic and later periods suggest they were markers whose appearance and presentation when cast like lots would determine God's will (see Num 27:21; 1 Sam 14:37-41 and 28:6). There is no negative character attached to the Urim and Thummim as there are to other divinatory practices, and they are never mentioned in passages describing non-Israelite worship or *ritual. Nevertheless the practice of posing yes-no questions to the gods (asking *oracles) is known throughout the ancient Near East. Particularly of interest are the *Babylonian *tamitu* texts, which preserve the answers to many oracular questions. Positive and negative stones (thought to be bright stones and dark stones) were also used widely in Mesopotamia in a procedure called psephomancy. In one *Assyrian text alabaster and hematite are specifically mentioned. The yes-no question would be posed and then a stone drawn out. The same color stone would have to be drawn out three times consecutively for the answer to be confirmed. *Urim* is the Hebrew word for "lights" and therefore would logically be associated with bright or white stones. One recent study has pointed out that hematite, because of its use for weights and seals, was termed the "truth stone" in *Sumerian. The Hebrew word Thummim could have a similar meaning.

28:31-35. robe. Under the ephod, the high priest was to wear a loose-fitting, pullover blue robe that fell almost to the ankles. The collar was reinforced to prevent tearing, and

there were only armholes, no sleeves. The hem was richly decorated with embroidered pomegranates, and bells were attached between the pomegranates.

28:33-34. pomegranates. Pomegranates were embroidered around the hem of the priest's robe in blue, purple and scarlet thread. This fruit is commonly mentioned in narrative and songs (Num 13:23, 20:5; Song 4:3, 6:7) and was used in decorating Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:18). They generally are symbolic of the fertility of the Promised Land. Pomegranates were also used for decoration of ritual accessories in *Ugarit.

28:33-35. gold bells. Tiny gold bells were attached to the priest's robe between the embroidered pomegranates. Their function was to signal the high priest's movements within the Holy of Holies. They reminded the priest to perform his duties exactly according to the law and indicated to the people that he was within the holy precinct.

28:36-38. engraved plate. As a continuous reminder of his special role as priest, an engraved golden plate with the words "Holy to the LORD" is attached to his turban. It would parallel the diadem in the king's crown as symbolizing his authority. The plate of office also placed responsibility for infractions on the person in charge of all *rituals.

28:38. bearing guilt. As the person in charge of all religious *rituals, it was important that the high priest took his office seriously. Thus an engraved plate was attached to his turban as a sign of his authority and as a signal to him that he would bear the blame and the punishment for any failure to obey the laws of *ritual and sacrifice.

28:39-41. tunic. The standard garment worn by both men and women in the biblical period was a linen tunic. Worn next to the skin, ankle length, with long sleeves, it provided protection from the sun and sometimes was embroidered or given a fancy hem by the wealthy (Gen 37:3 and 2 Sam 13:18-19) or by priests.

28:39. turban. The turban was made of linen and, according to Josephus, was nonconical in shape (*Antiquities of the Jews* 3.7.6). It may be assumed that the turban of the high priest would have been more elaborate then that of ordinary priests (28:40). It had the engraved plate attached to it and would have been more colorful.

28:42-43. linen undergarments. Unlike the common people, the priests were required to wear linen undergarments beneath their tunics in order to cover their genitals. Thus they would not expose their nakedness when climbing the altar stairs or cleaning around it. Nudity, although common among Mesopotamian priests, was prohibited in Israelite practice.

29:1-46
Ordination Instructions

29:1-46. consecration ceremony. Having ordered the manufacture of the tabernacle, the ark, the altar and all the associated utensils and decorations, Moses now gives instruction about their consecration, and that of the priesthood, to the service of God. Moses functions as priest in orchestrating and performing the rituals of consecration, which will hereafter be handled by Aaron and his descendants. This is a seven-day *ritual designed to set precedents for the use of tabernacle and altar, the types of sacrifices that are to be made in these sacred precincts, and the role and privileges attached to the priests. One of the most significant items in the ritual is blood, which is the symbol of life and is sprinkled both on the altar and on the garments of the priests. Sacrificial items (wheat, cakes and oil) as well as animals are presented and burnt on the altar. In this way the tabernacle and altar are purified, preparing them for use. Some pieces of the meat are used for a wave offering and then set aside as the portion reserved for the priests. Throughout the ceremony the sense of continuity is drawn between the first consecration and all future priestly action.

29:2-3. fine wheat flour. The items used to consecrate the tabernacle, altar and priests are representative of the fertility of the land, the gifts of God to the people. The wheat flour used to make unleavened bread and cakes would be of finest quality and thus a fitting sacrifice by a people who were dependent on farming for most of their food.

29:2-3. cakes with oil. Wheat and olive oil were the chief cash crops of ancient Israel. By mixing them into a sacrificial cake, the people recognized the role of God in providing them with fertility each year. The sequence of offerings also signifies the seasonal events of planting and harvest and the agricultural festivals.

29:2-3. wafers spread with oil. The presentation of grain and meat offerings together signify the people's acceptance of the *covenant and the acknowledgment of God's role as the provider of fertility. While the significance of providing unleavened bread, cakes and wafers is not clear, it may represent either the standard baked goods of the time or items set aside for *ritual use.

29:4. wash with water. It would not be appropriate for the new priests to clothe themselves

in their new sacral garments without first taking a ritual bath. They were to be fully immersed as a part of the consecration ceremony. After this only their hands and feet had to be washed before performing their duties (30:17-21).

29:5. waistband. Only the high priest has a specially designed and woven waistband to sash his garments. The lesser priests use ordinary sashes (29:9). This would be a mark of rank and would also serve the utilitarian function of keeping his robes bound when he had to bow or make sacrifices.

29:7. anointing. In this passage and in Leviticus 8:12, only the high priest was consecrated in his office by having his head anointed with oil. However, both Aaron and his sons are anointed in Exodus 30:30 and 40:15. Anointing their heads with oil would compare with the anointing of kings in later periods (1 Sam 10:1; 16:13). In both cases the oil would symbolize the gifts of God to the people and the responsibilities now laid on their leaders through this ceremony. In Israelite practice anointing was a sign of election and was often closely related to endowment by the Spirit. See the comment on Leviticus 8:1-9.

29:8-9. tunics, headbands, sashes. Aaron's sons, who will serve as lesser priests under their father, have less elaborate priestly garments. They have distinctive clothing which sets them aside from other Israelites, but their consecration does not involve as much ceremony, just as their duties will be less important than those of the high priest.

29:10, 15, 19. laying hands on animals. As each sacrificial animal is brought to the altar, it is necessary for the priests to examine it to make sure it is suitable. Once that is done, a symbolic certification *ritual is performed in which the priests lay their hands on the animal, taking responsibility for its death and the purpose for which it is sacrificed. Some would also suggest that this constitutes an affirmation of ownership. See comment on Leviticus 1:3-4 for discussion of various possibilities.

29:12. blood on the horns of the altar. The horns of the altar are specifically symbolic of the presence of God in any sacrificial act. By placing the blood of the sacrificed bull on the horns, the priests are acknowledging that presence, the power of the God who gives life, and purifying themselves of their sin (see comment on Lev 4:7).

29:12. blood at the base of the altar. The altar is the focal point of animal sacrifice. It is the platform associated with giving God his due. For it to be fully consecrated to this service its very roots (base) must be purified with the blood of the sin offering (v. 14).

29:13. fat parts burned. No portion of the bull was to be saved, since this was a sin offering. Thus the fatty parts as well as the kidneys and liver, which might have been used for *divination (as was the practice in Mesopotamia) or given to the participants, were instead to be burned on the altar.

29:14. other parts outside the camp. Impurities and waste were to be disposed of outside of the camp (see Deut 23:12-14). Since this bull had been used for a sin offering, its meat, hide and offal had become contaminated and thus could not be consumed or used in any way (see Lev 4:12).

29:14. sin offering. There are various kinds of sacrifices and offerings performed by the Israelites: generally for thanksgiving or expiation. A sin offering was designed to purify a person who had become unclean through contact with *impurity (physical or spiritual) or because of some event (nocturnal emission in Deut 23:10). It was also used in consecrating priests, since they were required to maintain an even higher standard of *purity than ordinary Israelites. The animals which were used in these *rituals received the sin and *impurity of the persons for whom they were sacrificed. Thus their entire substance was contaminated and could not be consumed or used to produce anything. Every portion of the sacrificed animal must be disposed of, with the organs and fat burnt on the altar and the flesh, hide and bones burned to ash outside the camp. This latter act prevented the people's habitation from becoming polluted. For more information see comment on Leviticus 4:1-3.

29:15-18. ram as a burnt offering. The first ram sacrificed in the *ritual of consecration is to be completely consumed by fire on the altar. Its carcass is cut up and washed so that it fits on top of the altar and retains no contaminating offal. Meat was precious to these pastoral people, but the ram and the bull, both symbols of fertility, must be totally destroyed so that the sacrificial offering to God is complete. There can be no holding back when the sacrifice is made in honor of God's power.

29:18. pleasing aroma. The gods of Mesopotamia could also be attracted to the smell of sacrifices (as in the *Gilgamesh flood story). However, additionally they had to consume the sacrifice to sustain themselves. In Israelite tradition, a "pleasing aroma" signified a proper sacrifice that would please God (see Gen 8:21). It becomes a technical term for a sacrifice acceptable to and accepted by God (compare Lev 26:31), not something he eats.

29:20. blood on earlobe, thumb, big toe. Just

as blood is used to make the altar fit for service, so too it is used to designate the faculties of the priest: to hear the word of God, perform sacrifices with his hands and lead the people to worship with his feet. There is also an element of purification of each of these abilities through the blood of expiation (compare Lev 14:14).

29:20. blood on sides of altar. The blood of the three sacrificial animals is used to care for the sins of the newly consecrated priests. By sprinkling the first ram's blood on the altar, they also acknowledge God's power to grant life and the significance attached to their service as well as their commitment as God's servants (compare 24:5-6).

29:21. sprinkling priests with blood and oil. Blood and oil are the chief elements of the sacrificial process. By sprinkling the priests and their garments with these items, the ordination ceremony is completed, and the priests are physically marked for service (compare the marking of the people as guarantors of the *covenant in 24:8) as well as purified.

29:22-25. wave offering. In the third stage of sacrificial *ritual, portions from the basket of cereal offerings and the ram of ordination are to be elevated as a "wave offering." It is more likely that the ungainly pile of sacrificial gifts was elevated rather than actually waved, since that act would be less likely to unbalance and/or drop the sacred items. The terminology used in the text is more appropriately rendered "elevation offering" and such treatment of offerings is likewise depicted in Egyptian reliefs. This gesture physically signifies that all sacrificial items derive from and belong to God. In this case the cakes and wafers are elevated and then burnt on the altar. However, the meat from the ram will be used as the basis for a *covenantal feast that Aaron and his sons will consume, unlike the first ram, which was totally burned. A precedent is also set here regarding which portions of the sacrifice belong to the priests (note that Moses takes his share since he serves as the officiating priest—v. 26).

29:26-28. parts of sacrifice as food for priests. Since the priests were restricted entirely to religious duties and they did not own land, they were sustained through a portion of the sacrifices brought to the altar. Certain portions, the breast and the leg of the ram, were set aside specifically for the priests. Because this food had been presented for sacrifice and offered up to God, only the priests were allowed to consume it. What they did not consume was for the same reason to be destroyed.

29:29-30. priestly garments hereditary. In this section, which interrupts the discussion of sacrificial meat, provision is made for the ordination of future generations of priests. The original high priestly vestments created for Aaron were to be passed on to his successor at Aaron's death. Thus when Aaron dies Moses strips his body of all of his sacral garments and in a seven-day *ritual invests them on Aaron's son Eleazer (Num 20:22-29).

29:31. cooked in a sacred place. Since the meat of the wave offering and presentation offering was now sacred, it could not be prepared in ordinary precincts. Thus it is taken into the courtyard of the tabernacle to be cooked. In this way sacred items retain their power and authority by only being used or dealt with in similarly sacred areas.

29:34. burning leftovers. Because of its sacred nature, the sacrificial meat which has been set aside for the nourishment of priests cannot be used for any other purpose or consumed by ordinary individuals. Thus the portion which is not immediately consumed must be destroyed by fire to prevent any misuse of sacred substance.

29:36-37. making atonement. Basic to the transformation process that the sacrificial altar undergoes is the idea of purification. No item made by humans can, by definition, be pure enough to be used for God's service. Only through a lengthy (twice a day for seven days) and prescribed *ritual of daily sacrifices of valuable animals (bulls) can the altar be sufficiently purified to become holy and sacred itself. Through this process the inherent sin of the men who built the altar and the contaminated materials (in the sense that they are not holy) of which it is constructed become usable for God's service. Hereafter everything that comes in contact with the altar must be pure (both priests and sacrifices). If the level of *purity is maintained, then the sacrifices will be accepted and the people will benefit from their service. See comment on Leviticus 1:4.

29:37. whatever touches it will be holy. Because of the superior quality of the sacrificial altar's level of holiness (second only to the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle), anything that touches it becomes holy. Similarly, it is important that the altar be guarded from those persons or things which are impure so that the holiness is not lost or corrupted.

29:38. daily offerings. Caring for sin and the giving of thank offerings by the people are required daily, not just on special occasions (such as ordination). Thus the priests are to sacrifice two year-old lambs each day (known as the tamid, "perpetual" offering), one in the morning and the other in the evening. This

daily *ritual signals to the people the continual presence of God among them as well as their constant obligation to obey the *covenant. The constant flow of movement to the sacrificial altar also maintains its holiness and reinforces the role of the priests as religious professionals.

29:40. tenth of an ephah. The principal dry measure in Israel was the homer, which equaled the load carried by a donkey. This weight varies in the sources from 3.8 bushels to 6.5 bushels. The ephah (an Egyptian loan word) equaled one-tenth of a homer (Ezek 45:11), or three-eighths to two-thirds of a bushel. One-tenth of an ephah (about 1.6 quarts) of fine flour was part of the daily sacrificial offering.

29:40. fourth of a hin. The hin (an Egyptian loan word) was a liquid measure equal to about a gallon. One-fourth of a hin (one quart) of olive oil was to be mixed with the flour as part of the daily sacrificial offering. In addition, a drink offering of a quart of wine was to be given daily.

29:40-41. drink offering. A libation or drink offering was part of the daily sacrifices in the tabernacle. They were presented with the lamb and the mixture of flour and oil in the morning and in the evening to signify God's protection and favor throughout the day. The pouring out of libations was a common household practice before meals, and that *ritual is carried over in the daily sacrifices as part of a communal, *covenant meal between God and the people.

30:1-38

Incense, Oil and Water

30:1-10. incense altar. Once the tabernacle was furnished and cleansed and the priesthood was ordained, the Presence of God entered the Holy of Holies to meet regularly with Moses (29:42-43). An additional object was therefore needed that would both represent the Presence and protect humans by veiling the Presence from their eyes. This was the incense altar, a small table (18 inches square and 3 feet high) constructed of acacia wood, with horns like the sacrificial altar, and covered with gold. It was placed in the area immediately outside the veil closing off the Holy of Holies. Like the ark, this inner altar had rings for carrying it with poles. A special blend of incense was burned on this altar every morning and evening. On the Day of Atonement blood from the sacrifice was to be daubed on each of its horns as a yearly repurification process.

30:7-8. burning of incense. The use of incense has been attested archaeologically from the earliest periods in Israelite history, although few incense altars have yet been excavated *in situ in Israelite shrines (Arad is the exception). The incense used probably consisted of a mixture of frankincense and other aromatic gums. The practice of burning incense has both practical and religious purposes. The smell of burning flesh from the sacrificial altar would have been unpleasant, and incense would have helped to mask that odor. The smoke from incense was also used to fumigate sacred precincts and to cast a veil of mystery within them to represent the presence of God or to mask God's presence from human eyes. It is also possible that the billowing of incense smoke signified the prayers of the people rising to God.

30:10. yearly atonement. The Day of Atonement was a special day set aside each year to remove the contamination from the sins of the past year. According to Leviticus 23:27-32 it fell ten days after the opening of the new year. On that day the high priest was to enter the inner precincts of the tabernacle and burn incense on the golden incense altar. Blood from the special sacrifice of the day was also to be daubed on the horns of the incense altar to tie this holiest of altars and its flow of incense to the need for cleansing of the nation's sins. A more elaborate description of this yearly *ritual, including the casting of the people's sins on the scapegoat, is found in Leviticus 16.

30:11-16. census temple tax. Every male aged twenty years and older was to pay a per capita tax of one-half shekel to help support the tabernacle. There is a sense of equality in this that no distinction is made between rich and poor—all pay the same amount. However, there is also a darker image here based on the threat of a plague and divine displeasure if they do not all submit to this census. Comparison with other such countings (Num 1 and 2 Sam 24) suggest that there is a real fear of taking a census because of its use for drafting men into the military and in the levying of taxes. However, in this case, at least, the "passing over" of the men as they paid their fee and were counted seemed to signify their acceptance of their responsibility to provide support for the construction and maintenance of the tabernacle.

30:11-16. census superstition. Taking a census was a practical measure utilized by governments in the ancient Near East as early as the Ebla tablets of around 2500 B.C. The benefits derived from this practice were not necessarily appreciated by the people since they led to increased tax levies as well as military or

forced labor service. Viewed in this light, it is not surprising that popular notions existed that the census was a source of bad luck or the basis of divine displeasure. *Mari texts (eighteenth century B.C.) from Mesopotamia describe men fleeing to the mountains to avoid being counted. In 2 Samuel 24 God punishes David and Israel with a plague after a census is taken. The explanation for such a calamity could be that the census was motivated by human pride.

30:13. shekels. The half-shekel payment made by each Israelite male as temple tax, at least until the sixth century B.C., would have been made in a measure of precious metal, not coined money. The average shekel weighed 11.4 grams, but this text refers to a "sanctuary shekel," which is believed to be a smaller fraction of the common shekel. Weights discovered in archaeological finds evidence a shekel weighing 9.3-10.5 grams. The sanctuary weight listed here may also refer to a shekel of more standard value and weight than the "marketplace" shekel.

30:13. gerah. The gerah (an *Akkadian loan word) is the smallest of the Israelite measures of weight. It weighed approximately half a gram and was equivalent to one-twentieth of a shekel.

30:17-21. bronze basin. A water-filled bronze basin was to be placed near the entrance to the courtyard between the sacrificial altar and the tabernacle proper. It was to be used by the priests to wash their hands and feet each time they entered this holy precinct, in preparation for their holy service. In this way they washed the impurities of the outside world from their hands before making sacrifices and cleaned their feet so that they did not track in the dust and grime of the street. This item is added to the list of tabernacle utensils after the ordination and consecration since it was to be used daily, not just on special occasions.

30:22-33. anointing oil. A special formula is prescribed for the mixture of precious spices (myrrh, cinnamon, cane, cassia) with olive oil into a substance for anointing the tabernacle and all of its furnishing as well as the priests. The process involved soaking the spices in water, boiling the water, then aging the concoction with the oil until the fragrance permeated the whole. To insure its exclusivity, the anointing oil is to be concocted by a professional perfumer and is designed to mark the sacred precincts and priests as holy.

30:23-24. spices. Since all of the spices listed in the anointing oil are imported products, they would have been expensive and extremely precious. They came from southern Arabia (myrrh), India or Sri Lanka (cinnamon), and other distant lands (see Jer 6:20 for fragrant cane) by sea and by way of the established caravan routes. They were mixed into aromatic oils by guilds of professional perfumers and were used for personal enhancement as well as to anoint priests and sacred places.

30:30-33. sacred recipe. The recipe for the anointing oil was reserved for sacred use. The special fragrance of the holy substance was only for the tabernacle and its personnel and was not to be used for secular purposes.

30:34-38. incense recipe. The incense burned on the golden incense altar in the tabernacle was mixed according to a special recipe that was not to be duplicated or used for other purposes. The recipe includes four specific items: gum or resin, perhaps from balsam trees; onycha from the glands of mollusks; galbanum, a resin native to Persia which adds pungency to other scents; and frankincense from southern Arabia.

31:1-18
Preparation for Construction of the Tabernacle and Its Furnishings

31:1-11. wood and metal craftsmanship. Having given instructions on how to construct the tabernacle and its furnishings, Moses now singles out craftsmen to carry out the task. They are said to have been given by God great skill in metalworking, engraving and carpentry. The idea of a deity lending expertise to the craftsmen involved in a sacred task is also attested in the god Ea guiding the skills of the experts who produced the cult statue of Sippar (ninth century). These two will then supervise the team of trained workers who will shape the various pieces of the tabernacle; cover many of its sacred objects with bronze and gold, stitch the fabrics used for the canopy, veil, and vestments of the priests; and engrave the stones for the ephah and breastplate.

31:12-17. sabbath as a sign of the covenant. While the individual's sign of participation in the *covenant is *circumcision, the sign of Israel's corporate participation in the covenant is the keeping of the sabbath. Like circumcision, the keeping of the sabbath is a continuous obligation required of each generation. Unlike circumcision, it is not a single act but an attitude to be consistently maintained and periodically expressed in action. With instruction given for construction of the tabernacle and workmen chosen to perform the task, it is now necessary to tie even this sacred work to the law of sabbath. Even this work must cease

every seventh day as a sign of respect for God's role as the Creator and in acceptance of the covenantal promise to obey God's command (see 20:8-11). Although refraining from work may be an economic burden, this is counterbalanced by the rejuvenation of the spirit and the body through rest. The commandment to rest on the sabbath is so important that the death penalty is imposed on all violators.

31:14-15. work as criterion (profane vs. holy). The sign of obedience to the *covenant is the willingness to cease work on the sabbath. Neither profane nor holy work may be done on this day of total rest. No specific examples are given here, but the text cites both exclusion from the community and execution as punishment for violators. This may mean that each individual case would have to be examined to determine if the act performed was to be defined as "work" (see examples in Num 15:32-26 and Jer 17:21).

31:18. two tablets of the testimony. This statement in which God gives Moses the two stone tablets returns the narrative to the point where it was broken off at 24:18. It also provides the narrative indicator that the parenthetical material on the construction of the tabernacle and the consecration of the priesthood is at an end and that the storyteller is about to resume the narrative of the events on Mount Sinai. The term "tablets of the testimony" also appears in 32:15 and is the basis for the name "ark of the testimony" (25:16-22).

32:1-35
The Golden Calf

32:1. make us gods who will go before. Moses was the Israelites' sole contact with Yahweh and was the mediator of Yahweh's power and guidance, and, for all the people knew, he might be dead. With him gone it was believed that contact with Yahweh was lost and that they therefore needed a replacement mediator to serve the role of "going before them." This role is filled by an angel in 33:2. The calf is formed to likewise fill the role of Yahweh's representative.

32:2-4. calf idol. Bull or calf figurines, made either of bronze or of a combination of metals, have been found in several archaeological excavations (Mount Gilboa, Hazor and Ashkelon), but they are only three to seven inches long. The calf symbol was well known in the Canaanite context of the second millennium and represented fertility and strength. The gods were typically not depicted in the form of bulls or calves but portrayed standing on the back of the animal. Nevertheless worship of the animal image was not unknown, and there is little in the biblical text to suggest the Israelites understood the figure merely as a pedestal (not unlike the ark). The fact that the calf is worshiped in the context of a feast to Yahweh suggests that this may be a violation of the second commandment rather than the first.

32:4. manufacture of calf. When the heated gold was pliable enough, Aaron began to shape it, probably around a carved wooden figure.

32:4. these are your gods. The proclamation "These are your gods" implies that the calf is in some way representative of Yahweh—history is not being rewritten to suggest that a different deity was responsible for the deliverance.

32:5-6. altar for festival to Yahweh. Since the altar was built for the celebration of a sacred feast, it may be concluded that the altar was for sacrificial use, as verse 6 states. But just as the worship of Yahweh had been corrupted by introducing an image to represent him, so it was also corrupted in the conduct of the Israelites in worship. Their coarse and excessive carousing was a typical feature of pagan *fertility festivals.

32:9-14. anger of God. In ancient Near Eastern religions it was believed that gods habitually became angry with their worshipers (for both unknown and unknowable reasons) and lashed out at them. Moses' plea is thus focused on preserving the distinctiveness of Yahweh's reputation.

32:15-16. inscribed front and back. The use of two tablets probably indicates that Moses was given two copies, not that some of the commandments were on one tablet and some on the other. The fact that they were stone suggests a larger size than clay tablets would have been, though inscribed stone tablets such as the Gezer calendar were small enough to fit in the palm of the hand. The Egyptian practice of this period was to use flakes of stone chipped from rocks. Inscription on front and back was not unusual. When the writing reached the bottom of one side, the scribe would often continue around the bottom edge and move onto the second side. Even flakes that fit in the palm of the hand could contain fifteen to twenty lines.

32:19-20. dancing. Dancing was often connected with cultic festivals in the ancient world and, especially in *fertility contexts, was often sensual in nature, though not necessarily so. Dancing is also known in the context of celebration of military victories, which would fit

with this being a celebration of the deity who brought them out of Egypt.

32:19. breaking of tablets. The breaking of the tablets, though a result of Moses' anger, is not a fit of temper. The severance of a *covenant was typically symbolized by the breaking of the tablets on which the terms of the agreement were inscribed.

32:20. drinking idol-dust brew. The sequence of burn-grind-scatter-eat is also found in a *Ugaritic text to indicate total destruction of a deity. That gold does not burn is insignificant (the gold was probably shaped around a wooden figure; see comment on 32:4)—a very destructive action is being carried out. The forced drinking by the Israelites is not specified as punishment against them but represents the final, irreversible destruction of the calf.

32:30-35. the book. The concept of divine ledgers is well known from Mesopotamia, where the ledgers concern both the decrees of one's destiny and one's rewards and punishments. For further information see comment on Psalm 69:28.

32:35. the plague. Epidemic disease is known from numerous sources throughout the ancient Near East, but specific identification is impossible in the absence of symptoms.

33:1-6

Preparing to Leave Sinai

33:2. peoples of the land, flowing with milk and honey. For the peoples of the land see the comment on 3:8, and for the description of Canaan as "flowing with milk and honey" see the comment on 3:7-10.

33:7-23

Moses' Meeting with the Lord

33:7-10. tent of meeting. The system prescribed in the law (chaps. 25-30) was for a sanctuary to be built so that the Lord could dwell in their midst. Given the present situation, however, the Lord is not going to dwell in their midst, but the tent of meeting was to be set up outside the camp where Moses would receive guidance. Nothing is said to take place inside this tent, but the Lord meets with Moses at the door of the tent when the pillar of cloud descends. There are no sacrifices offered there, and it contains no altar. It is a place for prophetic, not priestly, activity. Once the tabernacle is constructed and takes its place in the middle of the camp, it also serves as a tent of meeting.

33:11. speaking face to face. Speaking face to face is an idiom suggesting an honest and open relationship. It does not contradict 33:20-23. Numbers 12:8 uses a different expression with the same meaning, "mouth to mouth."

33:18-23. God's glory, God's back, God's face. Moses' request to see the glory of God is not a request for God to do what he has never done before. In 16:7 the people were told they would see God's glory (see also Lev 9:23). Moses has negotiated for God's presence to accompany them (actually, to precede them). Moses requests that he might see the presence/glory of God taking his place in the lead. God agrees but warns that his face may not be seen. The concept of deity having an awesome, unapproachable appearance was not limited to Israelite theology, for in Mesopotamia the gods displayed their power through their *melammu,* their divine brilliance.

34:1-35

New Tablets and More Laws

34:6-7. God's attributes and willingness to punish to third and fourth generation. Moses had asked to "know" God's ways (33:13), and this list of the thirteen attributes of God (according to Jewish tradition) serve as his answer. It is not unusual in the ancient world to find lists of various deities' attributes. While mercy and justice figure prominently among them, many lists are more interested in attributes of power, while this one focuses on the benevolent graciousness of God. This list is quoted many times in the Scriptures (Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3) and forms a sort of confessional statement. The litany of God's characteristics is still used in Jewish liturgy today and was probably an established part of the temple worship prior to the exile. Although compassion, constancy and the reliability of God's love are stressed, the conse-quences of failure to obey God's command are made perfectly clear by the magnification of punishment on future generations (see Deut 5:9). Punishment to the third or fourth generation expresses the fact that *covenant violation brings guilt on the entire family. "The third and fourth generation" thus refers to all living members of the family. This is a stark reminder of communal guilt after the incident of the golden calf (32:19-35).

34:12-13. destruction of pagan worship objects. In this section, which reiterates the importance of obedience to the commandments, special attention is given to the destruction of all forms of pagan worship, especially *cult objects and idols. This may be another re-

sponse to the golden calf incident (32:19-35). It is clear that the inhabitants of the Promised Land will have other gods and other ways of worshiping them. The Israelites are warned not to be enticed into alliance with these people or into worshiping their gods. Thus they are not to leave any sign of foreign worship intact. Carrying out this command would be evidence of great faith, for the destruction of sacred objects was considered a grave offense to a deity and was believed to result in the severest of punishments. The obedience of the Israelites would be tangible expression of their confidence that God could protect them from reprisals.

34:13. Asherah poles. The goddess *Asherah (under various related names) appears to be the divine consort of the principal male deity in a number of Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian pantheons: the *Babylonian storm god Amurru; the *Ugaritic god *El; and perhaps even the Canaanite god *Baal. She was often represented in the Bible by sacred poles erected near an altar. Her popularity among Israelites still tainted by a polytheistic worldview may be suggested by the inscription from Kuntillet ʿAjrud in the northwest part of the Sinai, "Yahweh and his Asherah." The order to cut down these cultic poles signified the need to purify the nation of foreign influence. It also follows the theme in this section of obedience to the commandments of a "jealous God" who would not countenance the worship or the symbols of rival deities (20:4-5).

34:16. sacred prostitution. One can distinguish between several different categories. In "sacred" prostitution, the proceeds go to the temple. In "cultic" prostitution, the intent is to insure *fertility through sexual *ritual. We must also differentiate between occasional sacred/cultic prostitution (as in Gen 38) and professional sacred/cultic prostitution (as in 2 Kings 23:7). The evidence for cultic prostitution in ancient Israel or elsewhere in the ancient Near East is not conclusive. Canaanite texts list prostitutes among the temple personnel, and *Akkadian literature attests those who were dedicated for life to serve the temple in this way. Although the Hebrew word used here is related to an Akkadian word for prostitute, this does not prove that any religious ritual or cultic practice is involved. It is quite possible for prostitutes to be employed by temples as a means of raising funds without their having any official status as priestesses. Furthermore, since women often did not have personal assets, sometimes the only way of earning money by which to pay a vow appeared to be prostitution. The injunction against bringing the wages of a prostitute to the temple may, however, be a reaction against practices like that of the *Ishtar temple servants in the Neo-Babylonian period, who hired out female members of their community as prostitutes. Their wages would have been placed in the temple treasury. All of this demonstrates the existence of sacred prostitution, both occasional and professional, in Israel and the ancient Near East. But the existence of cultic prostitution on either level is more difficult to prove. Cultic prostitution is not easily confirmed in Mesopotamia, unless one includes the annual sacred marriage ritual. But it is hard to imagine that prostitutes serving at the temple of Ishtar (who personified sexual force) were not viewed as playing a sacred role in the fertility cult.

34:17. cast idols. It was a fairly common practice (attested by archaeological data) to mass produce images of many of the gods of the ancient Near East using cast molds. They could thus be manufactured in a variety of metals or clay and sold to individuals, who would in turn establish private shrines in their homes (see Judg 17:4-5). The prohibition here is a specific example further clarifying the commandment in 20:4 and speaks to the case of the casting of the golden calf in 32:2-4.

34:18. Feast of Unleavened Bread. This is a reiteration of the commandment in 23:15. It gains greater authority here by being included in the ritual version of the Ten Commandments (see 34:28).

34:19-20. first-born offerings. This commandment in the ritual version of the Ten Commandments is a repetition of the injunction given during the exodus narrative to redeem the first-born sons and the first-born of their livestock (13:11-13).

34:21. sabbath. This command to rest on the sabbath is a repetition of 20:9 (see comment there).

34:22. Feast of Weeks. This is the same wheat-harvest festival that is described as the Feast of Harvest in 23:16, one of the three major festivals of the agricultural year. It gains extra authority from its inclusion in the ritual version of the Ten Commandments.

34:22. Feast of Ingathering. This is the same spring-harvest festival that is described in 23:17. These major agricultural festivals are also mentioned in Deuteronomy 16:9-17. The additional promise to protect the harvesters from attack by neighboring peoples is a further incentive to the people to comply with the commandment to bring their harvest offerings three times a year.

34:23-24. pilgrimages. This is the same com-

mand to come with their harvest offerings that is set out in 23:17 and Deuteronomy 16:11, 14. Every male is required to appear before the Lord three times a year with the fruits of his labor in order to insure the future fertility of the land and to demonstrate compliance with the *covenant.

34:25. no blood with yeast. This command in the ritual version of the Ten Commandments is a repetition of the law in 23:18. Yeast allows bread to rise but is also associated with the corruption or spoiling of food and so must not be mixed with the blood, a symbol of life.

34:25. Passover leftovers. This command regarding the Passover meal first appears in 12:8-10 and is reiterated in 23:18. Its inclusion here follows the sequence established of laws concerning the major agricultural festivals and reinforces the tie between this group of laws and the exodus event. The prohibition of keeping leftovers is a sign of the sacred character of the feast.

34:26 first fruits. This command is a repetition of the law in 23:19. Just as the first-born son is redeemed through sacrifice, so too is the cereal and fruit harvest redeemed for the people's use by bringing the first of the harvest to God as a sacrifice.

34:26. kid in mother's milk. This command is a repetition of the law in 23:19. It is the basis for the prohibition against the mixture of milk and meat in cooking and in sacrifice. It may also reflect a reaction against such practices in Canaanite worship.

34:28. Ten Commandments, ritual version. The first set of Ten Commandments, which were written on two stone tablets by God, was destroyed by Moses in his disgust over the unfaithfulness of the people in the golden calf incident (32:19). Thus a second set of tablets is inscribed in 34:28, but the laws do not exactly correspond to those found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. There is a greater emphasis on the exodus event in the laws included in this second list. It is also much more heavily balanced toward proper worship practices (including nearly verbatim sections from chap. 23) than the first set of the commandments.

34:29. Moses' "horns." The radiance of God is reflected in the shining texture of Moses' face when he returns with the tablets of the law. Although he is at first unaware of this phenomenon, Moses and the people recognize it as evidence that Moses has had direct contact with God. Subsequently, he wears a veil over his face to hide the radiance of his skin from the people. Jerome used the word *cornuta,* "horns," in translating Hebrew *qaran,* "radiant," in the Vulgate (c. A.D. 400) because the Hebrew term often refers to horns. Consequently tradition held that Moses grew horns as a result of this experience. The mistake is graphically portrayed in the horned statue of Moses sculpted by Michelangelo in the sixteenth century. The relatedness of horns and radiance can be seen in the ancient Near Eastern iconography that depicts rays or horns as symbols of power on the crowns of deities. These are related to the divine glory (Akkadian *melammu*) that emanated from the gods, especially from their heads or crowns. So, for instance, the goddess Inanna in a *Sumerian hymn is portrayed as having a terrible countenance that glows radiantly and intimidates all those around her. A closer parallel may be found in the instance of Samsuiluna (son of *Hammurabi), who receives messengers from the god *Enlil whose faces are radiant. One text makes reference to the god Enlil "whose horns gleam like the rays of the sun."

35:1-4
Sabbath

35:2-3. lighting a fire on the sabbath. This command repeats the injunction against any form of sabbath labor found in 31:15, with the additional statement prohibiting the lighting of a fire on the sabbath. It is another expansion on the theme of those types of work that could not be performed on the sabbath (see 34:21). Later rabbinic pronouncement required the kindling of a light prior to the sabbath so that the house would not be left in darkness. However, no further fueling of the fire was allowed on the sabbath.

35:4—39:31
Carrying Out the Instructions

These chapters discuss the actual construction of the tabernacle. They include the gathering of the materials (35:4-29) and the introduction of Bezalel and Oholiab as the chief craftsmen and the selection of their crew (35:30—36:7; cf. 31:1-10). Exodus 36:8-38 describes the building of the tabernacle to the exact dimensions outlined in 26:1-36. This is followed by the construction of the ark (37:1-9; see 25:10-22), the lampstand (37:17-24; see 25:31-40), the altar of incense (37:25-29; see 30:1-10), the altar of burnt offering (38:1-8; see 27:1-8) and the courtyard (38:9-20; see 27:9-19), and a summary of the materials used by the craftsmen (38:21-31). The final section describes the creation of the vestments for the priests: the ephod (39:2-7; see 28:6-14), the breastpiece (39:8-21; see 28:15-30) and the other priestly garments (39:22-31; see 28:31-43).

Moses then inspects everything, certifies it is correct and according to God's command, and gives it his blessing (39:32-43).

38:8. women who served at the entrance. In the ancient Near East there are many examples of women serving temples in various capacities. From menial tasks to priestly duties, from celibacy to prostitution, from short-term vows to lifelong dedication, examples of all sorts are available. It is therefore difficult to identify the nature of the service that the women mentioned here are performing. In 1 Samuel 2:22 the indictment of the sexual misconduct of Eli's sons suggests that the women either were involved in some duty of piety or were virgins. It must be noted, however, that there is no evidence of religiously motivated celibacy in Israel, and the text does not describe the women as virgins.

38:24. gold from the wave offering. The metals used in the construction of the tabernacle are listed in descending order of their value. As was done with the sacrificial meat set aside for the use of the priests (29:27), these materials were first presented as a wave offering to God as a way of consecrating them to their purpose.

38:24. 29 talents, 730 shekels of gold. The total amount of gold used in the decoration of the tabernacle's furnishings is described in talents (the largest unit of Israelite weight measure, equaling 3,000 shekels). The talent weighed 75.6 pounds, while the shekel weighed 0.4 ounces. Thus the total weight of gold used was 2,210.65 pounds.

38:25. 100 talents, 1775 shekels of silver. The total amount of silver given and used for the embellishment of the tabernacle's furnishings was 7,601 pounds (based on 3,000 shekels at 0.4 ounces equaling one talent and weighing 75.6 pounds). This amount is also linked to the total atonement tax (30:11-16) collected from each Israelite male.

38:26. beka. The beka is a weight of measure equal to one half of a shekel, that is, 0.2 ounces. This was the amount of the atonement tax exacted from every man twenty years old and above to provide funds for the construction and maintenance of the tabernacle (see 30:11-16).

38:26. number of Israelites. The number of men counted in the census and paying the atonement tax (see 30:11-16) of one-half shekel of silver is 603,550. This is the same number listed in the census in Numbers 1:46, which was used to determine the number of males who were twenty years old and thus able to serve in the military.

38:29-31. 70 talents, 2,400 shekels of bronze. With the equation of 3,000 shekels (0.4 ounces) per talent (75.6 pounds), the total amount of bronze presented as a wave offering and used in the construction of the tabernacle was 5,350 pounds. This more durable metal was used for the bases of the entranceway, the bronze altar and its grating, and the altar utensils, as well as the bases for each of the poles supporting the tent and the tent pegs.

39:32—40:38
Completion of the Tabernacle

40:17. timing. The tabernacle was erected on New Year's Day, two weeks short of the anniversary of the exodus event and exactly nine months after the people arrived at Mount Sinai. The construction process had been carried out with no deviation from the instructions given by God. It was only appropriate that a new era in the manner of worship should begin on New Year's Day.

LEVITICUS

1:1-17
The Burnt Offering

1:1-2. tent of meeting. Prior to the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus the tent of meeting was outside the camp and served as aplace of revelation (see the comment on Ex 33:7-10). However, now that the tabernacle is in operation, it also is referred to as the tent of meeting.

1:1-2. revelation of rituals. In the ancient Near East the priests undoubtedly claimed deity to be the source of the ritual procedures they used, though documents preserving such rituals do not present themselves as divine revelation as here. Some ritual procedures were prescribed through divination or by prophetic oracle, but they were not permanently established by those mechanisms. Early Sumerian literature portrays the mother goddess giving instructions for purification, petition and appeasement.

1:2. animal sacrifice. There have been many

theories about what thinking was represented in the sacrificial system. In some cultures sacrifice was viewed as a means of caring for the deity by providing food. Others saw the sacrifice as a gift to please the god and request his aid. In other contexts the sacrifices have been viewed as a means of entering into relationship with deity or maintaining that relationship. These are only a few of over a dozen possibilities. The history of animal sacrifice is difficult to trace. Earliest *Sumerian literature, specifically the Lugalbanda Epic, attests that sacrifices (better considered "ritual slaughter") originated as a means of permitting meat consumption. Sharing the meat with the deity allowed people to slaughter the animal for their food. Earliest archaeological evidence for sacrifice comes from the altars of the Ubaid period in fourth millennium B.C. Mesopotamia. Through most of *Assyrian and *Babylonian history, *ritual slaughter was carried out in order to obtain the entrails, believed to provide omens.

1:3-4. burnt offering. The burnt offering is always a male animal that is completely burned on the altar, except for the skin. This is the type of sacrifice that was offered by Noah and the type that Isaac was supposed to be. Other peoples are portrayed in the Bible as making burnt offerings (e.g., Num 23:14-15), and texts from Syria (*Ugarit and *Alalakh) and Anatolia (the *Hittites) testify to the practice in Syro-Palestine. In contrast there is not yet any evidence of this type of sacrifice in Egypt or Mesopotamia. The burnt offering serves as a means to approach the Lord with a plea. The plea could concern victory, mercy, forgiveness, purification, favor or any number of other things. The purpose of the offering is to entreat the deity's response. At least one each day was offered up on behalf of the people of Israel. Special ceremonies and festival days also generally featured burnt offerings.

1:3. male. Male animals were both more valuable and more expendable. A herd could be sustained with only a few males in proportion to the many females needed to bear the young. This would mean that a large percentage of the males that were born could be used for food or sacrifice. On the other hand, the good strong males were desirable because their genetic traits would be reflected in a large portion of the herd.

1:4. laying hand on the head. The laying on of the hand is an important part of the sacrificial *ritual. It is not designed to transfer sin, for it is used in sacrifices that do not deal with sin. Other possibilities are that the offerer in some way identifies with the animal, perhaps as his substitute, or identifies the animal as belonging to him. Most occurrences of the ritual confirm that either transferring or designating is taking place (or both), but it is not always clear what is being transferred or designated, and it may vary from one situation to another.

1:4. atonement. The function of this sacrifice as well as others is "to make atonement" (NIV). Many scholars now agree, however, that "atonement" is not the best translation for the concept on either the *ritual or the theological level. Perhaps most convincing is the fact that in the ritual texts the object of "atonement" is neither the sin nor the person, but a holy object connected with God's presence, such as the ark or the altar. A second important observation is that in a number of cases this "atonement" is necessary even though no sin has been committed (for instance, the ritual *impurity of women each month). For these and other reasons recent scholars have preferred "purification" or, more technically, "purgation," as the translation. So the altar would be purged on behalf of the offerer whose sin or *impurity had ritually tarnished it. The purpose was to maintain the sanctity of God's presence in their midst. The ritual, like a disinfectant, is normally remedial, but it can be preventative. The agent is usually blood, but not always. This decontamination of the sanctuary renders the offerer clean and paves the way for his reconciliation with God. The purging of objects (including cities, houses, temples and persons) from ritual contamination or evil influence by wiping or rubbing on a substance is also known in ancient Near Eastern practice, though these are mainly magical rites.

1:5-9. role of priests. Some aspects of the *ritual were performed by the priests, because only the priests had access to the altar and the holy place. (See comment on Exodus 28:1 for general information.) The priests of the ancient Near East were involved not only in sacrificial rituals but also in *divination and other magical rites. Incantations and general advice concerning appeasement of the gods were also under the jurisdiction of the priests. Priests were expected to be skilled in the knowledge of which rituals were to be used for any desired results and in the appropriate performance of the rituals.

1:5. importance of blood. Blood serves as the mechanism for ritual cleansing in Israel—a concept not shared by its ancient Near Eastern neighbors. The blood represented the life or life force of the animal, so the animal had to be killed for the blood to have efficacy. See the comment on 17:11 for more information.

1:5. sprinkling on the altar. The sprinkling of the blood on all sides of the altar is the symbolic means of applying the death of the animal to the purging of any contamination that might interfere with the entreaty that is being made on the occasion of the sacrifice. The blood represents the life/death of the animal, and the altar represents the sanctuary (God's presence) and is specifically the place where a request before God would be made.

1:8-9. parts. The pieces include the head as well as the suet (the fat that surrounds the internal organs). The only parts washed are the entrails (intestines) and the legs, both so that no dung is present on the altar.

1:9. pleasing aroma. It is typical for sacrifices to yield what is identified as the pleasing aroma of roasting meat. While it is certainly anthropomorphic (picturing God in human terms) to phrase it this way, cooked meat would have generally been used only for communal meals and special occasions, so important concepts of community were associated with the scent (like the smell of a Thanksgiving meal). It would be no different from God's being pleased by a sight or sound. In surrounding ancient Near Eastern thought the anthropomorphism is much stronger, for there the gods need and receive sustenance from food, and the smell is associated with their anticipation of a meal.

1:10-13. north side of altar. The north side of the altar is indicated, most likely because that is where there was the most room for this work to be done.

1:14-17. birds as offering. Birds, mainly domesticated doves, were the offering used by those who were too poor to own or to give up one of the larger herd animals. Texts from *Alalakh and Anatolia show that birds were also suitable sacrifices in surrounding cultures. Recent study has suggested it is not the crop that was removed but the crissum, including the tail, anus and intestines. Again, then, this is a matter of cleaning the animal in preparation for sacrifice.

1:16. east side where the ashes are. As early as the rabbis, it was suggested that the ash heap was on the east side because that was farthest away from the sanctuary, but the text never offers a reason.

2:1-16
The Grain Offering

2:1-3. grain offering. The rabbis considered the grain offering to be a substitute for the burnt offering for poor people. Mesopotamian practice is known to have made similar provision for the poor. The word used to describe this offering means "gift" or tribute. The offering is used in situations where respect or honor are intended. The same term is used the same way in *Ugaritic and *Akkadian (Canaan and Mesopotamia). It is typically found on occasions of celebration rather than the context of sadness or mourning. Generally a small portion was burned on the altar as a token of the gift to the Lord, while the remainder was given to the officiating priest. Sometimes it was offered in conjunction with other offerings.

2:1. fine flour with oil and incense. The ingredients of this offering were grain, oil and incense. The grain was the grits or semolina left in the sieve after wheat was ground into flour. The oil was olive oil. The best-quality oil was extracted by crushing the olives. But for the grain offerings the lower quality was acceptable; this was extracted through pressing and grinding. Oil was used as shortening in cooking and was easily combustible. The incense was frankincense, which was made from the gum resin of a type of tree found only in southern Arabia and Somaliland, on either side of the Gulf of Aden. This *Boswellia* tree will grow only where there is a very particular combination of rainfall, temperature and soil condition. Its fragrant aroma made the demand for frankincense high throughout the Near East, where it was used widely in both Mesopotamia and Egypt (some was found in Tutankhamen's tomb). This demand, along with its rarity, made it very expensive and one of the staples of the camel caravan trade. The grain offerings used a small amount that was entirely burned in a slow smolder.

2:3. the portion of the priests. As was the case with many offerings, the priest received a portion of the grain offering to eat. This was a means of providing for the needs of the priesthood. For fuller discussion of this practice, see comment on 6:14-18.

2:4-10. baked grain offering; cakes, no yeast, with oil. The grain offering that is for the priests' consumption can be prepared in oven, griddle or pan. The same oil and semolina are used, but no incense. Here it is specified that no yeast is to be used. Sacred use typically prohibited yeast of any sort, perhaps because it introduced a principle of spoilage (fermentation).

2:11-13. honey. Honey represents a natural resource, probably the syrup of the date rather than bees' honey. There is no evidence of bee domestication in Israel, though the *Hittites had accomplished that and used bee honey in their sacrifices (as did the Canaanites). In the

Bible honey occurs in lists with other agricultural products (see 2 Chron 31:5).

2:13. salt. Salt was used widely as symbolic of preservation. When treaties or alliances were made, salt was employed to symbolize that the terms would be preserved for a long time. *Babylonian, Persian, Arabic and Greek contexts all testify to this symbolic usage. In the Bible, likewise, the *covenant between the Lord and Israel is identified as a covenant of salt—a long-preserved covenant. Allies entering into such an agreement would generally share a communal meal where salted meat was featured. Thus the use of salt in the sacrifices was an appropriate reminder of the covenant relationship. Additionally, salt impedes the action of yeast (leaven), and since leaven was a symbol of rebellion, salt could easily represent that which inhibited rebellion. Finally, salt is symbolic for that which is infertile and therefore is used in curse pronouncements in treaties. In a Hittite treaty, the testator pronounces a curse: if the treaty is broken may he and his family and his lands, like salt that has no seed, likewise have no progeny.

2:14-16. first-fruits grain offering. Besides the grain offerings that substituted for burnt offerings and those that accompanied other sacrifices, some grain offerings were made in connection with the first fruits of the harvest. This grain has not undergone any processing but involves roasting from the sheaf in the green stage of ripening. It is likely that this offering used barley rather than wheat.

3:1-17
The Fellowship Offering

3:1-5. fellowship offering. The fellowship offering often accompanies the burnt offering and also involves an animal sacrifice. It is often present in conjunction with shared *covenantal meals (Ex 24:5; Josh 8:31) and, once kingship is instituted, often recognizes the role of the king in relation to either God or the people. A similar word referring to a gift between dignitaries also occurs in conjunction with festive meals from *Ugarit and *El Amarna (Canaanite). The three types of sacrifices in this category are the freewill offering, the vow offering and the thanksgiving offering. The common ground between them is that they provide the occasion for a meal with the offerer and his family and friends. The suet was burned on the altar, but all the meat became part of the meal.

3:4. fat covering the inner parts. The suet is the layer of fat around the internal organs, mainly the intestines, liver and kidneys. This can easily be peeled off and is inedible. Mesopotamians did not include the suet in their sacrifices, but many other cultures of the ancient Near East did. The description in the text is quite technical. J. Milgrom translates it in his commentary as follows: "The suet that covers the entrails and all the suet that is around the entrails; the two kidneys and the suet that is around them, that is on the sinews [not "loins" as in NIV]; and the caudate lobe of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys."

3:6-11. fat tail. When a flock animal is offered, the "fat tail" is included in the sacrifice. The sheep of this region had long tails, as long as four or five feet, weighing up to fifty pounds.

3:11. burned "as food." The language here again shows that the sacrificial terms used in Israel were influenced by non-Israelite notions of sacrifice. It is clear from passages such as Psalm 50:12-13 that the Israelites were not to consider sacrifices as food needed by God. Since the terminology is used only in this particular offering, perhaps it represents God's inclusion in the communal meal more than the meeting of any need for nourishment.

3:12-17. fat is the Lord's. The suet is grouped with the blood as the portion belonging to the Lord. Just as the blood is a token of the life of the animal, the suet is a token of the meat of the sacrifice.

4:1—5:13
The Purification Offering

4:1-3. sin offering. The purification offering has traditionally been called the "sin offering." The terminology has shifted as it has been recognized that the offering did not deal just with moral offenses but also with purification in cases of significant ritual uncleanness. In personal circumstances as well as in public services of consecration and in connection with certain festivals, the offering purified or purged the sanctuary (not the offerer) from the effects of the offense or condition. In the ancient Near East the purification of temples was a constant need, because the people felt that *impurity made the temple vulnerable to destructive demons. In Israel the preservation of the *purity of the sanctuary had to do with the holiness of God. If the Lord was to remain in their midst, the holiness of his sanctuary must be maintained.

4:4-12. laying on of the hands. The laying on of the hand is an important part of the sacrificial *ritual. It is not designed to transfer sin, for it is used in sacrifices that do not deal with sin. Other possibilities are that the offerer in

some way identifies with the animal, perhaps as his substitute, or identifies the animal as belonging to him. Most occurrences of the ritual confirm that either transferring or designating is taking place (or both), but it is not always clear what is being transferred or designated, and it may vary from one situation to another.

4:6. sprinkling seven times. The sevenfold sprinkling is a means of purifying all the parts of the sanctuary without going to each one individually. The sprinkling is directed toward the veil that separated the outer sanctuary from the Holy of Holies.

4:7. horns of the altar. The horns at the four corners of the altar were part of altar design throughout the ancient Near East. Research has suggested that they are emblems of the gods, though their function is unknown. Both the incense altar inside the sanctuary and the altar for sacrifice outside the sanctuary had horns.

4:7. incense altar. In this sacrifice the blood is spread on the horns of the incense altar. Incense altars were a typical piece of furniture in both Israelite and Canaanite sanctuaries. The incense offered on these altars was a mixture of spices featuring most prominently frankincense, but also gum resin, onycha and galbanum. Later Jewish tradition included a dozen spices in the mixture. The smoke of the incense represented the prayers of the people going up to God.

4:12. burning of extra parts outside the camp. Once the blood and fat are offered, the rest of the animal (including the meat) is burned outside the camp, so that none of it benefits the human offerers. There is no meal connected to this sacrifice. The ash pile from the second-temple period was just north of the wall in Jerusalem. Analysis of its contents has confirmed that it contained animal remains.

4:13-32. forgiveness. Forgiveness is the intended result of the purification and reparation offerings. The verb *forgive* has only God as the subject, never humans, and does not rule out punishment (see Num 14:19-24). We must therefore conclude that the concept concerns relationship rather than the judicial issue of punishment. The one who is offering these sacrifices seeks reconciliation with God, not pardon from punishment.

5:1-4. public charge to testify. The first case concerns one who does not respond to a public proclamation requesting information concerning a court case. It was common in the ancient Near East for such public requests to be made. The second and third cases concern contact with *impurity. The fourth concerns an impulsive oath. *Hittite texts also connect oath breaking with *impurity.

5:5-10. actions classified as "sins." These cases constitute a separate category because they are neither inadvertent nor defiant. Whether through carelessness or weakness an offense has been committed, and time has passed either because of a memory lapse or perhaps unwillingness to pay the price. This offering is unlike that of chapter 4 in that it required confession but resembles it in that it results in purification of the sanctuary and reconciliation to God.

5:11-13. no oil or incense. The offering to be brought was determined by the means one had. Even a grain offering could be used by the very poor. Oil and incense are omitted because they were associated with celebration, and this was not a festive occasion.

5:14—6:7
The Reparation Offering

5:14-16. reparation offering. The reparation offering was traditionally termed the guilt offering. Though the term that is used is often appropriately translated as guilt, the term serves a more technical function within the sacrificial system. This offering is designed to address a particular category of offense—understood to represent a breach of faith or an act of sacrilege. "Breach of faith" would appropriately describe the violation of a *covenant, while "sacrilege" refers generally to desecration of sacred areas or objects. Both of these crimes were well known in the ancient Near East, and examples can be found from the *Assyrians, *Babylonians, Egyptians, *Hittites and *Aramaeans. The Hittite *Instructions for Temple Officials* is particularly helpful in its identification of a number of categories of sacrilege, including (1) priests taking portions of sacrifices that do not belong to them, or taking valuables given to the temple for their families' use, and (2) laypeople failing to deliver offerings that belong to deity in a timely manner. The crime addressed by the purification offering (previous chapter) was contaminating the holy place with that which was unholy. The crime addressed by the reparation offering was appropriating that which was holy into the realm of that which was profane. Neither of these offerings existed in the other sacrificial systems of the ancient Near East.

5:18. ram, one fifth surcharge, sanctuary shekel. While the purification offering for a leader of Israel required a male goat, the male sheep (ram) of the reparation offering distinguishes this sacrifice from any that could be brought for purification. In addition to the

ram, the offender had to pay in silver the value of what he had desecrated and add one-fifth of the value for restitution. The sanctuary shekel used for the valuation is generally considered to be a fraction of the regular shekel, but precise information is not available. Archaeological finds do attest shekel pieces weighing 9.3-10.5 grams.

6:1-7. comparison of crimes. In the cases listed here the innocence or guilt of the supposed offender can be determined only by resort to an oath, because in most cases the evidence is not available or identifiable. While the previous section of the text concerned sacrilege with regard to sacred objects, this section refers to the sacrilege committed by swearing falsely. Fines are imposed here to deal with the offense on the civil level, where it would be classified as a misdemeanor rather than as a felony. In many of the ancient law collections, however, monetary reimbursement was used even in felony cases.

6:8-13

The Burnt Offering

6:9. burnt offering kept burning through the night. This section begins the instructions to the priests concerning the sacrifices that have been described in the previous chapters. The burnt offering was the last sacrifice to be offered for the day, and the regulations here specify that it should burn all night, with cleaning of the altar to take place in the morning. In this way petition on behalf of Israel can continue throughout the nighttime hours.

6:10. linen garments. The linen for the clothing worn by the priests was imported from Egypt, where it was also distinctively used for priests' garments. Angels, too, are said to be dressed in linen (for example, Dan 10:5).

6:14-23

The Grain Offering

6:16. provision for the priests. Whether or not the worshiper ate a portion of the sacrifice, a number of the sacrifices provided an opportunity for the priests to eat. This was also true in *Babylonian practice, where the king, the priest and other temple personnel received portions of the sacrifices. As early as the *Sumerian period, texts show that it was considered a grievous crime to eat that which had been set apart as holy.

6:16. courtyard of the tent of meeting. The Israelite temple that was discovered at Arad has the courtyard divided into two, the area closer to the sanctuary being more private. Ezekiel's description of the temple features special rooms adjoining the temple for the priests to eat their portions. It is likely, then, that the courtyard mentioned here, whether a partitioned open-air section or adjoining rooms in an area still considered the courtyard, would have been a private area.

6:18. holiness by touch. There was a contagion to various of the sacred objects that could be transmitted directly, but not secondarily (Hag 2:12). Tortuous analysis has led some experts to conclude that only objects, not persons, became holy by contact with something holy, but not all are convinced that such a distinction existed. Mesopotamian regulations likewise forbade the touching of sacred objects, but there is no discussion of contagion. An object that "contracted" holiness was confiscated by the priests and thereafter restricted to sacred use.

6:20. tenth of an ephah. This is about five cups of flour for two offerings, each one making a flat cake of eight to ten inches in diameter.

6:24-30

The Purification Offering

6:27. laundering a blood-spattered garment. Since the blood in this sacrifice has absorbed *impurity, the garment is now rendered impure and must be washed.

6:28. treatment of pottery vessels and metal vessels. Earthenware vessels retain their porosity and therefore absorb the *impurity of what they contain. Bronze or copper containers, in contrast, can easily be rinsed and thereby be purified for further use.

7:1-10

The Reparation Offering

7:2. blood sprinkled on all sides. The sprinkling of the blood on all sides of the altar is the symbolic means of applying the death of the animal to the purging of any contamination that might interfere with the entreaty that is being made. The blood represents the life and death of the animal, and the altar represents the sanctuary (God's presence).

7:3. fat parts. The suet is the layer of fat around the internal organs, mainly the intestines, liver and kidneys. This can easily be peeled off and is inedible. See 3:1-5 for more information.

7:6. eaten in a holy place. There were areas in the tabernacle compound provided for such occasions. See 6:14-23.

7:6. priestly shares. The concept of priestly

portions was discussed above in 6:14-23. Here the hide also belongs to the priest, a practice attested in *Babylon as well as in the larger Mediterranean context.

7:11-21
The Fellowship Offerings

7:12. preparation of thanksgiving offering. One each of four different breads are presented to the priest. The "cakes" are probably braided ring-bread perforated in the baking process, while the "wafers" are the thin disk-shaped variety, perhaps half an inch thick.

7:14. contribution. This term is traditionally rendered "heave offering" and refers to a dedicated gift. Cognate terms are attested in *Akkadian (Babylonian) and *Ugaritic. Being put in this category transfers ownership from the individual to the deity using informal procedures, generally not within the confines of the sanctuary.

7:15. difference between thanksgiving offering and other fellowship offerings. Unlike the other fellowship offerings, the thanksgiving offering was often made in places other than the sanctuary. As a result there is a stricter rule about eating it the day of the sacrifice, perhaps to avoid situations where *impurity could be contracted. This would not be as big a problem in the sanctuary precincts.

7:19-21. cutting off of those eating unclean food. The penalty cited here is not something that people carry out but refers to the action of God. Such a penalty is generally reserved for those encroaching on that which is sacred.

7:22-27
Eating of Fat (Suet) and Blood

7:22-27. prohibition against eating fat or blood. The suet is grouped with the blood as the portion belonging to the Lord. Just as the blood is a token of the life of the animal, the suet is a token of the meat of the sacrifice. The suet of nonsacrificial animals may be eaten, but the blood of any animal may not.

7:28-36
Priestly Portions

7:30-34. wave offering. Close textual analysis has demonstrated that nothing is "waved" in these offerings, though it is possible that the offering is lifted up before God in dedication (a practice attested in Egyptian "elevation offerings"). It is different from the "contribution" (v. 14) in that it is always in the presence of the Lord, that is, at the sanctuary. Most agree that it represents a special dedication ceremony. There are waving ceremonies attested in Mesopotamian and *Hittite rituals, but these are in quite different contexts from this Israelite ritual.

7:31-34. use of the breast and thigh. Since there is no mention of which breast, it is assumed that the animal is not quartered lengthwise but across the middle below the ribs, leaving the whole breast intact, a large piece of choice meat to be shared among the priests. The thigh is the choice individual portion and is reserved for the officiating priest.

8:1-36
The Consecration of Aaron and His Sons

8:1-9. anointing and anointing oil. The spices which were to be used for anointing purposes were myrrh, cinnamon, cane and cassia (see recipe in Ex 30:23-25). Oil symbolizes the gifts of God to the people and the responsibilities now laid on their leaders through this ceremony. In Israelite practice anointing was a sign of election and was often closely related to endowment by the Spirit, though that is never implied concerning the priests. Among the Egyptians and *Hittites, anointing was believed to protect a person from the power of netherworld deities. They anointed both kings and priests. In the *Amarna texts there is reference to a king of Nuhasse being anointed by the Pharaoh, and at Emar the priestess of Baal is anointed. There is no evidence that kings in Mesopotamia were anointed, but some priests were. Additionally, throughout the ancient world anointing symbolized an advance of a person's legal status. Both concepts of protection and change of status may correlate to the priest's anointing, for it would offer him protection in handling sacred things and identify him with the divine realm.

8:5-30. consecration ceremony. Investiture and anointing would have been normal procedures for social occasions. In Mesopotamian literature examples would include preparing Enkidu for entrance into society in the *Gilgamesh Epic and the hospitality offered *Adapa when he is called before the high god Anu in the *Myth of Adapa.* In the Israelite consecration ceremony, preparation for entering the serving circle of deity simply accentuates the normal procedures by using the very finest clothing and the most expensive oil. Installation of priests in Egypt also included clothing and anointing rituals.

8:1-7. priests in the ancient world. Every culture in the ancient Near East developed a

priesthood. Only the Bedouin tribes did not set these individuals aside to perform priestly duties exclusively. Their role was to function as a part of a priestly community, serving temples, performing sacrifices, conducting religious services and staging festivals. Priests would have been educated within the temple from an early age, and their position in the priestly class was hereditary in some cases. They would have been among the few literate persons in their society and thus were relied upon to keep records of major events and tie them to the will of the gods. This process was known as *divination, and it, along with *ritual sacrifice, was the chief source of priestly power and authority. There was a distinctive hierarchy among priests—ranging from a chief priest, who sometimes rivaled the king in power, to midlevel individuals who performed daily *rituals and sacrifices, to musicians, and on down to temple servants, who performed the mundane housekeeping and custodial tasks necessary in any large community.

8:7. ephod. The most important of Aaron's priestly garments is the ephod, which was either a linen robe covering the upper body or a frontal piece attached to the shoulders and sashed at the waist. The fact that the ephod is related to idols and false worship in later passages (Judg 17:5 and 8:24-27) suggests that it was a garment borrowed from Mesopotamian society—perhaps worn by priests or used to clothe idols. The breastpiece (Ex 28:15), the Urim and Thummim (Ex 28:30), and the ephod are used in *divination (1 Sam 23:9-11). Thus the high priest is clothed in garments which aid in the discernment of God's will. Discussion of the other items of the priests' garments can be found in the comments on Exodus 28.

8:8. Urim and Thummim. No description of these objects is found in Scripture, although traditions from the Hellenistic and later periods suggest they were markers whose appearance and presentation when cast like lots would determine God's will (see Num 27:21; 1 Sam 14:37-41; 28:6). There is no negative character attached to the Urim and Thummim as there are to other divinatory practices, and they are never mentioned in passages describing non-Israelite worship or *ritual. Nevertheless, the practice of posing yes-no questions to the gods (asking *oracles) is known throughout the ancient Near East. Particularly of interest are the *Babylonian *tamitu* texts, which preserve the answers to many oracular questions. Positive and negative stones (thought to be light stones and dark stones) were also used widely in Mesopotamia in a procedure called psephomancy. In one *Assyrian text, alabaster and hematite are specifically mentioned. The yes-no question would be posed and then a stone drawn out. The same color stone would have to be drawn out three times consecutively for the answer to be confirmed. *Urim* is the Hebrew word for "lights" and therefore would logically be associated with bright or white stones. One recent study has pointed out that hematite, because of its use for weights and seals, was termed the "truth stone" in *Sumerian. The Hebrew word *Thummim* could have a similar meaning.

8:9. the diadem. This refers to a symbol of authority worn on the forehead or on the front of a headpiece. Perhaps the best-known example of this in the ancient world is the serpent (uraeus) on the front of Pharaoh's crown, which was believed to be a protective device. In the descriptions of the high priest's garments the diadem is generally associated with a "gold plate" (NIV). Since the word translated "plate" here is also the word for flower, it is possible that the insignia was flower-shaped.

8:10-21. anointing the sancta. This is done to consecrate the tabernacle and its parts for sacred use. Egyptians regularly anointed the images of the gods, but this was part of the care procedures, not a consecration.

8:14. laying on the hand. See comment on 4:4-12.

8:22-30. ram for ordination. The idiom used here for ordination, the "filling of the hand," is known from *Akkadian contexts for both priests and kings. For *Assyrian king Adad-Nirari II it is specifically a scepter that is placed into his hand signifying the authority of his office. The idiom has wider use, however, and does not require an insignia. Here it is a sacrifice of a ram in addition to the purification offering (vv. 14-17) and the burnt offering (vv. 18-21) that provides the authorization for their office.

8:23. right ear, right thumb, right big toe. It is uncertain which part of the ear is intended (lobe and antihelix are the most often suggested). The blood functions both to cleanse from *impurity and protect from "sacred contagion." Smearing or daubing *rituals in the ancient Near East generally focus on edges and entrances.

8:29. wave offering. See comment on 7:30-34. Discussion of the details of verses 25-29 can be found in comments on chapter 1.

8:30. sprinkling of oil and blood. Aaron has already been anointed with oil and daubed with blood, but the sprinkling here serves a different purpose, that of consecration.

8:31-36. atonement. The concept of "purification" is closer to the mark than "atonement." See the comment on 1:4.

8:35. staying for seven days. The high priest may not leave for any reason because this would expose him to uncleanness. In his duties he absorbs *impurity but remains immune to its effects as long as he is in the sanctuary complex. Leaving would make him vulnerable to the lethal jeopardy such *impurity creates. *Sumerian texts attest to the same concerns for *entu*-priestesses, who must not venture out of the temple while *Dumuzi, still in the realm of the dead, roams the streets (Dumuzi is a dying and rising god connected to the fertility cycle of the seasons). Seven-day dedication ceremonies were common, as in Gudea's dedication of the temple in *Lagash.

9:1-22

The Beginning of Priestly Service

9:1. eighth-day ceremony. Information concerning the details of this section may be found in the previous comments. With the seven-day initiation and dedication ceremony completed, the eighth day marks the inauguration of the system. This ceremony is to be punctuated with the appearance of the Lord (vv. 4-6, 23-24). A similar initiation ceremony occurs when Solomon's temple is initiated (1 Kings 8:62-64), where the term *hanok* ("initiation") is used (cf. Hanukkah, though the present-day Jewish holiday is not related to this event but rather to the reinitiation of the altar and temple by the Maccabeans after they had been desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C.).

9:23—10:20

The Appearance of the Glory of the Lord and the Response

9:23. the glory of the Lord. Most temple dedications in the ancient Near East featured the deity being officially installed in the temple (generally by means of the image of the deity being taken in). Here there is no installation of *Yahweh, but his glory appears to emerge from the newly dedicated tabernacle, most likely in the form of the pillar of cloud and fire (see comment on Ex 13:21-22) that has represented the Lord's presence throughout the wilderness experience. Here the fire erupts from the pillar to consume the offerings.

10:1. censers. These are most likely long-handled pans that could also shovel up the hot coals. They served as portable altars because the incense was actually burned in them. Censers are also used for burning of incense in Egypt when people wanted to protect themselves from demonic forces. For a close parallel in the Bible, see Numbers 16:46-50.

10:1. unauthorized fire. Since access to the main altar (where coals for incense offerings were supposed to be obtained) was difficult given the consuming fire, and since Aaron's sons decided that incense was needed to shield the people from viewing the glory of the Lord (see 16:13), coals from another source (unauthorized fire) were used.

10:3. Aaron's silence. Aaron's silence is in contrast to the loud wailing that usually accompanied mourning. Rather than a stunned silence, it represents a determination to follow the procedure that officiating priests should not be in mourning.

10:4. relatives caring for the dead. One of the important roles for a family is to care for their dead. In this situation the brothers of the dead were not available in that they were still involved in officiating at the sacrifice. Therefore the cousins were instructed to perform the necessary duties.

10:6-7. mourning rites and anointing oil. Disheveled hair and torn clothing are two of the principal signs of mourning. Other signs would include shaving hair or beard, putting dust on the head, and even slashing oneself. The mourning period generally lasted seven days. Aaron was warned against doing this because it contradicted the priestly condition that he was required to maintain for the ceremony. It would cheapen the holiness of the sanctuary and God's presence to interrupt that which the anointing oil had put in motion. See 21:10-12.

10:8. wine and fermented drink. Dates, honey and grain products all could be fermented and used as beverages, but barley beer was probably the most common alcoholic beverage. There is some evidence of ritual intoxication in ancient Near Eastern literature and the Bible also attests the practice (Is 28:7).

10:10. the sacred compass. Verse 10 establishes several categories. Everything that was holy (consecrated to deity) was clean (ritually purified). That which was not holy (therefore profane or common) could be either clean or unclean. It was the duty of the priests to maintain the distinctions between these categories, and they did so by maintaining what is called the sacred compass. In this concept the center of sacred space was the Most Holy Place, where the ark was. Radiating from that point out were concentric zones of holiness, each with its requirements of levels of *purity. The priests enforced the rules that would maintain

the appropriate level of holiness and *purity for each zone.

10:11. priestly instruction. Instruction by the priests would have included ethical as well as *ritual matters, though here the emphasis is likely on the latter. Deuteronomy 24:8 offers an example of such priestly instruction. Priests in the ancient world were considered experts in ritual matters of the performance of the *cult and were regularly consulted about often complex procedures.

10:12-15. priestly portions. The details of verses 12-15 have been considered in comments on chapters 6 and 7.

10:16. the importance of eating the purification offering. The purification offering was believed to absorb the impurities that it was presented to remedy. This concept of ritual absorption is common in the ancient Near East. When a great amount is absorbed (as on the Day of Atonement), the entire offering is burned so as to dispose of the *impurity. But on most occasions the priest's eating of the prescribed parts plays a role in the purification process. Milgrom suggests that it symbolized holiness swallowing up *impurity. If this is so, Milgrom is right in understanding Aaron's explanation to Moses here as reflecting his fearful caution. The presence of his sons' corpses in the sanctuary area may have greatly increased the amount of *impurity absorbed by the purification offering, making it lethal to the priest.

11:1-46

Clean and Unclean Food

11:2. dietary restrictions. In Mesopotamia there were numerous occasions on which certain foods were prohibited for a short period. There is also evidence in *Babylonia that there were certain restrictions concerning animals that particular gods would accept for sacrifice. But there is no overriding system such as that found here. Yet though there is no known parallel in the ancient world to anything like the Israelite system of dietary restrictions, the permitted animals generally conform to the diet common in the ancient Near East.

11:3-7. criteria for classification of animals. The main criteria are (1) means of locomotion and (2) physical characteristics. Nothing is mentioned of their eating habits or the conditions of their habitat. Anthropologists have suggested that animals were considered clean or unclean depending on whether they possessed all the features that made them "normal" in their category. Other suggestions have concerned health and hygiene. The weakness of each of these is that there are too many examples that do not fit the explanation. A popular traditional explanation suggested that the animals prohibited had some connection to non-Israelite *rituals. In fact, however, the sacrificial practices of Israel's neighbors appear strikingly similar to Israel's. A recent promising suggestion is that the Israelite diet is modeled after God's "diet"—that is, if it could not be offered in sacrifice to God, then it was not suitable for human consumption either.

11:7. pigs. *Assyrian wisdom literature calls the pig unholy, unfit for the temple and an abomination to the gods. There is also one dream text in which eating pork is a bad omen. Yet it is clear that pork was a regular part of the diet in Mesopotamia. Some *Hittite *rituals require the sacrifice of a pig. Milgrom observes, however, that in such rituals the pig is not put on the altar as food for the god but absorbs *impurity and then is burned or buried as an offering to underworld deities. Likewise in Mesopotamia it was offered as a sacrifice to demons. There is evidence in Egypt of pigs used for food, and Herodotus claims they were used for sacrifice there as well. Egyptian sources speak of herds of swine being kept on temple property, and they were often included in donations to the temples. The pig was especially sacred to the god Seth. Most evidence for the sacrifice of pigs, however, comes from Greece and Rome, there also mostly to gods of the underworld. In urban settings pigs along with dogs often scavenged in the streets, making them additionally repulsive. The attitude toward the pig in Israel is very clear in Isaiah 65:4; 66:3, 17, the former showing close connection to worship of the dead. It is very possible then that sacrificing a pig was synonymous with sacrificing to demons or the dead.

11:8. transfer of *impurity. Objects that come into contact with a carcass absorb the uncleanness of the carcass unless they are imbedded in the ground. Springs and wells are therefore exempt, as is seed that is to be planted. The wet seed of verse 38 is being prepared to be used as food, and so it does become unclean. Any contact with a carcass made the individual unclean as well and required purification. Most eating of meat would have involved animals that had been ritually slaughtered and therefore would not transfer uncleanness.

12:1-8

Purification After Childbirth

12:2. ceremonial uncleanness. Not all uncleanness was avoidable, and the cause of uncleanness was often something that would in

no way be considered sinful. There are several categories of uncleanness that could not be easily avoided, including sexual impurities, disease-related impurities and the uncleanness that came from contact with a corpse or carcass. Though it was a matter of etiquette rather than ethics, the sacred compass needed to be protected from that which was inappropriate. Additionally it was a common belief that demons inhabited menstrual blood. In Israel bodily emissions such as menstrual blood and semen were closely associated with life. When the potential for life that they represented went unfulfilled, they would represent death and therefore uncleanness. That the uncleanness from childbirth should be seen as similar to monthly uncleanness from the menstrual cycle was common in ancient cultures, including Egypt, *Babylonia and Persia.

12:3. circumcision. See comment on Genesis 17:9-14.

12:4-5. purification for 33/66 days. The initial seven-day period plus the thirty-three additional days brings the total to forty—the normal number for estimations. Postpartum blood flow can last anywhere from two to six weeks, so this would be a suitable approximation. Persians and Greeks had similar forty-day restrictions concerning entering sacred areas after giving birth, and many cultures require a longer purification time for girls. *Hittites considered the child unclean for three months (male) or four (female). There is no sure rationale for why the purification time differs depending on the gender of the child.

12:7. atonement. Cases like this make it clear that what has been called a "sin offering" is actually a purification offering (see the comments on chap. 4). There is no sin here that needs "atonement." Rather the *impurity is cleansed from the altar (see the comment on 1:4).

13:1-46
Skin Disease

13:2. varieties of skin disease. Those studying the language have concluded that the term often translated "leprosy" (NIV: "infectious skin disease") is more accurately rendered "lesion" or, less technical, "scaly skin." Such patches could be swollen or weeping, as well as flaking. Similar broad terminology also exists in *Akkadian, where the *Babylonians likewise considered it an unclean condition and the punishment of the gods. Clinical leprosy (Hansen's disease) has not been attested in the ancient Near East prior to the time of Alexander the Great. None of the most prominent characteristics of Hansen's disease are listed in the text, and the symptoms that are listed argue against a relationship to Hansen's disease. The condition discussed in the text is not presented as contagious. Descriptions suggest that modern diagnoses would include psoriasis, eczema, favus and seborrheic dermatitis as well as a number of fungal-type infections. Comparison to "snow" most likely concerns the flakiness rather than the color ("white" is added in the translations that contain it). The great cultural aversion to skin diseases may be that in appearance (and sometimes odor) they resemble the rotting skin of the corpse and are therefore associated with death. This natural revulsion adds considerably to the victim's outcast status when combined with the quarantine that is ritually rather than medically motivated. A reflection of this can be seen in an Old Babylonian omen that interprets white areas of skin as an indication that that person has been rejected by his god and should therefore be rejected by people as well.

13:45. behavior of victim. The disheveled hair, torn clothing and covered face characterize the victim as a mourner. In the superstitions of the day the mourner would thus disguise himself from the evil forces hovering in the places of the dead. His cry would prevent someone from coming near, for popular belief held that even his breath could contaminate.

13:46. living outside the camp. Though the camp did not need to maintain the same level of *purity as the temple compound, there were restrictions. This restriction is also found in *Babylonian literature for victims of skin diseases forced to live in isolation. It is likely that they would have lived in the vicinity of the tombs.

13:47-59. contaminated cloth. This is a reference to various fungi and molds that can infect cloth or wood. Mesopotamian literature considers these growths to be associated with evil or the demonic, but they are not so personified in biblical text.

14:1-57
Purification of Scale Contamination

14:2. cleansing ritual. These *rituals are not concerned with dirt or bacteria but with ritual *impurity. Wild birds are used because the freed (contaminated) bird must never be inadvertently used for sacrifice. In Mesopotamian and *Hittite purification rituals birds are used because they are believed to carry the *impurity back to its source in the heavens. Cedar is apparently used for its red color, along with

the yarn and the blood. This is not used magically by the Israelites (curing had already taken place) but symbolically. Many interpreters consider the red to represent life.

14:8. significance of shaving. Hair sometimes represents a person's life or identity, but here it has no symbolic value. It is shaved off so all may see the restored condition of the skin and so no residual *impurity could be harbored there.

14:10. three-tenths of an ephah. Three-tenths of an ephah is about six quarts, the equivalent of offering a grain offering for each of the three sheep offered.

14:10. log of oil. A log is a small amount, less than a pint, but it is difficult to be precise. The Bible uses the term only in this chapter, and the occurrences in other languages are equally vague.

14:12. guilt offering. This offering, better translated "reparation offering," is described in chapter 5. It is generally offered when the sanctuary has somehow suffered loss. It may be part of this *ritual to make amends for any offerings that had to be omitted by the individual during his quarantine. Another suggestion is that since skin affliction could at times be a punishment from God for an act of sacrilege, the reparation offering is made just in case there was some such offense that the victim was unaware of.

14:12. the wave offering. See comment on 7:30-34. This context is the only one in which the entire animal in included in the ceremony (see chaps. 7—8).

14:14. right ear, right thumb, right big toe. See comment on 8:23.

14:15. the use of the oil. Oil is used in the ancient Near East as a protective substance. Though that function may well have disappeared in Israel, oil was retained as an important ritual element (like mistletoe in homes today being no longer considered protection from demons but associated with the season). An Egyptian *ritual for preparing an idol for the day includes a similar procedure to that described here in verse 18.

14:18. atonement. The oil (or, more likely, the entire reparation *ritual), the purification offering, the burnt offering and the grain offering are each said to make atonement for the individual. For atonement as purgation see comments on chapter 1. Here it is used to describe the complex ritual process that provides the individual with a clean slate for being reinstated into full participation in the ritual system.

14:34. mildew. The reference here is to fungal infections, which were considered to be evil omens in the ancient world. Mesopotamian *rituals target fungus growths in a number of different contexts. The wall containing the fungus was believed to be the indicator of which member of the family would die. The fungus was an omen of the coming of demons and their troubles. There is no such element here, and only the house needs the ritual procedures, not the inhabitants.

14:48. purification ritual. This *rite shows some similarity to the fungus purification rites known from the rest of the ancient Near East. The *Hurrian ritual uses birds (two sacrificed, one released) and burns cedar just as the Israelites did. *Babylonians used a raven and a hawk. The latter was released into the wilderness. For the other details of this ritual, see the comment on the beginning of this chapter.

15:1-33
Discharges

15:1-15. discharges caused by disease. Described here is the discharge of mucus that is most frequently caused by gonorrhea (though only the more benign varieties were present in the ancient world). Alternatively it has been identified as infectious urinary bilharzia, a known scourge of the ancient world. This disease was caused by the parasite *Schistosoma* related to snails in the water system that have been detected in excavations. Such discharges were believed to be evidence of demonic presence in the person in the larger ancient Near East, but in Israel they required only washing of the individual and purification of the sanctuary, not *exorcism as in Mesopotamia.

15:16-18. seminal emissions. Among the *Hittites nocturnal emissions were considered to result from sexual intercourse with spirits. There is no such stigma here, and the purification requires only washing, not sacrifice. Any sexual activity would prevent one from entering the temple compound until evening. This was also true in Egyptian practice, though it is not in evidence in many other ancient Near Eastern cultures, presumably due to the prevalence of ritualized prostitution. In these cultures, illustrated by *Hittite practice, sexual intercourse required washing prior to participation in rituals but required no waiting period and was not explicitly prohibited on temple grounds.

15:19-24. menstruation. Menstrual flow was considered a source of *impurity throughout the ancient world and in a few cultures represented danger of demonic influence. Again Israel treats it only as requiring washing, not sacrifice, and offers no protective rituals. A

royal *Assyrian decree toward the end of the second millennium prohibited a menstruating woman from coming into the king's presence when sacrifices were being made.

15:25-33. irregular discharges. Menostaxis is the name for the principal cause of continued blood flow beyond the regular monthly period. This could result in nearly perpetual uncleanness and make it nearly impossible to have children, for sexual intercourse is prohibited when such a blood flow exists.

16:1-34

Day of Atonement (Purgation)

16:2. limited access to holy places. Temples in the ancient world were typically not houses of public worship. Access to sacred precincts was heavily restricted because they were considered holy ground. The more sacred the area, the more restricted the access, both to protect the human beings who would be taking their lives in their hands to trespass on sacred ground and to prevent desecration of the dwelling place of deity.

16:2. appearing in a cloud. *Akkadian uses the term *melammu* to describe the glowing, visible representation of the glory of deity, which in turn is enshrouded in smoke or cloud. In Canaanite mythology it has been suggested the *melammu* concept is expressed by the word *anan,* the same Hebrew word here translated "cloud," but the occurrences are too few and obscure for confidence.

16:2. atonement cover. Traditionally translated "mercy seat," though all translations are speculative. The term refers to the solid gold rectangular plate or sheet (made of one piece with the cherubim) that sat on top of the ark (see comment on Ex 25:17). One suggestion is that the word comes from Egyptian, where a similar-sounding word refers to a place to rest one's feet. Since the ark is at times viewed as a footstool for God, this would fit well.

16:4. Aaron's garments. See the comments on Exodus 28 for the description of the high priest's garments. Here he is not dressed in full regalia but, as an act of humility, in more simple linen clothing. The linen for the clothing worn by the priests was imported from Egypt, where it was also distinctively used for priests' garments. Angels, too, are said to be dressed in linen (for example, Dan 10:5). Later in the ceremony the high priest will change into the regular uniform (vv. 23-24).

16:6-10. purpose of the day. Though other cultures of the ancient Near East have *rituals to dispose of evil, in all of those the evil is of a ritual or demonic nature, while in Israel all of the sins of the people are included. The ceremony begins with purification offerings so that the priest can enter the holy place. Once inside, the blood ritual cleanses all the parts of the sanctuary from the impurities accumulated throughout the year. It works from the inside out until the sins are placed on the head of the "scapegoat," which carries them away. The goal of the regular purification offerings was forgiveness (see comment on 4:13-32). In contrast, this annual ritual is intended to dispose of the sins of the people.

16:8. Azazel. The Hebrew word translated "scapegoat" is *azazel.* This translation results in dividing the Hebrew word into two words—an unlikely solution. Since verse 8 identifies one goat as "for *Yahweh" and the other goat as "for Azazel," it is most consistent to consider Azazel a proper name, probably of a demon. Early Jewish interpreters had this understanding, as is demonstrated in the book of Enoch (second century B.C.). This goat is not sacrificed to Azazel (consistent with 17:7) but released "to Azazel" (v. 26). *Babylonians believed in *alu*-demons that lived in deserted wasteland, and this may be a similar concept. In Ebla tablets there is a purification rite for a mausoleum using a goat which is then released into the steppe country.

16:8. scapegoat concept in the ancient Near East. A number of *Hittite *rituals feature the transfer of evil to an animal that is then sent away. In some cases the animal is considered a gift to appease the gods or a type of sacrifice to the gods, but in others it is simply a means of disposing of the evil. Mesopotamian rituals that transfer *impurity often see the animal as a substitute for an individual—a substitute that will now become the object of demonic attack instead of the person. In the *Asakki Marsuti* ritual for fever, the goat that is the substitute for the sick man is sent out into the wilderness. All of these differ significantly from Israelite practice in that they are enacted by means of incantations (reciting words of power)—a concept totally absent in Israelite ritual. Additionally the Israelite practice shows no intention to appease the anger of deity or demon, whereas this is the most common motivation of the ancient Near Eastern rituals.

16:8. casting lots. Casting lots gives the Lord the opportunity to choose the goat for sacrifice.

16:12. function of the incense. Incense altars were typical of both Israelite and Canaanite sanctuaries. The incense offered on these altars was a mixture of spices featuring most prominently frankincense but also including

gum resin, onycha and galbanum (see the comment on Ex 30:34-38). Later Jewish tradition included a dozen spices in the mixture. The smoke of the incense represented the prayers of the people going up to God.

16:29. tenth day of the seventh month. This would be in the fall, ten days after New Year's Day. In our calendar it falls toward the end of September.

16:34. atonement once a year. In the *Babylonian new year *ritual the priest slaughtered a ram to be used in purging the sanctuary. Incantations to exorcise demons were recited. The king declared himself free of a number of crimes concerning his office, and the body of the ram was thrown into the river.

17:1-18

Meat Consumption and Blood

17:4. guilty of bloodshed. Domestic animals suitable for sacrifice could not be ritually slaughtered for fellowship offerings except at the tabernacle/temple. This prohibition would help prevent the offering of these sacrifices to other gods or at unapproved shrines. It would also hinder the concept that the blood of an animal slaughtered away from the sanctuary could be considered as appeasing netherworld deities. It was this spilling of blood in illicit rituals that the individual would be guilty of.

17:7. goat idols. The term most likely refers to satyrlike demons who were believed to haunt the open fields and uninhabitable places.

17:9. cut off from his people. This terminology is generally accepted as reflecting a belief that God would carry out the appropriate punishment. It does not suggest any judicial or societal action against that person but awaits the action of God.

17:11. life in the blood. The idea that blood contained the essence of life is evident in the Mesopotamian belief that the first people were created from the blood of a slain deity. But there were no dietary restrictions regarding blood and nothing to suggest a ritual use of blood, either in terms of what was offered to deity or in purification rituals, anywhere else in the ancient Near East.

17:11. blood as atonement. It is because the blood was believed to contain the essence of life that it could serve as a purifying agent in the *rituals of the sacrificial system. For more discussion about the word translated "atonement," see the comment on 1:4.

17:12. prohibition against eating blood. Eating the blood could easily be viewed as one way of absorbing the life force of another creature. This type of thinking is forbidden, as is the idea that by ingesting it the individual has destroyed the life force by dissipation. Instead, the life is to be offered back to God, whence it came.

18:1-30

Sexual Prohibitions

18:1-29. sexual taboos. Every society develops sexual taboos to regulate marriage practices, adultery and unacceptable sexual practices. These restrictions vary from one culture to another, but they are all designed to reflect the economic and moral values of their society. The laws in chapter 18 are *apodictic (command) laws, which note only that these practices defile the people. The word used in verses 22-29 (NIV: "detestable") identifies the behavior as contrary to the character of God. A parallel term in *Sumerian and *Akkadian designates conduct as being despicable to deity. In the case of incest (vv. 6-18), the primary concern is over relations with immediate blood kin (father, mother, sister, brother, son, daughter) and affinal relations (wife, husband, uncle, aunt). The only exception is in the case of levirate obligation (Deut 25:5-10), when a man's brother is required to have sexual relations with his sister-in-law. Incest was equally abhorrent in most other societies (e.g., the prohibitions in *Hittite laws). A Hittite treaty prohibits sexual relationships with sisters-in-law or cousins on pain of death. The exception is Egypt, where incest was a common practice in the royal family (but little attested elsewhere) as a means to strengthen or consolidate royal authority. This concept is also seen among *Elamite kings. Adultery (v. 20) violates the sanctity of the family and contaminates the inheritance process (see the comment on Ex 20:14).

18:21. children passed through the fire to Molech. Evidence of child sacrifice has been recovered from Phoenician sites in North Africa (Carthage) and Sardinia, and it was also practiced in Syria and Mesopotamia during the *Assyrian period (eighth and seventh centuries B.C.). Dedicating children to a god as a form of sacrifice is found in several biblical narratives. It can be explained as a means of promoting *fertility (Mic 6:6-7) or as a way of obtaining a military victory (Judg 11:30-40; 2 Kings 3:27). In no case, however, is this considered acceptable as a sacrifice to *Yahweh under biblical law (Deut 18:10). Many consider Molech to be a netherworld deity whose worship featured *rituals with Canaanite origins focusing on dead ancestors. An eighth-

century B.C. Phoenician inscription speaks of sacrifices made to Molech before battle by the Cilicians and their enemies.

18:22-23. homosexuality and bestiality. Homosexuality (v. 22) and bestiality (v. 23) were both practiced in the context of *ritual or magic in the ancient Near East. The latter particularly occurs in the mythology of *Ugarit and is banned in legal materials (especially the *Hittite laws). The mixing of realms was contrary to concepts of *purity.

18:24-28. Canaanite sexual perversions. These perversions should not be considered simply the result of human depravity. Sex had been ritually incorporated into worship in order to procure *fertility of the land, the herds and flocks, and the people. While the fertility aspect of Canaanite religion is well attested, little is known of specific details of ritualized sex. Temple personnel included male and female prostitutes, but their ritual role is still obscure. The implication of these verses is also that violation of the sexual code pollutes both the people and the land, requiring a cleansing process that will drive them out and allow resettlement by the Israelites. There is thus an understanding of an intimate relationship between land and people that would have been natural to a people who based their lives on agriculture and herding. Despite the assurance that the land would ultimately belong to them, however, caution is expressed that the Israelites not follow this same course of personal defilement and be exiled in turn.

19:1-37

Miscellaneous Laws

19:9-10. intentionally inefficient harvesting. In *fertility *cults, the portion left in the field would have served as an offering to the deities of the ground. Here it becomes a means to care for the poor. While no examples of this legislation survive in ancient Near Eastern law, texts from the town of *Nuzi suggest a similar practice.

19:11-19. social contract. This is another set of *apodictic (command) decrees similar to the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) of Exodus 20:1-17. It provides an even fuller concept of the social contract between God and the Israelites, as well as the rights and obligations of the Israelites among themselves. There are no other examples of such social contracts between people and their deity. However the ancient Near Eastern gods were believed to be concerned about justice in society, and people considered themselves accountable to the gods, either to their personal/family gods or to Shamash, the god of justice. The gods were believed to judge people's conduct and were called upon to witness behavior in the human realm. Thus the social contracts that governed human behavior among Israel's neighbors were made between the human parties with the gods invoked by oath as protectors.

19:19. mixing animals, seeds, materials. Some mixtures were considered to be reserved for sacred use. The parallel passage in Deuteronomy 22:9-11 makes it clear that this is the issue in Israel as well. The mixture of wool and linen was used in the tabernacle and in the high priest's outer garments, and it was thus reserved for sacred use. This interpretation is also current in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QMMT). Sowing of two types of seed is also prohibited in the *Hittite laws, with a death threat to violators.

19:20-22. status of slave girl. Standards of conduct and penalties vary for slaves. Ancient Near Eastern law contains several examples of punishment for the rape of a female slave. Both the Neo-Sumerian laws of *Ur-Nammu and the *Babylonian laws of *Eshnunna (both c. 2000 B.C.) prescribe fines for rape of a female slave. The Eshnunna law adds the further provision that the woman remains the property of her original owner, so that rape cannot become a predatory means of obtaining a slave. In the biblical example, the case is not considered adultery and therefore does not end in execution (see Deut 22:23-24), since she is still technically a slave, not a free woman (see Ex 22:15-17).

19:23-25. fruit tree husbandry. Orchards of fruit trees were of such great value that the law forbade cutting them during times of war (Deut 20:19). They usually contained more than one variety of tree (see Amos 9:14). Among the most common fruit trees were fig, olive, date and sycamore fig. Some orchards were irrigated (Num 24:6), but most appear to have been planted on terraced hillsides (Jer 31:5). Careful cultivation and pruning was necessary during the first three years in order to insure eventual good harvests and proper maturing of the trees. The fruit during this period could not be eaten and was declared unclean (literally, "uncircumcised"). In the fourth year the entire harvest was to be dedicated to God as an offering, and from the fifth year on the owner could eat the fruit.

19:26. divination. *Divination involves a variety of methods used by prophets (Mic 3:11), soothsayers, mediums and sorcerers to determine the will of the gods and to predict the future. These included the examination of the entrails of sacrificial animals, the analysis of

omens of various types and the reading of the future in natural and unnatural phenomena (see Gen 44:5). The prohibition against eating meat with the "blood still in it" in this verse is tied to the injunction against participating in any form of divination or sorcery. Thus, rather than being a dietary law, this decree involves the practice of draining blood from a sacrificial animal into the ground or a sacred pit, which was designed to attract the spirits of the dead (see 1 Sam 28:7-19) or chthonic (underworld) deities in order to consult them about the future. Such practices are found in several *Hittite ritual texts and in Odysseus' visit to the underworld (*Odyssey* 11.23-29, 34-43). These practices were condemned (Deut 18:10-11) because they infringed on the idea of *Yahweh as an all-powerful God who was not controlled by fate.

19:27. significance of hair trimming. For men hair has symbolic value as a sign of manhood or virility (see 2 Sam 10:4). Women decorate their hair and groom it carefully as a sign of beauty. The prohibition against trimming the "sides of your head" or the "edges of your beard" uses the same terminology as in 19:9-10, which deals with the harvesting of fields. In both cases an offering is involved—one to the poor and the other to God. The law's placement here immediately after the prohibition against *divination suggests that the restriction on cutting the hair is based on the Canaanite practice of making an offering of hair to propitiate the spirits of the dead (see Deut 14:1). *Hammurabi's code penalizes false witnesses by having half the person's hair cut off. The Middle Assyrian code allows a debt-slave's master to pull out his or her hair as punishment (see Neh 13:25). Both laws suggest that shame is attached to the loss of hair. There is a Phoenician inscription from the ninth century B.C. reporting the dedication of shaven hair by an individual in fulfillment of a vow made to the goddess *Astarte. In ancient thinking hair (along with blood) was one of the main representatives of a person's life essence. As such it was often an ingredient in sympathetic magic. This is evident, for instance, in the practice of sending along a lock of a presumed prophet's hair when his prophecies were sent to the king of *Mari. The hair would be used in divination to determine whether the prophet's message would be accepted as valid.

19:28. cutting body for dead. Mourning and *cultic practices sometimes included lacerating oneself (see 1 Kings 18:28; Jer 16:6, 41:5). This may have been done to attract a god's attention, ward off the spirits of the dead or demonstrate greater grief then simply wailing. The prohibition may be due to its association with Canaanite religion. For instance, the *Ugaritic cycle of stories about the god *Baal (c. 1600-1200 B.C.) includes an example of mourning by the chief god *El over the death of Baal. His grief takes the ritual form of filling his hair with dirt, wearing sackcloth and cutting himself with a razor. The text reads that "he plowed his chest like a garden."

19:28. tattoo marks. The prohibition against marking the skin may involve either tattooing or painting the body as part of a religious *ritual. Such markings may have been designed to protect a person from the spirits of the dead or to demonstrate membership in a group. Some evidence for this has been found in the examination of human remains in Scythian tombs dating to the sixth century B.C. The Israelite law may prohibit this practice since it involves a self-imposed alteration of God's creation, unlike *circumcision, which is commanded by God.

19:29. prostitution. In line with the surrounding laws, which prohibit defiling either the people or the produce of the land, this law against selling a daughter into prostitution is designed to prevent defiling both her honor and that of the family. Financial problems might tempt a father to do this, but it is considered a moral pollution of both the people and of the land itself. As in 18:24-28, such a practice could result in eventual expulsion from the land. The extreme nature of this penalty may be based on the loss of honor of both the household and the community. However, it is also possible that this refers to *cultic prostitution and thus would mean the worship of gods other than *Yahweh.

19:31. mediums and spiritualists. The practitioners of spiritism and sorcery are condemned (Deut 18:10-11) because of their association with Canaanite religion and because their "art" attempted to circumvent *Yahweh by seeking knowledge and power from spirits. They represented a form of "popular religion" that was closer to the folk practices of the common people and served as a form of "shadow religion" for many. Sometimes, because of its association with *divination, their *rituals and methods stood in direct opposition to "official religion" or as an alternative to be used in times of desperation (see Saul's use of the outlawed witch of Endor in 1 Sam 28). Sorcery and potions used in the practice of magic were also banned in *Hammurabi's code and the Middle Assyrian law, suggesting that the prohibition and fear of these practices was not unique to Israel.

19:35-36. honest measurements. The injunction to deal in honest weights and measures when doing business is directly related to the laws in 19:11-18, which require fair dealing and an internalized sense that your neighbor is to be treated as you would want to be treated. Standardization of weights and measures was required in *Hammurabi's code with regard to repayment of debts in grain or silver, and involving the measuring out of grain to pay for wine. Penalties for violators ranged from forfeiture of property to execution.

20:1-27
Defiling Conduct

20:2-5. children of Molech. One of the major themes in this book equates idolatry with prostituting oneself after other gods. This in turn pollutes *Yahweh's sanctuary, the Israelites themselves and the land. The practice of sacrificing children to Molech (see comment on 18:21) is condemned, and the perpetrators are to be stoned (a form of communal execution which draws everyone into the act of purification). No violation of this command will be tolerated, even if God must mete out the punishment when the community chooses to turn a blind eye to sin. The idea of "cutting off" the sinner implies complete banishment from God and the community and was generally a punishment that was seen as being carried out by God.

20:9. cursing parents. Contrary to the NIV translation, studies have demonstrated that the infraction here is not cursing but treating with contempt. This is a more general category and would certainly include the prohibition of Exodus 21:15, which forbids striking a parent, and would be the opposite of the fifth commandment to "honor your father and your mother" (Ex 20:12). Each injunction is designed to protect the cohesion of the family unit as well as insure that each subsequent generation provide their parents with the respect, food and protection they deserve (see Deut 21:18-21). Mesopotamian law codes and legal documents are also clear on the issue of treating parents with contempt. The *Sumerian laws allow a son who disowns his parents to be sold as a slave. *Hammurabi requires the amputation of the hand of a man who strikes his father. A will from *Ugarit describes a son's behavior using the same verb used in this verse and stipulates disinheritance.

20:10-16. capital punishment for sexual crimes. The violation of sexual codes (adultery, incest, homosexuality, bestiality) is placed on a par with idolatry in this law code and thus requires the sentence of death. Both defile persons and the land and cannot be tolerated. Crimes of this nature are also punishable in *Hammurabi's code (adultery requires trial by ordeal in laws 129 and 132; rape is a capital crime in law 130; incest is punished by exile in law 154), the *Middle Assyrian laws (homosexuality punished by castration in law 20) and the *Hittite laws (bestiality with pigs or dogs punished by death in law 199). In the Hittite treaty between Shuppiluliuma and Huqqana, the latter is charged not to take his sister or cousin sexually because among the Hittites people are put to death for such behavior. Such inhibitions, however, were certainly not universal. In the Persian period, for instance, men were encouraged to marry their sisters, daughters or mother as acts of piety. In Israelite practice, however, these were all believed to undermine the family, the foundational element of Israelite society. To undermine the family was to undermine the *covenant.

20:20-21. penalty of childlessness. Having children meant having someone to care for you in old age and give proper burial and the extension of the family into the next generation. Being childless represented the cutting off of the family and the risk of being neglected in old age and death.

20:27. medium or spiritist. See comment on 19:31.

21:1—22:32
Regulations for Priests

21:5. shaving practices of priests. Priests have the special injunction to keep themselves pure and holy because it is their responsibility to bring offerings to God. As a result, their skin and hair must remain intact, free of blemish or injury, as a testimony to that holiness. Thus they are prohibited from engaging in the mourning practices common in Canaan of gashing themselves, tearing their hair or shaving their beard. In fact it would be shameful for them to present themselves in any condition that was not holy (see Satan's accusation against the high priest Joshua in Zech 3:3).

21:7. marriage regulations for priests. There was a special regulation for priests against marrying a woman who was known to have engaged repeatedly in prostituting herself ("defiled by prostitution" implies flagrant abuse). Furthermore, he was also denied the right to marry a woman who was divorced. This is probably due to the fact that the principal charge made against a woman by her husband in a divorce proceeding was infidelity

(see Num 5:11-31; Deut 22:13-14; 24:1).

21:10-14. special regulations for high priest. Even a higher standard of *purity was required for the high priest. He must avoid contaminating his person by coming into contact with the dead, even if this means absenting himself from his parents' funeral, and he cannot engage in the usual forms of mourning (see purification rituals for corpse contamination in Num 19). This restriction may also be an attempt to disassociate the priesthood from *cults of the dead. Furthermore, the priest's wife must be a virgin. She cannot have been married before, nor can she be either a divorcee or a prostitute. The high priest was anointed to represent the *purity of the nation in its dealings with God. Therefore he must avoid all contact with persons or objects that might defile him and through him the Holy of Holies.

21:16-23. prohibiting priests with defects. Just as animals with physical defects or blemishes may not be offered for sacrifice (22:19-22), priests who have a physical defect may not serve before the altar. Ritual *purity is required for the sacred precincts of the altar, the sacrifice and the religious practitioner officiating at the altar in every religion in the ancient Near East. Priests must therefore be in perfect health and in full command of their bodies and senses. Thus anyone who is "blind [even in one eye], lame, disfigured or deformed," is restricted from priestly service. The list is quite graphic and includes defects caused by accidents (broken bones, crushed testicles), birth defects (dwarfism, lameness, hunchback) or disease (skin afflictions, sores). Even though he may not approach the altar, the disabled priest is still entitled to his share of the priestly portion of the sacrifice.

21:21. food of his God. A portion of most sacrificial offerings was reserved for the nourishment of the priests (see 2:3, 10; 7:6, 31-34; 24:8-9; Num 18:12-13, 15, 26, for a description of the sacrifices and the priestly portion). Even if a priest is disqualified from taking part in the sacrificial *ritual, due to physical defect, he still has the right to eat from this divine meal, for he is still a priest. The sharing of the sacrificial repast by the deity and attending priests is also found in Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts, creating a special bond between servitor and deity. See comments on 1:1-2 and 3:6-11.

22:3-9. prohibiting priests with uncleanness. The altar and those who officiated at it were required to maintain strict *purity and cleanliness. This was the case among the Israelites as well as other peoples of the ancient Near East. Egyptian priests were required to undergo lengthy purification rites before approaching the altar. One *Hittite text contains a long list of instructions on maintaining the ritual *purity of priest and temple as well as the means to cleanse them in case of contamination, which is very similar to that found in chapter 22. Any source of contamination (improper or defective sacrifice or a defiled person or priest) would defile them and require lengthy purification rites before they could once again fulfill their function. The list in 22:4-5 provides a guide to persons who must be kept away from the sacred precincts and the priests, including those who have come in contact with the dead or an unclean animal or person or have eaten unclean food. *Hittite law, which prohibits persons who have had sexual relations with a horse or mule from becoming priests, provides another type of uncleanness which is not commensurate with serving as a priest.

22:8. carcasses. All animals found dead were unclean, so only those that had been ritually slaughtered with the blood properly drained were available for the priests.

22:10-16. eligibility for priestly portions. There are foods which are only to be consumed by the god(s) and their priests. A graphic example of this is found in the oath of a *Hittite prince, "Prayers of Kantuzilis," which certifies that he has never eaten "that which is holy to my god." At least in the Israelite law, the portion set aside for the priest may also be shared with members of his household, although not with guests or hired workers. The restrictions are based on the fact that this is sacred food, and it must not be given to persons outside his extended family (including his slaves). Even daughters who marry outside the priestly community are prohibited from eating this food. There is provision for her return to her father's household after the death of her husband, and in that case she will once again be allowed to eat from the sacrificial offering.

22:17-28. classes of unacceptable sacrifices. Just as the altar and the priests must be without defect and ritually pure, so too must the items brought for sacrifice. However, there are categories of acceptable offerings based on the type of sacrifice. For instance, when an animal is presented as a freewill offering or to fulfill a vow, it must be male and without defect. No beast which is blind, injured or maimed or which has skin disorders (warts or sores) will be accepted. But for lesser freewill offerings, a cow or sheep which is deformed or stunted will be accepted, although not one whose testicles are damaged. Similarly, in *Hittite *ritual, dogs, which were normally considered

unclean, could be sacrificed to the gods of the underworld.

22:28. prohibition concerning slaughter of mother and young. The regulation that a mother and her young should not be offered the same day provided some protection to those with just a few animals who might otherwise have found themselves with ritual requirements that would decimate their small herd. There is nothing known of foreign *cultic practice that this would combat, though some have defended the alternative that the regulation had humanitarian concerns.

23:1-44
Religious Calendar

23:1-44. Israel's religious calendar. Versions of Israel's festal calendar are found in Exodus 23:12-19; 34:18-26; Leviticus 23; Deuteronomy 16:1-17; and Numbers 28—29. Each has its own characteristics and emphases. In Leviticus a list of the sacrifices required throughout the year is intertwined with the festivals of sabbath, Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. These feasts mark the various stages in the agricultural year, celebrate harvests and give both credit and a sacrificial portion back to God, who has provided their bounty. Several also became related to historical events. Although the sabbath is not technically a feast day, it is appended here to mark its importance, and it provides a sense of how the ancients calculated time. Much of the rest of the ancient Near East had calendars more cognizant of the sun and moon, since these were manifestations of principal deities. While Israel's calendar did not neglect lunar and solar cycles, less attention was paid to equinoxes and solstices (sometimes viewed as times of conflict between sun and moon gods). Since the agricultural seasons ultimately link to the solar cycles, the lunar month/year system used throughout the ancient Near East had to be periodically adjusted to the solar cycle. This was done by adding a thirteenth month a few days in length when priests determined that an adjustment was called for.

23:3. sacred assembly on the sabbath. Sacred assemblies or proclamations were an important part of most religious practice in the ancient world. They refer to local or national gatherings for public, corporate worship. The people were summoned together away from their occupational work. Aside from performance of corporate *rituals, it is unclear what took place at these gatherings. In later times they were used for public readings, but evidence for this on all such occasions in the early periods is lacking (see Deut 31:10-13). This passage is the only reference to these gatherings in association with the sabbath.

23:5. Passover. This celebration refers to the Passover sacrifice commemorating the departure from Egypt (detailed in Ex 12—13). It is to begin at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month (March-April). Since the sacrifice is to be a year-old lamb, some speculate that the origin of this event is found among the pastoral nomadic groups of the land and was at this time appended to the agriculturally based Feast of Unleavened Bread. Eventually, Passover became a pilgrimage festival when worship was centralized in Jerusalem, but it returned to home celebration after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

23:6-8. Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of Unleavened Bread signals the beginning of the barley harvest (March-April). Unleavened bread was made from the newly harvested grain without adding yeast and was celebrated as the first sign of coming harvests that year. The seven days of celebration and burnt offering are enclosed by days at the beginning and the end when no work is allowed (see comment on Ex 12:14-20).

23:10-14. wave offering for harvest. As a part of the harvest festival, the "first fruits" are brought to the priest. He in turn waves the sheaf of grain or elevates it before the altar of the Lord. This gesture physically draws God's attention to the sacrifice and signifies that all gifts and sacrificial items derive from and belong to God. It also releases the remainder of the harvest for the people's use (see comment on 7:28-38).

23:12-13. burnt, grain and drink offering. The burnt offering of the year-old lamb, a quantity twice the usual amount of grain, and a libation of wine constituted the three major products of Israel (sometimes with olive oil replacing or supplementing wine—see 2:1; Num 15:4-7). By combining them, the fertility provided by God will be directed toward all of their efforts in animal husbandry and farming. The pleasing odor draws *Yahweh's attention to the sacrifice (see Noah's sacrifice in Gen 8:20-21) and marks it as the properly prescribed thanksgiving *ritual—not the feeding of a god as in Mesopotamian and Egyptian religions.

23:15-22. Feast of Weeks. This second of the three major harvest festivals comes seven weeks after the harvest of the early grain (Ex 34:22; Deut 16:9-12) and is also known as the

Feast of Harvest or Pentecost (Ex 23:16). In the agricultural cycle it marks the end of the wheat harvest season, and by tradition it is tied to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. It is also associated with *covenant renewal and pilgrimage. Celebration includes the bringing of a "wave offering" of two loaves of bread, animal sacrifices (seven year-old lambs, one bull and two rams) and a drink offering in thanksgiving for a good harvest. A goat is also to be sacrificed as a sin offering for the people.

23:16-20. offerings. The Feast of Weeks requires a variety of offerings from the people. The "new grain" offering is distinct from the regular grain offering (see 2:13). The two loaves are made with yeast, but they will not actually be taken up on the altar (see regulations in 7:13). The animals that serve as burnt offerings (seven year-old lambs, a young bull and two rams) demonstrate the mixed character of the Israelite economy. The reason for the inclusion of a sin offering of a goat is unclear beyond the idea that the people must be restored to *cultic *purity prior to consuming their harvest.

23:23-25. Feast of Trumpets. The first day of the seventh month (the most sacred month in the Israelite calendar) was to be marked with the blowing of ram's horn (shofar), commemorating the *covenantal agreement and gifts of God to the people. No work is allowed, and burnt offerings are presented (see Num 29:2-6 for items sacrificed). The festival would continue until the tenth day of the month when the Day of Atonement would be observed (see 16:29-34 for details). In later times the Feast of Trumpets would become the New Year's festival, but that occurred in late postexilic times.

23:26-32. Day of Atonement. For information on the Day of Atonement, see the comments on chapter 16.

23:33-43. Feast of Tabernacles. The final harvest of the year occurred in the autumn prior to the onset of the rainy season and marked the beginning of a new agricultural year (fifteenth day of the seventh month). At this time the last of the ripening grain and fruits were gathered and stored. The seven-day event was also known as the Feast of Ingathering (Ex 23:16) and was symbolized by the construction of booths decorated with greenery for the harvesters. The festival was tied into Israelite tradition as a commemoration of the wilderness wanderings. It was also the occasion for the dedication of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:65).

23:40. fruit, leaves and branches. To represent the abundance and lushness of the land, Israelites were instructed to celebrate, decorating their booths with fruit (citron) as well as leaves and branches from willow and palm trees. The festal occasion probably included dancing and processions carrying bundles of the leafy branches. In this way, the people acknowledge the abundance provided by God and communally celebrate the visible fulfillment of the *covenant.

23:42-43. live in booths. As a way of commemorating their life in the wilderness, the Israelites are told to construct booths and live in them during the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles. The more practical application of these temporary shelters would be to serve as housing for workers who would protect the harvest until its distribution after the festival.

24:1-9

Maintaining the Holy Place

24:2-4. oil lamps. Only the highest quality olive oil was to be used in the sacred oil lamps that illuminated the sacred precincts of the tabernacle. They were placed on golden lampstands (see Ex 25:31-39), which stood just outside the curtain of the testimony in the tent of meeting (see Ex 27:20-21). They were to burn from evening until morning, and Aaron and his descendants were given a sacred trust to keep them lit for all time to come. Like many of the *cultic items associated with the tent of meeting, the oil lamps symbolized the presence and protection of *Yahweh as well as the perpetual service of the priests.

24:4. significance of the menorah. The familiar image of the menorah, with its six branches and center lamp, comes from the description in Exodus 25:31-40 and may be symbolic of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. However, the description of the lampstand in 24:4 only includes the fact that it is made of gold. The number of lamps is also not specified here.

24:5-9. setting out of the bread and incense. The twelve loaves of the bread of the Presence (Ex 25:23-30) represented the twelve tribes of Israel. These loaves were consumed by the priests every sabbath, and new loaves were put in their place. The burning of frankincense provided the "sacrificial aroma," substituted for burning the flour on the altar. Because the loaves were sacred, they were reserved for the priests (although see 1 Sam 21:4-6).

24:10-23

The Case of the Blasphemer

24:10-16. nature of blasphemy. The name of God is holy. Just as the people are warned not

to misuse the name of God (Ex 20:7), to pronounce a curse using God's name without authorization or to curse God by name (Ex 22:28) is considered blasphemy. This is a capital offense, punishable by stoning. The *Assyrian texts condemn blasphemers to having their tongues cut out and to being skinned alive.

24:14-16. stoning as means of execution. Stoning is a communal form of execution and the most commonly mentioned form of execution in the Bible. It is used to punish crimes against the entire community (apostasy in 20:2; sorcery in 20:27), and it requires all those persons who have been offended to participate. Because it cannot be determined whose individual stone caused the death of the condemned, no one person need bear the guilt for the death. Mesopotamian texts do not mention stoning, but employ drowning, impalement, beheading and burning as forms of execution.

24:17-22. *lex talionis*. The legal concept of equal retribution or "an eye for an eye," is found in biblical (Ex 21:23-25; Deut 19:21) and Mesopotamian law codes. It has variations in *Hammurabi's code (eighteenth-century B.C. *Babylonia) based on the social status (nobility, citizen, slave) of the accused and the person harmed. It is possible that a price was set to redeem a life in capital cases or to replace the necessity of inflicting matching harm (broken arm, gouged eye, etc.). The basis for such laws was to insure legal restitution and thereby avoid the culturally disruptive necessity of seeking private revenge. Ideally, when an injury is done to another person, the way to provide true justice is to cause an equal injury to the culprit. Although this may seem extreme, it in fact limits the punishment that can be inflicted on the person accused of the injury.

25:1-55

Sabbatical Year and Jubilee

25:2-7. sabbatical rest for land. This set of laws requiring that the land lie fallow every seventh year parallels that found in Exodus 23:10-11. However only here is the term *sabbatical* applied to the seventh year. The benefit derived from resting the land is to retard the rate of salinization (sodium content in the soil) caused by irrigation. Large areas in Mesopotamia were actually left abandoned due to exhaustion of the soil and a disastrously high salt content. During the seventh year no cultivation of the soil is allowed. *Ugaritic texts likewise feature seven-year agricultural cycles, and some would contend that a fallow-year concept is also included. However, all of the people, as well as hired laborers and the farm animals, are allowed to eat the produce of the land that grows on its own. Such a policy may actually have been enforced on portions of each field every year, so that eventually it was all allowed to rest.

25:8-55. Jubilee year. Every fiftieth year (seven sabbaths of years plus one year) was marked by a general release from debt, servitude and a return of all land that had been mortgaged or sold to the rightful owner. Such concerns for the perpetual ownership of the land are also evident in *Ugaritic real estate documents. Declarations that returned land to its original owners and freed debt slaves were periodically made among the *Hittites and in Mesopotamia (often in the first year of a new king's reign) and are attested in proclamations by early kings such as Uruinimgina and Ammisaduqa. At the heart of the Israelite laws is the idea of the inalienable right of the people to their land. The land could be used to redeem a debt but must be released at the Jubilee in much the same way that debt slaves were to be released in the seventh year of their servitude (Ex 23:10-11; Deut 15:1-11). This could, of course, serve as the basis for the returned exiles' claim to their former lands, but this does not exclude the practice from previous historical periods.

25:23. God as owner of land compared to temple economy. All of the land occupied by the Israelites was the property of *Yahweh. It was granted to them as tenants, and as such they could not sell it outright to anyone. In the Jubilee year (every fiftieth year), all land that had been consigned for payment of debts was to be returned to its owners. If a man died, it was the responsibility of his nearest kin to redeem the land so that it would remain in the family (25:24-25; Jer 32:6-15). This concept is similar to that found in Egypt, where the "divine" Pharaoh owned the land and granted it to his subjects. However, it stands in contrast with the temple economy that existed in Mesopotamia. There land was owned by individual citizens, the king and the temples of the various gods. The laws of *Hammurabi speak of the king's land grants, which could revert to him upon the death of the vassal. The land owned by the temples was granted to tenants, who paid a portion of their harvest for the right to work the land. This patchwork of ownership, while depending in many cases on tenants who could not sell the land, did not provide the sense of unity implied in the biblical concept.

25:24-25. kinsman redeemer. Since *Yahweh has granted the land to the Israelites as ten-

ants, they cannot sell it, and if they mortgage a portion of it to pay debts, it is the obligation of their kinsman to "redeem" the land by paying off the mortgage. This demonstrates both the sense of obligation and the solidarity that are the hallmarks of ancient Israel's communally based society. Evidence of this legislation's being put into practice is found in Jeremiah's redeeming of his kinsman's land during the siege of Jerusalem (Jer 32:6-15) and in the legal background to Ruth 4:1-12. In this way the land remained within the extended family as a sign of their membership in the *covenantal community. The importance of this inalienable right to land can be seen in Naboth's refusal to relinquish the "inheritance of my fathers" when King Ahab offers to buy his vineyard (1 Kings 21:2-3). In Mesopotamia (especially the earlier periods) land was often privately owned by families rather than individuals.

25:29-31. difference between houses in walled cities and houses in villages. There is a different legal classification for dwellings in walled towns and those in unwalled villages. In the towns, inhabited by Levites, artisans and government officials, a house could only be redeemed from its buyer within one year. After that the sale was final. Similarly, the Law of *Eshnunna allows a debtor who has sold his house first claim to repurchase it when it comes up for sale again. However, Israelite village dwellings (literally, "encampments") adjacent to fields and pasture lands fell within the same legal category as arable land and could not be sold in perpetuity and were to be released in the Jubilee year. Such legislation is based on the different social conditions in these two settings and indicates an awareness that property in urban centers produced no harvest. It merely provided shelter and business space.

25:38. prohibition against taking interest. Like the other prohibitions against charging interest on loans to fellow Israelites (Ex 22:25; Deut 23:19, see comments there), this legislation is designed to help a person to escape his insolvent condition and to prevent him from falling into debt servitude due to default on a loan. This applies to loans of money as well as grain, which would ordinarily be paid back at the end of the harvest. These laws are also a way to allow the debtor to retain a measure of personal dignity and honor by being treated on a level higher than a slave or a foreigner (see Deut 23:20). Both the laws of *Eshnunna and *Hammurabi's code contain set rates of interest on loans (20 percent to 33.3 percent was not uncommon and was considered fair). However, it was understood that "acts of god," such as a flood, require compassion on the debtor and a cancellation of interest payments.

25:39-55. slavery in Israel. Ancient Israel considered permanent slavery the most inhumane condition possible. The laws dealing with slavery reflect an understanding of the reasons for poverty and try to deal with its victims nonviolently. They also do not account for the principal cause of slavery in Mesopotamia—warfare. One sign of Israelite concern may be seen in the practice of allowing a household to pledge the work of its members as collateral when it borrowed goods or services from another household. To avoid confiscation of their land and children, the members of a household in default would work off their debt one day at a time. As a state, Israel tried to prevent debt from accumulating to the point where slavery was the only option. Thus the laws against charging interest on loans worked in most cases to aid the poor (Ex 22:24; Deut 23:19-20; Lev 25:35-37; Ezek 18:3). In these cases a household could become destitute and at the insistence of its creditors sell members of the household into slavery to pay debts (2 Kings 4:1; Neh 5:1-5). Slavery in this case is defined as temporary debt slavery, since the law restricts the number of years a man may be held to six (Ex 21:2-11; Deut 15:12-18). Regulations also restrict the sale or the enslavement of Israelites by other Israelites (Lev 25:35-42). In this case the Israelite who is in financial difficulties would be reduced to the status of a hired hand or indentured servant rather than a slave, even if his owner is a non-Israelite (25:47-55). Verse 48 refers to the redemption of slaves, a practice also attested in a number of Mesopotamian sources.

26:1-46
Obedience and Disobedience

26:1. carved stone. This term occurs only here (though it is probably referred to again in Num 33:52) and is quite obscure. A. Hurowitz (on the basis of an Assyrian inscription) has suggested that it may refer to a decorated or engraved threshold slab in the temple area that the king prostrated himself on when making a petition for a favorable sign. For a potentially similar situation see comment on Ezekiel 44:3.

26:1. sacred stone. Like idols (19:4), sacred standing stones are also prohibited as foreign *cult objects. They may have been huge monoliths representing a god or a set of pillars ar-

ranged around an altar or shrine. Some of those found in excavations at Gezer and Hazor were decorated with carvings such as raised hands or symbols associated with a particular deity.

26:1. nature and forms of idols. Idols came in a variety of shapes and sizes in the ancient Near East. They were carved from stone and wood and were cast in molds using gold, silver and bronze (see Is 40:19-20). Basically human in appearance (except those from Egypt, which combined human and animal characteristics), they had distinctive, even formalized, poises, clothing and hairstyles. The image was not the deity, but the deity was thought to inhabit the image and manifest its presence and will through the image. Archaeologists have found very few life-sized images that the texts describe, but there are renderings of them that allow accurate knowledge of details.

26:3-45. blessings and curses in treaty formulae. It is typical of ancient Near Eastern legal codes and treaties to append a section of divine blessings and curses (see Deut 28; Code of *Hammurabi [eighteenth century B.C.]; Esarhaddon Treaty [680-669 B.C.]; thirteenth-century B.C. treaty between Rameses II of Egypt and *Hittite king Hattusilis III). Characteristically, the curses far outweigh the blessings and, as in this case, are generally arranged in order of increasing severity. The principle behind these statements is the need to insure compliance with law or with treaties by bringing in divine goodwill and sanction. In this way the parties will feel more obligated than if they were to simply depend on the conscientiousness of their people or neighbors.

26:4-5. importance of fertility. Without continuous yield from the land, the people could not survive. Thus fertility, in the form of regular rainfall and abundant harvest from fields and vines, was a constant concern. As a result many of the gods of the ancient Near East were concerned with rain and storm, *fertility and the growing seasons. The inclusion of fertility in the set of blessings here is a reiteration of *Yahweh's *covenant promise to give the people land and children (i.e., a country of their own and fertility to insure life to each successive generation).

26:5. agricultural calendar. As noted in the Gezer calendar, a tenth-century B.C. schoolboy exercise on a fragment of limestone, the Israelite year was divided into agricultural seasons. Thus the "rain in season" would come in the fall (October-November) to moisten the newly planted fields and in early spring (March-April) to complete the ripening process before harvest (Deut 11:14).

26:8. five will chase a hundred. A sign of the promised blessing of peace is that *Yahweh, the "Divine Warrior," will fight for them and give them the victory over their enemies, no matter how great the odds against them. Thus five can rout a hundred. This underdog-turned-conqueror theme is also found in Deuteronomy 32:30, Joshua 23:10 and Isaiah 30:17. Similar assurance of the aid of a "Divine Warrior" is found in the Moabite inscription of King Mesha (c. 830 B.C.).

26:13. bars of the yoke. Yokes, usually made of wood, consisted of a bar across the nape of the animals' necks. The bar had pegs placed down through it on either side of each animal's head. The pegs were then tied together under the chin. As slaves in Egypt, the people were burdened with work like oxen bound to a yoke (see Jer 28:10-14). God has broken this yoke of bondage, freeing them of their heavy burdens and allowing them to stand upright like free men and women. Their freedom and their human dignity have thus been restored.

26:16. nature of the illnesses. The diseases promised in this curse include a "wasting disease," a fever, an illness that damages the sufferer's eyesight and causes loss of appetite. These may all be explained by the "terror"—depression and anxiety caused by God's wrath and the incursions of their enemies. Although there have been clinical diagnostic texts discovered from Mesopotamia, it is impossible to attach a specific diagnosis to the diseases mentioned here.

26:19. iron sky, bronze ground. The sense of this metaphoric curse is also found in the execration (curse) of Deuteronomy 28 and in the Treaty of Esarhaddon (seventh century B.C.). It implies that the land itself will turn against the people, becoming hard as bronze because the iron gates of heaven will have closed and no rain will fall on it.

26:26. ten women baking with one oven. The picture of so little grain that numerous women can all bake their bread in the same oven is also found on the *Aramaic statue found at Tell Fekherye, where one hundred women cannot fill up an oven with their bread.

26:29. cannibalism in ancient Near East. Only ultimate desperation and immanent starvation would cause the people of the ancient Near East to resort to cannibalism (see 2 Kings 6:24-30). It is included as part of the curses section here and in Deuteronomy 28:53-57 and in the *Assyrian treaties of the seventh century B.C. to demonstrate just how horrible God's punishment will be on the disobedient.

27:1-34

Vows

27:2-13. nature of vows. Information concerning vows can be found in most of the cultures of the ancient Near East, including *Hittite, *Ugaritic, Mesopotamian and, less often, Egyptian. Vows are voluntary agreements made with deity. In this case the vow involves pledging the value of a person dedicated to temple service (see 1 Sam 1:11). This may relate back to the redemption of the firstborn in Exodus 13:13; 34:20 and Numbers 18:15-16, but it does not involve human sacrifice. The table of equivalences defines the value of the person to be redeemed based on gender, age and ability to work. In this way the temple received sufficient funds to make needed repairs and purchase equipment (see 2 Kings 12:5-6). As is the case in all vows, God is invoked (note the seriousness of this act in Ex 20:7), and both parties are expected to act according to the terms of the vow. The vows would typically be conditional and accompany a petition made to deity. The items that are given to redeem the person become sacred and cannot be redeemed themselves unless, by their nature, they are unacceptable for dedication (i.e., unclean or unfit). The huge amounts involved (up to fifty shekels) make it unlikely this vow was common.

27:2-8. dedication of persons. The concept of dedicating a person to temple service may be based on the idea that a family must sacrifice (i.e., give up their labor) to God's service. Thus Samuel was dedicated to the shrine at Shiloh by Hannah prior to his birth (1 Sam 1:11). However, in the labor-poor region of Israel, this would have been impractical. Thus a system was created whereby the obligation was fulfilled by redemption of the person through a set table of equivalencies based on age, gender, ability to work and ability to pay. This might be compared to the laws of bodily injury in the *Ur-Nammu code, the Laws of *Eshnunna and the laws of *Hammurabi, which set a specific monetary fine based on the type of injury, age, social status and gender of the victim.

27:3-8. relative values. The set of relative values established for redemption of persons dedicated to temple service is based on four criteria: age, gender, ability to work and ability to pay. The assumption is that the value of the labor service of an adult male between age twenty and sixty is fifty silver shekels. Even though they may serve longer than an adult, the value set for children is only a fraction of this amount (based on gender). However, for persons over sixty, the amount, understandably, is less than for those of standard working age. The amount set for the poor is based on a priest's determination of their ability to pay. Although these amounts may reflect the value of slaves, this amount fluctuates too much over time to be a reliable indicator.

27:3-7. amounts of money. The amounts of money specified for redemption of persons dedicated to temple service are all in silver. The largest, fifty shekels, based on the silver content of twenty gerahs/shekels (27:25), was many times the annual wage for a laborer. This makes it unlikely that many persons would have made this type of vow, knowing it must be paid once the vow is made. They simply could not have paid this sum and therefore the redemption of a dedicated person may have been a rare occasion.

27:3. sanctuary shekel. The price in silver to be paid was based on the sanctuary shekel as opposed to a common shekel weight, which was generally 11.4 grams. The sanctuary shekel used for the valuation is generally considered to be a fraction of the regular shekel, but precise information is not available. Archaeological finds do attest shekel pieces weighing 9.3-10.5 grams.

27:9-13. redeeming animals. If a person wished to use an animal as payment of the vow, then the determination of its value and its acceptability would be based on priestly inspection for blemish or other imperfection, and on whether the animal was clean (i.e., acceptable for sacrifice). If an animal was ceremonially unclean, it could still be offered, but it in turn would be redeemed with an extra payment of one-fifth of its value. If it was the intent of the donor to give the animal up for sacrifice, it could not under any circumstances be redeemed (see 22:21-25). Such care over the ritual *purity of sacrificial animals was also common in *Hittite and Mesopotamian rituals.

27:14-25. dedication of house or land. The consecration of a dwelling or of fields, whether owned by a person or held as collateral for a debt, may be made, but they must be inspected and valued by the priest. This allows for a set amount should the owner wish to redeem them, plus one-fifth of their value. It also could involve a purification *ritual of the property, as is also evident in *Hittite texts. The basis for this practice might involve a vow to make special provision, beyond normal sacrifices or tithes, for God's sanctuary or priesthood, and it may result from the lack of an heir. Thus the produce of land or the use of the house (for storage or rents) would belong

to God. The Year of Jubilee is also a factor which must be taken into account in this valuation and assignment of property. Only land which was owned and not redeemed may ultimately become the permanent property of the priests (27:20-21).

27:21. priest property. We know from *Hittite, Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts that temple communities owned land and benefited from its produce. Although the practice of deeding over property to the temple is not mentioned outside the Bible, it seems likely that the priestly community throughout the ancient Near East could acquire ownership of land that was consecrated to the use of the god(s). This is made possible if the owner of the land fails to redeem it. At that point, the land becomes "holy" and like sacrificial animals may not be redeemed in the future. Thus in the Israelite Jubilee year celebration, instead of the land reverting to its original owner, it becomes the permanent property of the priests.

27:25. twenty gerahs to the shekel. The sanctuary shekel (weighing 11-13 grams) was to have a silver content of twenty gerahs (0.571 grams or 8.71 grains). This established the weight as acceptable payment for dedicated persons or property.

27:29. person dedicated to destruction. There are some acts which cannot be expiated through sacrifice or redemption. Persons who have been condemned for false worship (Ex 22:19) or for violating the ban (Josh 7:13-26) or for murder (Num 35:31-34) or willful violations of ritual *purity (as in the *Hittite texts) may not be redeemed. In some cases their families and their property were also destroyed in a general purging of evil. They have committed acts that violate God's holiness and contaminate the community. Therefore their sentence must be carried out without exception. Only in this way can God's name be restored to its proper sanctity and the people be cleansed of their *impurity.

27:31-33. redeeming the tithe. Since all of the produce of the land (grain and fruit) belongs to God, a tithe must be made on it (Deut 14:22-26). Those items set aside for the tithe could not be considered part of the "freewill" offerings, since the tithe is considered the unrestricted property of *Yahweh. The amount of the tithe may be redeemed by a payment of its value plus one-fifth of that value. Note that this payment can be made only for farm produce (compare Num 18:14-19). Animals not only cannot be redeemed, but any attempt to do so results in the loss of both the animal originally chosen for the tithe and the one substituted.

NUMBERS

1:1-46

Census

1:1. Desert of Sinai. "Desert of Sinai" refers to the wilderness area surrounding the mountain where the Israelites were camped (see comment on Ex 19:1-2).

1:1. chronology. By comparing this to Exodus 40:17 it can be seen that the tabernacle has now been set up for one month and the people have been camped at Sinai for nearly a year.

1:2. purpose of census. Censuses in the ancient world were used as a means of conscripting men for either military service or government building projects. They also were often accompanied or even motivated by the collection of a head tax. This census is for conscription into the army, but it cannot easily be separated from the one in Exodus 30:11-16 (see comment) where a temple tax is collected.

1:46. size of the population. For some of the problems see the comment on Exodus 12:37.

1:47—2:34

The Arrangement of the Camp

1:52. grouping of the tribes. The camp of the priests and Levites surrounded the sanctuary, while the other tribal camps formed an outer rectangle with three camps on each side. Rectangular military encampments were the norm in Egyptian practice of this time and are portrayed in ninth-century *Assyrian art with the king protected in the center. Judah leads the prominent eastern camp (the tabernacle entrance faced east) as the leader among the tribes. Reuben, the tribe of the eldest son, leads the southern group, while Dan, the tribe of the eldest of the *concubines' sons, leads the northern group. The tribes from Rachel's sons are on the west side, led by Ephraim, the

son of Joseph with firstborn rights.

1:52. standards. In Egypt each army division was named after a deity, and the standard for that division bore a representation of that deity. It would therefore be reasonable to assume that the standard of each tribe displayed a symbol of the tribe. On the other hand, some interpreters have interpreted this word to refer to a military unit rather than a standard.

2:3-32. numbers of the census. As discussed in the comment on Exodus 12:37, there is a problem with the numbers. The most probable solution at this point is to understand that the numbers given here are mixtures. Since the Hebrew word translated "thousand" *('lp)* looks the same as the word translated "military division," a number like 74,600 (v. 4) may be read as 74 military divisions, (totaling) 600 men. The total in verse 32 would originally have been written 598 military divisions *('lp)*, 5 thousand *('lp)* and 5 hundred men. But at some point in the transmission of the text the two words were confused and added together to make 603 thousand. If this solution is correct, the size of the Israelite group that left Egypt would have been about 20,000.

3:1—4:49

The Levite Clans

3:7-10. Levites as sanctuary guards. Encamped around the sanctuary and instructed to put to death any trespasser, the Levites restricted the access to the tabernacle. Ancient sanctuaries were not public places for gathering but were the divine residences. The priests are seen as guards in *Hittite texts as well as in texts from *Mari on the upper Euphrates. In *Babylonian beliefs there were also demons or protective spirits who guarded temple entrances.

3:12-13. Levites in the place of the first-born. In the ancient world many cultures featured an ancestor *cult in which libations were poured out on behalf of the dead ancestors, whose spirits would then offer protection and help to those still living. In *Babylon the disembodied spirit *(utukki)* or the ghost *(etemmu)* could become very dangerous if not cared for and often were the objects of incantations. Care for the dead would begin with proper burial and would continue with ongoing gifts and honor of the memory and name of the deceased. The firstborn was responsible for maintaining this ancestor worship and therefore inherited the family gods (often images of deceased ancestors). While ancestor worship or *funerary cult was not approved for Israelites, the indictments of the prophets make it clear that it was one of the deviant practices of the common people. The transfer of the status of the firstborn to the Levites therefore implies that rather than a family-level ancestor worship maintained by the firstborn, Israel would have a national-level religious practice maintained and regulated by the Levites (see also the comments at Ex 13:1-3; Deut 14:1-2; 26:14). For legal background see comment on 8:24-26.

3:47-51. redemption money. The concept of ransom or redemption money occurs both in *Akkadian (Babylonian) and *Ugaritic (Canaanite) texts, though not in this same function. The nation here bought back its firstborn from God by "trading" the Levites, and the remainder of the firstborn had to be bought back with money according to the value set in Leviticus 27:6. The average shekel weighed 11.4 grams, although there are also references to a "heavy shekel," which may have weighed more. The sanctuary weight listed here may refer to a shekel that has a more standard value and weight than the standard "marketplace" shekel. It is generally considered a lighter shekel (see comment on Ex 30:13). Five shekels would have represented about half a year's wages.

4:6. hide of sea cows. Both sea cows (a herbivorous mammal, the dugong) and dolphins are found in the Red Sea, and their hides could have been tanned and used for decoration. These creatures had been hunted for their hides along the Arabian Gulf for millennia. Alternatively, this word may be compared to an *Akkadian word which refers to a semiprecious yellow or orange stone, and thus to the color of dye used rather than to an animal.

4:6. blue cloth. This has more recently been interpreted as a blue-purple or violet color. The dye for this color was one of the major exports of Phoenicia, where it was extracted from the murex snail *(Murex trunculus)*, which inhabited shallow coastal waters of the Mediterranean. An ancient refinery has also been found at Dor along the northern coast of Israel. One chemist estimated that a quarter of a million snails would be needed to produce one ounce of pure dye. This dye was used in the manufacture of the most sacred objects such as the veil of the Holy of Holies and the high priestly garments.

4:46-48. number of the Levites. Here the number of Levite men aged thirty to fifty is 8,580, while in 3:30 the total number of males over a month old was 22,000. This would imply that there were 13,420 males younger than thirty and older than fifty. This is a reasonable distribution and argues that the numbers are in right proportion. It is still likely that there has

been confusion concerning the word *thousand,* as described in the comment on 2:3-32.

5:1-4

Persons Sent Outside the Camp

5:2. infectious skin diseases. For the nature of these diseases see comment on Leviticus 13:2.

5:2. discharges. For discussion of the various classes of discharges, see the comments on Leviticus 15.

5:2. ceremonial uncleanness. Not all uncleanness was avoidable, and the cause of uncleanness was often something that would in no way be considered sinful. There are several categories of uncleanness that could not be easily avoided, including sexual impurities, disease-related impurities and the uncleanness that came from contact with corpse or carcass. Though it was a matter of etiquette rather than ethics, the sacred compass needed to be protected from that which was inappropriate. Additionally it was a common belief that demons inhabited menstrual blood. That the uncleanness from childbirth should be seen as similar to monthly uncleanness is common in ancient cultures, including Egypt, *Babylonia and Persia.

5:3. living outside the camp. Though the camp did not need to maintain the same level of *purity as the temple compound, there were restrictions. This restriction is also found in *Babylonian literature for victims of skin diseases forced to live in isolation. It is likely that they would have lived in the vicinity of the tombs.

5:5-10

Restitution in Fraud Cases

5:6-7. nature of the legislation. This section concerns a case where someone has used a formal oath to defraud someone else in court and later feels guilty about having done so. Giving restitution plus 20 percent to the defrauded individual, his next of kin or to the priest, plus the appropriate reparation offering, is commanded. In *Hammurabi's laws one-sixth is typically added to restitution amounts in the form of interest payments.

5:11-31

The Case of the Jealous Husband

5:14. basis for legal action. The only basis for this action is the jealousy of the woman's husband. The word used to describe the nature of the crime in verse 12 usually refers to a breach of faith or an act of sacrilege (see the comment on Lev 5:14-16). It is therefore likely that the woman has previously been asked to swear an oath to her innocence and is now being accused of swearing falsely. Such an accusation may come about if the woman is now found to be pregnant and the husband contends that the child is not his.

5:15. the husband's actions. It is unclear why the husband brings the particular offering that he does. Unlike the regular meal offering, it is barley (as offered by the poor) instead of wheat, and it omits the oil and incense as meal offerings associated with potential offenses do. Generally oil and incense were associated with celebration, and this was not a festive occasion.

5:16-17. the priest's actions. A text from *Mari (northwest Mesopotamia) speaks of a trial by ordeal where the gods are asked to drink water which contains dirt taken from the city gate. This bound the gods to their oath to protect the city. Here the ingredients are sacred (water from the laver, dirt from the sanctuary floor) and mixed with the inscribed curses that concern the woman's obligation to preserve the *purity of the sanctuary.

5:18. loosening the hair. This is elsewhere connected to mourning and may suggest that the woman is to adopt a posture of mourning until the Lord's verdict is clarified.

5:23-24. trial by ordeal in the ancient Near East. "Ordeal" describes a judicial situation in which the accused is placed in the hand of God using some mechanism, generally one that will put the accused in jeopardy. If the deity intervenes to protect the accused from harm, the verdict is innocent. Most trials by ordeal in the ancient Near East involved dangers such as water, fire or poison. The accused who is exposed to these threats is in effect being assumed guilty until the deity declares otherwise by action on her behalf. In contrast, the procedure in this text invokes neither magic nor danger but simply creates a situation for God to respond to. Thus the woman here is presumed innocent until circumstances (directed by the Lord) show otherwise. *Hammurabi's laws contain similar cases in which the woman undergoes a river ordeal to determine her guilt or innocence.

5:27. the negative potential results. Suggestions have ranged from a flooded uterus to false pregnancy to pelvic prolapse to atrophied genitalia. Whatever the actual physical manifestations might be, the text clearly indicates that the result is sterility. If the woman has been brought into this process because of pregnancy, it may be that the potion would be expected to induce a miscarriage in the case

that the pregnancy came about through illicit behavior.

6:1-21

The Nazirite Vow

6:3. abstinence from drinks. There are a number of different words used to describe fermented drinks made from grapes used here. While some of the terms could at times refer to intoxicants made from other ingredients (e.g., grain), only those that can refer to grape products are used here. That suggests that only grape intoxicants are prohibited to the *Nazirite. It is not drunkenness that is the issue here, but grape drinks of any sort.

6:3-4. abstinence from grape products. Prohibition of grape products has suggested to some interpreters that a nomadic lifestyle is being elevated, but it is very difficult to see that as a biblical or priestly agenda. Alternatively one must notice that the grape is one of the principal, one could say characteristic, staples of Canaan and therefore symbolically connected to the issue of fertility (note that the spies bring back a huge cluster of grapes [13:24] as evidence of the fertility of the land). The use of raisins in raisin cakes for the *fertility *cult can be seen in Hosea 3:1.

6:5. significance of hair. There is a Phoenician inscription from the ninth century B.C. reporting the dedication of shaven hair by an individual in fulfillment of a vow made to the goddess *Astarte. It is of importance that in the biblical text there is no discussion of what should be done with the hair that is cut. It is neither dedicated as in the above inscription, nor is it deposited in the temple as in some cultures. The dedicated hair is uncut (v. 9), not cut. For men hair has symbolic value as a sign of manhood or virility (see 2 Sam 10:4). Women decorate their hair and groom it carefully as a sign of beauty. The prohibition against trimming the "sides of your head" or the "edges of your beard" uses the same terminology as in Leviticus 19:9-10, which deals with the harvesting of fields. In both cases an offering is involved—one to the poor and the other to God. *Hammurabi's code penalizes false witnesses by having half the person's hair cut off. The Middle Assyrian code allows a debt-slave's master to pull out his or her hair as punishment (see Neh 13:25). Both laws suggest that shame is attached to the loss of hair. In ancient thinking hair (along with blood) was one of the main representatives of a person's life essence. As such it was often an ingredient in sympathetic magic. This is evident, for instance, in the practice of sending along a lock of a presumed prophet's hair when his prophecies were sent to the king of *Mari. The hair would be used in divination to determine whether the prophet's message would be accepted as valid. (See Lev 19:27.) Studies have shown that hair cutting was used in the ancient world as an act of distinguishing oneself from those around (as in mourning), or of reentering society (as seems to be the case with the Nazirites).

6:6-7. corpse prohibition. Corpse contamination was one of the most common and unavoidable causes of ritual uncleanness (see comment on 19:11). Some have further speculated that ritual uncleanness from corpse contamination may also represent a statement against the always prevalent *cult of the dead (see comment on 3:1, Levites in the place of the first-born).

6:8. Nazirite background. It may be no coincidence that the three prohibited areas for the *Nazirite represent fertility (grape products), sympathetic magic (hair) and the *cult of the dead (corpse contamination). These are the three principal popular religious practices that *Yahweh worship sought to eliminate. It is difficult to reconstruct, however, why these elements were chosen, or what the original thinking behind the vow was.

6:9-12. ritual procedure in case of violation. Ritual violation of the vow required the purging of the altar but only included the least expensive offerings (pigeons). It was also necessary to offer a lamb for a reparation offering because the violation involved a breach of faith (see comment on Lev 5:14-16).

6:13-20. conclusion of the vow. A whole series of offerings (see the comments on the early chapters of Leviticus for more information on each) concludes the vow, followed by the cutting and burning of the hair. Most vows in the ancient Near East were conditional vows attached to some past or present entreaty (see comment on Lev 27), and there is no reason to assume that the *Nazirite vow is any different. It is not surprising, then, that the vow culminates in offertory gifts. What is unusual, against the background of ancient Near Eastern vows, is the ritualized period of abstinence that precedes the offerings.

6:22-27

The Priestly Blessing

6:24-26. ancient Near Eastern blessings. In the ancient world blessings and curses were believed to have a power all their own that

would result in their fulfillment. This blessing is probably one that the priests were to give to someone leaving the sanctuary after participating in some *ritual. Two small silver scrolls (about one inch long) have been found in the area known as Keteph Hinnom in Jerusalem. They were *amulets in a burial cave from the sixth or seventh century B.C., and they contained this benediction. At present they represent the oldest example of any text of Scripture. The concept of the shining face of the deity resulting in mercy is found in Mesopotamian documents and inscriptions from as early as the twelfth century B.C. as well as in a letter from *Ugarit. Additionally a phrase invoking the gods to grant watch-care and well-being is used regularly in *Ugaritic and *Akkadian salutations. Finally, the phrase "the Lord bless you and keep you" is also included in the words (Hebrew) painted on a large storage jar from the ninth century B.C. found at Kuntillet Ajrud in the northern Sinai.

7:1-89

Offerings for the Tabernacle

7:1. function of anointing sacred objects. Anointing is an act of dedication. It is unclear whether here the anointing is with oil or blood—the former is usually deemed more likely.

7:13. silver plate. The two silver objects named here are more bowl-shaped, the former almost twice the size of the latter and probably deeper. They weigh about three pounds and one and a half pounds respectively.

7:13. fine flour. The flour here was the grits or semolina left in the sieve after wheat was ground into flour. It is the same as was used for the grain offerings (see comment on Lev 2:1).

7:14. gold ladle. These ladles weighed about four ounces. The word translated "ladle" is simply the word for "hand." There are tongs found at *Amarna whose ends are shaped like hands, but the fact that these implements could be filled with incense suggests ladles rather than tongs. Though they were relatively small, the incense they held was valuable so even this small amount was a substantial gift, in addition to the value of the gold.

7:84-88. function of the offerings brought. The text does not speak of the animals actually being sacrificed, and the word translated "offerings" does not refer to sacrifices. The animals were dedicated for tabernacle use for particular offerings (as indicated in the lists), but they became part of the sanctuary livestock to be used as the need arose. In providing basic supplies for operation, this resembled a housewarming party.

8:1-4

The Lampstand

8:2. lampstand. The design of three branches on either side of a central axis is common in the *Late Bronze Age cultures of the Mediterranean. See comment on Exodus 25:31-40.

8:5-26

The Levites

8:7. shaving the body for purification. Egyptian priests were also required to shave their heads and bodies as part of their purification process. Razors were often bronze, either knife-shaped with rounded handles or blades with a thin handle attached perpendicular to the flat.

8:10. laying on of hands. This is the same procedure that the Israelites used when presenting a sacrifice (see comment below). It is symbolic of designating the Levites to serve on behalf of the Israelites.

8:11. Levites as a wave offering. The wave offering (better: elevation offering) is a rite of dedication (see comment on Lev 8:27).

8:12. Levites laying hands on the bulls. See comment on Leviticus 1:4.

8:12. making "atonement" for Levites. For the word here translated "atonement" as a purifying consequence of sacrifice, see comment on Leviticus 1:3-4. But there is no sacrifice being offered here, only sacrificial symbolism being used. The Levites do not perform purification rites on behalf of the Israelites— that is the task of the priests. Instead the Levites protect against divine wrath by providing a ransom. Such attempts are commonplace in *Babylonian and *Hittite appeasement *rituals.

8:24-26. role of the Levites. In the ancient Near East there was a legal transaction by which a creditor would receive the service of a person in the family of the individual to whom he had extended a loan or commodity. The person on loan is assigned a specific area of work over a predetermined length of time. This service took the place of interest on a loan. The person on loan became part of the household of the creditor and received support and sustenance from him. In the same way, the Levites do specified service at the house of the creditor (God) and receive support and sustenance from him. That which is received by the Israelites in exchange is their firstborn.

9:1-14

The Passover

9:1. Desert of Sinai. This is the wilderness area around Mount Sinai (see comment on 1:1).

9:2. Passover. This is the first celebration of Passover since its inception a year earlier in Egypt. For the meaning of the Hebrew term see comment on Exodus 12:11. For further discussion about Passover see the comments on Exodus 12:1-23.

9:15-23

The Guidance of the Cloud

9:15. the function and nature of the cloud. Some have thought the pillar of cloud and fire could be best explained as the result of volcanic activity. An eruption on the Island of Thera (six hundred miles northwest) in 1628 B.C. brought an end to Minoan civilization, and it is possible that its effects could have been seen in the Delta. But the date is far too early (see "The Date of the Exodus," pp.96-97, and this theory would offer no explanation of the movements of the pillar, nor of the location described for it in the biblical account (they are moving southeast). The text does not suggest that the pillar was supernaturally generated, only that it was the means of supernatural guidance. For this reason some have suggested that it was the result of a brazier of some sort carried on a pole that would be used by the vanguard scouts. This was a method often used by caravans. On the other hand, the pillar is always portrayed as acting (coming down, moving) rather than being operated (no human is ever said to move it), so the vanguard theory is difficult to support. In the ancient world a bright or flaming aura surrounding deity is the norm. In Egyptian literature it is depicted as the winged sun disk accompanied by storm clouds. *Akkadian uses the term *melammu* to describe this visible representation of the glory of deity, which in turn is enshrouded in smoke or cloud. In Canaanite mythology it has been suggested the *melammu* concept is expressed by the word *anan,* the same Hebrew word here translated "cloud," but the occurrences are too few and obscure for confidence. In any case, the pillar here would then be one; smoke being visible in the daytime, while the inner flame it covered would glow through at night. (See Ex 13:21-22.)

10:1-10

The Trumpets

10:2. silver trumpets. As is obvious from the materials they are made of, these are not the ram's horn trumpets that are referred to in other contexts. Tubular flared trumpets were used in this period in military as well as ritual contexts. This is depicted on Egyptian reliefs as well as evidenced by actual instruments found, for example, in the tomb of King Tut (a silver trumpet nearly two feet long).

10:2. silver work. The techniques of silver mining were known as early as the mid-third millennium. A process called cupellation using a crucible was used to extract silver from lead and refine it through several stages of purification. In *Ur silversmith artisans were producing musical instruments as well as jewelry and other items in the third millennium.

10:3-7. trumpet signaling. In warfare signaling was done in various ways. Fire signals were common both along garrison lines as well as in the open field. Basic commands were at times communicated by upraised staff or javelin. Trumpet signals are attested in Egypt in the *Late Bronze Age (this time period) in both military and religious contexts. A preset code would include some combination of long and short blasts.

10:11-36

Leaving Sinai

10:11. chronology. At this point the Israelites are still at Sinai having left Egypt only thirteen months earlier. In our calendar it would be early May.

10:12. itinerary. If the Wilderness of Sinai is in the southern section of the Sinai peninsula, as we have suggested, this is a march toward the northeast. The Wilderness of Paran includes Kadesh Barnea and is generally located in the northeast corner of the Sinai peninsula. Several of the sites they stop at on the way are mentioned at the end of chapter 11. The Israelites spend the bulk of their forty years of wandering in the Wilderness of Paran.

10:29. Hobab, son of Reuel. In Exodus 2 Moses' father-in-law was called Reuel, in Exodus 3 he is referred to as Jethro, and here he appears to be named Hobab (see Judg 4:11). The difficulty can be resolved once the ambiguity of the terminology is recognized. The term designating male in-laws is nonspecific. Referring to a male near-relative of the bride, the term could be used for her father, brother, or even grandfather. Most solutions take account of this. Perhaps Reuel is the grandfather head of the clan, Jethro is the father of Zipporah and technically the father-in-law of Moses, and Hobab is the brother-in-law of Moses, Jethro's son. Alternatively, Jethro and Hobab

could both be brothers-in-law, and Reuel the father. (See Ex 3:1.)

11:1—12:16
A Rebellious and Quarrelsome People

11:3. Taberah. There is good reason to associate Taberah with Kibroth Hattaavah (v. 34), since there is no record of travel between these two accounts. Each name reflects an incident that occurred there. No firm identification of these sites is possible.

11:4. meat. The meat they are craving is not beef, lamb or venison. The Israelites had livestock with them but would have been reluctant to slaughter them and thus deplete their herds and flocks. Furthermore, these meats were not part of their normal diet but were eaten only on special occasions. Life by the river in Egypt had accustomed them to a regular diet of fish, however, and the next verse clarifies that this is the meat referred to.

11:5. diet in Egypt. Five types of produce are mentioned here as staples of the Israelite diet in Egypt. Several of them are known from Egyptian texts and wall paintings. The melons are either watermelons or muskmelons.

11:7-9. manna. The bread from heaven was called manna in Exodus 16:31, where it is described. The fact that it came with the dew (Ex 16:4) suggests that God's miraculous provision used a natural process. The most frequent identification is with the secretion of small aphids that feed on the sap of tamarisk trees. When it hardens and falls to the ground, it can be collected and used for a sweetener. The problem is that this only occurs during certain seasons (May to July) and only where there are tamarisk trees. A full season would normally produce only about five hundred pounds, in contrast to the biblical account that has the people gathering about half a pound per person per day. Alternatively, some would favor the sweet liquid of the hammada plant, common in southern Sinai, that is used to sweeten cakes. As with the plagues, it is not necessarily the occurrence of this phenomenon that is unnatural but the timing and magnitude. Nevertheless, these natural explanations seem to fall far short of the biblical data. The comparison to what most translations identify as the seed of the coriander (rarely found in the desert) is more likely to refer to a wider generic category of desert plants with white seeds. (See Ex 16:4-9.)

11:25. the Spirit and prophesying. Ecstatic prophecy, or prophecy that appears to proceed from someone in a "possessed" or trancelike state, is known in Israel as well as in the ancient Near East. In Mesopotamia the ecstatic prophet's title was *muhhu,* and in Israel the ecstasies often resulted in the prophets being thought of as madmen (see, for example, 1 Sam 19:19-24; Jer 29:26). Here the phenomenon does not result in prophetic messages from the Lord but serves as a sign of the power of God on the elders. In that sense it could be compared to the tongues of fire in the upper room in Acts 2.

11:31. quail. Small, plump migratory quail often come through the Sinai on their way north from the Sudan to Europe, usually in the months of March and April. They generally fly with the wind and are driven to ground (or water) if caught in a crosswind. In their exhaustion it is not unusual for them to fly so low that they can be easily caught. Quail looking for a place to land and rest have been known to sink small boats, and in the Sinai they have been noted to cover the ground so densely that some landed on the tops of others. (See Ex 16:13.)

11:32. 10 homers. A homer is a donkey load. It certainly became a more precise dry measure in time, but it is not always used with precision. Estimates of ten homers would run anywhere from forty to sixty bushels. By any estimate the Israelites were overcome with greed. Normally the quails would have been preserved with salt before being laid out to dry. Since this step is not mentioned by the text, it may have been omitted. This suggests that the plague was food poisoning.

11:34. Kibroth Hattaavah. This location cannot be identified with any degree of confidence.

11:35. Hazeroth. Tentatively identified by some as Ain el-Khadra.

12:1. Cushite wife of Moses. Cush can refer to several different places in the Old Testament, though it is most frequently the designation for the area translations usually render "Ethiopia." This is misleading, for the area Cush refers to is not modern Ethiopia (Abyssinia) but the area along the Nile just south of Egypt, ancient Nubia (in modern Sudan). The boundary between Egypt and Nubia in ancient times was usually either at the first or second cataract of the Nile. It is unlikely that Nubia ever extended much beyond the sixth cataract at Khartoum. Another possibility connects Cush here with Cushan, identified in Habakkuk 3:7 with Midian. This has been attractive to some because of Moses' known marriage to a Midianite woman, Zipporah (see Ex 2—4). While the objection of Miriam and Aaron appears to have been ethnic, there is insufficient evidence

to clarify what her ethnic background was. Nubians are depicted with dark skin pigmentation in Egyptian paintings but are sometimes lacking other features designated "negroid."

12:5. pillar of cloud. For a general discussion of the pillar of cloud, see the comment on Exodus 13:21-22. For the pillar as a means of God meeting with Moses, see comment on Exodus 33:10. Here they come to the tent of meeting for judgment of a case. In Canaanite literature the chief deity *El also dwells in a tent and from that tent (where the divine assembly is thought to meet) come forth decrees and judgments. For another example of judgment proceeding from the tent in terms of punishment, see the comment on Leviticus 9:23.

12:6. prophets. By this date there was already a well-established prophetic institution in the ancient Near East. As this text indicates, the usual modes of revelation were dreams and visions. In over fifty texts from the town of *Mari (several centuries earlier than Moses) local officials report prophetic utterances to the king of Mari, Zimri-Lim. Yahweh could choose to speak through anyone, but Moses' status and experience go beyond that of other prophets. Both dreams and visions often used symbolism that required interpretation (often through use of *divination or by an expert in the dream books; see comment on Gen 40:5-18), but there were no such riddles to solve in order to understand God's revelation to Moses.

12:10. Miriam's disease. Hansen's disease (the modern term for leprosy) is unattested in the ancient Near East prior to the time of Alexander the Great (see comment on Lev 13:1-46). The skin diseases described here and elsewhere in the Old Testament are more along the line of psoriasis and eczema. The analogy to a stillborn in verse 12 further confirms this type of diagnosis in that it describes exfoliation (peeling of the skin, not associated with Hansen's disease), not necrosis (destruction of body tissue, including bones and nerves). A stillborn progresses from reddish coloring to a brownish gray and then begins to lose its skin.

12:16. Desert of Paran. See comment on 10:12.

13:1-33

The Reconnaissance of the Land

13:21-22. scope of the exploration. The Wilderness of Zin is the area going south from an imaginary line drawn between the southern tip of the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean, an area also referred to as the Negev. It constitutes the southern border of Canaan. Rehob has often been identified with Tell el-Balat Beth-rehob, almost halfway from the Mediterranean to Hazor. Lebo Hamath is most likely modern Lebweh on one of the sources of the Orontes. This was the southern border of the land of Hamath and therefore the northern border of Canaan. These reference points suggest the scouts explored the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean up and down its full 350-mile length.

13:22. Anakites. The descendants of Anak are specifically mentioned in verses 22 and 28. When names are given, they are *Hurrian (biblical Horites; see comment on Deut 2). The descendants of Anak are generally considered "giants" (v. 33; Deut 2:10-11; 2 Sam 21:18-22), though the description "gigantic" may be more appropriate. There is no mention of the Anakites in other sources, but the Egyptian letter on Papyrus Anastasi I (thirteenth century B.C.) describes fierce warriors in Canaan that are seven to nine feet tall.

13:22. the building of Hebron. Hebron was built seven years before Zoan. Zoan refers to the Egyptian city of Dja'net, which the Greeks called Tanis. It became the capital city of the Delta region in the Twenty-first Dynasty (twelfth century B.C.). The earliest major builder identified by the archaeological finds is Psusennes I in the middle of the eleventh century. The archaeology of Hebron is very complex. The site was occupied in the *Early Bronze Age (third millennium), and there was a fortified city on the site in the Middle Bronze Age II (up to the middle of the second millennium). There is evidence of a tribal population during the period of the conquest and then a permanent settlement again in the *Iron Age (from 1200 on). It is difficult to be certain which building of Hebron this verse refers to.

13:24. the Valley of Eshcol. There are many wadis in this general area, and there is no way of telling which one may have been referred to here. Around Hebron today, Ramet el-'Amleh is known for its grape produce and is near a wadi.

13:26. Kadesh. Kadesh Barnea is usually identified as 'Ain el-Qudeirat, about fifty miles south of Beersheba, which has the most plentiful water supply in the region. There are no archaeological remains on this site from this period, but the site has long been a stopping place for nomads and Bedouin, and the abundance of "Negev" ware (pottery dated to this period) suggests that was true during the time of the Israelite wanderings as well.

13:27. land flowing with milk and honey. The land of Canaan is described as a land "flowing with milk and honey." This refers to the bounty of the land for a pastoral lifestyle, but not necessarily in terms of agriculture. Milk is the product of herds, while honey represents a natural resource, probably the syrup of the date rather than bees' honey. A similar expression to this is found in the *Ugaritic epic of *Baal and Mot, which describes the return of fertility to the land in terms of the wadis flowing with honey. Egyptian texts as early as the *Story of *Sinuhe* describe the land of Canaan as rich in natural resources as well as in cultivated produce. (See Ex 3:7-10.)

13:29. inhabitants of the land. The people groups inhabiting the land are identified in verse 29 as the Amalekites, *Hittites, Jebusites, *Amorites and Canaanites. The Amalekites, who were descended from Abraham through Esau (Gen 36:15), were a nomadic or seminomadic people who inhabited the general region of the Negev and the Sinai during the second half of the second millennium B.C. The well-known Hittites were from Anatolia, modern Turkey, but groups occupying sections of Syria and Canaan were also called Hittites and may or may not be related. The Hittites in Canaan have Semitic names, while the Hittites of Anatolia were Indo-European. Jebusites inhabited the area around Jerusalem and are known only from the Old Testament, which tells us very little about them. *Amorites (known in Mesopotamia as *Amurru* or *Martu*) are known from written documents as early as the middle third millennium B.C. Most scholars think that their roots were in Syria but that they came to occupy many areas in the Near East. The term can be used to refer to a geographical area ("westerners") or to an ethnic group. Some Amorites were nomadic, but there were Amorite city-states in Syria as early as the end of the third millennium. The Canaanites were the principle inhabitants of the fortified cities of the land, though they do not seem to have been native to the land. The kings of this area refer to themselves in the *Amarna letters (mid-second millennium) as *Kinanu,* a term also used in Egyptian inscriptions of this period. There are also records from Egypt concerning the population of Canaan. A prisoner list from a campaign of Amenhotep II (fifteenth century) lists numbers of Canaanites, *Apiru* (unlanded or dispossessed peoples), *Shasu* (nomadic peoples sometimes connected with biblical groups like the Midianites or Amalekites) and *Hurru* (Hurrians).

13:33. like grasshoppers. It is not unusual to use an animal metaphor to describe relative size in exaggerated comparison (cf. English "shrimp"). Grasshoppers were edible, so this invites the additional frightening prospect that "we wouldn't have even made a mouthful to them." In the *Ugaritic Epic of *Keret an army is compared to grasshoppers to indicate the vast number of soldiers.

13:33. Nephilim. The only other sure reference to the Nephilim is in Genesis 6:4, which offers little information in terms of identification. Some have also seen the word in Ezekiel 32:27 (with a slight text variation), where it would refer to warriors. Earliest interpretation (intertestamental) is divided between considering them giants, heroes and fallen angels.

14:1-45
The People Decide Not to Enter the Land

14:6. tearing clothes. Along with placing ashes in the hair, the tearing of clothing was a common form of mourning in the ancient Near East. One example outside the Bible is found in the *Ugaritic Epic of *Aqhat (c. 1600 B.C.) in which the sister of the hero tears her father's garment as she foretells a coming drought. Such an act often implied grief over the death of a relative, friend or prominent individual (2 Sam 3:31). However, it also was a sign of shame (as in this case) or loss of honor or status (2 Sam 13:19).

14:8. flowing with milk and honey. See comment on 13:27.

14:13-16. divine sponsorship and its implications. All of the peoples of the ancient Near East believed in the patronage of the gods. Each city had a patron deity (e.g., *Marduk in *Babylon), and many professions also had particular gods to whom they looked for special aid. Such associations, however, meant that when a city or a group of people warred with another, their gods also joined in the battle. The god/gods of the losing side were discredited and often abandoned by their worshipers. Thus Moses' prayer to Yahweh involves the knowledge of God's sponsorship of the Israelites and the promise of land and children. If Yahweh should destroy the Israelites in the wilderness for their disobedience, it could be construed as failure on God's part to fulfill these promises.

14:25. geographical information. These instructions require the Israelites, who fear moving directly north into Canaan, to proceed south from Kadesh in the Wilderness of Paran to the area of Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba. *Yam Suph* in this verse is therefore not the Red Sea

but, as in Numbers 21:4 and Deuteronomy 1:40; 2:1, refers to the Gulf of Aqaba on the eastern coast of the Sinai peninsula.

14:36-38. fate of the spies. Initially God was so angry at the Israelites' grumbling that they were all condemned to die of a plague (v. 12). However, after Moses asked Yahweh to have mercy, this sentence is changed to the death of all these unfaithful people in the wilderness without seeing the Promised Land. Only the spies who had brought a report questioning God's power died immediately of a plague. The term translated "plague" is too vague to identify a particular disease, although some consider it to represent bubonic plague. In the Old Testament it is generally a punishment from God for serious desecration or blasphemy.

14:45. Hormah. "Hormah" has a double meaning here. In the Hebrew it means "destruction," and this is what happened to the invading Israelites. It is also a geographic term for a site seven and a half miles east of Beersheba, tentatively identified with Tell Masos (Khirbet el-Meshash).

15:1-31

Sacrifice Regulations in the Land

15:1-31. general elements of the sacrificial system. Within the Israelite sacrificial system there were both obligatory and voluntary offerings, and they applied to the entire Israelite community as well as to resident aliens. The obligatory sacrifices, brought to a shrine or temple and burnt on the altar by priests, included portions of the harvest (grain, fruits, oil, wine) as well as from the flocks and herds. A portion of each offering was then designated for the use and maintenance of the priestly community. Some sacrifices were expiatory and designed to mitigate specific sins or infractions of the law as well as to serve as part of the *ritual of purification after a person came in contact with unclean items (corpses, diseased persons, body fluids). Voluntary sacrifices were offered as evidence of generosity or in thanksgiving for a particular joy (marriage, birth of a son, a particularly good harvest). Unlike sacrificial offerings in the rest of the ancient Near East, however, those to *Yahweh were not designed to nourish the god (see the famished gods at the end of the flood story in the *Babylonian *Gilgamesh Epic). They only were presented in a ritually correct manner ("an aroma pleasing to the Lord") in order to obtain God's blessing or forgiveness. For further information see the comments on the early part of Leviticus.

15:22-26. community culpability. Inadvertent violations of the law also require purification. For example, in *Hammurabi's code, an unknowing violator of the slave laws must take an oath before the god to clear himself. In the Israelite context, the entire community is held responsible for sins committed unknowingly and for sins of omission (usually involving *ritual or matters of law). The community is defined as both Israelites and resident aliens. The infraction may involve commission of an act without knowledge that it is a violation of the law or confusion over the consumption of some portion of the sacrificial meat or fat. Unlike in Leviticus 4:13-21, however, the expiatory sacrifice of a young bull is not called a "sin" (purification) offering. Instead it is referred to here as a "burnt offering," and a male goat is also to be sacrificed as the purification offering (see comment on Lev 4:1-3).

15:30. defiant sin. Providing contrast to inadvertent sin, this offense is committed with full knowledge of one's actions and premeditated defiance of God and community. For instance, in *Sumerian law a son who publicly denounces his father is disinherited and can be sold as a slave. Similarly, according to Israelite law deliberate criminal acts cannot be allowed to go unpunished, since they violate not only God's laws but the community's collective *covenant to obey these statutes. The sentence "to be cut off from his people," implies punishment by both human and divine agencies—perhaps capital punishment by the authorities and extinction of his family line by God.

15:30. blasphemy. The verb "to blaspheme" is used only here in the Old Testament and means to taunt or revile God so as to deny the authority of God. Such an act demonstrates total defiance of the law, and, because of its danger to the community, the violator must be "cut off from his people." This may involve capital punishment, but it also probably implies punishment by God through the elimination of the person's entire family line. One example of the extreme nature of this offense can be found in the Cyrus Cylinder (c. 540 B.C.), which charges the *Babylonian king Nabonidus with failing to recognize *Marduk's authority as the city god and explains that the god has abandoned him and allowed the Persians to capture the city unmolested.

15:32-36

The Sabbath Breaker

15:32-36. gathering wood on the sabbath. This story provides a legal *etiology explain-

ing the seriousness of violating the sabbath (gathering wood, presumably to cook with, violates Ex 35:3) and provides a precedent for future violations of the sabbath (see Nehemiah's civil reforms in Neh 13:15-22). Detention of the culprit is only until God provides the proper form of punishment, which in this case is stoning. Communal and other forms of execution must be performed outside the camp in order to prevent contamination from contact with the corpse.

15:37-41

Tassel Regulation

15:37-41. tassels on the garments. All adult male Israelites were commanded to sew blue cords into the four quarters of the hem of their robes as a perpetual reminder of God's commandments. The blue dye was extracted from the gland of the *Murex trunculus* snail and was very costly (see comment on 4:6). Decorative hems are common in ancient Near Eastern fashion as many reliefs, paintings and texts attest. Hem design was often an indication of a person's status or office. The tassels are symbolic and are designed to promote right action, not to serve as an *amulet to ward off danger or temptation. The blue cord may signify the status of each Israelite as a member of a kingdom of priests (see comment on Ex 19:5-6).

16:1—17:13

Korah's Revolt and Aaron's Rod

16:1-3. clan and tribal political structure. Each person within the Israelite community was identified as a member of a particular household, clan and tribe. This not only set them into particular kinship groups (the Reubenites claiming ascendancy here over Moses) but also served as the basis on which they could be appointed elders and members of council—so many from each tribe and clan to aid in maintaining order and assisting Moses in the administration of justice. Rivalries between the kinship groups are typical of tribal confederations. In this type of loose political structure, loyalties to the smaller kin affiliations often supersede ties of loyalty to the overall group. Even during the monarchy period, the kings will be faced with this type of mixed loyalty (2 Sam 20:1-2; 1 Kings 12:16-17).

16:6-7. the function of incense censers. The censers are most likely long-handled pans that could also shovel up the hot coals. They served as portable altars, because the incense was actually burned in them. Censers were also used for burning of incense in Egypt when people wanted to protect themselves from demonic forces. Burning incense purifies the area of the altar and signifies God's presence (see comments on Ex 30:7-8, 34-38). Moses proposes a test, ordering the followers of the rebellious Korah to offer incense in a censer before God. This was the exclusive prerogative of priests and could be very dangerous for anyone, priest or nonpriests, who might do it incorrectly (Lev 10:1-2).

16:10. distinction between Levites and priests. The Levites were given custody of the tabernacle and the sacred precincts around the altar. It was their responsibility to monitor Israelites who brought their offerings to be sacrificed and prevent them from violating any statute or encroaching on sacred areas reserved for the priests. Priests actually performed the *ritual and the sacrifices on the altar. Although both groups belonged to the priestly community and received a share of the sacrificial offerings, priests had the greatest responsibility and power over *ritual acts. Differentiation of task and authority were also common in Mesopotamian temple communities.

16:13-14. land flowing with milk and honey. The phrase "flowing with milk and honey" becomes synonymous with the Promised Land. It occurs as part of the *covenant promise and is used here in contrast to the harshness of life in the wilderness. This would also relate the lush grazing that would insure good milk production in sheep, goats and cattle. See also comment on Exodus 3:7-10.

16:14. gouging out the eyes. This is an idiom meaning to trick or "pull the wool over one's eyes." Korah's followers refuse to participate in any test suggested by Moses, calling him a charlatan who has already hoodwinked the people into following him.

16:28-30. curse pronouncement. To demonstrate his authority from God, Moses calls for a demonstration of power similar to the plagues in Egypt. The rebel leaders Dathan and Abiram stand in defiance, along with their households, and Moses must curse them so thoroughly that no doubt is left about God's choice of leader. Therefore he asks God to open the earth and take these men and their families down to Sheol alive. The underworld in ancient Near Eastern tradition (Ugaritic and Mesopotamian epics) is often portrayed as a gaping mouth. Thus no one can claim a natural event like an earthquake killed them. Their fate was predicted, and Moses proves to be a true prophet when it occurs.

16:31-35. earthquake and fire as judgment.

Both earthquake and fire cause the death of many people. However in this case the men opposing Moses and Aaron are consumed, along with their households, by the earth and by a divine fire (God's *kabod,* "glory"). The entire community witnesses the event, which demonstrates God's choice of Moses as leader. The *Lament for the Destruction of U*r in Mesopotamian literature provides a similar manifestation of divine wrath through firestorm and earthquake. Additionally, in an Assyrian text of Ashurbanipal, divine intervention resulted in fire falling from heaven and consuming the enemy.

16:47. incense as atonement. In this instance, God's wrath over the people's rebellion against Moses had "broken out" in the form of a plague. Moses has Aaron burn incense as a type of *apotropaic remedy (similar to the blood painted on their door frames during the Passover in Ex 12:7). The burning of the incense by an authorized priest was designed to provide expiation for the people's sins and guard them from God's anger. However, the more common means of expiation was blood sacrifice (see Lev 17:11). Egyptian use of incense to ward off hostile supernatural powers is well attested. To that end censers were carried in cultic processions. They are depicted in the *rituals performed when a city was under siege.

16:47-50. nature of the plague. The plague, which kills 14,700 people, takes the form of the "Angel Destroyer" who had cut down the firstborn in Egypt. So devastating is its power that Moses orders Aaron to carry a burning censer in among the dead and dying in order to ward off any further destruction. This is extraordinary, since priests normally were not to come in contact with the dead. Apparently this was the only way to hold the plague in check. An exact diagnosis of the plague is not possible from the text (see comment on 25:8).

17:2-7. staff as insignia of tribal leadership. The staff was used by shepherds to guide their flocks. In the hands of an elder or tribal leader, the staff (probably distinctively carved and known to belong to that man) symbolized his authority (see Gen 38:18). By writing the name of each of the twelve tribal leaders on the staffs and placing them before the tent of meeting, there would be no question whose flowered at God's command and who was therefore the designated priest. This public pattern of discernment is also found in Joshua 7:14-15 and 1 Samuel 10:20-21.

17:4-11. divination by wooden objects. The method of determining who is God's chosen priestly leader involves a form of *divination (using objects to ascertain God's will). This method is not to be confused with the divination practices condemned in Hosea 4:12, which involve either a wooden idol or an *Asherah pole. Here each tribal leader, plus Aaron, is commanded to place his staff in the tent of meeting. The text contains a pun on the word for staff, which also means "tribe" in Hebrew, signifying God's intention to differentiate between the leaders of the tribes. This event is never repeated and thus is not a part of a cultic *ritual. When Aaron's blooms, his authority is certified and no further argument is allowed on this matter. Association of divination practices in proximity to a tree may be found in the references to the soothsayer's tree in Judges 9:37 and to Deborah's palm tree in Judges 4:4-5. *Ugaritic texts also mention the use of trees in ritual contexts.

17:8. significance of almonds. Aaron's staff sprouts, blossoms and flowers as an almond branch. This whole creative process signifies God's power over creation, the fruitfulness of the Promised Land (see Gen 43:11) and the "diligence" (Hebrew meaning for *saqed* "almond") expected of Aaron's priesthood. In Jeremiah 1:11-12 the sprouting almond branch symbolizes God's watching over Israel. The almond was recognized as the earliest of the blossoming plants of the region (e.g., in the Egyptian Wisdom of *Ahiqar) and may therefore also signify the priority of Aaron's office.

18:1-32
Priestly Duties and Prerogatives

18:1-7. concept and care of the sacred compass. The center of the sacred space was the Most Holy Place where the ark was. Radiating from that point out were concentric zones of holiness, each with its requirements of levels of *purity. One of the principal tasks of the priests was to enforce the rules that would maintain the appropriate level of holiness for each zone. Since the entire tribe of Levi had been singled out to serve as priests, it was necessary to assign duties and responsibilities and to create a hierarchy within the group headed by Aaron and his sons. All of the Levites were put in the charge of Aaron's household. They were to perform the mundane tasks necessary to maintain the tent of meeting, guard its precincts and assist worshipers who brought offerings for sacrifice. However, no one other than Aaron and his sons and their descendants was to be allowed to actually perform the sacrifices or to minister before the ark of the testimony. Any violation by a Levite of these restrictions would result in the

death of both the Levite and Aaron. Any non-Levite who entered the forbidden precincts of the sanctuary was condemned to death. Through these restrictions on the community and the placing of such heavy responsibilities on Aaron's family, the mystery and power associated with God's service and the items tied to it are magnified and protected.

18:8-10. sacrificial portions. The most sacred sacrificial portions are designated to be consumed by Aaron and his sons as a reward for their heavy responsibilities. This consists of those items which are brought into the most sacred precincts of the tent of meeting (see Lev 6:1-7:10). They may not be shared, as are other portions, with their families but must be eaten by priests who are ritually pure and therefore holy enough to consume sacred gifts. This includes grain, sin and guilt offerings, some of which is to be burnt on the altar while the remainder becomes the holy food of the priests. Hittite sacred texts also express concern over the consumption of the "god's food" by princes and other secular officials. The seriousness of sacred property is also found in Mesopotamian law, where strict penalties (heavy fines or capital punishment) are prescribed for theft of temple property.

18:11. wave offerings. Continuing the list of sacrificial portions set aside for the priests and their families are the wave offerings. These consist of items brought to the sanctuary and given a special distinction through an elevation *ritual before the altar (see comment on Lev 8:22-30). This does not include all wave offerings, since some are totally consumed by fire (Ex 29:22-25) and some are reserved solely for male priests (Lev 14:12-14).

18:12-19. priestly prerogatives. Completing the list of items perpetually set aside for the priests and their families (excluding daughters-in-law and laborers) are the first fruits of the harvest (grain, oil and wine) and the meat of first-born animals. Some regulations are imposed. Unclean animals may be redeemed for a set price by their owners, and human babies must be redeemed by their parents (see Ex 13:12-13; 34:19-20). All blood, fat and certain internal organs are to be burnt on the altar as a well-being offering (see Lev 3:9; 7:3). Since these animal products contain the symbolic essence of life, it is proper that they be given entirely to God rather than set aside for priestly consumption.

18:16. sanctuary shekel. The shekel weight used for the redemption of children and unclean animals is equivalent to 20 gerahs of silver (11.5 grams). It will not be in the form of coined money until the fourth century B.C. For weight considerations see comment on Exodus 30:13.

18:19. covenant of salt. Salt was used widely as symbolic of preservation. When treaties or alliances were made, salt was employed to symbolize that the terms would be preserved for a long time. *Babylonian, Persian, Arabic and Greek contexts all testify to this symbolic usage. In the Bible, likewise, the *covenant between the Lord and Israel is identified as a covenant of salt—a long-preserved covenant. Allies entering into such an agreement would generally share a communal meal where salted meat was featured. Thus the use of salt in the sacrifices was an appropriate reminder of the covenant relationship. Additionally, salt impedes the action of yeast (leaven), and since leaven was a symbol of rebellion, salt could easily represent that which inhibited rebellion. (See Lev 2:13.)

18:21-32. tithing as priests' wages in the ancient Near East. Apparently, the practice of designating one-tenth of all produce (cereal, fruit and animal) as wages for the priesthood was unique to the Israelites. Although Mesopotamian temples did exact rents from tenant farmers on their lands, they were not able to tax the entire population. As a result, the revenues needed to maintain the temple and the priesthood came from their own lands and from gifts from individuals and royalty. Kings also had lands from which they derived revenue in Egypt and Mesopotamia, but this did not have the same significance as a tithe. In Canaanite culture the tithe was very similar to that in Israel but went to the king and his administration rather than to the priesthood, though priests were sometimes included among the administrative personnel. Since the Levites were not given land in the distribution after the conquest, they were to be supported by all of the people through the tithe. It should be noted, however, that the Levites also paid a tithe of what they received to Aaron and his family, thereby providing a clear distinction between Levites and priests.

19:1-22

The Ceremony of the Red Heifer

19:2-10. significance of the red heifer. The animal designated for sacrifice and whose blood will be mixed with ashes to serve as a means of purifying persons who have come in contact with the dead is a young cow. The color red may symbolize blood, but that is uncertain. The exact age of the animal is not made clear by the Hebrew, but the fact that it was not to be allowed to pull the plow or do any

other type of work suggests it may have just reached maturity. One example of this may be the cows hitched to the wagon bearing the ark by the Philistines in 1 Samuel 6:7. They were suitable for sacrifice and thus could be used in this test of divine intention. The case of an unknown homicide in Deuteronomy 21:1-9 also requires the sacrifice of a heifer and the use of its blood for a purification *ritual. The blood and the innocence of the animal are the keys to purification.

19:2-10. ritual of the red heifer. In order to create the mixture needed to cleanse a person who has become contaminated through contact with a corpse, the law requires that a red heifer without blemish that has never been yoked for labor be taken outside the camp and slaughtered by Eleazar, Aaron's son. Eleazar does this because Aaron, the high priest, would have been contaminated by the carcass of the animal. Eleazar sprinkles some of its blood seven times on the tent of meeting and then supervises the burning of the carcass, while throwing cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool on the fire. The ashes are kept outside the camp for later use in purification *rituals. These actions cause participants in the sacrifice to become unclean until evening, even though they bathe and wash their clothes. Comparison with *Hittite ritual corroborates that it is the ritual act, plus the ingredients concocted to purify persons, that causes a temporary *impurity by the priest.

19:11. ritual contamination from a corpse. There was a widespread *cult of the dead in the ancient Near East. Although there was no well-defined concept of afterlife in Mesopotamia or ancient Israel, it was still believed that the spirits of the dead could effect the living. For instance, in Hittite texts the terror of the dead seems to come from the fear of being "unclean before" the spirits of the dead, just as one would be before a god. Thus offerings were made in tombs to the ancestors, but actual contamination by corpses does not appear to be a concern for the *Hittites. In contrast the Mesopotamian *namburbi* *ritual evidences a significant fear of corpse contamination. What may have been of concern was a mixing of the two spheres of existence, the living and the dead. When a person came in contact with the dead, whether human or animal, contamination occurred. Purification was necessary so that that person did not infect others or the entire community with his *impurity. The biblical purification rituals are perhaps the most detailed of any developed in the ancient Near East, although those employed by the Hittites also involved bathing, sacrifices and a period of exclusion.

19:17-19. cleansing ritual. To cleanse a person contaminated by a corpse, a ceremonially clean man takes the ashes of the red heifer, mixes them with water from a spring or running stream, and sprinkles the unclean person using a hyssop branch. The hyssop is used because its hairy branches can absorb liquid. Sprinkling takes place on the third and seventh days (both of these prime numbers are often used in *rituals and stories). Then, on the seventh day, the unclean person purifies him- or herself by bathing and washing clothing. That evening he or she will be ritually pure again. In this way there is no mixing of clean and unclean within the community itself, and the ideal is maintained of a community worthy to serve their God.

19:20-21. water of cleansing. The mixture of ashes from the sacrificed heifer and water from a spring or running stream is called the "water of cleansing." It is sprinkled on an unclean person as part of the cleansing *ritual. Hittite ritual texts also include water as a means of removing actual or suspected *impurity. However, the mixture described in Numbers also makes the person who sprinkles the water unclean until evening. This is based on association with the mixture's purpose and the assumed contamination created by the sacrificial ingredients themselves.

20:1-13
Water from the Rock

20:1. chronological note. At this point the forty years of wandering in the wilderness are coming to an end, and the remaining survivors of the exodus must leave the scene, since they are not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Thus in the first month of the fortieth year Miriam, Moses' sister, dies, marking the transition of leadership that will culminate in Aaron's death in the fifth month (Num 33:38).

20:1. Wilderness of Zin. The Wilderness of Zin lies north of the Wilderness of Paran. Although its exact location is unknown, it is referred to as the southern boundary of the Promised Land (Num 34:3-4; Josh 15:1, 3). Kadesh, the oasis where the Israelites spend a considerable time, is in the Desert of Zin (see chaps. 13—14).

20:6. appearance of the glory of the Lord. During times of crisis Moses and Aaron turn to God for guidance and assistance. They go to the entrance of the tent of meeting and as supplicants they bow to the ground. Because of their humble submission of their plea,

God's "glory" *(kabod)* appears and provides a solution (see similar instances in Num 14:5-12; 16:19-22). A physical manifestation of a god's aura or power is common in Mesopotamian epics, where it is referred to as the god's *melammu*, and it can be used as a means of defeating an enemy (as in *Marduk's struggle with *Tiamat in the **Enuma Elish*).

20:1-13. water from the rock. Sedimentary rock is known to feature pockets where water can collect just below the surface. If there is some seepage, one can see where these pockets exist and by breaking through the surface can release the collected water. Again, however, we are dealing with a quantity of water beyond what this explanation affords.

20:13. waters of Meribah. The location of the waters of Meribah in Exodus 17 had been in the vicinity of Sinai, specifically at Rephidim. Now they are at Kadesh, about 150 air miles north-northeast of Rephidim. Nevertheless, these are waters of quarreling *(meribah)*, just as those had been.

20:14-21

Request to the Edomites

20:14-21. Late Bronze Age Edom. Edom was the territory ranging south from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. Recently archaeologists have found small amounts of pottery from the *Late Bronze period at a number of settlements in this region, but no architectural remains or written records. The Egyptians referred to the nomadic population there as the Shosu, though that term may refer to social class rather than to ethnic origin.

20:22-29

The Death of Aaron

20:22-26. Mount Hor. The death site for Aaron (although Deut 10:6 identifies his death with Moseroth). The traditional location is near Petra at Jebal Nabi Harun, but this is not "on the border of Edom." Another possibility is Jebal Madrah, west of Kadesh and near the Edomite border, but it lacks sufficient water sources.

20:29. 30 days of mourning. The normal mourning period is seven days (Gen 50:10; 1 Sam 31:13). However, to demonstrate their importance, both Moses (Deut 34:8) and Aaron are mourned for thirty days. The occasion is also marked by transition of leadership, with Eleazar succeeding his father as high priest and wearing his vestments (Num 20:26). Similarly, Joshua succeeds Moses (Deut 34:9).

21:1-3

The Destruction of Arad

21:1-3. Arad. The site identified as Arad was a walled city in the *Early Bronze period (first half of the third millennium), well before the time of Abraham. It had a major role in the copper industry that thrived in the Sinai peninsula. The next occupation detected by archaeologists is connected with the Early *Iron Age (Judges period), and there was a series of citadels and even a temple on the site about the time of Solomon. Since there is no sign of occupation during the period of the exodus and conquest, some archaeologists have suggested that the Arad of the Canaanite period is the site now identified as Tell Malhata, about seven or eight miles southwest of the site now known as Arad. Egyptian inscriptions of the tenth century identify two Arads.

21:1. Atharim. This word is obscure and may be either a place name or a profession (KJV and LXX translate it "spies"). Most likely it is to be identified with the area just south of the Dead Sea, possibly with the site of Tamar. Here the Israelites were attacked by the army of the king of Arad.

21:3. Hormah. The Hebrew word means "destruction." It is applied as a place name here to commemorate the Israelite victory. They had vowed to totally destroy the cities of the Canaanites in that area and dedicate the spoil to the sanctuary if God gave them the victory. This is similar to the **herem*, "holy war," declared against Jericho (Josh 6:17-19, 24). As a geographical name it refers to a site seven and a half miles east of Beersheba tentatively identified with Tell Masos (Khirbet el-Meshash).

21:4-9

The Bronze Serpent

21:4. itinerary. The Israelites marched south from Mount Hor on the border of Edom toward Elath at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqabah. Archaeological survey of the area suggests that the Edomites did not extend this far until the time of Solomon (tenth century B.C.).

21:6-7. snakes. The snakes are not clearly identified but may be a species of desert viper. Their "fiery" or "winged" character may have to do with their association with the cobra or their quick spring as they strike (Deut 8:15). For general information see the comment on Genesis 3:1.

21:8-9. bronze snake on a pole. The Hebrew here is actually "copper" snake. Bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, was smelted in the Tim-

nah region where this event occurred, and thus the translation here has a physical background. Excavations in that area have unearthed an Egyptian temple to the god Hathor. During the period of the Judges this temple was adopted by Midianites in the area, who made it into a shrine draped with curtains. In the inner chamber of this shrine was found a five-inch long copper image of a snake. It was common in the ancient Near East to believe that the image of something could protect against the thing itself. As a result Egyptians (living as well as dead) sometimes wore snake-shaped *amulets to protect them from serpents. Finally it is of interest that a well-known bronze bowl from *Nineveh with Hebrew names on it depicts a winged snake on a pole of some sort.

21:10-20
Journey Through Moab

21:10-20. itinerary. A fuller list of stops on this journey is given in Numbers 33:41-48. A number of the towns are unknown, making it difficult to offer archaeological evidence. Nevertheless, a number of the stops also occur on Egyptian maps and itineraries from this period. The Zered Valley is today the Wadi el-Hesa, and the Arnon River flows through the Wadi el-Mojib. Both flow from east to west, the former into the southern end of the Dead Sea and the latter into a midpoint on the east side.

21:14. book of the wars of the Lord. In compiling the history and traditions of the conquest, the biblical writers drew on a variety of sources, both written and oral. Among the written sources was the Book of Jashar (see Josh 10:13; 2 Sam 1:18) and the Book of the Wars of the Lord. Based on the three fragments of these documents that appear in the Bible, they were composed primarily of victory songs and tales of the mighty acts of God and the leaders of the Israelites during this formative period. Unfortunately, neither book has survived, but their mention in the biblical text indicates that the narrative was based, at least in part, on cultural memories.

21:21-35
Sihon and Og

21:21. Amorites. The *Amurru or Amorites of Mesopotamia formed a significant ethnic group after 2000 B.C. and are mentioned in the *Mari texts and the administrative documents of *Hammurabi of *Babylon during the eighteenth century B.C. Egyptian records list them as one of several kingdoms during the fourteenth century B.C. in the area south of the Orontes River and into Transjordan. Their effective control of Transjordan may be associated with the conflict between Egypt and the Hittite Empire. The indecisive battle of Kadesh (c. 1290 B.C.) between these two powers opened a temporary political opportunity for Amorite control, but the coming of the *Sea Peoples in 1200 B.C. further disrupted the region. In the Bible, *Amorites* is used as an ethnic term for the kingdoms of Sihon and Og (Num 21:21, 33) as well as for the inhabitants of Canaan (Gen 15:16; Deut 1:7).

21:23. Jahaz. The site of the battle with the forces of the *Amorite king Sihon is given as Jahaz. Its probable location, based on the church historian Eusebius (fourth century A.D.) and the Mesha inscription (ninth century B.C.), is between the territories of Madaba and Dibon, at Khirbet Medeiniyeh at the eastern edge of Moab by the Wadi al-Themed. The battle is also mentioned in Deuteronomy 2:33 and Judges 11:20.

21:24-30. captured land. The area of central Transjordan which is here described as the kingdoms of Sihon and Og stretches from the Arnon River valley in the south to the Jabbok River in the north. It would include Moab but not Ammon. It seems likely that these "kingdoms" were not organized states in this period and that their conquest provided passage for the Israelites without the tribes actually taking control of and settling this region.

21:25-28. Heshbon. The modern site of Tell-Heshban is located nearly fifty miles directly east of Jerusalem. However, archaeologists have not been able to detect any evidence that this site was settled prior to 1200 B.C. Some have suspected that the *Late Bronze city of Heshbon may have been at a different site, with Tell Jalul named as one possibility. Recent surveys and excavations in this region have turned up more and more *Late Bronze pottery, but it remains difficult to assess the nature of the occupation during this period.

21:29. Chemosh. The Moabite god *Chemosh, mentioned here in Israel's "taunt song" marking their victory over the Transjordanian kingdoms of Sihon and Og, is also mentioned in the ninth-century B.C. Moabite inscription of King Mesha (see also Judg 11:24; 1 Kings 11:7). As the national god of Moab, Chemosh stood in opposition to *Yahweh, just as Moab did to Israel. His *cult has similarities to Yahweh worship, and his attributes (giving of land to his people and victory in battle) are also similar. This may simply be an indication that the expectations placed on their gods by the peo-

ple of the ancient Near East were very much the same from one nation to another. Chemosh first appears in the list of gods from ancient Ebla in northern Syria (c. 2600-2250 B.C.) and may have also been worshiped in Mesopotamia and *Ugarit as an elemental deity associated with clay or mud bricks.

21:30. area of destruction. Heshbon and Dibon are the major cities in the north and south respectively in the northern section of Moab (north of the Arnon). For Heshbon see the comment earlier in this chapter. Dibon is modern Dhiban, just a mile or two north of the Arnon (Wadi al-Mujib). In the ninth century B.C. it served as one of Mesha's royal cities and is prominent in the Mesha inscription that was found there. The lack of *Late Bronze finds at the site raises questions about whether the ancient city was at Dhiban or somewhere else nearby. The fact that Rameses II also lists Dibon on his itinerary shows that there was a Late Bronze city of that name. Nophah has not been identified, and even the reading of the name is uncertain. Medeba is the principal city in the central region of north Moab and is identified with the modern city of the same name. There has been limited excavation on the site because of the modern town.

21:32. Jazer. This geographical name is associated with both a city as well as the surrounding region, including small villages or "daughters." Although its location is disputed, the most likely site is Khirbet Jazzir, twelve miles south of the Jabbok River. It served as an outpost on the border with Ammon and represented the eastward thrust of the Israelite forces.

21:33. Bashan. After defeating Sihon, the Israelites travel northward to the region of Bashan in the area (known today as the Golan Heights) bordered by Mount Hermon to the north, Jebel Druze to the east and the Sea of Galilee to the west, where they defeated King Og at Edrei (modern Der'a, thirty miles east of the Sea of Galilee). It is a broad, fertile plateau region noted for its grazing (Ps 22:12; Amos 4:1-3). See the comment on Deuteronomy 3 for more detail.

21:33. Edrei. The Israelites defeat the *Amorite king Og at Edrei on the southeastern border of Bashan. The site is identified as modern Der'a in Syria, about sixty miles south of Damascus and thirty miles east of the Sea of Galilee near the Yarmuk River. Though no excavations have been conducted there, the town is also mentioned in ancient texts from Egypt and *Ugarit.

21:33. Og. The *Amorite king of Bashan, Og, is mentioned as the last of the Rephaim or giants, whose "bed was made of iron and was more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide" (see comment on Deut 3:11). There is no historical information that sheds light on this individual. The victory was celebrated many times in Israelite tradition and is recorded in Deuteronomy 1:4; 3:1-13; 4:47; 29:7; 31:4; Joshua 2:10; 9:10; and 1 Kings 4:19.

22:1—24:25

Balaam and Balak

22:1. plains of Moab. This is the broad plain or steppe region immediately north of the Dead Sea and east of the Jordan River, just opposite the "plains of Jericho" (Josh 4:13). Its location serves as the jumping-off point for entrance into Canaan.

22:2. Balak of Moab. Balak, the king of Moab, is unknown in other historical sources. In fact, there is very little of Moab's history that has been recovered aside from the information given in the Mesha Inscription concerning the ninth century. It must be remembered that the title *king* could be used for rulers of vast empires or, as most likely in this case, petty rulers or tribal leaders.

22:4-7. Midianites. The Midianites are a people living in the southern portions of the Transjordan region. They are described as the descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25:106) and operate as traders and caravaneers in the Joseph narrative (Gen 37:25-36). Moses joins the Midianite clan of Jethro after fleeing Egypt (see comment on Ex 2:15), but the Midianites do not join the Israelites in the conquest of Canaan. In the Balaam narrative, the Midianite elders are allied with the Moabites and participate in the hiring of the prophet to curse Israel.

22:4-20. Balaam at Deir Allah. In 1967 a Dutch archaeological expedition led by H. J. Franken discovered some inscribed pieces of plaster at a site in Jordan known as Deir 'Allah. The fragments are apparently written in *Aramaic and date to about 850 B.C. They mention Balaam son of Beor, the same figure described as a "seer" in Numbers 22—24. Although the text is very fragmentary, with many breaks and uncertain words, it can be established that Balaam was a seer who received a divine message during the night and that his message was not what his neighbors expected to hear. Whether this text refers to the events described in the Bible is questionable, but it does establish a nonbiblical tradition current in the ninth century of a prophet named Balaam. It may be that Balaam's notoriety was such that he remained an important prophetic figure for

centuries and could thus be identified with the earlier Israelite narratives of the conquest.

22:5. Pethor. This is probably to be identified with Pitru on the Sajur River, a tributary of the upper Euphrates, located about twelve miles from Carchemish in northern Syria. Since Balaam is said to have been brought from *Aram in Numbers 23:7, this identification seems appropriate. However, the distance involved (about four hundred miles) has caused some to look closer to Moab for the site of Pethor.

22:6. prophetic status of Balaam. In Joshua 13:22, Balaam is described as a "soothsayer," while in Numbers 22:6 he is said to be a man whose blessings and curses are effective. He is from the region of upper Mesopotamia, near Carchemish, and has an international reputation as a true prophet. Throughout the narrative in Numbers 22—24, Balaam continually reminds Balak that he can speak only the words which God gives him to speak (Num 22:18, 38; 23:12, 26; 24:13). Although Balaam uses sacrificial rituals to obtain God's answer, he is not to be considered simply a diviner. *Divination, while sometimes used by Mesopotamian prophets, is more often associated with *cultic personnel who examine sacrificial animals or natural conditions (flights of birds, etc.). In each case, Balaam seems to have direct communication with God and then speaks God's word in the form of *oracles to Balak. This is the typical form of prophetic address found in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and other Israelite prophets. Spoken oracles are also recorded in over fifty *Mari texts (a few centuries earlier than Balaam, about 250 miles downstream from Carchemish). Through either lay people or temple personnel, various messages are offered to Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, from various deities. Therefore it is clear that prophetic activity in the ancient Near East during this general time period was not uncommon.

22:6. power of a curse. Curses draw the wrath of the deity on persons, groups, cities or places. They may be composed and spoken by anyone, with an intent to bring death, destruction, disease and defeat. Ritual performance was also employed, as in a Hittite text that requires water to be poured and a curse spoken against anyone who gave the king "polluted" water to drink. Curses often accompanied *covenant or treaty agreements to involve the power of the gods as cosigners and to put treaty breakers on notice of their peril. However, cursing can have negative effects on the one who curses as well. The death penalty was imposed on those who curse their parents (Ex 21:17) or God (Lev 24:11-24). In the Israelite tradition expressed in the Balaam narrative, Yahweh alone was capable of carrying out a curse, and no prophet acting, on his own could effectively curse anyone. Yet Balak describes Balaam as one so attuned to the gods that both his blessings and his curses are always effective. In effect, the prophet, as a god's intermediary or representative, is believed to be capable of interceding for good or ill with the god(s). Balaam discounts this, however, saying he can only speak what God gives him to speak.

22:7. fee for *divination. It is to be expected that a fee or reward would be paid for vital information (see 2 Sam 4:10). Diviners, as religious practitioners, would be paid for their services (1 Sam 9:8). However, Balaam is not to be paid until after he curses the Israelites (Num 24:11). Thus this may simply be an offer rather than a retainer for services.

22:18. Balaam and Yahweh. If Balaam is truly a Mesopotamian prophet who has spoken in the name of many gods, it seems unusual that he would refer to *Yahweh as "the LORD my God." It is perfectly possible that Balaam was familiar with the Israelite God, at least by reputation (see Rahab's speech in Josh 2:9-11). Or he may always refer to each god he is dealing with in these intimate terms to demonstrate his prophetic authority. Balak's interest in Balaam seems to be based on his ability to invoke blessings or curses—no matter which god he calls upon. There is little reason to maintain that Balaam served Yahweh exclusively.

22:21-35. God opposing after sending. There are times when there seems to be a strange change of mind by God. The Lord called on Jacob (Gen 31—32) and Moses to go somewhere but then accosted each on the way. In each instance God did indeed want the individual to make the journey but had an issue to settle first.

22:22-35. angel of the Lord. In the ancient world direct communication between heads of state was a rarity. Diplomatic and political exchange normally required the use of an intermediary. The messenger who served as the intermediary was a fully vested representative of the party he represented. He spoke for that party and with the authority of that party. He was accorded the same treatment as that party would enjoy were he there in person. While this was standard protocol, there was no confusion about the person's identity. All of this treatment simply served as appropriate recognition of the individual that he represented. Gifts given were understood to belong to the represented party, not the representative. Words spoken to the representative were

expected to be reported back in accurate detail and were understood as having been spoken directly to the represented individual. When official words were spoken by the representative, everyone understood that he was not speaking for himself but was merely conveying the words, opinions, policies and decisions of his liege. In the same way the Angel of the Lord serves as the messenger, the royal envoy endowed with the authority of the sender of the message. The word in Hebrew describing what the angel of the Lord does here is *satan*. This being is not the personified "accuser" or "adversary" found in Job 1—2 and Zechariah 3:1. The term is used only to explain the adversarial role played by the angel.

22:28-30. speaking animals. The only other instance in the Bible of a talking animal is the dialogue between Eve and the serpent in Genesis 3:1-5. In that case the serpent is described as the most cunning of the animals, and it is possible that it was the only animal that could speak. In the Balaam narrative the donkey is able to speak only after God gives it that ability. Such stories are commonly identified as fables, and they are quite popular in ancient as well as more recent literature. They generally have a wisdom theme and are designed to establish or question basic truths. Among the ancient Near Eastern examples are the talking cattle in the Egyptian *Tale of Two Brothers* and the dialogue between the leopard and the gazelle in the *Assyrian *Teachings of *Ahiqar.* The effect of the speaking animal in this story is to make it clear to Balaam that God can speak through any creature he chooses, with no credit to the creature.

22:36-41. geography. From the city of Ar-Moab (NIV: "the Moabite town") near the northern border of Moab, the two proceed north to Kiriath Huzoth and Bamoth Baal. Ar-Moab (see 21:15) has not been identified with certainty, but is usually connected with modern Balu'a along the southern tributary that the King's Highway followed to the Arnon. The location of Kiriath Huzoth is unknown, as is Bamoth Baal. Some place the latter some twenty-five to thirty miles north of Ar along the King's Highway, though some would place it farther north, in closer proximity to where the Israelites were camped.

23:1. seven altars. The number seven is often attested in the Bible and may be associated with the days of creation or the fact that it is a prime number (see 1 Kings 18:43; 2 Kings 5:10). Nowhere else in the Bible are seven altars constructed for sacrifice. This may relate to a non-Israelite *ritual in which each of the altars is dedicated to a different god. It is conceivable that when an international treaty was concluded and the gods were called to witness the agreement (as in the treaty between the *Assyrian king Esarhaddon and Baal of Tyre, which calls on the "seven gods"), altars to each god would be erected and sacrifices made before them (see Gen 31:44-54). But nontreaty contexts in Mesopotamia also attest the practice of using seven altars in order to offer seven sacrifices simultaneously before the high gods.

23:1. sacrifice of bulls and rams. These were the most prized and valuable stock animals in the ancient Near East, and thus their sacrifice would have signified a supreme effort on the part of the worshipers to please the god(s) and gain their aid. The sacrifice of seven of these animals is also found in Job's sin offering for his three friends (Job 42:8).

23:3. barren height for revelation. The translation "barren height" is contested, and the meaning of the Hebrew word questionable. It seems clear from the context that Balaam separated himself from the Moabites to practice his *divination alone. This may have been required by the *ritual or perhaps by God's desire to only communicate directly with Balaam. In any case, high places are often associated with gods and their revelations (Mounts Sinai, Zaphon, Olympus).

23:4. meeting with *Elohim. In the ancient world messages from deity were generally conveyed through dreams, communications from the dead or temple personnel in prophetic trances. The language here suggests none of those options, though the nature of Balaam's encounter with God is not described.

23:14. Zophim/Pisgah. *Zophim* means "watchmen" or "lookout." Used in relation to Pisgah, the generic term for the promontories of the Moabite plateau looking west toward Canaan (see Num 21:20), *Zophim* simply means that Balaam went to a known observation point to watch for a sign from God. It is possible that he intended to observe the flight of birds in order to receive an omen. This is not only a common *divination practice in Mesopotamia but one that the Deir Allah inscription (see comment on 22:4) appears to relate to Balaam.

24:1-2. difference in Balaam's method and role of the Spirit of God. As a Mesopotamian prophet, Balaam's usual procedures when invoking a god or seeking an omen would have been to engage in some form of *divination. Having now perceived that Yahweh's intent is to bless the Israelites, Balaam dispenses with these mechanical methods and leaves himself open to direct revelation from God. At that

point he turns toward the Israelites and is empowered by God's Spirit. He speaks the divine blessing, probably in a trance. It is his willingness to become vulnerable in the sight of the Moabite king that demonstrates the truth of his message and provides an example of ecstatic prophecy (see 1 Sam 10:5-6, 10-11).

24:5-7. metaphors. Balaam's *oracle contains a promise of abundance and prosperity for Israel. Looking down on their tents, he likens them to a forest containing aromatic aloe and cedars. Aloes are not native to Canaan, but the metaphor may refer to the immigrant Israelites "planted" in the Promised Land by God. Cedars do not grow near streams, and this may simply refer to any coniferous tree. The image of abundant waters and seed refer to the richness of the land of Canaan and the *covenantal promise of children. By referring to a king, the author speaks of the future nation's triumph over its enemies, the Amalekites, whose king, Agag, will be defeated by Saul (1 Sam 15:7-8).

24:7. Agag. Agag was the mighty king of the Amalekites in the time of Saul (1 Sam 15:7-8). Although Saul defeats them, the Amalekites continue to be a thorn in Israel's side (1 Sam 27:8; 30:1; 2 Sam 1:1). Agag's name appears again in the book of Esther as the ethnic name for the villain Haman the Agagite. Some have suggested that Agag should be understood as a title (like Pharaoh), but evidence is unavailable.

24:17. star and scepter metaphors. While a star is a common metaphor for kings in the ancient Near East, it is seldom used in the Bible (Is 14:12; Ezek 32:7). Its association here with a scepter, the symbol of royal power (Ps 45:6), however, makes this identification more certain. Balaam's *oracle thus predicts the rise of the monarchy in Israel and the extension of its power (like the waving of the scepter) over the lands of Transjordan. As in the Egyptian inscription of Tuthmoses III (c. 1504-1450 B.C.), the scepter is also used as a mace to crush the heads of enemy nations.

24:20. Amalekites. The Amalekites were a confederation of tribes living primarily in the steppe area southeast of Canaan (Ex 17; Judg 6—7). There may have also been groups of Amalekites in the hill country west of Samaria. They are always portrayed as Israel's rival for territory. The title of "first among the nations" may refer to what they called themselves or perhaps to their distinction as the first people to challenge the Israelites (Ex 17:8-15).

24:21-22. Kenites. Although the Kenites are described as friendly prior to this *oracle (Moses' father-in-law, Ex 2:16-22), they are condemned here with the Amalekites. They were nomadic tribes living around Kadesh in the northern Sinai peninsula and in the region of Galilee and may have been itinerant metalworkers (there were copper mines nearby in Sinai) as well as shepherds. Balaam mocks their mountain settlements, saying that they cannot prevent their eventual fall to Asshur.

24:22-24. Asshur. It is unlikely that this reference is to the Neo-Assyrian empire, which dominated the entire ancient Near East during the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. That would place the focus (and, some would say, composition) of this *oracle very late. However, the Asshurim, a tribe descended from Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25:3) does not seem significant enough to defeat the Kenites. The *Assyrians of the fourteenth century were sufficiently militaristic to contribute to the fall of the *Hurrian kingdom of Mitanni, but there is no evidence of military activity further west. This most likely should be identified as the Asshur mentioned in connection with the Ishmaelites in Genesis 25:18.

24:24. Kittim. This is the ancient name for the island of Cyprus (Gen 10:4) and derives from the name of the city Kition. In later texts (Qumran), Kittim is used as a generic for maritime nations (Dan 11:30) or for the Romans. Here some have suggested that it may refer to the "Sea Peoples"—the amalgamation of tribes (including the Philistines) that invaded the Near East around 1200 B.C.

24:24. Eber. Eber is identified as the ancestor of the Hebrews in Genesis 10:21 and 11:14. That cannot fit the context of this *oracle, however, since it would be a curse on Israel. Possible solutions may be a reference to an attack by the Kittim on "Heber," either one of the clans of the Kenites or of the Israelite tribe of Asher. No really satisfactory explanation has been put forward for this name.

25:1-18

The Incident at Baal-Peor

25:1. Shittim. The full name of this site was Abel-shittim (Num 33:49), and it is the jumping-off point for Joshua's spies and for the Israelite's entrance into Canaan (Josh 2:1; 3:1; Mic 6:5). Josephus places it seven miles from the Jordan River. Its actual location is uncertain, but it may be Tell el-Hammam on the Wadi Kefrein.

25:3. Baal of Peor. It is not uncommon for the god *Baal to be identified with different mountains (Zaphon) or city sites in the region of Canaan (see Num 32:38; 33:7; 2 Kings 1:2).

In this case, the Israelites are influenced by the Moabite women to worship the city god of Peor (see Deut 3:29 for Beth Peor). This is apparently their first contact with Baal, the Canaanite god of *fertility and rain, since the name does not appear in Genesis. The result is disastrous and sets a precedent for God's reaction to idolatry.

25:4. corpse exposure. Although the form of execution is unclear here (see 2 Sam 21:9 for a similar use of words), there is a purpose in placing the bodies of these unfaithful leaders on public display. It may be an attempt to propitiate God's anger or a warning to others that idolatry will not be tolerated. Legal tradition forbade leaving bodies exposed or impaled overnight (Deut 21:22-23). Impalement and public display of corpses was common punishment by the *Assyrians (referred to in the annals of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal).

25:6. brought to his family. The unnamed Israelite may simply be introducing this Midianite woman to his family as his wife. But many have believed that the cause of distress here is the practice of ritual intercourse. By bringing a Midianite woman to his family, this man was encouraging all of his male kin to participate in this forbidden *ritual—even though the people were supposed to be repenting for their previous idolatry. The "chamber" (v. 8) into which they enter appears to be in the sacred enclosure and therefore suggests ritual intercourse. Though the ritual may have been *fertility-oriented, the Israelites are not engaging in agriculture, so it is difficult to imagine what connection that might have here. Alternatively, Psalm 106:28 links Baal-Peor to sacrifices for the dead (NIV: "lifeless gods"). The plague of verse 3 may have been attributed to ancestral spirits who could be appeased by ritual intercourse. In this case the "family" the woman was brought to may be the ancestral spirits.

25:8. the plague. Since no symptoms are given, the nature of the plague afflicting the Israelites is unclear. Diagnostic texts from Mesopotamia often sought to identify a causal relationship between certain symptoms or illnesses and the presumed sins that caused them. Israel had no such hierarchy of diseases, but they would interpret major or sudden outbreak of serious disease as punishment from God. Endemic and epidemic diseases in the ancient world included typhoid, malaria, cholera, tuberculosis, anthrax, bubonic plague, diphtheria and more. Yahweh's use of plague is similar to that associated with plague deities in the ancient Near East. In Mesopotamian mythology, Nergal (or, Erra) is the god of plague and king of the netherworld. The comparable Canaanite deity is Resheph, and the Hittite, Irshappa. Murshilish, a Hittite king of this general period, complains in one prayer about a plague that has lasted twenty years. He sees it as a punishment for his father's sins.

25:13. covenant of priesthood. Like the *covenant made with David (2 Sam 7:8-16; Ps 89:29), this is an "everlasting" covenant. Again, this language and the concept of a perpetual treaty agreement is not unique. It is common in Mesopotamian treaty texts (see the *Assyrian Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon). In this instance, Phineas's act of piety is the basis for marking his particular branch of Aaron's family as the group with the sole right to officiate in the temple (see the genealogy in 1 Chron 6:3-14, which traces Phineas's lineage and not that of his brothers).

26:1-65

The Second Census

26:55. distribution by lot. By employing lots to determine the distribution of the land, the decision is left to God's judgment. This process was also employed at *Mari in Mesopotamia to allocate fiefs by the king to vassals and military retirees.

27:1-11

The Case of Zelophehad's Daughters

27:1-11. daughters' inheritance rights. Land is generally redeemed by a male relative if a man dies without a male heir (for the levirate obligation see comment on Deut 25:5-10; for the Jubilee year see comment on Lev 25:8-55; for the relative's claim see Lev 25:25-28). The separate question of a daughter's right to inherit requires, in this case, an *oracle and a divine decision, since it cannot be dealt with under existing legislation. Levirate rights (Deut 25:5-10) apparently do not apply here, since no male heirs (sons or paternal brothers) are mentioned. In this situation, therefore, the decision is made and laws are enacted giving daughters the right to inherit in the absence of any male heirs, as well as establishing a law of procedure in cases of inheritance. Some precedent seems to exist for this in Mesopotamian legal documents (Sumerian text Gudea statute B [c. 2150 B.C.]; *Alalakh [eighteenth century B.C.]; *Nuzi; and *Emar). The law in Numbers 27, however, has to be modified later due to the problem of the potential loss of a family's land if the daughter marries out of her tribe. Thus Numbers 36:6-9 adds the further stipula-

tion that daughters who inherit land from their father must marry within their own tribal clans.

27:12-23

Joshua Commissioned

27:12. Abarim range. This is a range of mountains extending east of the mouth of the Jordan River and on around the northern end of the Dead Sea (see Deut 32:49). It forms the northwestern rim of the Moabite plateau. The specific peak in this range from which Moses will view the Promised Land is Mount Nebo, 2,740 feet in height.

27:14. geography. The parenthetical note that retells the story of Moses' and Aaron's sin at Meribah is based on the version in Numbers 20:1-13. This places the events near the oasis of Kadesh Barnea, probably 'Ein Qudeirat in the wadi el'Ain, the largest oasis in the northern Sinai. The Wilderness of Zin is the barren region in the Negev south of Canaan that extends toward the Sinai.

27:18. the spirit. As Moses' chosen successor, Joshua's qualification for this position is based on the authority of God with which he has been endowed. He has shown this trait in military campaigns (Ex 17:9-13) as well as in his courage in standing up to the people and the elders (Num 14:6-10; 26:65). Eventually he will be invested with the spirit of wisdom (Deut 34:9), but here it is his God-given skills as a leader that stand out as the basis of his elevation to command. There is no established political authority over all the tribes except that designated by the Lord. The recognition of the empowerment by the spirit of God becomes the criterion by which political authority is granted by the tribes.

27:18. laying on of hands. Part of the process of investing a person with authority and signifying the transferral of power from one leader to another involves the laying on of hands (see Num 8:10; Lev 16:21). For instance, the paintings found in the *El Amarna rock tombs (c. 1400-1350 B.C.) portray the investiture of officials by Pharaoh. They are given special garments, and Pharaoh is pictured extending his arms over them as a sign of their new authority.

27:21. priest and the Urim. One sign of Joshua's new leadership role as Moses' successor is his use of the oracular office of the High Priest. By using the Urim and Thummim, the high priest could consult God and obtain a yes or no answer to questions (see this practice by David and Abiathar in 1 Sam 23:9-12; 30:7-8). While it is uncertain what the Urim and Thummim actually looked like, their use is similar to the oracular questions and answers found in *Babylonian omen texts. They were kept in a pocket inside the high priest's "breastplate" and next to his heart (Ex 28:16; Lev 8:8). For further information, see the comment on Exodus 28:30.

28:1-15

Offerings

28:1-30. festivals and holy days. The major religious festivals and holy days celebrated throughout the ancient Near East were for the most part agriculturally based. While daily offerings were made to the gods, there were "patron days" in specific towns and villages for locally honored deities, as well as occasions when the national god(s) were paraded from one town to another, "visiting" shrines and promoting the general *fertility and well-being of the land. The single most important of the Mesopotamian festivals was the Akitu or new year's celebration. The monarch assumed the role of the chief god, while the high priestess served as his consort and represented the chief goddess. Their performance of a series of intricate sacred *rituals and sacrifices was designed to please the gods and thus insure a prosperous and fertile year ahead. During the year, based on a lunar calendar, "new moon" festivals were celebrated, as were the events of the agricultural calendar (the coming of the rains or annual flood waters, plowing and harvesting). Some rituals grew out of the changing of the seasons, such as the mourning for the "dying god" Tammuz (or *Dumuzi), who could be released from the underworld only through the tears of devotees (see Ezek 8:14).

28:1-8. daily offerings: who makes them and why. The heart of the sacrificial system in ancient Israel was the daily offering made for the people by the priests. This was a communal offering made on behalf of the people rather than an offering that each person made. Although the actual content of the sacrifice apparently differed from one time period to another (compare morning and evening animal sacrifice here with a morning animal sacrifice and an evening grain offering in 2 Kings 16:15), its intent was to provide continuous thanksgiving to God and signify daily compliance with the *covenant (see the comment on burnt offerings at Lev 1:1). The belief is quite clear that any interruption in this pattern would have resulted in dire consequences for the people (see Dan 8:11-14).

28:9-10. sabbath offering: who and why. The injunction to observe the sabbath each sev-

enth day by ceasing work and by offering an additional burnt offering marks the weekly commemoration of the release from Egyptian bondage (Ex 20:11). Every Israelite, as well as their animals, servants and visitors, is required by this statute to observe the sabbath (Ex 31:12-17). This offering is not made by each family or clan but is made on behalf of the people as a whole. There is little evidence that the sabbath was used as a time for worship gatherings in ancient Israel. The sabbath is not tied to any other calendar event during the year and only has parallels in the celebration of the sabbatical and Jubilee years (Lev 25). Because the exodus event is unique to the Israelites, no similar, weekly holy day is observed by the peoples of the ancient Near East.

28:11-15. new moon offering: who and why. The lunar calendar was used throughout the ancient Near East and the worship of the moon god Sin was quite common, especially in northern Mesopotamia. Each new month began the first day of the new moon and signified the moon god's continuing dominion. The inclusion of a new moon offering in the liturgical calendar only appears in Numbers 28, although its celebration is known elsewhere (1 Sam 20:5; 2 Kings 4:23). Like the sabbath offering, the sacrifice marking the new moon is in addition to the daily offering. It is placed on a par with other major festivals with its sacrifice of a larger number of valuable animals (two bulls, a ram and seven sheep) and the addition of a sacrificial goat as a sin offering.

28:16—29:40

The Festival Calendar

28:16-25. Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of Unleavened Bread signals the beginning of the barley harvest (March-April). Unleavened bread was made from the newly harvested grain without adding yeast and was eaten with joy as the first sign of coming harvests that year. For further information see the comments on Exodus 12:14-20.

28:26-31. Feast of Weeks. This second of the three major harvest festivals comes seven weeks after the harvest of the early grain (Ex 34:22; Deut 16:9-12) and is also known as the Feast of Harvest or Pentecost (Ex 23:16). Like the sabbath celebration, the Feast of Weeks is not tied to the lunar calendar (in this case because of the inaccuracy of a calendar based solely on the phases of the moon). In the agricultural cycle it marks the end of the wheat harvest season, and by tradition it is tied to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. It is also associated with *covenant renewal and pilgrimage. Celebration includes the bringing of a "wave offering" (see comment on Lev 8:27) of two loaves of bread, animal sacrifices (seven year-old lambs, one bull and two rams) and a drink offering in thanksgiving for a good harvest (see Lev 23:15-22). Like the other major feasts, a goat is also to be sacrificed as a sin offering for the people (Num 28:30).

29:1-6. Feast of Trumpets. The first day of the seventh month (the most sacred month in the Israelite calendar) was to be marked with the blowing of ram's horns (shofar) by the priests, commemorating the *covenantal agreement and gifts of God to the people. Its significance may partially derive from its being the seventh new moon of the seventh month of the year (compare this to the sabbatical cycle). No work is allowed, and burnt offerings are presented in addition to the daily offerings. The festival would continue until the tenth day of the month when the Day of Atonement would be observed (see Lev 16:29-34 for details). In later times the Feast of Trumpets would become the new year's festival, but that occurs in late postexilic times (see Lev 23:23-25).

29:7-11. Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement was a special day set aside each year to deal with the people's sins. The seriousness of this occasion is demonstrated by the fact that all of the *rituals had to be performed inside the sanctuary by the high priest. According to Leviticus 23:27-32 the Day of Atonement fell ten days after the opening of the civil new year (during the seventh month). On that day the people remained home in prayer and fasting while the high priest entered the inner precincts of the tabernacle and burned incense on the golden incense altar. Blood from this special sacrifice was also to be daubed on the horns of the incense altar to tie this holiest of altars and its flow of incense to the need for getting rid of the nation's sins. A more elaborate description of this yearly ritual, including the casting of the people's sins on the scapegoat, is found in Leviticus 16. See comments there for further information.

29:12-39. Feast of Tabernacles. The final harvest of the year occurred in the autumn prior to the onset of the rainy season and marked the beginning of a new agricultural year (fifteenth day of the seventh month). At this time the last of the ripening grain and fruits were gathered and stored, allowing time afterwards for pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The seven-day event is also known as the Feast of Ingathering (Ex 23:16) and is symbolized by the construction of booths decorated with greenery

for the harvesters. The festival was tied into Israelite tradition as a commemoration of the wilderness wanderings (see Lev 23:33-43). It was also the occasion for the dedication of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:65) and was such a popular festival that the prophet Zechariah described it as the eschatological feast celebrated by the nations following Yahweh's ultimate triumph (Zech 14:16).

29:13-38. number of animals. There are more animals sacrificed during the eight days of the Feast of Tabernacles than any other annual festival. A total of 71 bulls, 15 rams, 105 lambs and 8 goats are sacrificed, with accompanying cereal and drink offerings (compare the much smaller number prescribed in Ezek 45:13-25 for holy days). The number of bulls offered diminishes during the days of the festival, perhaps as a way of denoting the passage of time or possibly as a means of sparing the nation some of its most valuable livestock. The very large number of animals involved, however, speaks both to the joy associated with the harvest (a sign of the *covenant's fulfillment) and to the need to feed the large number of persons who have made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

30:1-16

Regulations Concerning Vows

30:2-15. importance and role of vows. The taking of a vow magnifies the devotion of an individual in performing a specific task (sacrifice—see Lev 27; transport of the ark to Jerusalem by David—Ps 132:2-5) or serves as a form of bargaining with the deity to obtain a goal (Jephthah's vow to gain a victory—Judg 11:30-31). Thus a vow differs from an oath in that it is generally conditional rather than just promissory. It can also be used to initiate a special dedicatory period, as was the case with the *Nazirite vows (Num 6), or, during war, as a form of abstinence sacrifice, which devotes all of the spoils to God (Num 21:1-3; Josh 6:18-19). Since this is a religious act, drawing the deity into a pact with the worshiper, it may not be broken under penalty of God's displeasure (see Ex 20:7 and the injunction not to "misuse" God's name). For more information, see the comment on Leviticus 27:2-13.

30:3-15. women and vows. According to the injunction in this passage, young women and wives may not pledge themselves to a vow without the consent of their father or husband. The father or husband, as head of a household, has the right to annul any such vow. However, if he first approves of the vow and later attempts to obstruct a woman from carrying it out, he bears the punishment for its nonfulfillment (vv. 14-15). In the first case (vv. 3-5) unmarried women are considered wards of their father and thus do not own property and may not, without prior consent, obstruct their father's ability to arrange their marriage or to utilize their person to benefit the family. Married women are similarly bound to their husband's household and may not make decisions without consulting their husband that might affect the functioning or economic viability of the household (vv. 6-8, 10-13). Only in the case of Hannah (1 Sam 1) does a wife on her own initiative make a vow, dedicating her child to temple service at Shiloh.

30:3-15. the subordinate role of women. Although women often had great influence over their husbands (especially royal women), only widows and elderly women appear to have been able to act on their own in Israelite society. Young women still living with their parents and wives were under the legal control of their fathers and husbands. They could not own property, start a business, initiate a lawsuit or arrange their own marriage. All of these acts were reserved for the male. There do seem to have been instances in which married women functioned more freely in the community (as in Prov 31), but the implication is always that this was done with the consent of their husbands. Their primary responsibility, in the biblical context as well as in the wider ancient Near Eastern context, was to maintain the home, provide heirs for their husbands and, when possible, assist with the economic assets of the household (farming, herding, manufacturing). In *Hammurabi's laws a woman who neglected her household duties in preferring business pursuits could be divorced by her husband. Older women beyond childbearing years may have moved into a different social category, functioning as female elders (see Deborah [Judg 4—5] and the wise women of Tekoa and Abel [2 Sam 14:2-20; 20:15-22]).

31:1-54

Battle with the Midianites

31:1-12. Midianites. Midianite territory centered in the region east of the Gulf of Aqaba in northwest Arabia, but the Midianites ranged west into the Sinai peninsula as well as north into Transjordan in various periods. Though their early history appears to be seminomadic or Bedouin in nature, archaeological study has revealed villages, walled cities and extensive irrigation in this region, beginning as early as the *Late Bronze period (the time of the exo-

dus and early judges). There is, so far, no reference to the Midianites in ancient texts.

31:6. articles from the sanctuary. Nearly every army in the ancient Near East included priests and diviners (as seen in the *Mari texts), prophets (2 Kings 3) and portable sacred objects (Assyrian Annals of Shalmaneser III [858-824 B.C.]). In this way, the god(s) could be consulted on the battlefield or invoked to lead the soldiers to victory. Phineas, Aaron's son and a high-ranking priest himself, thus helps build the confidence of the army with his presence. Exactly which items are included here is uncertain but may have included the ark of the covenant, the breastplate of the priest and the Urim and Thummim (see the carrying of the ark into battle elsewhere—Josh 6:4-7; 1 Sam 4:3-8).

31:6. trumpets for signaling. When large numbers of troops are deployed over a fairly wide area, the piercing notes of the trumpets could serve a dual purpose, symbolizing the voice of God to frighten the enemy (see Judg 7:17-22) and giving signals to the various detachments of the army (see 2 Chron 13:2). While the shofar or horn trumpet is used elsewhere as a signaling device (Judg 3:27; 6:34; Neh 4:18-20), the Hebrew word here is for a metal trumpet, probably made of bronze or silver and capable of producing four or five tones. Tubular flared trumpets were used in this period in military as well as ritual contexts. This is depicted on Egyptian reliefs as well as evidenced by actual instruments found, for example, in the tomb of King Tut (a silver trumpet nearly two feet long). Trumpet signals are attested in Egypt in the *Late Bronze Age (this time period) in both military and religious contexts. A preset code would include some combination of long and short blasts.

31:17-18. rationale for who is put to death. The criteria used to determine who would be executed were two: (1) all the boys must be killed to prevent them from presenting a military threat in the future, and (2) all nonvirgins must die since they have already been contaminated by sexual contact with a proscribed people. Virgins represent an "unplowed field" and may be adopted through marriage into the Israelite tribes (see Judg 21:11-12). It is also possible that they were enslaved or used as *concubines. These young women were presumably innocent of the seduction of the Israelites by Midianite women at Baal-Peor (Num 25).

31:19-24. purification. The soldiers required purification because of their contact with the dead. The seven-day purification *ritual for the soldiers and for the plunder taken in war had to be performed outside the camp (compare Deut 23:10-15) in order to prevent contamination of the rest of the people (see Num 19:11-13, 16-22). Purification included bathing (Num 19:18-19) and laundering by the soldiers (see Lev 11:25, 28 and the *War Scroll* from Qumran for similar injunctions). The spoils are purified by means of fire and water. Bathing metals in fire is also found in *Hittite birth rituals.

31:25-50. conventions for distribution of plunder. Soldiers until very recently were paid in plunder. This became a sacred right in the ancient Near East. In the *Mari texts officers took oaths that they would not infringe on the booty due to their men. Normally, the god(s) also received a share, which was collected on the battlefield by the accompanying priests. In this case the convention set for distribution provides the soldiers with a share ten times that of the civilians, while one-five-hundredth of the army's share was set aside for Eleazar (and the maintenance of the sanctuary) and one-fiftieth of the civilians' share was given to support the Levites. This could be compared to the tithe given by Abraham to Melchizedek of Salem in Genesis 14:20 and David's equal distribution to soldiers and civilians in 1 Samuel 30:24-25.

31:50. gold for ransom. Counting people in the ancient world was particularly unpopular (see comment on Ex 30:11-16) and could be subject to divine displeasure, since it might suggest distrust of the god(s) as well as a concern with personal power (see the plague which results from David's census in 2 Sam 24:1-17). According to the law in Exodus 30:12, whenever a census is taken a ransom must be paid for the life of each man counted. Thus after counting the army of Israel and determining that not a single casualty had been inflicted by the Midianites, the officers paid this ransom with the golden objects they had stripped from the bodies of the dead. This ransom (NIV: "atonement") is made to prevent a plague (see Num 8:19), and the golden jewelry is melted into sacred vessels that will serve the needs of the sanctuary as an eternal memorial to the victory and the people's willingness to submit to God's law. The amount of gold given is about six hundred pounds.

32:1-42
The Tribes Who Inherited Transjordan

32:1. Jazer and Gilead. The Transjordanian region in the area of the Jabbok River provided

suitable grazing and was an attractive place for the tribes of Reuben and Gad to settle. Jazer is probably Khirbet Jazzir, twelve miles south of the Jabbok, on the border with Ammon (see Num 21:32). The region of Gilead (mentioned in *Ugaritic texts) extends from the Arnon River in the south to Bashan and the Transjordanian side of the Galilee in the north.

32:3. cities list. This same list of cities also appears in Numbers 32:34-38. Ataroth is identified with Khirbet 'Attarus, eight miles northwest of Dibon and eight miles east of the Dead Sea. It is also mentioned in the Mesha stele inscription (c. 830 B.C.) as a site built by the Israelites and inhabited by the tribe of Gad. Dibon (=Diban), the Moabite capital, is approximately four miles north of the Arnon River and twelve miles east of the Dead Sea. Nimrah, near modern Tell Nimrin, is in the northern sector of Transjordan along with Jazer. Heshbon (=Hesban), on the northwest corner of the Madaba plain (three miles northeast of Mount Nebo), is said to be the capital of the *Amorite king Sihon, but there is no archaeological evidence for permanent occupation prior to 1200 B.C. (see comment on Num 21:25-28). Elealeh (= el-'Al) is located northeast of Heshbon (see Is 15:4; 16:9; Jer 48:34). Sebam is an unknown site. Nebo has also not been located, but it is mentioned in the Mesha stele. Beon (=Ma'in, Baal Meon in Num 32:38) is ten miles southwest of Heshbon. In his victory stele Mesha (ninth-century king of Moab) claims to have built it.

32:1-37. Transjordan topography. A wide range of topography characterizes Transjordan, which included the areas of Bashan, Gilead, Ammon, Moab and Edom. In the north this includes the Mount Hermon range (highest peak at 9,230 feet above sea level) and a portion of the rift valley between the Huleh basin (230 feet above sea level) and the Sea of Galilee (695 feet below sea level). The southern limit of the region is at the Gulf of Aqaba. The rift valley extends south following the Jordan River to the Dead Sea (2,550 feet below sea level at its deepest point). East of the Jordan, the hills of Gilead rise to 3,500 feet above sea level and in the south the mountains of Edom stand 5,700 feet near the region of Petra. Most north-south travel followed the "King's Highway," starting at Damascus, cutting across the major wadis and skirting the desert to the east. East-west travel followed the Yabis, Jabbok, Nimrin and Abu Gharaba wadis. The generally dry climate necessitates irrigation farming but supplies sufficient pasturage for pastoral nomadic groups.

32:34-42. geography of tribal settlements in Transjordan. Based on the locations of the cities in this list (see Num 32:3 for locations of most of them), the tribe of Gad built cities in the southern, northern and northwestern sectors of the region of Transjordan (principally Gilead and Bashan). The Reubenites focused on the city of Heshbon, along with its surrounding villages. Joshua 13:15-31 presents the final distribution of cities, which yields to Reuben certain of the cities that the Gadites had built. Locations which can be posited for cities not discussed in Numbers 32:3 include Aroer, three miles south of Diban on the Arnon River; Jogbehah (=Jubeihat), five miles northwest of Rabbah; Beth Haran (=either Tell er-Rame or Tell Iktanu), south of Tell Nimrim; Kiriathaim (=Khirbet el-Qureiyat), six miles northwest of Diban. Archaeological attention to this area has increased in the last couple of decades, but many of these sites have yet to be excavated.

33:1-56

The Wilderness Itinerary

33:1-49. the itinerary of the journey. The itinerary form is common in ancient Near Eastern annals, including those of the ninth century B.C. *Assyrian kings, who described their campaigns in terms of stopping points and cities conquered. Closer to this period are the Egyptian itineraries preserved in the records of their various excursions into the Syro-Palestine region. This list provides a fairly complete chronicle of the journey from Rameses in Egypt to the Jordan crossing prior to the conquest. However, the omission of some important sites (Massah, Meribah) suggests that it is not comprehensive. The stages of the journey include (1) Egypt to the wilderness of Sinai (vv. 5-15; many of these sites are discussed specifically in the comments on Ex 13—17); (2) from the wilderness to Ezion Geber (vv. 16-35); (3) Ezion Geber to Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin (v. 36); and (4) Kadesh to Moab (vv. 37-49). Many of the names are obscure, occurring only here in the biblical record and unknown from ancient records or modern geographical and archaeological studies. Among those place names that can be at least tentatively identified are Rameses (=Tell el-Dab'a, see comment on Ex 1:8-14); Ezion Geber, a port city located at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba (1 Kings 9:26), either Tell el-Kheleifeh or on the island of Jezirat Far'on (the only site in the region with evidence of a substantial harbor area); Punon (=Khirbet Feinan), thirty miles south of the Dead Sea; mountains of Abarim, near Mount Nebo, just east of the Dead Sea (see comment on Num 27:12); and Abel-shittim (Shittim, see comment on Num 25:1), which is

either Tell el-Hammam on the Wadi Kefrein (runs east-west into the Jordan across from Jericho) or just east of that site at Tell Kefrein.

34:1-29

The Land to Be Assigned

34:1-12. trace the boundaries. The boundaries of the Promised Land are laid out here as a logical sequel to the order to displace the present inhabitants of the area (Num 33:50-56). Although these are not the actual borders of the nation of Israel at any point in its history, they are a close approximation of the territory claimed by Egypt in Canaan during the fifteenth to thirteenth centuries B.C. (see 2 Sam 3:10 for the realized dimensions: "from Dan to Beersheba") and are also approached by the description of the territory controlled by David and Solomon. The boundaries are outlined, using a set of then-known border points (see Josh 15—19 for the tribal divisions). The most obvious limits are those to the east and west—the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea respectively. The northern border reaches to the mountains of Lebanon as far as Mount Hor (unknown peak, probably in the Lebanese range) and Lebo (=Lebo Hamath, most likely modern Lebweh on one of the sources of the Orontes). This was the southern border of the land of Hamath and therefore the northern border of Canaan, including the Damascus area and Bashan (roughly equated to the modern Golan Heights). Zedad is likely modern Sedad, about thirty-five miles northeast of Lebweh, while Ziphron and Hazar Enan are commonly identified as the two oases to the southeast of Zedad. Moving south, the territory passes through the Galilee to the Yarmuk valley (the sites mentioned in v. 11 are unknown) where it moves west to the Jordan valley and from there south to Kadesh Barnea (see the comment on Num 13) in the Wilderness of Zin (see comment on Num 20:1) before swinging west to the Mediterranean at El-'Arish. It is common to identify Hazar Addar and Azmon with two of the other springs in the vicinity of Kadesh, namely, 'Ain Qedeis and 'Ain Muweilih. The location of Scorpion Pass (akrabim) is unknown, though it is usually identified with a narrow passage along the Wadi Marra headed northeast toward the south end of the Dead Sea.

35:1-34

Cities of Refuge

35:1-5. Levitical cities. Since their primary responsibility is as sacrificial priests and religious officials, the Levites are not given a portion of the Promised Land to farm (see Num 18:23-24). However, they do receive forty-eight towns, with their surrounding area as pasturage for their flocks and herds (see Lev 25:32-34 for their property rights in these towns). The precedent of assigning towns to priestly control can be seen in the practice of Egypt's rule in Canaan (and also in Hittite practice), where some cities were set aside as royal estates and placed in the hands of the priesthood, which administered that territory. These Egyptian administrative centers were typically fortified and collected the tribute or tax money from that region. Likewise in Mesopotamian and Syrian practice, designated cities had royal pasturelands connected to them. While a secular administrative role is not evident for the Levitical cities, they may well have been centers for religious instruction and collection of sanctuary revenues. Since pastureland is specified, it may also be that livestock collected for ritual use was provided for in this way.

35:6-34. cities of refuge and the judicial system. Six of the Levitical cities were to serve as places of refuge for persons who had committed an unintentional homicide (see also Deut 4:41-43). This solution, which provides asylum to the accused and prevents the "blood avenger" from killing him, may be an extension or alternative to the use of asylum altars mentioned in Exodus 21:12-14. The priestly community would have been concerned about polluting the altar and the sanctuary when a lawbreaker grasped the horns of the altar. Thus by extending the asylum zone to the entire city of refuge, this *pollution would not happen, and the person accused would also have better accommodations until the trial was completed. Sacred cities or royal cities with privileged status are evidenced throughout the ancient Near East, but the protection they offer is often in terms of freedom from certain government imposed obligations, though one text speaks of a prohibition against shedding the blood of anyone under such protection. The concept of asylum is also found in classical sources and suggests an attempt on the part of the government to tighten control over the judicial system, removing the rights of revenge from families, and insuring due process.

35:9-34. family responsibility for vengeance. While the biblical law clearly indicates the responsibility of the "blood avenger" to avenge the death of a kinsman, this practice of blood feud could be disruptive to the administration of justice, and thus the six cities of refuge were

established to provide a "cooling off" phase as well as due process for the accused. Two witnesses were necessary to convict (Num 35:30), and then it became the responsibility of the "blood avenger" to execute the felon (Num 35:19-21; Deut 19:12). No ransom for the convicted murderer was possible (Num 35:31-32). This contrasts with laws formulated elsewhere in the ancient Near East. Both the Hittite laws and the Middle *Assyrian laws provide for the payment of a ransom to buy back the life of the murderer. The Assyrian law reflects a middle ground, giving the deceased's next-of-kin the option of executing the murderer or accepting a ransom.

35:25, 28. death of the high priest. It is not the period of exile within the city of refuge that absolves a person of unintentional homicide (see Josh 20:2-6). The blood of the slain can only be expiated by another death, for bloodguilt accompanies every human slaying. However, since the accused has not been judged a murderer, he must remain in refuge until the death of the high priest. It is thus the high priest's death that eliminates the bloodguilt attached to the homicide. In this way even the death of the high priest continues his *cultic service to the people by removing bloodguilt and disposing of their sins (see Ex 28:36-38; Lev 16:16).

35:33. bloodshed polluting the land. The Promised Land, as a gift of the *covenant, is sacred and can be polluted by bloodshed and idolatry (see Ezek 36:17-18). Since blood is the source of life and a gift of God, the *pollution caused by shedding blood can be wiped away only by the shedding of blood. Thus even the blood of animals must be poured on the altar as a ransom for the person who slaughtered them (see Lev 17:11). That is why the convicted murderer must be executed and why the death of the high priest wipes away the pollution of the unintentional homicide. Failure to obey this command corrupts the land. If the land and its people become polluted, God can no longer dwell in their midst. And if he abandons the land, it will no longer yield its covenantal bounty (see Gen 4:10-12).

36:1-13

Case of Inheritance Law

36:1-13. tribal retention of land inherited by daughters. In the law established in Numbers 27:1-11, Zelophehad's daughters were given the right to inherit land since there was no male heir (the apocryphal book Tobit [6:13] shows an application of the law). A loophole was inadvertently created here which would have allowed for the transference of property to another tribe through marriage. Thus this codicil was added, restricting women who had inherited land from marrying outside their tribe so that the original tribal allotment would remain intact. Here it becomes clear that the preservation of family property holdings was one of the highest values in Israelite society. That is because the land was the gift of the *covenant, so each family's allotment was its share in the covenant. While land ownership was important in the rest of the ancient Near East, no other country had such strong religious overtones connected to the land.

DEUTERONOMY

1:1-8

Introduction

1:1-2. geography. The Arabah is the area of the Jordan rift, sometimes limited to the section between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. The list of locations looks more like an itinerary than a description of the Israelites' present location (thus the comment concerning the trip along the Mount Seir road). The sites are difficult to identify with any certainty. Mount Seir is another name for Edom, and the Mount Seir road takes one from the Sinai peninsula into Edom. For details on Kadesh Barnea see the comment on Numbers 13:26, and the for location of Sinai/Horeb see the comment on Exodus 19:1-2. The eleven-day journey (140 miles) mentioned here is consistent with a southern location for Mount Sinai.

1:3. chronology. The eleventh month is Tebet, and it spans our December-January. In Israel it is the middle of the rainy season, but in the southern region where the Israelites still are there is very little rainfall (an average of two inches per year), and though it is winter, the average daytime temperature would still be about sixty-five degrees Fahrenheit. It is difficult to assign a number to this fortieth year since the text has offered us no anchor to abso-

lute chronology. In the ancient world chronology was only noted in relative terms ("the fifth year of king X"), and the biblical text does the same (here, the fortieth year since the exodus). There was no absolute chronology system ("the year 1385"). See "The Date of the Exodus," p. 86.

1:4. history. The account of these battles is found in Numbers 21:21-35. Of the three sites mentioned here, only Heshbon has been excavated, and it has been controversial (see comment on Num 21:25-28). Ashtaroth is identified here as the capital city of Bashan. It is mentioned in Egyptian and *Assyrian texts and the *Amarna letters, and some think it occurs in a text from *Ugarit as a place where the god *El reigns. It is known today as Tell 'Ashtarah and is located on the Yarmuk River about twenty-five miles east of the Sea of Galilee. Neither Sihon nor Og is known from any extrabiblical records.

1:6. Horeb. Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, most likely located in the southern section of the Sinai peninsula. For more detailed discussion see the comment on Exodus 19:1-2.

1:7. geography. The description in this verse is largely by topographical areas. The hill country of the *Amorites may refer to the entire southern region, in contrast to the land of the Canaanites, which would be the northern region. The Arabah refers to the Jordan rift valley from the Gulf of Aqaba north, while the hill country extends north and south along the west side of the Jordan River, interrupted by the valley of Jezreel. The Shephelah (NIV: "western foothills") descend from the mountains to the coast in the southern section. The Negev is the wilderness in the triangle formed by the Dead Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. The Lebanon is the northern mountain range, and the northwestern spur of the Euphrates marks the northeastern border.

1:9-18

Judiciary System

1:16. judicial structures in the ancient Near East. Egyptian and *Hittite records of this general period likewise evidence a judicial system set up in tiers, and the Hittite *Instructions to Officers and Commanders* even has military leaders in the position of judge, as verse 13 here does. This suggests the close relationship between military activity and the activity of judging that the book of Judges implies. In most other systems difficult cases were referred to the king, whereas here Moses serves as the final adjudicator. Thus in the ancient Near East, leaders, whether tribal, military, city, provincial or national, had the obligation of judging the cases under their jurisdiction. There was no trial by jury, though at times a group of elders may have been involved in judging a case together. When only one individual judge was involved, the danger of favoring the powerful or the wealthy was very real. In both ancient Near Eastern documents and the Bible impartiality is valued, along with discernment. There were no lawyers, so most people represented themselves in court. Witnesses could be called, and oaths played a very significant role since most of our scientific means of gathering evidence were not available.

1:19-25

The Commission and Report of the Spies

1:19. Amorites. The *Amorites were also known as the Amurru (in *Akkadian) and the Martu (in *Sumerian). The term *Amorites* ("westerners"), like the term *Canaanites*, can be used to describe the general population of the land of Canaan. As an ethnic group, Amorites are known from written sources as early as the middle third millennium B.C. Most scholars think that their homeland was in Syria, from where they came to occupy many areas in the Near East.

1:24. the valley of Eshcol. There are many wadis in this general area, and there is no way of telling which one may be referred to here. Around Hebron today, Ramet el-'Amleh is known for its grape production and is near a wadi.

1:26-46

The Rebellion of the People

1:28. Anakites. The descendants of Anak are specifically mentioned in Numbers 13:22, 28. When names are given, they are *Hurrian (biblical Horites; see comment on Deut 2). The descendants of Anak are generally considered "giants" (Num 13:33; Deut 2:10-11; 2 Sam 21:18-22), though the description "gigantic" may be more appropriate. There is no mention of the Anakites in other sources, but the Egyptian letter on Papyrus Anastasi I (thirteenth century B.C.) describes fierce warriors in Canaan that are seven to nine feet tall.

1:44. Seir to Hormah. Seir is generally considered the mountainous central region of Edom (with elevations generally over five thousand

feet) between Wadi al-Ghuwayr on the north and Ras en-Naqb on the south. Hormah is a site seven and a half miles east of Beersheba, tentatively identified with Tell Masos (Khirbet el-Meshash). Seir to Hormah is about fifty miles along a route to the northwest.

1:46. Kadesh Barnea. Kadesh Barnea is usually identified as 'Ain el-Qudeirat, about fifty miles south of Beersheba, which has the most plentiful water supply in the region. There are no archaeological remains on this site from this period, but the site has long been a stopping place for nomads and Bedouin, and the abundance of "Negev" ware (pottery dated to this period) suggests that was true during the time of the Israelite wanderings as well.

2:1-25

Wandering in the Wilderness

2:1. geography. Traveling the road to the Red Sea took the Israelites south along the Arabah, but probably not as far south as Elath at the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba. Instead it appears they turned north at one of the east-west wadis in the southern region of Seir to arrive at the route north that would take them to the plains of Moab.

2:8. Arabah road. The Arabah road runs north-south from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Dead Sea through the rift valley.

2:8. Elath and Ezion Geber. Elath is near the modern city of Aqaba at the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba. Ezion Geber was a port city located at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba (1 Kings 9:26) and may be either Tell el-Kheleifeh (which some identify as Elath) or on the island of Jezirat Far'on (the only site in the region with evidence of a substantial harbor area).

2:9. Ar. "Ar" is sometimes seen as a variant of Aroer. While some consider it a regional name, others have suggested it be identified with Khirbet Balu along one of the tributaries of the Arnon on the King's Highway, the major north-south route running on the east side of the Jordan.

2:10. Emites. These people are also referred to in Genesis 14:6, but nothing else is known of them.

2:10. Anakites. See comment on 1:26-46.

2:11. Rephaites. The Rephaites are mentioned as one of the ethnic groups inhabiting the land of Canaan in Genesis 15:20, but nothing else is known of them either inside or outside the Bible. The *Ugaritic texts speak of the Rephaim, whom some scholars consider to be the shades of dead heroes and kings. There is no cause, however, to think of this biblical group in those terms, though the Rephaim referred to in poetic texts such as Isaiah 14:9 (as well as in Job and Psalms) may be spirits.

2:12. Horites. The Horites are known throughout ancient Near Eastern literature as the *Hurrians. They were an Indo-European ethnic group centered along the Euphrates River in the third and second millennia. They established a political empire known as *Mitanni in the mid-second millennium, but it was breaking up around the time of the events of this book. Many Hurrian groups therefore ended up as displaced people and wandered into Syria and Palestine. The Hurrians were the dominant ethnic group in *Nuzi, and Hurrian

THE COVENANT AND ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TREATIES

Archaeologists have recovered many treaties from the second and first millennia between nations and their vassals. The second millennium treaties are mostly made between the Hittites and others, while the first millennium examples come during the time of Assyrian kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal of the seventh century B.C. The format followed in these treaties shows striking similarity to the format of a number of covenant documents in the Bible, most notably, Deuteronomy. These treaties begin with a preamble that identifies the suzerain who is making the treaty. Besides giving his titles and attributes it emphasizes his greatness and his right to proclaim the treaty. In Deuteronomy this occupies the first five verses of ch. 1. Next the treaties offer a historical prologue in which the relationship between the parties is reviewed. Priority is given to the kindness and power of the suzerain. In Deuteronomy this section comprises 1:6—3:29 (and some would extend it through the end of ch. 11). The core of the treaty is the stipulations section which details the obligations of each party. Deuteronomy accomplishes the same thing by its presentation of the law in chaps. 4-26. The treaties are concluded by three sections of legal material including instructions concerning the document, witnesses to the agreement and blessings and curses that will result from either honoring or violating the treaty. Deuteronomy addresses such issues in chaps. 28 and 31.

As a result of the recognition of this format, it becomes evident that the Lord used a very familiar literary form to communicate his covenant to Israel. Israelites would have realized that the Lord was putting himself in the place of the suzerain and that they should respond as a vassal would. It is a relationship bringing support and protection to the vassal as he is loyal to the suzerain.

groups are known from *Alalakh, *Mari, *Ugarit and the *Amarna texts as well. The Egyptians often referred to Canaan as Khurri land.

2:13. Zered Valley. The Zered Valley is the border between Edom and Moab. It is probably the wadi known today as Wadi al-Hesa, which runs east from the southern tip of the Dead Sea for about thirty miles.

2:19. Ammonites. The Ammonites lived north of the Moabites in the region around the Jabbok River. They are known from *Assyrian records as Bit-Ammon and as the land of Benammanu. They were settling this territory just around the time of the Israelite wanderings.

2:20. Zamzummites. The Zamzummites are known as the Zuzim in Genesis 14:5, but aside from their association with the Rephaites, nothing more is known about them.

2:22. Edomites and Horites. Nothing is known of this historic warfare between Esau's descendants and the *Hurrians. There have so far been no positive archaeological evidences of a Hurrian presence in Edom.

2:23. Avvites and Caphtorites. Caphtor is identified as Crete and is often associated with the homeland of the Philistines (Gen 10:14; Amos 9:7). Gaza was one of the five cities of the Philistines in the coastal plain. The Avvites are unknown outside the few obscure references to them in the Bible.

2:24. Arnon Gorge. The Arnon is today identified as the Wadi al-Mawjib, which flows about thirty miles northwest and west through Transjordan before emptying into the Dead Sea at its midpoint. The Arnon was often the northern border of Moab, though at times the Moabites extended their control north to Heshbon.

2:25. divine terror. The dread of a deity as a divine warrior was often believed to precede a powerful, successful army into battle. Egyptian texts attribute this terror to Amun-Re in the inscriptions of Thutmose III, and *Hittite, *Assyrian and *Babylonian texts all have their divine warriors who strike terror into the hearts of the enemy.

2:26-37

Battle Against Sihon the Amorite

2:26. Sihon the *Amorite. This battle is initially recorded in Numbers 21. Sihon is known only from the biblical records, and archaeology has little information to offer regarding his capital city or his kingdom.

2:26. Heshbon. The modern site of Tell-Heshban is located nearly fifty miles directly east of Jerusalem. However, archaeologists have not been able to detect any evidence that this site was settled prior to 1200 B.C. Some have suspected that the *Late Bronze city of Heshbon that was Sihon's capital was at a different site, with Tell Jalul named as one possibility. Recent surveys and excavations in this region have turned up more and more Late Bronze pottery, but it remains difficult to assess the nature of the occupation during this period.

2:26. Desert of Kedemoth. This refers to the wilderness region beyond the eastern border of Moab. The city of Kedemoth is identified tentatively as Saliya at the southern corner.

2:32. Jahaz. The site of the battle with the forces of the *Amorite king Sihon is given as Jahaz. Its probable location, based on the church historian Eusebius (fourth century A.D.) and the Mesha inscription (ninth century B.C.), is between the territories of Madaba and Dibon, at Khirbet Medeiniyeh at the eastern edge of Moab by the Wadi al-Themed. The battle is also mentioned in Deuteronomy 2:33 and Judges 11:20.

2:24-30. captured land. The area of central Transjordan, which is here described as the kingdoms of Sihon and Og, stretches from the Arnon River valley in the south to the Jabbok River in the north. It would include Moab but not Ammon. It seems likely that these "kingdoms" were not organized states in this period and that their conquest provided passage for the Israelites without the tribes' actually taking control of and settling this region.

2:34. complete destruction. See comment on the "ban" in 7:2.

2:36-37. geography. Aroer was a border fortress, identified as modern 'Ara'ir just north of the Arnon gorge, where it turns south. *Late Bronze remains have been found at the site. The Israelites are victorious throughout the Transjordan territories from the Arnon (north boundary of Moab) up to the Jabbok (the territory of the Ammonites), about fifty miles north to south and twenty to twenty-five miles east to west.

3:1-11

The Battle Against Og of Bashan

3:1. Bashan. After defeating Sihon, the Israelites traveled northward to Og's kingdom in the area known today as the Golan Heights. It was bordered by Mount Hermon to the north, Jebel Druze (Mount Hauran) to the east, the Sea of Galilee to the west and the Yarmuk region to the south. They defeated King Og at Edrei (modern Der'a, thirty miles east of the Sea of Galilee). Bashan proper, more limited to

the region of the (upper?) Yarmuk, is a broad, fertile plateau region noted for its grazing (Ps 22:12; Amos 4:1-3).

3:1. Og. There is no extrabiblical information either from historical sources or from archaeology to shed light on Og.

3:4. Argob. From the description here it is obvious that the region of Argob is heavily populated. It is sometimes equated with Bashan, and one possibility is that it refers to the area just south of the Yarmuk and half encircled by it. The *Assyrian kings of the ninth century also found and conquered many cities in this region in the vicinity of Mount Hauran.

3:5. fortified cities in Transjordan. There has been little excavation in this region, but sites such as Tel Soreg may be characteristic of the unwalled farming communities in the area. Seven cities in the area east of the Sea of Galilee are mentioned in the *Amarna texts of the fourteenth century in an area they identify as Garu (=Geshur?). Archaeological surveys in the Golan Heights have located twenty-seven cities occupied at the end of the *Middle Bronze period and eight in the *Late Bronze.

3:5. gates and bars. Gateways were often multichambered (featuring inner and outer gates) and sometimes included a turn of some sort within the gateway. The *Iron Age outer gate at Tell en-Nasebeh has slots in the stone beside the gate where bars would have been placed. The inhabitants would lock the gates by sliding the bars into sockets in the wall.

3:9. Hermon/Sirion/Senir. Hermon is in the Anti-Lebanon range. Its highest peak, Jabal ash-Shaykh, has an elevation of 9,232 feet and is usually snowcapped. The term *Sirion* is used in Egyptian, *Hittite and *Ugaritic materials. *Assyrian records of the ninth century refer to it as Saniru.

3:10. Salecah and Edrei. Edrei is identified as modern Der'a in Syria, about sixty miles south of Damascus and thirty miles east of the Sea of Galilee near the Yarmuk River. No excavations have been conducted here. The town is also mentioned in ancient texts from Egypt and *Ugarit. Salecah, modern Salhad, is another twenty-five miles east of Edrei.

3:11. Og's iron bed. Though many commentators and even some translations have identified this as a basalt sarcophagus, the language is clear enough and "iron bed" should be retained. Just as many objects described as gold, silver or ivory are not made of those but are decorated, overlaid or gilded with them, so we need not imagine a bed of solid iron. This account is still in the *Bronze Age, when iron was considered precious, so it would not be strange for this to be noted as a remarkable piece. The bed is about thirteen feet long and six feet wide. This is the same size as Marduk's bed in the temple Esagila in Babylon. Beds were not just for sleeping but were often used for reclining on during feasts and celebrations. Some reliefs picture kings reclining on magnificent couches.

3:11. Rephaim. See comment on 2:11.

3:12-20

The Division of Transjordan

3:12-17. geography. Gilead is the hilly section of Transjordan between the Jabbok on the south almost to the Yarmuk on the north. The southern half of this, as well as the territory taken from Sihon south to the Arnon (northern border of Moab), was given to the tribes of Reuben and Gad. The section of Gilead that extends into the curve of the Yarmuk (the region of Argob?) as well as some territory north of the Yarmuk (all taken from Og) was assigned to Manasseh. Geshur and Maacah are excepted, though apparently part of Og's kingdom. Geshur is a small area just east of the Sea of Galilee. Maacah is just north of Geshur and stretches to Hermon. It is referred to in the Egyptian *Execration Texts.

3:17. Pisgah. Pisgah is the designation of one of the peaks of the Abarim range (Num 27:12) paired with Mount Nebo, which is slightly higher. They are identified as the two peaks of Jebel Shayhan, about five miles northwest of Medeba and about a mile and a half apart. They stand about ten miles from the Jordan River.

3:21-29

Moses Views the Land

3:27. view from Pisgah. Though Pisgah is about four hundred feet lower than Nebo in elevation, it is farther north and west and affords a better view of the Jordan Valley and the land opposite. At this point the Mediterranean is about sixty miles west, but it cannot be seen because the hills on the west side of the Jordan obscure the view. On a clear day one can see Mount Hermon, about a hundred miles to the north, the mountains to the northwest that flank the Jezreel Valley (Tabor and Gilboa), the mountains of the central hill country (Ebal and Gerizim) and to the southwest as far as Engedi.

3:29. valley near Beth Peor. The Wadi Ayun Musa at the foot of Mount Nebo is generally considered to be the Valley of Beth Peor, with the site Khirbet Ayun Musa as probably the town.

4:1-40

Call to Obedience to the Law

4:3. Baal Peor. *Baal Peor is the god who was worshiped at Beth Peor. This refers back to the incident in Numbers 25, when the Israelites were drawn into idolatrous worship by the Moabite women. It was perhaps their first exposure to the *fertility worship of Canaan. Fertility *cults are common in agrarian societies where the populace is dependent on rainfall and the fertility of the soil for survival. These cults often featured a "dying and rising" god in the pattern of the change of the seasons. The association of human fertility with the earth's fertility led to the development of sexual elements in the religious *rituals.

4:6-8. result of the laws. The laws are presented here as an evidence of wisdom and righteousness that will distinguish Israel from the other nations. In a number of the collections of laws known from the ancient Near East there is a prologue and epilogue explaining that the collection of laws will demonstrate how wise and just the king is. Likewise Solomon's wisdom was evidenced by how he was able to make just decrees and rulings. The kings of the ancient Near East usually counted on their collections of laws to convince the gods that they were wise and just rulers. Here the Lord is revealing his own wisdom and justice to his people and the world.

4:7. nearness of god. In Mesopotamia the laws were presented to the god of justice (Shamash) by the king as evidence that he was a just king. The king had been given the authority to make laws by the gods, the guardians of cosmic law. Law was seen as something inherent in the universe, and laws were supposed to somehow reflect that impersonal cosmic law. In Israelite thinking, however, law emanated from the character of God and he was seen as the source of the laws. Moses was not the lawmaker, *Yahweh was. By proclaiming laws, the Lord is therefore revealing himself in an act that distinguished him from the other gods of the ancient world. This is the "nearness" that the text remarks on.

4:10. Horeb. Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, most likely located in the southern section of the Sinai peninsula. See the comment on Exodus 19:1-2.

4:13. two stone tablets. See the comments on Exodus 24:12; 32:15-16.

4:15-18. prohibition of images. The second commandment concerns how *Yahweh is to be worshiped, for the idols that it prohibits are idols of him (the previous commandment already dismissed the thought of other gods). The commandment has nothing to do with art, though the graven images of the ancient world were indeed works of art. They were typically carved of wood and overlaid with hammered sheets of silver or gold, then clothed in the finest attire. But the prohibition is more concerned with how they are employed, and here the issue is power. Images of deity in the ancient Near East were where the deity became present in a special way, to the extent that the *cult statue became the god (when the god so favored his worshipers), even though it was not the only manifestation of the god. As a result of this linkage, spells, incantations and other magical acts could be performed on the image in order to threaten, bind or compel the deity. In contrast, other rites related to the image were intended to aid the deity or care for the deity. The images then represent a worldview, a concept of deity that was not consistent with how Yahweh had revealed himself.

4:19. astral worship in the ancient Near East. The celestial gods (sun god, moon god and Venus particularly; in *Babylonia, Shamash, Sin and *Ishtar respectively) were primary in most ancient religions. Controlling calendar and time, seasons and weather, they were viewed as the most powerful of the gods. They provided signs by which omens were read, and they looked down on all. *Yahweh has now warned the Israelites against *fertility worship (v. 3), magic and manipulation (idolatry, vv. 16-18), and omens and linking deities to cosmic phenomena (v. 19), all the major characteristics of the pagan polytheism of the ancient world.

4:20. iron-smelting furnace. The ancient world did not have the blast furnace, which is used today to produce cast iron. Iron has a melting point of 1,537 degrees C., a temperature that could not be consistently achieved with ancient technology. But once the iron is heated beyond 1,100 degrees C., it takes a spongy, semisolid form that can be forged. The furnace was usually fueled by charcoal to provide the carbon necessary for the chemical process. The strength of the steel is dependent on the amount of carbon it is able to absorb. The lower the temperature, the more often the process has to be repeated in order to get rid of enough slag to achieve a usable product. While a furnace can certainly be a metaphor of oppression, the fire of the smelting furnace is not destructive but constructive. It is the furnace that transforms the malleable ore to the durable iron product. The exodus experience transformed Israel into the *covenant people of God.

4:26. heaven and earth as witnesses. In ancient Near Eastern treaties the gods are typically called to witness as ones who would be able to adjudicate any failures to adhere to the terms. Here heaven and earth are not understood as deified, but, representing the entire created universe, they signify that the agreement is intended to endure long beyond human life spans. A clearer indication of the implications can be seen in the fuller wording of Psalm 89:28-29, 34-37 (see also Jer 33:20-21).
4:28. view of idols. Other passages that articulate this view are Isaiah 44; Jeremiah 10; and Psalm 115:4-8. On the beliefs about idols in ancient Near Eastern religious practice, see the comment on 4:15-18. It has long been of interest to scholars that the text does not refute mythology or the existence of the pagan gods but attacks their understanding of idols. In the end, however, it is very difficult to prove to someone that his gods do not exist. But it can be shown that the gods do not operate in the way they are believed to. To the biblical authors the "idol as fetish" aspect of pagan belief was the most vulnerable and the most ridiculous. If the gods were not manifest in their images, then many of the other aspects of the common worldview were also in jeopardy.
4:32-34. Israel's unique experience with deity. The two aspects the text highlights as unique are the two major features of the *covenant: election (vv. 34, 37) and revelation (vv. 33, 35). *Yahweh distinguished himself from the gods of the ancient Near East by these actions. The gods of the ancient Near East were sometimes believed to have chosen an individual or a family to favor with their blessing. Usually this would be a king who claimed a particular deity as his sponsor. But without revelation, such "election" is only inference or propaganda. The gods of the ancient Near East did not reveal their long-term plans and were not necessarily considered to have any. They did not reveal what they were like or what pleased or displeased them. All of this had to be inferred or deduced by those who worshiped them. But *Yahweh has chosen to reveal himself both through the law ("I am holy, so you are to be holy") and through his actions (covenant with forefathers, plagues, exodus, bringing them to the land, etc.).

4:41-43
Cities of Refuge

4:42. cities of refuge. For more information on the cities of refuge, see the comments on Numbers 35. Bezer is in the region around Medeba. It is known from the Mesha inscription (ninth century B.C.), but its archaeological identification is uncertain. The principal candidates are Umm al-Amad (about seven miles northeast of Medeba) and Tell Jalul (three or four miles directly east of Medeba). Ramoth Gilead is generally identified as Tell er-Rumeith near modern Ramtha south of Edrei along the King's Highway. Excavations at the site, however, have turned up nothing earlier than Solomon. Golan, the modern Sahm al-Joulan, is at the eastern boundary of the Golan Heights on the east side of the river el-Allan.

4:44-49
Territorial Description

4:48. borders. Finally the whole Transjordan territory is circumscribed, from the Arnon River in the south (the north border of Moab proper) to Mount Hermon in the north. The Jordan rift valley is included and the Dead Sea (Sea of Arabah).

5:1-33
The Ten Commandments

5:2. Horeb. Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, most likely located in the southern section of the Sinai peninsula. For more detailed discussion see the comment on Exodus 19:1-2.
5:6-21. the Ten Commandments. See the comments on Exodus 20.
5:22. two stone tablets. The use of two tablets probably indicates that Moses was given two copies, not that some of the commandments were on one tablet and some on the other. The fact that they were stone suggests a larger size than clay tablets would have been, though inscribed stone tablets such as the Gezer calendar were small enough to fit in the palm of the hand. The Egyptian practice of this period was to use flakes of stone chipped from rocks. Inscription on front and back was not unusual. When the writing reached the bottom of one side, the scribe would often continue around the bottom edge and move onto the second side. Even flakes that fit in the palm of the hand could contain fifteen to twenty lines.

6:1-25
The Importance of the Law

6:3. milk and honey. The land of Canaan is described as a land "flowing with milk and honey." This refers to the bounty of the land for a pastoral lifestyle, but not necessarily in terms of agriculture. Milk is the product of herds, while honey represents a natural resource, probably the syrup of the date rather

than bees' honey. A similar expression to this is found in the *Ugaritic epic of *Baal and Mot that describes the return of fertility to the land in terms of the wadis flowing with honey. Egyptian texts as early as the *Story of *Sinuhe* describe the land of Canaan as rich in natural resources as well as in cultivated produce.

6:4. categories of monotheism. There are several levels of monotheism that can be identified and that may have characterized the beliefs of various Israelites in various periods. The ultimate monotheism could be called *philosophical monotheism:* there has only ever been one God in existence. **Henotheism* acknowledges the existence of other gods but often insists on the supremacy of one's own god. Similarly, **monolatry* describes a situation where a person or group has determined to worship only one God, regardless of whether other gods, exist or not. Finally, a *practical monotheist* may acknowledge a number of gods, but most of his religious and worship activity is focused on one particular deity. The material in Deuteronomy does not allow for practical monotheism but does allow for henotheism and monolatry at the very least.

6:4. Yahweh is one. The claim that a deity is one, or alone, in other ancient Near Eastern texts (made, for instance, by *Enlil [Sumerian] and *Baal [Canaanite]) generally relates to the supremacy of their rule. Another possibility is that the statement insists on a unified view of *Yahweh. Since a major god in the ancient Near East may have a number of different shrines, each shrine would come to emphasize a different perspective on the god. In Mesopotamia they may consider *Ishtar of Arbela quite differently from Ishtar of *Uruk. Inscriptions in Palestine do in fact indicate that this was true in Israel as well, as reference is made to Yahweh of Samaria and Yahweh of Teman.

6:4. monotheism in the ancient Near East. There were two movements interpreted as monotheistic in the ancient Near East of the Old Testament period. The first was by the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten in the general time period of the Pentateuch; the second by the *Babylonian king Nabonidus in the years just before the fall of Babylon to the Persian king Cyrus. Neither movement lasted more than twenty years. Akhenaten attempted to establish the sole worship of the sun disk, Aten, a god with no mythology, portrayed with no human form. It was a worship without image and had little use for temple or *ritual. Every attempt was made to eradicate the worship of Amun-Re, previously the major deity of the land, and the sun disk was proclaimed the sole god (though there was no apparent attempt to eradicate many other gods). Though Akhenaten may have intended this to be philosophical monotheism (some have even tried to identify it as trinitarian), it does not appear that many of his subjects adopted his beliefs. Nabonidus embarked on an official sponsorship of the moon god Sin by restoring his temple in Harran. For ten years he then stayed in Teima in northwest Arabia, apparently (according to some interpretations) devoted to establishing the *cult of Sin. There is little evidence, however, that this was done to the exclusion of other deities. Though he favored Sin, he continued to make requisite appearances at and donations to other temples. His time in Teima may have been the result of a falling out with the priestly powers in Babylon, or may have had trade policies or other political ends motivating it, but there is no reason to attribute monotheistic reform to it. Whether Israelite belief at this stage is labeled monotheism or henotheism, there is thus little to compare it with in the rest of the ancient world.

6:6. anatomical metaphors. Like English, Hebrew used parts of the body metaphorically to refer to different aspects of the person. "Hand" can refer to power or authority; "arm" to strength; "head" to leadership, and so on. Many of these metaphors have carried into English either because of their inherent logic or because of the role of the Bible in the English-speaking world. Not all anatomical metaphors, however, carry the same significance in the two languages. For instance, the kidneys were considered the seat of the conscience in Hebrew, and the throat was connected with life and essence of personhood. In English, "heart" is used metaphorically for the seat of emotions, in contrast to logic and reason. Hebrew uses it as the center of both emotions and reason/intellect. This usage is also true of the related Semitic languages, such as *Ugaritic, *Aramaic and *Akkadian.

6:8. symbols on hands and forehead. Headbands and armbands were common accessories in Syro-Palestine, though there is no graphic evidence proving Israelites wore them. *Amulets were often worn in the ancient Near East as protection from evil spirits. Precious metals and gems were considered particularly effective. At times amulets would include magical words or spells. Israelite practice disapproved of amulets, but if used here they are converted to reminders of the law or, in other places, may contain prayers or blessings, such as the small silver scrolls that were found in a preexilic tomb just outside Jerusalem in 1979. These miniature scrolls contain

the blessing of Numbers 6:24-26 and represent the oldest extant copy of any biblical text. There is also evidence that symbols worn on the forehead or arm were used as indicators of loyalty to a particular deity.

6:9. inscription on door frames and gates. Aside from doorways as entrances representing the house itself and needing special protection, there is evidence from Egypt of sacred inscriptions on doorposts. Requirements of this sort could function either to *preserve* the continuity of life in positive ways and a mutually beneficial relationship with deity; or to *prevent* negative consequences of dangerous situations. While Passover blood on the doorposts functioned in the latter way, the law on the doorposts is an example of the former. The idea that written texts provided protection is found in the Mesopotamian *Erra Epic,* where the invasion by the god of plague can be prevented as long as a copy of the text of this work is kept in the house.

6:10-11. cities of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age. *Late Bronze Age Canaan (1550-1200 B.C.) was characterized by declining population and fewer fortified cities than the *Middle Bronze period. Even the villages and rural settlements show significant decline. In the *Amarna letters (fourteenth-century correspondence between Canaan and Egypt), Hazor and Megiddo were two of the most important and powerful city states in the north, Shechem in the central region, and Jerusalem and Gezer in the south. Archaeology has found that the cities' wealthier inhabitants had comfortable houses, usually with center courtyards. Most cities were surrounded by arable land farmed by the majority of the population. The work of digging wells and hewing out stone cisterns, preparing the soil and setting up irrigation had all been part of the agricultural lifestyle in Canaan. Groves and vineyards usually took many years to develop and be productive, but all of this groundwork was already done.

6:13. oaths in Yahweh's name. Since oaths were considered powerful and effective, the utterance of oaths would demonstrate which deity was truly considered powerful. Though inheriting the cities, homes and farms of the Canaanites, the Israelites are not to inherit the gods that had been associated with protecting these cities and providing fertility to this land. One of the ways to demonstrate their rejection of those gods is to refuse to attribute power to them through oaths.

6:16. Massah. Massah is the name given to the place at Rephidim near Sinai where water came out of the rock (see Ex 17:7).

7:1-26

Promises and Policies Concerning the Nations

7:1. peoples of Canaan. The *Hittites were from Anatolia, modern Turkey, but groups occupying sections of Syria and Canaan were also called Hittites and may or may not have been related. The Hittites in Canaan have Semitic names, while the Hittites of Anatolia were Indo-European. Girgashites are little known, though they are attested in the *Ugaritic texts. *Amorites (known in Mesopotamia as Amurru or Martu) are known from written documents as early as the middle third millennium B.C.. Most scholars think that they came to occupy many areas in the Near East from their roots in Syria. The term can be used to refer to a geographical area ("westerners") or to an ethnic group. Some Amorites were nomadic, but there were Amorite city-states in Syria as early as the end of the third millennium. Canaan is mentioned as early as the Ebla tablets (twenty-fourth century B.C.), and the Canaanite people were the principal inhabitants of the fortified cities of the land, though they do not seem to have been native to the land. The kings of this area refer to themselves in the *Amarna letters (mid-second millennium) as *Kinanu,* a term also used in Egyptian inscriptions of this period. There is still debate as to whether the term *Perizzites* is ethnic or sociological (those living in unwalled settlements). The Hivites are sometimes connected to the Horites, in which case they may be *Hurrians. The Jebusites occupied the region later associated with the tribe of Benjamin, notably the city of Jerusalem, and are often related to the Perizzites who were located in the same region. There is no mention of the Perizzites, Hivites or Jebusites outside the Bible.

7:2. the ban *(*herem*). *Ban* is sometimes chosen as the English word to represent the concept of total destruction that is commanded here in verse 2 and elaborated in verses 5-6. Just as there were some types of sacrifices that belonged entirely to the Lord, while others were shared by priest and offerer, so some plunder was set aside as belonging solely to the Lord. Just as the whole burnt offering was entirely consumed on the altar, so the ban mandated total destruction. Since the warfare was commanded by Yahweh and represented his judgment on the Canaanites, the Israelites were on a divine mission with Yahweh as their commander. Since it was his war, not theirs, and he was the victor, the spoil belonged to him. Although the divine warrior motif occurs

throughout the ancient Near East, the *ḥerem* concept is more limited—the only other occurrence of the term is in the Moabite Mesha inscription, but the idea of total destruction is also in the *Hittite material. Some sites, such as Gezer, feature a distinct burn layer in association with the *Late Bronze period. Under siege conditions sanitation is at its worst and disease is often rampant. The practice of burning everything after the defeat of a city thus had an element of health connected to it.

7:3. command not to intermarry. In *Hittite documents of this period certain cities are designated temple cities and accorded special privileges. In order to protect those privileges, the inhabitants are prohibited from marrying outside the community. In a similar way the entire land of Israel has been designated "God's land," and the Israelites are a kingdom of priests. The prohibition against intermarriage therefore protects the privileges of the *covenant as well as the *purity of their religious ideals.

7:5. sacred stones. Standing stones or *masseboth* were apparently a common feature of Canaanite religion and also appear as memorials in a number of Israelite *covenantal contexts (see Ex 24:3-8; Josh 24:25-27). Their association with *Asherah, *Baal and other Canaanite deities is the basis for their being condemned as rivals and a threat to *Yahweh worship. Archaeologists have discovered sacred stones at Gezer, Shechem, Hazor and Arad. In the latter three cases, they are clearly within a sacred precinct and part of the *cultic practices at these sites. The Hazor stones include incised representations of upraised arms and a sun disk.

7:5. Asherah poles. *Asherah can be either the name of a *fertility goddess or the name of a *cult object (as here). The goddess was popular in the pagan deviations in Israel and was sometimes considered to be a mediator of *Yahweh's blessings. An indication of this belief is found in the inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom. In Canaanite mythology she was the consort of the chief god, *El. She appears in Mesopotamian literature as early as the eighteenth century, where she is the consort of the *Amorite god Amurru. The *cult symbol may or may not have borne a representation of the deity on it. The pole may represent an artificial tree, since Asherah is often associated with sacred groves. Sometimes the cult object can be made or built, while on other occasions it is planted. We have little information on the function of these poles in *ritual practice.

7:6-11. the *covenant relationship. The terminology used here of love, loyalty and obedience are common to the international treaties of this time. *Hittite, *Akkadian, *Ugaritic and *Aramaic examples all show that the positive action of the suzerain toward the vassal is expressed as love, kindness and graciousness, and in return the vassal is expected to respond with obedience and loyalty.

7:15. diseases of Egypt. Some consider this to be a reference to the plagues, while others associate it with diseases indigenous to Egypt. If the latter is intended, it is difficult to be more specific, though examination of mummies has suggested the prevalence of smallpox, malaria and polio. Emphysema and tuberculosis are also evidenced. Egyptian medicine was well known for its treatment of eye diseases and diseases of the digestive and excretory/urinary systems. This might suggest that that was where persistent disease was encountered. All of these were worsened by the very primitive sanitation conditions archaeologists have identified even around the estates of the wealthy. The dry season in Egypt is known for its proliferation of diseases, usually brought to an end by the annual flooding of the Nile.

7:20. the hornet. Insects are often used as metaphors for armies, for instance, bees and flies (Is 7:18-19) and locusts (Joel 1—2). However, some interpreters see this as a wordplay on *Egypt* (see comment on Ex 23:28) or a reference to Egypt by means of an insect that was used to symbolize Lower Egypt. Other interpreters have translated the word as "plague" or "terror."

8:1-19

Remembering What God Had Done

8:3. manna. The food that nourished the Israelites in the wilderness is not easily identified. For possibilities see the comment on Exodus 16:4-9.

8:4. clothes not wearing out. In the Gilgamesh Epic, *Utnapishtim instructs that *Gilgamesh be clothed with garments that do not wear out for his return journey. Job 13:28 describes the "wearing out" of clothes as being "moth-eaten" or perhaps moldy. This verse suggests a supernatural protection from decay.

8:7. water sources. The text mentions streams, pools and springs. The first is the result of runoff from precipitation at high elevations, and the other two represent subterranean water sources. In a land where rainfall is seasonal and, in some areas, limited, irrigation is necessary to sustain agriculture, and water sources are important both for animal herds and for human settlements. While there are few

streams west of the Jordan, there are many springs that were used to sustain cities and villages.

8:8. staples of agriculture. Seven agricultural products are mentioned here that are the staple products of the region. The Egyptian *Story of *Sinuhe* describes the land of Canaan and lists six of the seven named here (pomegranates are omitted). Wine and olive oil were two of the principal exports of the region, while the other products provided a significant portion of their diet. The honey referred to here is the product of the date palm, not bees' honey.

8:9. iron and copper. The text also identifies the natural resources of the land from the mining perspective. There are numerous deposits of poor-quality iron ore in Palestine, but few of high quality. The only major deposits of iron ore known in Palestine today are at Mughar-at el-Wardeh in the Ajlun hills by the Jabbok River. Copper mining sites are mostly in Transjordan. While iron can be mined on the surface, copper mining requires shafts.

9:1-6
Conquest as Punishment

9:1. walled cities. City defenses were of most concern in troubled, insecure times. The latter part of the *Middle Bronze Age in Canaan (eighteenth-sixteenth centuries) was one such time, and many fortified cities were built. The end of that period brought the destruction of many of these cities, and many were not rebuilt during the *Late Bronze Age (1550-1200). It is generally assumed that this was because Egypt controlled the region and offered security to it. There were, however, still a number of fortified cities that served as administrative centers for Egyptian control. The fortification techniques developed in the Middle Bronze period included steep earthen slopes (some reaching fifty feet) at the foundation of the walls and a ditch around the outside dug to bedrock. These features would both hamper the approach of siege machines and prevent tunneling. The stone walls were twenty-five to thirty feet wide and perhaps thirty feet high.

9:2. Anakites. See comment on 1:28.

9:7—10:11
Remembering the Events at Sinai

9:8. Horeb. Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, most likely located in the southern section of the Sinai peninsula. See comment on Exodus 19:1-2.

9:9. stone tablets. See comment on 5:22.

9:16. golden calf. Bull or calf figurines, made either of bronze or a combination of metals, have been found in several archaeological excavations (Mount Gilboa, Hazor and Ashkelon), but they are only three to seven inches long. The calf symbol was well known in the Canaanite context of the second millennium and represented fertility and strength. The gods were typically not depicted in the form of bulls or calves, but portrayed standing on the back of the animal. Nevertheless worship of the animal image was not unknown, and there is little in the biblical text to suggest the Israelites understood the figure merely as a pedestal (not unlike the ark). The fact that the calf is worshiped in the context of a feast to Yahweh suggests that this may be a violation of the second commandment rather than the first.

9:22. Taberah, Massah, Kibroth Hattaavah. These are all places where the Israelites experienced God's judgment. Taberah and Kibroth Hattaavah are in Numbers 11 in connection with the plague from eating quail, and Massah is associated with the incident in Exodus 16 where the people challenged the Lord to provide water.

9:23. Kadesh Barnea. Kadesh Barnea was the main camping place during the wilderness wandering. See comment on 1:46.

9:28. belligerent deities. Though the claim made in verse 28 might seem a preposterous way to think, it would not have been an unusual view in the religious world of the ancient Near East. In a polytheistic system gods could not be omnipotent, so they might fail to accomplish something they set out to do. Additionally they were not considered to be friendly, forthright or predictable. Examples would include the Mesopotamian god *Ea telling his "favorite" *Adapa that the food he would be offered was "bread of death" when in reality it would have procured eternal life for him. In the *Gilgamesh Epic, Ea advises deceiving the people into thinking that blessings cannot rain down on them unless *Utnapishtim leaves in his boat. After they send him off, they are rained on in a totally unexpected way when the flood comes and destroys them. Around 1200 B.C. the Libyans complain that the gods gave them initial success against Egypt with the intent to eventually destroy them. In Egypt the mortuary texts (Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts) are targeted against hostile deities.

10:6. wells of the Jaakanites, Moserah, Gudgodah, Jotbathah. These sites are also in the itinerary of Numbers 33:30-34. Most of them are unidentified, but Jotbathah has been associated with Tabeh, an oasis along the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba.

10:12—11:32

Covenant Response to Yahweh

10:17. divine titles. The enumeration of divine names and attributes is a common form of praise in the ancient Near East. Perhaps most notable is the *Babylonian creation epic, **Enuma Elish*, that proclaims the fifty names of *Marduk, chief god of Babylon.

10:17. gods accepting bribes. In the religious beliefs of the ancient Near East the gods could be manipulated because they were believed to have needs. Sacrifice and temple upkeep were part of a program of taking care of them and feeding them. By providing the food, clothing and shelter that the gods needed, an individual could win the favor of the deity. This text makes it clear that *Yahweh is not to be thought of in the same way as the gods of Israel's neighbors. This also reflects the picture of Yahweh as a just judge who refuses to distort justice for personal gain.

11:1. loving deity in ancient Near East. In the *Amarna letters (from vassal kings of Canaan to their Egyptian overlord) "love" is used as a characterization of friendly and loyal international relationships. It expresses the vassal's intentions to be loyal and to honor the terms of the treaty agreement between the parties. The biblical text shows a clear example of this usage in 1 Kings 5:1. There are rare instances in Mesopotamian literature where an individual is admonished to love a deity, but in general the gods of the ancient Near East neither sought love from their worshipers nor entered into *covenant relationships with them.

11:2. outstretched arm. The "outstretched arm" is a metaphor that was used by the Egyptian Pharaohs for the extension of their power and authority. It was *Yahweh's outstretched arm that extended his power over Egypt to bring deliverance to his people. See comment on Deuteronomy 26:8.

11:4. Red Sea/Reed Sea. There have been many different suggestions concerning the identification of this body of water. Lake Balah or Lake Timsah are the most common. See comment on Exodus 13:18.

11:9. land of milk and honey. See comment on 6:3.

11:10. irrigation methods in Egypt. The contrast here does not favor rainfall over irrigation, for everyone recognized the value and success of irrigation methods and technology. Furthermore, it is not suggested that the often-sparse rainfall of Palestine is superior to the regular abundant annual flooding of the Nile. There is no known irrigation method that would be identified as "watering by foot," but that phrase is used as a euphemism for urinating in the reading preserved in some manuscripts of 2 Kings 18:27. If that is the meaning here, the contrast would have to do not with technologies of irrigation or abundance of water supply but with the purity of the water used to grow food.

11:11-15. seasons in Israel. Israel has a rainy season (winter months) and a dry season (summer months). The rainy season begins with the autumn rains ("early rains," October-November) and ends with the spring rains ("latter rains," early April). These are important for what they contribute to the overall moisture levels in the earth and for softening the ground for plowing. Grain is harvested in the spring (barley in May, wheat in June), and the summer months (July and August) are for threshing and winnowing. Grapes are harvested in the fall, while the olive harvest stretches into the winter.

11:18. symbols on hands, foreheads and doorframes. See comment on 6:8-9.

11:24. Lebanon to the Euphrates. For the general boundaries of the land, see the comment on 1:7.

11:29. Gerizim and Ebal. Gerizim and Ebal are the mountains that flank the town of Shechem in the central hill country, Gerizim (elevation 2,849 feet) to the south, Ebal (elevation 3,077 feet) to the north. This site was chosen for the ceremony because it was believed to represent the center of the land (Judg 9:37) and because from here a large portion of the land could be seen. The valley that runs between the two mountains, Wadi Nablus, was one of the only passageways through the region. The valley at its southeastern end is quite narrow (the lower flanks of the hills are separated by little over a quarter of a mile) and would easily accommodate the antiphonal ceremony anticipated here.

11:29. blessings and curses. The international treaties of this time featured blessings and curses on the parties responsible for keeping the terms of the *covenant. The blessings and curses typically were seen as to be carried out by the deities in whose name the agreement had been made. The blessing formulas are rarer and the curse formulas grow longer between the second and first millennia.

11:30. Gilgal. This is not the same Gilgal that the Israelites use as a base in the book of Joshua but is farther north in the vicinity of Shechem. One possibility is the site of El-Unuk, about four miles east of Shechem along the Wadi Far'ah.

12:1-32

Central Place of Worship

12:2-3. outdoor shrines. Apparently the use of outdoor shrines was common among the Canaanites. These local *cult sites were considered abhorrent to the writer because they promoted a "popular" brand of religion that contained elements of Canaanite worship that deviated from the established *Yahweh-only doctrine. Thus local altars, sacred poles dedicated to *Asherah, sacred groves and any place associated with a Canaanite god (*Baal, *El, etc.) and the worship of God outside of Jerusalem, "the place the Lord your God will choose" (Deut 12:5), were forbidden. There is a difference between these outdoor *cultic places and the "high place" *(bamah)* often mentioned as a religious center in the local towns and cities (1 Kings 11:7; Jer 7:31; Ezek 16:16; 2 Chron 21:11; Mesha's inscription). The "high place" was apparently an indoor facility, built to house sacred furniture, an altar and precincts large enough to accommodate a priesthood. A clear differentiation is drawn between these two types of religious sites in 2 Kings 17:9-11.

12:3. sacred stones. See comment on 7:5.

12:3. Asherah poles. One common feature of Canaanite worship and of *syncretized Israelite worship on "high places" and in city shrines is the erection of *Asherah poles (Judg 3:7; 1 Kings 14:15; 15:13; 2 Kings 13:6). There is some uncertainty about whether these were simply wooden poles erected to symbolize trees, perhaps containing a carved image of the *fertility goddess, or part of a sacred grove. The reference in 2 Kings 17:10, which refers to Asherah poles beside "every spreading tree," seems to indicate that these were poles erected for *cultic purposes rather than planted trees. As the consort of *El, Asherah was clearly a popular goddess (see 2 Kings 18:19), and her worship is mentioned in *Ugaritic texts (1600-1200 B.C.). Her prominent appearance in the biblical narrative indicates that her *cult was a major rival to *Yahweh worship (see the prohibition in Ex 34:13; Deut 16:21). This explains the number of examples in which Asherah poles are erected and venerated, the strong condemnations of this practice and the depictions of these poles being cut down and burned (Judg 6:25-30; 2 Kings 23:4-7). For more information see the comment on Deuteronomy 7:5.

12:4, 30-31. their way of worshiping. The prohibited aspects of Canaanite religion would have included the use of idols to manipulate the deity, *fertility practices (perhaps including *ritual sex with temple prostitutes, but see comment on 23:17-18), child sacrifice, *divination and appeasement rituals.

12:3-5. wipe out their names, the Lord establishing his name. The potency and power associated with names and name giving are clearly demonstrated in the biblical narrative (see Gen 17:5; 41:45; Ex 3:13-15; Deut 5:11). One sign of this is found in the practice of erasing the names of discredited officials and even pharaohs from their monuments in ancient Egypt. Names were also used in *execration formulas throughout the Near East to curse enemies and to call down divinely inspired disaster (Num 22:6; Jer 19:3-15). *Execration texts are known in Egypt throughout the second millennium and consist of names of rulers or cities written on objects that were then smashed. When the Israelites are called on to wipe out the names of the Canaanites and their gods, the command is to wipe them from the pages of history. Utter destruction, in a world tied to the service of named persons and gods, could only come if all memory of these names was obliterated. Once that was done, only one name would remain, and there would be no reason or desire to worship another (see Is 42:8).

12:5-7. sacrifices in the presence of deity. Throughout the ancient Near East it was a common understanding that deities had their own realms of influence and thus were tied to particular sites (e.g., *Marduk of *Babylon or Baalzebub of Ekron). It was expected that devotees of these gods would come to the principal shrines, where they could offer sacrifices, take vows, formalize contracts or treaties, or provide legal testimony within the sacred precinct of the god (as in the Code of *Hammurabi and the *Middle Assyrian laws). By doing this, the supplicant could draw on the god as a witness and thus add force to the act being performed. It also provided validity to the shrine, marking it as the place where God's presence was made manifest.

12:11. vows. See comment on Leviticus 27:2-13.

12:16. pouring out blood before eating meat. Sacred literature from *Ugarit and Mesopotamia identified blood as the life force of any animal. In Israelite tradition, blood as the life force belonged to the life-giver, the Creator God *Yahweh. Therefore, the Israelites were prohibited from consuming meat which still contained blood. This sacred fluid had to be drained from the meat and "poured on the ground like water" so that it returned to the earth. In sacrificial contexts, the blood was to be poured on the altar (see Lev 17:11-12).

12:20. eating meat. The promise that the Israelites would be able to eat their fill of meat is tied to the *covenantal promise of land and fertility. This society, however, was generally never so rich in animals that they could be slaughtered indiscriminately. Animal sacrifice was therefore both a sacred and a solemn occasion. The meat of the sacrifice might be the only meat eaten for weeks at a time.

13:1-18
Those Who Encourage the Worship of Other Gods

13:1-18. sources of rebellion. In this passage prophets, close relatives and a localized subversive population are viewed as potential breeding grounds for rebellion. In Assyrian king Esarhaddon's instructions to his vassals, he requires that they report any improper or negative statements that may be made by enemy or ally, by relatives, prophets, ecstatics or dream interpreters.

13:1-3. prophet urging worship of other gods. In its effort to delineate a *Yahweh-only religion, Deuteronomy had to discredit and disavow the teachings and pronouncements of all other gods and their prophets. Prophets, diviners and priests for these other gods were present among the Canaanites and other neighboring groups (mentioned in *Mari texts, the account of Balaam in Numbers 22—24 and the Deir 'Alla inscriptions). However, what seems most heinous here are Israelites who speak in the name of other gods. This type of internal proselytizing was particularly frightening since it had a stronger degree of credibility and could therefore be most effective (see Num 25:5-11). Should the words or the predictions of prophets come true (a sign of their validity as prophets, Deut 18:22), the Israelites were to be alert to whether they attributed the signs to Yahweh. If not, it was a test of their faithfulness, and they must reject the prophet and condemn him to death as a corrupting influence.

13:1-5. foretelling by dreams in ancient Near East. Dreams were one of the standard means for receiving messages from a god in the ancient Near East (see Jacob in Gen 28:12; Joseph in Gen 37:5-11; Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 2, 4). They appear in *Old Babylonian omen texts, along with reports of the examination of sheep livers, anomalies in the weather and birth of animals, and other presumed signs of divine will. Among the most famous is the dream of Gudea of *Lagash (c. 2150 B.C.), who was commanded in a dream to build a temple by a figure reminiscent of the apocalyptic figures in Daniel's dreams and Ezekiel's call narrative (Dan 7; Ezek 1:25-28). The royal correspondence from *Mari (c. 1750 B.C.) contains around twenty prophetic utterances involving dreams, always from nonprofessional personnel. These portents were taken quite seriously and studied. The professional priesthood in both Mesopotamia and Egypt included instruction in the interpretation of dreams and other omens (see the appearance of wise men, mediums and astrologers in Gen 41:8 and Dan 2:4-11).

13:10. stoning as capital punishment. Aside from the ready availability of stones in Israel, stoning was chosen as a form of execution because it was communal. No one person was responsible for the death of the condemned criminal, but in the case of public offenses (apostasy, blasphemy, sorcery, stealing from the **herem*) every citizen was required to take a hand in purging the community of evil (see Deut 17:5; Lev 20:27; 24:14; Josh 7:25). Familial offenses such as adultery and recurrent disobedience also were punishable by stoning, and again the entire community was involved (Deut 21:21; 22:21). Stoning is not mentioned as a form of capital punishment outside the Bible. Ancient Near Eastern law codes list only drowning, burning, impalement and beheading, and in each case it is an official body, not the community at large, that is charged with carrying out the punishment.

13:16. plunder as burnt offering. There are two types of plunder reckoned as belonging solely to God: that taken in a **herem* (holy war, Josh 6:18-19) and that gathered from a village condemned for its apostasy. To keep any of these objects corrupts the one who takes them and brings down God's wrath on the people (Josh 7).

13:16. ruin. The Hebrew word that the NIV translates as "ruin" is *tel*, and it has come into English as *"tell," referring to a mound made up of the layers of the accumulated ruins of ancient settlements.

14:1-21
Clean and Unclean Food

14:1-2. ritual for the dead. Ancestor worship and *rituals associated with mourning and memorializing the dead were common in ancient Israel. The assumption behind them was that the dead, although having a rather shadowy existence, could for a time have some effect on the living (see 1 Sam 28:13-14). Thus libations were poured out during meals, and special garments were worn by the mourner. Unlike public worship, however, the rituals

for the dead were private and thus more difficult to control. These practices were specifically targeted in the late monarchy period as efforts were made to nationalize *Yahweh worship and move toward strict monotheism in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Kings 23:24). The specific practices (such as lacerating the skin) prohibited in Deuteronomy are also mentioned in the *Baal cycle of stories and in the *Aqhat epic from *Ugarit (c. 1600-1200 B.C.). Their association with magic and with polytheistic cultures would have made them prime targets for the Israelite writers. See comments on Numbers 3:12-13 and Deuteronomy 26:14.

14:2. treasured possession. The phrase "treasured possession" uses a word common in other languages of the ancient Near East to describe accumulated assets, whether through division of spoils or inheritance from estate. That people can be so described is evident in a royal seal from *Alalakh, where the king identifies himself as the "treasured possession" of the god Hadad. Likewise in a *Ugaritic text the king of Ugarit's favored status as a vassal is noted by naming him a "treasured possession" of his *Hittite overlord. Additionally, the Israelites are identified as a "kingdom of priests," which identifies the nation as serving a priestly role among the nations as intermediary between the peoples and God. Additionally there is a well-attested concept in the ancient Near East that a city or group of people may be freed from being subject to a king and placed in direct subjection to a deity. So Israel, freed from Egypt, is now given sacred status.

14:3-21. dietary restrictions. In Mesopotamia there were numerous occasions on which certain foods were prohibited for a short period. There is also evidence in *Babylonia that there were certain restrictions concerning animals that particular gods would accept for sacrifice. But there is no overriding system such as that found here. Yet though there is no known parallel in the ancient world to anything like the Israelite system of dietary restrictions, the permitted animals generally conform to the diet common in the ancient Near East.

14:6-10. criteria for classification of animals. The main criteria are (1) means of locomotion and (2) physical characteristics. Nothing is mentioned of their eating habits or the conditions of their habitat. Anthropologists have suggested that animals were considered clean or unclean depending on whether they possessed all the features that made them "normal" in their category. Other suggestions have concerned health and hygiene. The weakness of each of these is that there are too many examples that do not fit the explanation. A popular traditional explanation suggested that the animals prohibited had some connection to non-Israelite *rituals. In fact, however, the sacrificial practices of Israel's neighbors appear strikingly similar to Israel's. A recent promising suggestion is that the Israelite diet is modeled after God's "diet"—that is, if it could not be offered in sacrifice to God, then it was not suitable for human consumption either.

14:8. pigs. *Assyrian wisdom literature calls the pig unholy, unfit for the temple and an abomination to the gods. There is also one dream text in which eating pork is a bad omen. Yet it is clear that pork was a regular part of the diet in Mesopotamia. Some *Hittite *rituals require the sacrifice of a pig. Milgrom observes, however, that in such rituals the pig is not put on the altar as food for the god but absorbs *impurity and then is burned or buried as an offering to underworld deities. Likewise in Mesopotamia it was offered as a sacrifice to demons. There is evidence in Egypt of pigs being used for food, and Herodotus claims they were used for sacrifice there as well. Egyptian sources speak of herds of swine being kept on temple property, and pigs were often included in donations to the temples. The pig was especially sacred to the god Seth. Most evidence for the sacrifice of pigs, however, comes from Greece and Rome, there also mostly to gods of the underworld. In urban settings pigs, along with dogs, often scavenged in the streets, making them additionally repulsive. The attitude toward the pig in Israel is very clear in Isaiah 65:4; 66:3,17, the former showing close connection to worship of the dead. It is very possible then that sacrificing a pig was synonymous with sacrificing to demons or the dead.

14:21. disposal of roadkill. In a protein-starved area such as ancient Israel, it would have been almost criminal to let good meat go to waste. However, since the carcass would not have been drained of its blood, Israelites might not eat it (see Deut 12:16; Lev 11:40; 17:50). The meat could be distributed as charity to resident aliens (one of the protected classes, Deut 1:16; 16:11; 26:11). It could also be sold to foreigners who were not settlers in Israel.

14:21. goat in its mother's milk. See comment on Exodus 23:19.

14:22-29
Tithes

14:22-29. tithes and taxes. In the ancient Near

East there was little difference between tithes and taxes. Both were exacted from villages as payment to the government and usually stored in temple complexes, from which the grain, oil and wine were then redistributed to maintain royal and religious officials. In collecting and redistributing the tithe, the distinction between sacred and secular was blurred. The kings were considered divinely chosen, and the storage centers were religious centers. The services that were provided in exchange for the tithe/tax included both administrative and sacred tasks. The process is well laid out in 1 Samuel 8:10-17, a text describing how the king will "take a tenth . . . and give it to his officials and attendants." This is precisely the same procedure outlined in *Ugaritic economic texts and royal correspondence. There too specialists (artisans, bureaucrats, temple personnel) are listed, along with their ration. State building throughout the ancient Near East required assessing the annual production of their lands and villages. The harvesting of the tithe is a reflection of that type of state planning. See comment on Numbers 18:21-32 for further information.

14:23. eating the tithe. It is unlikely that the one who is tithing is expected to eat the entire tithe. That would frustrate its purpose of providing for the priestly community and serving as a reserve for the destitute. The injunction probably has more to do with bringing the tithe (or its value in silver) to God's sanctuary in Jerusalem and thereby demonstrating devotion (see Deut 14:24-26). What is eaten would serve as a *covenantal meal, similar to that eaten in Exodus 24:9-11.

14:27-29. provision for the Levites. As spelled out more completely in 18:1-8, the Levites were to receive a portion of the sacrificial tithe because they were not apportioned any section of the land after the conquest. As religious specialists, they would be allotted a ration from the land's produce in much the same way that bureaucrats and artisans are assigned specific grain and wine rations in the *Ugaritic economic documents (see comment on 14:22-29). It is therefore to be expected that the Levites would be paid for services rendered.

14:29. provision for the vulnerable. A major aspect of Israelite legal tradition involves making provision for groups classified as weak or poor: widows, orphans and the resident alien (see Ex 22:22; Deut 10:18-19; 24:17-21). Thus the tithe from the third year (not an additional tithe in that year) is to be set aside and used to support the vulnerable of society. Concern for the needy is evident in Mesopotamian legal collections as early as the mid-third millennium, but this generally addresses protection of rights and guarantee of justice in the courts rather than financial provision.

15:1-18
Cancellation of Slavery and Debts

15:1-11. financial systems in the ancient Near East. Since the wealth of the nations of the ancient Near East was based on the dual economic foundations of natural resources (mines and agriculture) and trade, an intricate financial system had to be developed to support these ventures. For instance, risk capital (in the form of gold, silver, precious stones, spices, etc.) was provided by kings and entrepreneurs in Egypt and Mesopotamia to mariners plying the Mediterranean routes to Cyprus and Crete and the trade routes south along the Red Sea to Arabia, Africa and India. Loans were also made to merchants leading caravans throughout the Near East (with an expected yield on investment of at least 100 percent) and to farmers to provide seed and equipment for the growing season. These loans were generally made at interest (although there was an interest-free category of loan within a set payment period). *Hammurabi's code contains numerous examples governing the rate of interest and even prescribing forfeiture of investment if the creditor charged more than 20 percent. Individual farmers who experienced a bad harvest would often have to incur debt in order to provide food for the coming year and supplies for the next year's planting. Continuing bad harvests would lead to the indenturing of the land or the sale of his family and eventually himself into debt slavery.

15:2-3. debt remission. In granting an absolute remission of all debt at the end of the seventh year, the Deuteronomic law expands on the original sabbatical year legislation (Ex 23:10-11), which related to the fallowing of the land. As the economy expanded, this required broadening the law to include debt as well as the return of property that had been given as collateral for debt (see the Jubilee law in Lev 25). The likelihood that this is total remission of debt rather than a suspension of debt for the year is confirmed by the *misharum* decree of the *Old Babylonian king Ammisaduqa (1646-1626 B.C.). This document prohibits creditors from pursuing the payment of debt after the decree has been issued, on pain of death. However, as in Deuteronomic law, merchants, who were often foreign nationals or new settlers (foreigners in 15:3), are still re-

quired to repay investors, since this is a transaction rather than a debt.

15:1-6. sabbatical year. The fallowing of the land in the seventh year, as an acknowledgment of the Creator's work and an example of good husbandry, is first found in Exodus 23:10-11. An expansion of that law is later found in Leviticus 25:2-7, providing more specificity about how it affects the land and the people. The Deuteronomic legislation is more concerned with debt remission, manumission of slaves (15:12-18) and the educational process of reading the law publicly (31:10-13) during the sabbatical year. Although there is no direct parallel to either sabbath or sabbatical-year legislation outside the Bible, the *Ugaritic epic of *Baal contains a seven-year agricultural cycle that may be related. In *Hammurabi's laws women and children sold into slavery would be freed after three years.

15:12. Hebrew. It may well be that originally *Hebrew,* like **Habiru* in *Akkadian texts, was a generic term for landless, stateless persons who contracted themselves as mercenaries, laborers and servants. This is not necessarily a pejorative designation. There are some negative connotations present, since persons in the ancient world tended to identify themselves with a group or place. But considering the fact that the first "Hebrew," Abram, was a landless immigrant, something like "gypsy" might give a general idea of meaning. Israelite villagers considered themselves to be free landowners. *Hebrew,* therefore, would refer to an Israelite who had become destitute (compare Jer 34:9) or was living in foreign lands (Judg 19:16). The Hebrew had to work his full six-year term in order to regain his mortgaged land and landowner status. Thus the Hebrew in Exodus 21:2, Deuteronomy 15:12 and Jeremiah 34:9 would be an Israelite, who, unlike the non-Israelite, could not be sold into permanent slavery. It was his right to release that distinguished him from the non-Israelite.

15:16-17. ear-piercing ceremony. See the comment on Exodus 21:5-6. The only difference in the description of the ceremony is that Deuteronomy has added the phrase "Do the same for your maidservant" in verse 6, since this version of the manumission law deals more fully with both male and female slaves.

15:19-23
Firstborn Animals

15:19-23. treatment of firstborn animals. Dedication of firstborn animals to deity is without firm attestation in the other cultures of the ancient Near East, though some claim to have found such a practice in the *Ugaritic texts. If it is there, the texts give us little information to understand the reasoning behind the practice.

15:23. eating blood. See the comments on Leviticus 17:11 and Deuteronomy 12:16, 20, regarding the prohibition against consuming the blood of animals along with their meat.

16:1-17
The Three Major Festivals

16:1-17. Israel's sacred calendar. Other versions of the calendar are found in Exodus 23:12-19; 34:18-26; Leviticus 23; and Numbers 28—29 (see the comments there).

16:1. Abib. The month of Abib (March-April) is considered the first month in the Israelite calendar and is tied to the exodus event (see Ex 13:4; 23:15). It is one of the month names that is often thought to have been brought over from the Canaanite month names. The first month later came to be known as the month of Nisan when the names were adopted from the *Babylonian calendar. In Exodus 23:15, Abib is tied to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, while in the Deuteronomic law it is keyed to the Passover.

16:1-8. Passover. Compare the comment on the Passover in Exodus 12. This Deuteronomic legislation makes allowance for the changes in Israelite society that have taken place since the exodus and centralizes the celebration of the Passover in "the place [God] will eventually choose as a dwelling for his Name" (v. 5), that is, Jerusalem.

16:8. sacred assembly. Sacred assemblies or proclamations were an important part of most religious practice in the ancient world. They refer to local or national gatherings for public, corporate worship. The people were summoned together away from their occupational work.

16:9. standing grain. The Feast of Weeks (see Ex 23:16) is tied to the wheat harvest of March-April. The Gezer calendar notes this as the month to "reap and feast." Since the grain would have matured at different times in the various locales of the country, the harvest of "standing grain" would have required the prescribed seven-week period to complete.

16:9-12. Feast of Weeks. This second of the three major harvest festivals comes seven weeks after the harvest of the early grain (Ex 34:22) and is also known as the Feast of Harvest or Pentecost (Ex 23:16). In the agricultural cycle it marks the end of the wheat harvest season, and by tradition it is tied to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. It is also associated with *covenant renewal and pilgrimage. Cele-

bration includes the bringing of a "wave offering" of two loaves of bread, animal sacrifices (seven year-old lambs, one bull and two rams) and a drink offering in thanksgiving for a good harvest. A goat is also to be sacrificed as a sin offering for the people.

16:13-17. Feast of Tabernacles. The final harvest of the year occurred in the autumn prior to the onset of the rainy season and marked the beginning of a new agricultural year (fifteenth day of the seventh month). At this time the last of the ripening grain and fruits were gathered and stored. The seven-day event is also known as the Feast of Ingathering (Ex 23:16) and is symbolized by the construction of booths decorated with greenery for the harvesters. The use of the term *booths* for this festival appears first in Deuteronomy and is probably a reflection of the practice of harvesters of setting up shelters in the fields so that they could work throughout the day without returning to their homes (see Lev 23:42). The festival was tied into Israelite tradition as a commemoration of the wilderness wanderings. It was also the occasion for the dedication of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:65).

16:16. pilgrimage feasts. See the comment on Exodus 23:17 regarding the obligation imposed on the Israelites to come before the Lord as pilgrims three times a year. In the rest of the ancient world each town had its patron deities and its local temples. Festivals and other worship activities would therefore not require lengthy pilgrimage. Nevertheless festivals such as the great Akitu (new year's) festival of *Marduk in *Babylon would undoubtedly have drawn pilgrims from near and far. One of the primary aspects of the ancient Near Eastern festivals was procession, where the image of the God was carried through various symbolic stages. Instead of finding its parallels in other religions' festivals, the pilgrimage aspect of Israel's festivals finds similarity to the *Hittite treaty documents that require the vassal king to travel periodically to the suzerain in order to reaffirm his loyalty (and pay the annual tribute).

16:18—17:13

Establishing Justice

16:18-20. judiciary institutions in ancient Near East. As evidenced by the preface to the Code of *Hammurabi (c. 1750 B.C.) and the statements made by the "eloquent peasant" in Egyptian wisdom literature (c. 2100 B.C.), those in authority were expected to protect the rights of the poor and weak in society. "True justice" (see Lev 19:15) was required of kings, officials and local magistrates. In fact, the "world turned upside down" theme found in the book of Judges and in prophetic literature (Is 1:23) describes a society in which "laws are enacted, but ignored" (for example in the Egyptian *Visions of Neferti* [c. 1900 B.C.]). An efficiently administered state in the ancient Near East depended on the reliability of the law and its enforcement. To this end, every organized state created a bureaucracy of judges and local officials to deal with civil and criminal cases. It was their task to hear testimony, investigate charges made and evaluate evidence, and then execute judgment (detailed in the *Middle Assyrian laws and the Code of Hammurabi). There were some cases, however, that required the attention of the king (see 2 Sam 15:2-4), and appeals were occasionally forwarded to that highest magistrate (as in the *Mari texts).

16:19. bribes in the ancient world. The temptation for judges and government officials to accept bribes is found in every time and place (see Prov 6:35; Mic 7:3). Taking bribes becomes almost institutionally accepted in bureaucratic situations as competing parties attempt to outmaneuver each other (see Mic 3:11; Ezra 4:4-5). However, at least on the ideal level, arguments and penalties are imposed to eliminate or at least lessen this problem. Thus *Hammurabi's code places harsh penalties on any judge who alters one of his decisions (presumably because of a bribe), including stiff fines and permanent removal from the bench. Exodus 23:8 forbids the taking of bribes and the perversion of justice as an offense against God, the weak and innocent, and the entire community (see Is 5:23; Amos 5:12).

16:21. Asherah poles. See the comments on Exodus 34:13 and Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:3.

16:22. sacred stones. See the comments on Exodus 23:24 and Deuteronomy 12:3.

17:3. astral worship. The worship of the celestial bodies (sun, moon, planets, stars) was common throughout the ancient Near East. One of the principal gods of *Assyria and *Babylonia was a sun god (Shamash), and a moon god (Thoth in Egypt; Sin in Mesopotamia; Yarah in Canaanite religion) was widely worshiped. During most of their history the Israelites would have been familiar with and heavily influenced by Assyrian culture and religion (see Deut 4:19; 2 Kings 21:1-7; 23:4-5). These forbidden practices continued to be a source of condemnation during the Neo-Babylonian period, as Israelites burned incense on altars placed on the roofs of their houses to the "starry hosts" (Jer 19:13). Be-

cause worship of the elements of nature diminished *Yahweh's position as the sole power in creation, they were outlawed. However, the popular nature of this type of worship continues to appear in prophetic literature and in Job (see Job 31:26-28; 38:7). For additional information see comment on Deuteronomy 4.

17:5. stoning as capital punishment. See the comment on 13:10.

17:6-7. witnesses in the ancient court system. The task of serving as a witness occurs in a variety of legal contexts and is a solemn duty which is not to be abused (Ex 20:16; Num 35:30; Deut 19:16-19). It can involve hearing testimony, signing commercial or civil documents, or testifying on a legal matter (laws of *Ur-Nammu, Code of *Hammurabi and the *Middle Assyrian laws). Witnesses serve an essential purpose in verifying business transactions (Jer 32:44; Hammurabi), such as the sale of property, marriages and changes in social status (*Middle Assyrian laws). Occasionally, they function as representatives of the people in matters brought before a god (Ex 24:9-11; Hammurabi).

17:8-13. verdict by omen in ancient Near East. In situations where physical evidence was not present or was insufficient, a verdict could be determined by the reading of omens. This meant that plaintiffs had to consult religious professionals (Levitical priests in 17:9), whose service included seeking divine verdicts. Among the *divination methods used in the ancient Near East were the examination of a sheep's liver (hepatoscopy), the interpretation of dreams (specific *Babylonian texts contain lists of dreams and what they portend—accidents, deaths, military defeats or victories; see Dan 2:9), the noting of freak occurrences in nature and the use of astrological charting (especially during the period of the *Assyrian empire in the tenth to seventh centuries B.C.). In the biblical text, the Urim and Thummim (Ex 28:30; Num 27:21) were used to help divine God's will, and a number of the prophets point to famines, droughts and other natural calamities as a sign of God's judgment on an unfaithful people (Amos 4:10-12; Hag 1:5-11).

17:14-20

The King

17:14-20. king chosen by deity. The *Sumerian King List, which purports to contain the names of kings from before the flood until the end of the *Ur III dynasty (c. 2000 B.C.), begins with the line, "When the kingship was lowered from heaven." The assumption throughout Mesopotamian history is that every ruler received his certification to reign from the gods. Thus *Hammurabi (1792-1750 B.C.) speaks in the prologue to his law code of the gods' establishment of "an enduring kingship" in *Babylon and how the gods Anum and *Enlil specifically chose him to rule on behalf of the people. The result is an obligation imposed on the king to rule wisely and with justice, never abusing his power and being responsible to the commands and requirements of the gods. The situation is slightly different in Egypt, where each pharaoh was considered to be a god.

17:16. proliferation of horses. Since horses were used primarily to draw chariots and carry horsemen into battle, the acquisition of large numbers of these animals implies either an aggressive foreign policy or a monarch who wishes to impress his people and his neighbors with his wealth and power. The reference to Egypt is suggestive of dependence on that nation as an ally and a supplier of horses for war (Is 36:6-9). Such alliances in the late monarchy period proved disastrous for Israel and Judah and were roundly condemned by the prophets (Is 31:1-3; Mic 5:10).

17:17. royal marriage as alliance. Marriage was a tool of diplomacy throughout the ancient Near East. For instance, Zimri-Lim, the king of *Mari (eighteenth century B.C.), used his daughters to cement alliances and establish treaties with his neighboring kingdoms. Similarly, Pharaoh Thutmose IV (1425-1412 B.C.) arranged a marriage with a daughter of the *Mitannian king to demonstrate good relations and end a series of wars with that middle Euphrates kingdom. Solomon's seven hundred wives and three hundred *concubines (1 Kings 11:3) were a measure of his power and wealth (just as horses are in Deut 17:16), especially his marriage to the daughter of the pharaoh (1 Kings 3:1). While the political advantages were quite evident, the danger of such marriages is demonstrated in the introduction of the worship of other gods by Solomon's wives (1 Kings 11:4-8).

17:17. royal treasuries. The theme of excessive acquisition of royal symbols of power (horses, wives, gold and silver) continues in this admonition against overtaxing the people simply to fill the royal treasury. All of the categories of wealth are said to lead to excessive pride, apostasy and a rejection or diminution of *Yahweh's role (compare 8:11-14). The vanity of kings who amass wealth without purpose other than pride is found in Ecclesiastes 2:8-11 and Jeremiah 48:7. The treasuries typically contained the precious metal assets of

temple and state, including contributions as well as plunder. Though coinage or bullion may have been included, much of it would be in the form of jewelry, vessels for *ritual use, religious objects or the various accessories of royal or wealthy households. Payment of tribute at times required drawing from or even emptying the treasuries (see 1 Kings 14:26; 2 Kings 18:15). Excavations or descriptions of temples and palaces often indicate rooms as treasuries, and royal officers included keepers of the treasuries.

17:18-20. king subject to the law. In Egypt and Mesopotamia the king was the fountainhead of law. It was his task to perceive and maintain the order that was built into the universe (Egyptian *ma'at;* Mesopotamian *me*). The king could not be "brought to justice," except by the gods. He was not above the law, but there was no mechanism by which he could be tried in a human court. Judicially this may have been no different in Israel, though the prophets, as spokesmen for the deity, could call the king to account.

18:1-13

Priests and Levites

18:1-5. provision for Levites. Whether or not the worshiper ate a portion of the sacrifice, a number of the sacrifices provided an opportunity for the priests to eat. This was also true in *Babylonian practice, where the king, the priest and other temple personnel received portions of the sacrifices. As early as *Sumerian texts it was considered a grievous crime to eat that which had been set apart as holy. See also the comment on Numbers 18:12-19 for tithes paid to the priests.

18:6-8. function of the Levites in the towns. During the early settlement period, Levites officiated at local shrines and altars. It would have been their role to serve as religious professionals, performing sacrifices and instructing the people on the law. While some Levites may have been tied to these places for generations (1 Sam 1:3), there is also evidence of itinerant Levites, who traveled about the country and were hired to serve for a time at a local shrine or high place (Judg 17:7-13). Without an inheritance of their own (Josh 14:3-4), the Levites stood out within a society that was territorial. The Levites were supposed to instruct the people in proper worship, though the book of Judges makes it clear that sometimes they were a major part of the problem rather than the solution. They were supposed to be preservers of tradition and law and would have often served as judges.

18:9-22

Receiving Information from Deity

18:10. divination. See the comment on Leviticus 19:26. *Divination involves a variety of methods used by prophets (Mic 3:11), soothsayers, mediums and sorcerers to determine the will of the gods and to predict the future. These included the examination of the entrails of sacrificial animals, the analysis of omens of various types and the reading of the future in natural and unnatural phenomena (see Gen 44:5). While there were acceptable divination practices among the Israelites (use of the Urim and Thummim), what is being condemned here is a group of practitioners, who served as professional fortunetellers.

18:10. sorcery. Since magic in the ancient world was a means of contacting the supernatural realm, it was considered to have two facets: good magic and evil. In Mesopotamia and among the *Hittites harmful magic was practiced by sorcerers and was punishable by death. It involved the use of potions, figurines and curses designed to bring death, disease or bad luck to the victim. This was distinguished from the practical and helpful magic of professional exorcists and "old women," whose role included the rites involved in temple construction and dedication, as well as medical aid. Only in Egypt was there no distinction between white and black magic. There the practitioners' job involved intimidating demons and other divine powers to perform required tasks or to remove curses. The Israelite law totally rejected all these practices because of their polytheistic character and the diminishing of *Yahweh's role as lord of creation (see Ex 22:18).

18:10. omens. One of the priestly classes mentioned in Mesopotamian texts is the *baru*-diviners. It was their task to perform extispicy (generally on lambs), examining the liver and interpreting this omen for the person who has asked for a reading of the future. The *baru* might be consulted by a king who wished to go to war (compare 1 Kings 22:6), a merchant about to send out a caravan or a person who had become ill. Government officials often included the report of omens in their letters (*Mari texts). However, since omens were not always clear, several groups of diviners might be used before action was taken. An entire body of omen texts (with descriptions of past events and predictions) were archived in temples and palaces for consultation by staff diviners. Even clay models of livers were used in schooling apprentices in the trade.

18:10. witchcraft. Like sorcery, witchcraft was

generally classed as an illegitimate use of magic. Its practitioners might serve in royal courts or temples or as local herbalists and itinerant diviners, who would, for a price, provide the means to harm or destroy an enemy (see Lev 19:26; 20:6; 2 Kings 21:6). The Mesopotamian distinction between good and evil magic is lost in Israelite law, where the female witch is condemned (Ex 22:18) and the words of sorcerers are declared to be unreliable (Jer 27:9; Mal 3:5).

18:11. spells, medium, spiritist. The practitioners of spiritism and sorcery are condemned because of their association with Canaanite religion and because their "art" attempted to circumvent *Yahweh by seeking knowledge and power from spirits. They represented a form of popular religion that was closer to the folk practices of the common people and served as a form of "shadow religion" for many. Sometimes, because of its association with *divination, their *rituals and methods stood in direct opposition to official religion or as an alternative to be used in times of desperation (see Saul's use of the outlawed witch of Endor in 1 Sam 28). Sorcery and potions used in the practice of magic were also banned in the Code of *Hammurabi and the *Middle Assyrian laws, suggesting that the prohibition and fear of these practices were not unique to Israel.

18:11. consulting the dead. Although there was no clear sense of an afterlife in ancient Mesopotamia, no envisioning of a place of reward or punishment, ancestor worship did exist, and offerings were made to the spirits of the dead. A group of magical practitioners created a means for consulting the spirits of the dead to find out about the future (see the witch of Endor in 1 Sam 28:7-14). This was called necromancy and could involve consulting a particular or "familiar" spirit, or it could be the raising of any ghost attracted by the spells of the medium. Ritual pits, stuffed with bread and blood, were commonly used in *Hittite ritual by diviners, and the Greek hero Odysseus used a pit filled with blood to attract the shades of his dead companions. It was believed that if libations were poured out to them, the spirits of dead ancestors could offer protection and help to those still living. In *Babylon the disembodied spirit *(utukki)* or the ghost *(etemmu)* could become very dangerous if not cared for, and such spirits were often the objects of incantations. Proper care for the dead would begin with proper burial and would continue with ongoing gifts and honor of the memory and name of the deceased. The firstborn was responsible for maintaining this ancestor worship and therefore inherited the family gods (often images of deceased ancestors).

18:10-13. worldview basis for prohibiting divination. The worldview promulgated in the Old Testament maintains that *Yahweh is the sole God and is the ultimate power and authority in the universe. In stark contrast, the polytheistic religions of the ancient Near East did not consider their gods (even as a group) to represent the ultimate power in the universe. Instead they believed in an impersonal primordial realm that was the source of knowledge and power. *Divination attempted to tap into that realm for the purposes of gaining knowledge; incantations tried to utilize its power. Both *divination and incantation can therefore be seen to assume a worldview that was contradictory to Yahweh's revealed position.

18:14-22. function of the prophet. These individuals were more than simple religious practitioners. While some of them were members of the priestly community, they stood outside that institution. Their role was to challenge the establishment and the social order, to remind the leadership and the people of their obligation to the *covenant with *Yahweh and to provide warning of the punishment that went with violation of the covenantal agreement. The prophet is invested with special powers, a message and a mission, and there is a special compulsion associated with being called as a prophet. It can be denied for a time (see Jonah's flight) but ultimately must be answered. It should also be noted that prophets may be reluctant to speak harsh words or condemnations of their own people. When this occurs, the prophet will experience a compulsion to speak that cannot be resisted (Jer 20:9). Since they speak a message that comes from God, they separate themselves from the words and thus cannot be charged with treason, sedition or doomsaying. The message is thus the most important thing about the prophet, not the prophet himself or herself. Certainly, there were some prophets like Balaam and Elijah who acquired a personal reputation, but this was based on their message or their ability to speak for God. For a prophet to gain credibility with the people, the message must come true. Although sometimes the prophets are mentioned as part of the *cult community (Isaiah and Ezekiel) and as court prophets (Nathan), they always seem to be able to stand apart from these institutions to criticize them and to point out where they have broken the *covenant with God. In the early periods of the monarchy, the prophets

primarily addressed the king and his court, much like their ancient Near Eastern counterparts did (they have been termed "preclassical" prophets). Beginning in the eighth century, however, they turned their attention increasingly to the people and became the social/spiritual commentators whom we most readily identify with the prophetic institution (the "classical" prophets and the "writing" prophets). Their role was not to predict as much as it was to advise of God's policies and plans.

18:20-22. false prophecy. Like Deuteronomy 13:1-3 and its discussion of persons urging the worship of other gods, false prophets are generally those who speak in the name of other gods. Deuteronomy discounts the existence of these other gods and thus the veracity of their prophets. In cases where prophets presume to speak in *Yahweh's name without permission, the test of true prophecy is whether what they say actually occurs. There are a number of examples of false prophecy cited in the biblical text. Jeremiah rails against it in his accusation against Hananiah (Jer 28:12-17) and in his warning against other prophets who predicted a quick end to the exile (29:20-23). In some cases, the potential for confusion involved is such that events must take their course before the true prophet is revealed (see 1 Kings 22). The Israelites were not alone in their caution concerning false prophecy. In other cultures, however, they generally used *divination to try to confirm the message of the prophet, but this was not permissible for Israel.

18:14-22. prophecy in the ancient Near East. Texts from Mesopotamia, Syria and Anatolia contain a large number of prophetic utterances, demonstrating the existence of prophets throughout much of ancient Near Eastern history. While some of these texts may actually fall into the realm of wisdom literature or omen reports, many involve individuals who claim to have received a message from a god. Most famous among these texts are about fifty texts from *Mari (eighteenth century B.C.) that contain reports from both male and female prophets: warnings about plots against the king, admonitions from a god to build a temple or to provide a *funerary offering, and assurances of military victory. These prophets present divine messages received in dreams or through omens. Others are said to fall into a trance state and speak as ecstatic prophets. This type of prophecy is also found in the eleventh-century B.C. Egyptian tale of *Wenamon and in 1 Samuel 10:5-11 and 2 Kings 3:15.

19:1-21

Capital Punishment Cases

19:1. Late Bronze Canaanite cities. Most of what is known about *Late Bronze Canaanite cities comes from archaeological excavations and surveys and the inscriptions of the Egyptian Pharaohs who ruled that region. Evidence suggests that the major cities of this period (Jerusalem, Shechem, Megiddo) were walled, but settlements were spaced fairly far apart. The central hill country was sparsely inhabited prior to 1200 B.C. The population was mixed, containing peoples who had come from the *Hittite kingdom, Syria, Mesopotamia and the desert areas of Arabia. The Egyptians apparently had some difficulty governing the area and were required on numerous occasions to send military expeditions to quell revolts and end brigandage (reported in the fourteenth-century B.C. *Amarna letters as well as in the victory inscriptions of Amenophis II [c. 1450-1425 B.C.] and of Merenptah [c. 1208 B.C.]).

19:2-3. refuge cities in ancient Near East. See the comment on Numbers 35:6-34 for a discussion of the cities of refuge in Israel. The concept of asylum and refuge is quite old. *Babylonian and *Hittite texts both speak of sacred space where all are to be protected. The inhabitants of the great temple cities of Nippur, Sippar and Babylon were granted special status because of the protection afforded by patron deities of these places. The principle was that only the god could withdraw protection from persons here, and thus no one could shed their blood without an omen or sign from the god (Herodotus has an example from the classical period). Egyptian tradition regarding asylum appears to apply only to the temple precinct rather than to the entire city. This would parallel the biblical examples in which a fugitive takes refuge at the altar (1 Kings 1:50-53; 2:28-34).

19:6. avenger of blood and the justice system. See the comment on Numbers 35:9-34 for a discussion of the responsibility of the family to avenge a death. It is possible that the title "avenger of blood" evolved out of the family obligation to engage in blood revenge when one of their clan members was slain. Such a process, while typical of tribal society, is extremely disruptive to the maintenance of order within an organized state. As a result, the "avenger of blood" (a term which appears only in the context of the cities of refuge) may have been appointed by the government to serve the needs of both the family and the state by apprehending the accused and then

carrying out the sentence if the verdict was murder.

19:11-13. capital punishment. In the Bible capital punishment is the sentence imposed for apostasy (Lev 20:2), blasphemy (Lev 24:14), sorcery (Lev 20:27), violation of the sabbath (Num 15:35-36), stealing from the **herem* (Josh 7:25), gross disobedience to parents (Deut 21:21), adultery (Deut 22:21), incest (Lev 20:14) and deliberate homicide (Num 35:9). While stoning is the most common form of capital punishment, some offenses require burning or stabbing with a sword. In every case the purpose is to eliminate contaminating elements from society and thereby purge the evil that threatened to draw the people away from the *covenant.

19:14. moving boundary stones. Since the land had been given to the people by God and apportioned according to a God-given formula, to move boundary stones and thus appropriate territory unlawfully was a crime of theft against God. The antiquity of laws concerning property rights is affirmed by inscriptions on sixteenth-century B.C. Kassite *kudurru* boundary stones, admonitions in eleventh-century B.C. Egyptian wisdom literature against relocating a surveyor's stone *(Teachings of Amenemope)* and in the curse in Hosea 5:10. Each example calls on the gods to protect the owner's rights against encroachment.

19:15-20. the role of witnesses in the ancient judicial system. Witnesses were an essential part of the judicial system in the ancient world. One sign of this is that Israelite law required two witnesses to convict a person of a crime (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 1 Kings 21:13). Both *Hammurabi's code and the *Middle Assyrian laws rely heavily on the presence of witnesses to certify business transactions and to testify in civil and criminal cases.

19:21. *lex talionis*. The legal principle of "an eye for an eye" or *lex talionis* ("law of retaliation") is found in both the biblical law codes and the codes of Mesopotamia. Biblical examples (Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20) express the desire to eliminate a corrupting or unclean element in society. The admonition is to have "no mercy" on the culprit. Mesopotamian law contains both the idealized version of *lex talionis* and an amelioration to set limits of compensation. For instance, the law collection of *Eshnunna sets a fine of one mina of silver for the loss of an eye. In the personal liability laws found in *Hammurabi's code, reciprocity for injury may be an exactly equivalent injury, a fine or mutilation, depending on the social status of the injured party and the accused. Even in the cases where exact reciprocity is required by Mesopotamian law, it is quite possible that a monetary equivalent was taken in compensation (if not explicitly included in the law), rather than an eye or a tooth being actually removed.

20:1-20
Rules for Warfare

20:2. priest addressing the army. Since warfare was considered a religious enterprise, it was expected that priests and other religious functionaries would accompany the army. *Assyrian texts and reliefs depict the roles performed by priests accompanying the troops. They carried or attended the images and emblems of the gods (see Josh 6:4-5; 1 Sam 4:4), performed religious *rituals and sacrifices, and undoubtedly addressed the army in the name of the gods. This latter task may have involved interpreting of omens, assuring the aid of the gods and exhorting the troops to fight for the god's chosen king (as in the annals of Tukulti-Ninurta I [1244-1208 B.C.] and Ashurnasirpal II [883-859 B.C.]).

20:5-9. exemptions from military duty. While every able-bodied free man was expected to serve in the military, in practice exemptions were allowed for special categories, such as priests (in the *Mari texts), newlyweds (Deut 24:5) and those who have religious duties to perform (see Lev 19:23-25). Conscription of troops was necessary to fulfill feudal obligations to kings and took various forms, including census taking and coercion (at Mari). The biblical injunction to allow the "frightened" to leave the army may have had its basis in maintaining discipline in the ranks, but it is also an assurance that those who fight are certain of Yahweh's aid in battle (see Judg 7:1-3). The law codes are at times contradictory on the matter of hiring substitutes for service in the military. The *Hittite code allows this practice, but it is outlawed in the Code of *Hammurabi. This latter case is based on a direct order to join the king's campaign. It is possible that arrangements could be made for members of the nobility that would preempt any awkward legal problems. In the Canaanite **Keret Epic* the king raises an army in a cause so important that normal exemptions (newlywed among them) are abandoned.

20:10-15. normal warfare practices. In the ancient world, the standard procedure was not to pay soldiers a wage. Instead they were given a portion of the loot taken in the capture of villages and towns. Because warfare was also seen as a divine mission, ordered by the god(s) and facilitated by divine intervention,

all plunder taken in battle was technically the sacred property of the god(s). As a result strict procedures had to be followed in its division in order to prevent a violation of sacred taboos. For instance, in the *Mari texts officers took an oath not to "eat the *asakkum*" (i.e., infringe on the rights) of their peers or of lesser ranks. Violators were punished with heavy fines. Following this pattern, Mesopotamian as well as Israelite armies commonly took women and children as spoils, along with animals and moveable property, while the men were killed (see Gen 34:25-29; *Assyrian Annals of Sennacherib). In this way the efforts of the victorious were rewarded, and the psychological effect of the sight of devastated cities served the purpose of enhancing the reputation of the conquering nation and its god(s).

20:16-18. holy war procedures. In unusual circumstances, an army chose to forego taking prisoners or spoils and dedicated it entirely to the god who had given them the victory. This practice is known as **herem* in Hebrew and is used very sparingly as a method of warfare. Only in a few instances is the total destruction of a city called for: Jericho in Joshua 6:17-24, Hazor in Joshua 11:10-11, Zephath in Judges 1:17 and the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15:3. There are several instances where some variation on utter destruction is allowed, as in Deuteronomy 2:34-35 and 3:6-7 (people killed, livestock taken as spoil). Outside the Bible, this perspective on war is attested as early as the ninth century B.C. in the war against the tribe of Gad by the Moabite king Mesha. A similar concept may be reflected in the annals of several of the *Assyrian kings, who used total destruction as a psychological ploy to make revolting nations submissive.

20:20. siege works. To capture a walled city, it was necessary to employ a variety of siege works, including ramps (2 Sam 20:15; 2 Kings 19:32), towers (Is 23:13; Ezek 21:22) or perimeter walls to prevent escape (Ezek 26:8; Mic 5:1). Battering rams (Ezek 26:9) as well as supports for tunnels undermining the walls also required the use of timbers. This explains the dispensation allowed in Deuteronomy for the cutting of trees during a siege. The *Assyrian reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.) at Nimrud portray many of these siege engines and simultaneous methods of warfare.

21:1-9
Unsolved Murder

21:1-9. innocent blood procedures and concepts. See the comments on Numbers 19 dealing with the significance of the purification *ritual and the use of the red heifer. These comments also deal with the importance of expiation for the shedding of "innocent blood." In *Hittite law if a body was found out in the open country, the person's heir was entitled to some property from the town nearest the place where the body was found, up to three leagues' distance. This legislation is more concerned with the rights of the heir than with the issue of innocent bloodshed.

21:10-14
Rights of Captive Women

21:10-14. treatment of captive women. Part of warfare is the disposition of prisoners. Some female captives could expect to serve as slaves (2 Kings 5:2-3), but many would also be taken as wives by the soldiers. The Deuteronomic law deals with the transformation process as these women were adopted into Israelite society. This included the shaving of the head, a change of clothing and a period of mourning marking the death of the woman's old life and the beginning of a new one (compare Joseph's transformation in Gen 41:41-45). The *Mari texts also provide clothing and a job to captive women. The rights extended to the former captive after she has married are similar to those of Israelite women and are designed to demonstrate that there is no reduction of her status if a divorce occurs. Similar concerns are reflected in the *Middle Assyrian laws, which require former captives who are now married to dress like all Assyrian women of that class.

21:15-21
Treatment of Sons

21:15-17. right of the firstborn. Inheritance rights are based on the law of primogeniture. This stipulates that the firstborn son is to receive a double share of his father's property. That this was the normal situation in the ancient Near East can be seen in Middle Assyrian texts, *Larsa, *Mari and *Nuzi documents, just to name a few. The intent of such laws is to insure orderly transmission of property from one generation to the next. *Hammurabi's law gives the father the right to favor whichever son he chooses. In the Nuzi texts the father had the option of altering the firstborn rights. In the ancient Near East the closest legislation to that found here is the stipulation in Hammurabi's law that says the children of the slave wife, if acknowledged as children during the father's lifetime, have an equal share in the inheritance with the full

wife's children.

21:18-21. execution of a rebellious son. When a breakdown of family coherence occurred and a son refused to give his parents the obedience and support they were entitled to, it became a threat to the community as a whole. The language used here makes it clear that a repudiation of the *covenant is involved. The references to gluttony and drunkenness are considered indications that the son is beyond reform. Due process includes parental witness of the offense, and then a communal form of execution is prescribed (see comment on Deut 13:10). This offense is as grave a threat to the covenant as worshiping other gods. Mesopotamian law also defends the rights of parents, but only extending to disinheritance or mutilation. See the comment on Exodus 21:17. The legislation limits the authority of the parents in that they have to bring such a matter before the elders rather than having the freedom to act independently.

21:22-23

Treatment of Executed Criminals

21:22-23. exposure of executed criminals. Since the Deuteronomic laws are seldom concerned with matters of ritual *purity and polluting elements (see Lev 13—17 and comments on Lev 20:10-16; 22:3-9), it may be that the sense of "desecrating" the land is based on either the sight or the smell of an exposed and decaying body. The corpse was considered a defiling object (Lev 22:8; Num 5:2) and thus a danger to the living. Very few narratives describe the practice of exposing a body (Josh 8:29; 10:26-7; 2 Sam 4:12; 21:8-13). It is unlikely that hanging was the form of execution used here. Rather, a tree or pole was used to impale the bodies for public display. *Assyrian reliefs from the palace of Sennacherib in *Nineveh (704-681 B.C.) depict soldiers erecting stakes holding the impaled bodies of men of Lachish. It is possible that the horror of this form of shameful display is the basis for the Israelite law requiring the body to be removed and buried at sunset rather than leaving it to be devoured by birds and other animals (Gen 40:19; 2 Sam 21:10).

22:1-12

Miscellaneous Laws

22:1-3. lost property. Just as in Exodus 23:4, it is expected that an Israelite will either return lost property (animals, clothing, etc.) or keep it safe until the owner reclaims it. Taking the two laws together, this maxim applies to fellow Israelites as well as enemies. The laws of *Eshnunna and *Hammurabi also deal with lost property, but they broaden the legislation to include both the responsibilities of the finder and the legal rights of the owner when property is resold.

22:5. transvestism in the ancient Near East. Just as clothing served as a status marker in the ancient world, it also distinguished gender. In classical contexts, cross-dressing occurred in the theater, where women were not allowed to perform, and was also an aspect of homosexual practice. Most instances in which cross-dressing or transvestism are mentioned in ancient Near Eastern texts are *cultic or legal in nature. For instance, when the *Ugaritic hero *Aqhat is murdered, his sister Paghat puts on a male garment under her female robes in order to assume the role of blood avenger in the absence of a male relative. An *Assyrian wisdom text contains a dialogue between husband and wife who propose to exchange their clothing and thus assume each other's gender roles. This may be a *fertility rite or perhaps a part of a religious drama honoring a goddess. It may be this association with other religions that made transvestism an "abomination" in Deuteronomy, but the issue may also be the blurring of gender distinctions. *Hittite texts use gender-related objects as well as clothing in a number of magical rites used to influence one's sexual status or diminish or alter the gender status of an adversary. The objects of the female were mirror and distaff; those of the male, various weapons.

22:6-7. treatment of bird's nest. Aside from the apparent humanitarian concern for the welfare of the creatures involved here, conservation of nature is found in leaving the mature bird to breed again. One might compare this with the prohibition against cutting down fruit trees in Deuteronomy 20:19-20. In both instances, future sources of food are preserved while an alternative is suggested for immediate needs.

22:8. parapet on house. Since roofs were considered living space (see 2 Sam 11:2; 2 Kings 4:10), a parapet would have been an appropriate safety measure. This law deals with the liability of a homeowner for injury to a visitor in the case of negligent building practices. *Hammurabi's code (laws 229-33) cautions builders against doing a substandard or unsafe job that could lead to injury or death. Penalties ranged from fines to capital punishment.

22:9-11. mixing. Some mixtures were considered to be reserved for sacred use. The mix-

ture of wool and linen was used in the tabernacle and in the high priest's outer garments, and was reserved for those uses. This interpretation is offered in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QMMT). Sowing of two types of seed is also prohibited in the *Hittite laws with a death threat to violators. While it is not entirely clear why these mixtures are prohibited, it is possible that their origin is based on either religious or cultural taboos. The fact that the crop is "defiled" or forfeited to the priesthood suggests religious implications and perhaps a reaction to a Canaanite *fertility *ritual or practice. In Leviticus 19:19 the prohibition is against mating two kinds of animals, while here it concerns plowing with them together. Experiments with hybridization and cross-breeding are attested as early as the third millennium B.C.

22:12. tassels. All adult male Israelites were commanded to sew blue cords into the four quarters of the hem of their robes as a perpetual reminder of God's commandments (Num 15:37-41). Decorative hems are common in ancient Near Eastern fashion as many reliefs, paintings and texts attest. Hem design was often an indication of a person's status or office. The tassels are symbolic and are designed to promote right action, not to serve as an *amulet to ward off danger or temptation.

22:13-30

Laws Concerning Marriage

22:13-21. proof of virginity. Virginity prior to marriage was prized as a means of insuring that one's children and heirs were actually one's own. The integrity of the woman's household was based on her being able to show proof of her virginity. The physical evidence demanded in this case could be either the sheets from the initial consummation (bloodied by the breaking of the hymen) or possibly rags used during the woman's last menstrual period, showing that she was not pregnant prior to the marriage.

22:19. one hundred shekels of silver. The fine imposed here for false accusation amounts to about two and one-half pounds of silver. *Hammurabi's laws include cases of false accusation of sexual misconduct, but these do not concern the wedding context, and monetary fines are not set. Based on the bride price paid in Deuteronomy 22:29 of fifty shekels, this penalty amounts to twice the bride price and thus would be a real deterrent to such accusations. It would be the equivalent of about ten years of normal wages.

22:22. adultery. Having sexual relations with another man's wife was punishable by death in both the biblical and ancient Near Eastern codes. The Egyptian *Tale of Two Brothers* calls it a "great crime" that no honest man or woman would consider. This was an attack on a man's household, stealing his rights to procreate and endangering the orderly transmission of his estate to his heirs (see comment on Ex 20:14). The act itself defiles both participants (Lev 18:20; Num 13:5). Since it is not only an attack on the sanctity of the household but also a source of general contamination, adultery serves as a reason for God to expel the people from the land (Lev 18:24-25).

22:23-24. "in town" criterion. The rape of a virgin within a town brings an automatic death penalty because the woman had the opportunity to cry out and could expect to receive assistance. This is based on implied consent on her part. Mesopotamian codes also include locale as part of the rape law. However, in the *Sumerian laws, the focus is more on whether her parents were aware that she was out of the household and whether the rapist knew whether she was slave or free (laws of *Ur-Nammu and *Eshnunna impose fines for raping a virgin slave woman). *Hammurabi's law most closely resembles the Deuteronomic law. In this case the rapist is to be executed if he attacks a woman in the street and witnesses testify that she defended herself. *Middle Assyrian laws allow the parents of the victim to take the rapist's wife and have her raped. There is also provision for the rapist to marry the victim, if the family chooses, for a premium bride price.

22:23, 25. "pledged" status. A marriage contract was a sacred compact, comparable to the *covenant agreement made with Yahweh (see Ezek 16:8). The "pledge" agreement (1) set a bride price as well as the amount of the dowry, (2) guaranteed that the bride would be a virgin at the time of marriage and (3) required complete fidelity of the parties. Marriage was such an important economic and social factor in the ancient Near East that it was the basis of a huge amount of legislation. For instance, the laws of *Eshnunna and *Hammurabi explain the importance of having an official marriage contract. Hammurabi's laws also provide guidance on payment of the bride price and instances when one party or the other wishes to break the contract (see 2 Sam 3:14). Once an agreement is in place, it is expected that other persons will respect the betrothed status of the woman as technically already married (see Gen 20:3). Thus the laws of adultery are in full force even before the actual ceremony and consummation of the marriage.

22:25-27. "in the country" criterion. In this case, Israelite law adds another criterion by specifying the guiltlessness of the woman who is raped in the countryside, where her screams were unlikely to attract assistance. The assumption of her innocence is based on implied resistance to the rape in this circumstance. It is likely that the law applied to married as well as to betrothed women, even though only the latter are mentioned. A similar statement appears in *Hittite law, which condemns the man only if he seizes a woman "in the mountains" and condemns the woman only if the crime occurs "in (her) house" (see the adulterous woman in Prov 5:3-14).

22:29. fifty shekels. The bride price probably varied depending on the status and wealth of the bride-to-be's family. Fifty shekels of silver may have been a standard amount (equivalent to the value of the bride's virginity, according to *Middle Assyrian laws), but there were probably other items exchanged as well (compare Ex 22:16-17). To provide one measure of these transactions, in the *Ugaritic religious texts the moon god Yarih offers one thousand shekels of silver as a bride price for the moon goddess Nikkal. These amounts should be measured against the fact that the standard annual wage in the ancient world was ten shekels.

22:29. divorce in ancient Near East. The most straightforward statement on divorce in the ancient Near Eastern law codes is Middle Assyrian law 37, which simply says that it is a man's right to divorce his wife and that he may choose whether or not to provide her with a settlement. Other legal clauses, however, at least provide grounds for divorce: wife neglects household duties to go into business (Hammurabi); wife's desertion of her husband (*Middle Assyrian laws); failure to produce children (Hammurabi). General indications are that men in both Egypt and Mesopotamia could divorce their wives on almost any grounds. There are also a number of sources that prescribe a fixed settlement: one mina of silver to a primary wife and one-half mina of silver to a former widow (Ur-Nammu); one mina of silver if no bride price was paid (Hammurabi). It should be noted that women did have some rights in divorce proceedings: to keep the bride price (*Middle Assyrian laws); to have dowry returned (Hammurabi); to receive a share of the inheritance as a dowry (Hammurabi). There is also one case in which a woman was able to leave an unsatisfactory marriage, taking her dowry with her (Hammurabi). However, this was based on an examination of her character, which could lead to her execution if she was found to be at fault (Hammurabi).

22:30. incest. Incest was equally abhorrent in most other societies (e.g., the prohibitions in *Hittite laws). The most well-known exception is Egypt, where it was a common practice in the royal family (but little attested elsewhere) as a means to strengthen or consolidate royal authority. This concept is also seen among *Elamite kings. *Hammurabi's laws call for the execution of a son who has intercourse with his mother after the death of his father.

23:1-14
Defiling the Assembly and the Camp

23:1-8. exclusions from the assembly. "Assembly of the LORD," like the more common "assembly of Israel," is a technical term for all those adult males who are enfranchised to make decisions, participate in *cultic activities and serve in the military of Israel (Mic 2:5). Because they were a chosen people, who were required to maintain their *ritual purity as part of the *covenant (Ex 19:6), the unclean and the stranger were excluded from the activities of the assembly. The examples listed include persons who were sexually impaired (probably eunuchs) and thus incapable of procreation, men of illegitimate birth (including incest and intermarriage) and certain national groups who were excluded from ever being adopted into the assembly.

23:4. Balaam's home. The exact location of Balaam's home is unknown. Numbers 22:5, 23:7 and Deuteronomy 23:4 seem to indicate the area of the upper Euphrates, perhaps the site of Pitru, twelve miles south of Carchemish, mentioned in the monolith inscription of the *Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.). However, the journey of Balaam described in Numbers 22:21-35 suggests a shorter distance, possibly a journey from Ammon.

23:9-14. sanitation in the camp. Since the army is engaged in a holy war, they must maintain themselves in a state of ritual purity consistent with God's holiness. Thus matters of personal hygiene are elevated to reinforce the need to keep both person (see Lev 15:16-17) and place clean. Obviously, there would be health value in digging latrines outside the camp, but such mundane activities here are keyed to preventing the ritual *impurity that would cause God to abandon them (see Deut 8:11-20).

23:15-25
Miscellaneous Laws

23:15-16. slavery. Although debt slavery oc-

curred in ancient Israel, it had a term limit of six years and then the slave was freed. Perpetual slavery did exist as well, but that involved foreign captives and Israelites who had made the decision to accept that condition (Ex 21:2-11; Deut 15:12-18). It is most likely this latter class of persons that is mentioned in this law, since debt slaves could expect to be released eventually. Israel's fugitive slave law is unusual in the context of ancient Near Eastern law. However it is tied to Israel's former condition as slaves in Egypt and thus is based on a national hatred of the institution (see Ex 22:21). The Code of *Hammurabi makes hiding a runaway slave a capital crime and sets a bounty of two shekels of silver for the return of a slave. Similarly, the international treaty between Pharaoh Rameses II and the *Hittite king Hattusilis III (c. 1280 B.C.) includes an extradition clause requiring the return of fugitive slaves.

23:17-18. cultic *prostitution. One can distinguish between several different categories. In "sacred" prostitution, the proceeds go to the temple. In "cultic" prostitution, the intent is to insure *fertility through sexual *ritual. We must also differentiate between occasional sacred/cultic prostitution (as in Gen 38) and professional sacred/cultic prostitution (as in 2 Kings 23:7). The evidence for cultic prostitution in ancient Israel or elsewhere in the ancient Near East is not conclusive. Canaanite texts list prostitutes among the temple personnel, and *Akkadian literature attests those who were dedicated for life to serve the temple in this way. Although the Hebrew word used here is related to an Akkadian word for prostitute, this does not prove that any religious ritual or cultic practice is involved. It is quite possible for prostitutes to be employed by temples as a means of raising funds without their having any official status as priestesses. Furthermore, since women often did not have personal assets, sometimes the only way of earning money by which to pay a vow appeared to be prostitution. The injunction against bringing the wages of a prostitute to the temple may, however, be a reaction against practices like that of the *Ishtar temple servants in the Neo-Babylonian period, who hired out female members of their community as prostitutes. Their wages would have been placed in the temple treasury. All of this demonstrates the existence of sacred prostitution, both occasional and professional, in Israel and the ancient Near East. But the existence of cultic prostitution on either level is more difficult to prove. Cultic prostitution is not easily confirmed in Mesopotamia, unless one includes the annual sacred marriage ritual. But it is hard to imagine that prostitutes serving at the temple of Ishtar (who personified sexual force) were not viewed as playing a sacred role in the fertility cult. The translation "male prostitute" in Deuteronomy 23:18 is based on the use of the Hebrew word that usually means "dog." In the fourth-century B.C. Kition inscription, this term is used to describe a group that receives temple rations. It is possible, but not certain, that this refers to a temple official or priest. Recent study has shown that, at least by the Persian period (sixth-fifth century), dogs had some significant role in Phoenician *cultic practice. *Kalbu* (dog) has a more positive meaning of "faithful one," as can be seen in its use in personal names (like the biblical Caleb). (See Ex 34:16.)

23:19-20. charging interest. See the comment on Exodus 22:25. In Deuteronomy, though not in Exodus, it is explicitly stated that interest may be charged on loans to non-Israelites.

23:21-23. vows. In the Decalogue is the commandment that no one should "misuse the name of the Lord" (Ex 20:7). When a vow using God's name is spoken, it brings God into contract with that person. Thus any failure to carry out the stipulations of the vow breaks the contract and subjects that person to divine wrath (see Judg 11:35-36). The instruction about vows contained in Deuteronomy is a wisdom statement similar in form to Ecclesiastes 5:4-7. It is designed as a caution against unwise speech and has many parallels in ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. For instance, the seventh-century B.C. *Assyrian *Instructions of *Ahiqar* notes that "a human word is a bird; once released it can never be recaptured." Similarly, the Egyptian *Admonitions of Amenemope* state that "to stop and think before you speak . . . is a quality pleasing to the gods" (c. 1100 B.C.). For more information on vows, see comments on Leviticus 27 and Numbers 30.

23:24-25. hand gleaning. Just as widows may glean in a ripe field or orchard to sustain themselves from the harvest provided by God, it is permissible for a traveler to refresh himself with a handful of fruit or grain, taken in passing from a field (see Deut 24:19-21). However, it is theft if a person purposefully harvests from a neighbor's field. The hospitality rights of travelers are also discussed in the Egyptian *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* (c. 2100 B.C.).

24:1-22

Protection of Dignity

24:1-4. divorce. The basis for divorce in the

biblical text is the dissatisfaction of the husband with his wife (as in the *Middle Assyrian Laws). In that sense there must be clear grounds for the divorce (as in *Hammurabi and the *Middle Assyrian Laws). A "bill of divorcement" is drawn up specifying these particulars (see Jer 3:8), which, if it follows the manner of other legal proceedings, would be reviewed by a body of elders, and testimony would be given (as in Hammurabi's laws). For further information see the comment on Deuteronomy 22:29.

24:4. defilement. The very unusual form of the Hebrew verb used in verse 4 makes it clear that the woman in this case is the victim, not the guilty party. She has been forced to declare her uncleanness by the uncharitable actions of the first husband, and the second marriage demonstrates that another husband has been capable of accommodating whatever *impurity she was plagued with. The prohibition is aimed at preventing the first husband from marrying the woman again (in which case he might be able to realize some financial gain), whereas if the woman were impure the prohibition would be against her and would preclude a marriage relationship with anyone.

24:5. newlywed rule. This humanitarian law could be compared to the recruitment law in Deuteronomy 20:7. The latter exempts men who are betrothed from service, while this one specifically exempts the newly married man. In both cases the object is to give him time to father an heir and establish a household. However, the law in chapter 24 also concerns itself with the right of the individual to take pleasure in the joys of life before going to war.

24:6. millstone as necessary for survival. The millstone was made up of two stones, usually basalt. The lower millstone was heavy (sometimes nearly one hundred pounds), a flat or slightly curved stone upon which the grain was laid and then ground into flour with the upper, lighter stone (weighing four or five pounds), which was shaped to the hand of the worker. The poor, who could not buy processed grain from others, had to grind it themselves each day. If they were forced to give their millstone in pledge for a day's labor, they could be left without the means to feed themselves.

24:7. slave trade in ancient Near East. While slaves were bought and sold throughout the ancient Near East (see Gen 37:28-36), it was forbidden by law for persons to kidnap free citizens and sell them as slaves (compare Ex 21:16). Both the Deuteronomic law and *Hammurabi's laws condemned the kidnapper to death. In this way some restraint was placed on slave traders adding to their stock by simply taking stray children or unlucky adults. The vast majority of persons who did end up on the slave block either were sold to the slavers by their own families or were prisoners of war.

24:8-9. leprosy. See the comments on the diagnosis of skin diseases by the priests in Leviticus 13:1-46. The Deuteronomic injunction simply reinforces the prerogatives and authority of the priests to determine whether a person had the skin condition (probably psoriasis or other skin disease, since Hansen's disease was unknown in the Near East until the Hellenistic period) and, when it was cured, to perform a purification *ritual.

24:10-15. regulations concerning a pledge. It was a common business practice in the ancient Near East for a person to "make a pledge" (i.e., offer as collateral) a portion of his property as a guarantee of paying off a debt or other financial obligation. For instance, the Code of *Hammurabi and *Hittite laws stipulate the pledging of land or planted fields. Hammurabi and *Middle Assyrian laws both deal with the legal rights of persons who have been taken in pledge for a debt. What is distinctive about the Deuteronomic law, as compared to the older version in the *covenant code (Ex 22:26-27), is its emphasis on protecting both the humanitarian rights and the personal honor of the debtor. Thus the creditor may not enter the debtor's house to take an object in pledge. Instead, the debtor's dignity is preserved by maintaining the sanctity of his personal dwelling and by giving him the opportunity to choose what will be offered. In this way the poor are treated on a par with all other Israelites.

24:16. family culpability. This legal concept of personal responsibility is cited in 2 Kings 14:6 as the basis for sparing the sons of condemned men. What is unclear is this principle's relationship to the concept of *corporate responsibility, evidenced in Deuteronomy 13:12-17 and 21:1-9. In the latter cases, the entire nation was expected to maintain their ritual purity by eliminating contaminating elements. If individual and corporate responsibility were coexisting legal ideas, then the instances where entire families were slain because of the sin of the father (Josh 7:24-26; 2 Sam 21:1-9; 2 Kings 9:26) would be viewed as cases of divine punishment rather than the actions of the civil legal system.

24:17-18. justice for the vulnerable. Once again the legal rights of the "protected classes" of society (widows, orphans, resident aliens) are listed (see Ex 22:21-24; Deut 26:12).

The basis for protecting and providing for these persons is God's compassion during the exodus event, as well as the *covenant promise of a fertile land. The theme of legal protection for the vulnerable is quite common in the ancient Near East (Ex 23:6), especially in wisdom literature. For example, in the Egyptian *Teachings of Amenemope* appears the admonition not to "steal from the poor, nor cheat the cripple . . . nor poach on the widow's field." Among the titles that the "Eloquent Peasant" of Egyptian literature uses for the local governor is "father of the orphan" and "husband of the widow," reminding him of his responsibilities to uphold the rights of the weak in society.

24:19-22. provision for the needy. Since the bounty of the harvest is a reflection of God's *covenant promise, it is only just that the owners of fields and orchards share a portion of their harvest (see comments on Ex 22:22-24 and Deut 23:24-25). Such a provision served several purposes. It insured that the entire community participated in the humanitarian efforts to sustain the poor (see Lev 23:22). The practice of leaving a portion of a field unharvested may also be tied into the regular fallowing of fields (Ex 23:10-11), which allowed the land to rest and regain its fertility. In the ancient Near East in general it is likely that what was left in the fields was originally associated with sacrificial offerings to local *fertility gods. By designating this produce for the poor, rather than local deities, the biblical writer both removes the taint of false worship and establishes a practical welfare system.

25:1-19
Individual Rights

25:1-3. punishments meted out by courts. In complex societies, when a legal dispute arises, it is necessary to take it to the judicial system. This system must include judges and a place for the hearing of testimony. On the village level this simply means drawing together the "elders" at the gate or threshing floor (see Deut 21:18-21; Ruth 4:1-12). In towns and cities, the judges were officials appointed by the government, who could hear appeals from village courts (Deut 17:9-10) or try cases within their own jurisdiction (2 Sam 15:3; Jer 26:10-19). Their responsibility included hearing testimony, making a judgment based on the law and officiating to insure that punishment was meted out exactly as the law decreed (in the *Middle Assyrian laws the judges are expected to observe the punishment).

25:2-3. limitation on number of lashes. Ancient Near Eastern law (*Middle Assyrian laws and *Hammurabi) stipulate that both men and women be flogged for various crimes. The number of lashes ranges from twenty to sixty. In Deuteronomy, however, forty lashes serves as the upper limit. This limit may be based on either the symbolic value of forty or the degree of mutilation and personal humiliation permissible for an Israelite to bear without being permanently excluded from social and religious activities.

25:4. role of oxen in grain processing. Oxen were used to plow fields and to pull threshing sleds to crush the stocks of grain once they were harvested. At the threshing floor, the grain would be laid in such a way that a heavy sled could be driven over it. The hooves of the oxen would also aid in the processing of the grain. The injunction that the ox not be muzzled follows the humanitarian pattern of previous laws and allows the animal to eat a portion of the grain as its wage. Since few farmers owned their own team of oxen, they were provided by government officials (observed in *Mari texts) or hired from wealthier farmers or even other villages (as in *Lipit-Ishtar laws and *Hammurabi, which include statutes regarding the hire and liability for oxen).

25:5-10. levirate marriage. For additional information on this practice, see the comment on Genesis 38:6-26. *Hittite law 193 and *Middle Assyrian law 33 have very similar legislation, though neither offers an explanation in terms of providing a family heir or of passing on property in an orderly fashion. Both of these concerns are referred to in Deuteronomy. Thus the law, although it is also designed to provide the widow with the security attendant upon marriage and having a son, is primarily focused on the rights of the deceased husband. The obligation owed to the deceased by his brother (defined best as nearest male kin) can be an economic hardship (see Ruth 4). Thus the second part of this law allows the levir to renounce his obligation publicly and thus, judging by the example in Ruth, presumably allow the widow to marry whomever she wishes. Even though the levir must submit to public humiliation and be labeled uncooperative, the financial factors involved might make it justifiable.

25:7-8. elders at town gate. Because of the constant traffic at the gate as people went to and from the fields, it became the place of judgment and business transaction in ancient Near Eastern towns. Merchants would set up collapsible booths or simply sit under an umbrella while their customers came to them (see Lot in Gen 19:1). When a legal matter came

up, a group of the town elders either could be found sitting in the gate (Prov 31:23) or could be gathered from those passing by (Ruth 4:1-2).

25:9. removing sandal. Sandals were the ordinary footwear in the ancient Near East, but they were also a symbolic item of clothing, especially in the relationship between the widow and her legal guardian or levir. This is due to the fact that land was purchased based on whatever size triangle of land one could walk off in an hour, a day, a week or a month (1 Kings 21:16-17). Land was surveyed in triangles, and a benchmark was constructed of fieldstones to serve as a boundary marker (Deut 19:14). Since they walked on the land in sandals, the sandals became the movable title to that land. By removing the sandals of her guardian (Ruth 4:7), a widow removed his authorization to administer the land of her household.

25:11-12. law. There is a very close parallel to this law in the *Middle Assyrian code, in which the degree of physical punishment on the woman is dependent on whether one or both testicles are damaged. It would appear that punishment in the Deuteronomic law is based not on the degree of injury inflicted on the man's genitals but on the act of immodesty displayed by the woman. Her hand is severed because it is the offending appendage (see the comment on the laws of talion in Deuteronomy 19:21). Although she is attempting to help her husband, by grasping another man's genitals she has committed a sexual act that disonors her and her husband.

25:13-16. weights and measures standards. Commerce in a society without coined money is dependent on standard weights and measures. Examples of stone and metal weights, marked with specific symbols designating weight values, have been found in Egyptian tombs as well as at several sites in Israel and Mesopotamia (stylized lion-weights were found in eighth-century B.C. levels of Nimrud in *Assyria). The merchant who used a heavier weight to buy than to sell defrauded his suppliers and customers (see Prov 11:1; 20:23; Amos 8:5). Although this was condemned as an abhorrent practice, it was common enough in the ancient world. A good example is in the Egyptian *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, which accuses government officials and grain distributors of "shorting" the people.

25:17-19. Amalekites. See the comment on Numbers 24:20. The Amalekites wandered through vast stretches of land in the Negev, Transjordan and Sinai peninsula. They are unattested outside the Bible, and no archaeological remains can be positively linked to them. However, archaeological surveys of the region have turned up ample evidence of nomadic and seminomadic groups like the Amalekites during this period. Despite several attempts to eliminate the Amalekites (Ex 17:8-13; 1 Sam 15:2-3), they reappear as enemies of Israel on an alarming number of occasions (Judg 6:3; 1 Sam 30:1; 2 Sam 8:12; 1 Chron 4:43). Their refusal to aid the Israelites as they crossed Sinai functions, as it does here, as the basis for the original enmity, but subsequent disputes are probably based on territorial clashes and raiding of each others' villages.

26:1-18
First Fruits

26:1-15. first-fruit offering in ancient Near East. The religious principle involved in offering the "first fruits" (animal, vegetable or human) to the gods is based on the promotion of fertility. From earliest times the assumption was made that the gods created life in its various forms and that they expected to receive as their due offering the first of the harvest or the first fruit of the womb. Israelite religion tempered this by allowing for the redemption of some animals and all human firstborn males (Ex 13:11-13; Num 18:14-15). The giving of the first fruits could also take on a political character. The *Assyrian annals of Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) contain his command that conquered peoples pay their first-fruit offerings of sheep, wine and dates to the gods of Assyria.

26:5. wandering Aramean. The creedal statement contained here emphasizes the nomadic character of Israel's ancestors. The original homeland of Abraham and his family is generally identified as Paddan Aram or Aram Naharaim (see comment on Gen 11:28). The mention of Arameans in relation to Abraham and Jacob is likely a reference to scattered tribes of peoples in upper Mesopotamia who had not yet coalesced into the nation of *Aram that appears in later texts. Based on other examples from *cuneiform literature, the name Aram may in fact have originally been that of a region (cf. Sippar-Amnantum of the *Old Babylonian period) that was later applied to people living there. For more on the Arameans see comment on Genesis 28:5.

26:8. mighty hand and outstretched arm as Egyptian metaphors. These two attributes of God also appear together in 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 11:2; and 26:8, and in the prophetic literature (Jer 32:21; Ezek 20:33). Its origin may be found in Egyptian royal hymns and official correspondence. For example, in the fourteenth-

century B.C. *Amarna letters, Abdi-Heba, the governor of Jerusalem, refers to "the strong arm of the king" as the basis for his government appointment. Similarly, the Eighteenth-Dynasty "Hymn to *Osiris" equates Osiris's growing to majority with the phrase "when his arm was strong," and Haremhab's "Hymn to *Thoth" describes the moon god as guiding the divine bark through the sky with "arms outstretched."

26:9. milk and honey. See comment on 6:3.

26:11. sharing with Levites and aliens. Once again the "protected classes" are listed, and the command is made to share a portion of the sacrificial offering with them. In the case of Levites and aliens, neither group is allowed to own land, and thus both are economically impaired (see 1:16; 12:18; 14:29; 16:11). Their receipt of aid is balanced in the case of the Levites by their service as priests and in the case of aliens by their itinerant labor service.

26:12-15. tithing in ancient Near East. See the comments on tithing in 14:22-29 and Numbers 18:31-32.

26:12. third year, year of the tithe. See comment on 14:29.

26:12-13. provision for the needy. The four categories of needy persons are the Levites, aliens, widows and orphans. Because they lack either land or the protection of a household, it becomes the obligation of the nation to provide food and legal protection to these vulnerable people (see 1:16). In this case, the form of support which they are to receive is the tithe in the third year. However, it may be presumed that additional provision was made throughout the year, every year, for them (see Ruth 2:2-18).

26:14. eating while mourning or unclean. This threefold litany of ritual purity and obedience, similar in form to Job's "oath of clearance" (Job 31), maintains that the offerer has not contaminated the sacred meal by being in an impure state. For example, persons who had come in contact with the dead were considered unclean (Lev 5:2). *Hittite *ritual for the preparation of the king's food and meal offerings for the gods included meticulous attention to physical cleanliness as well as the exclusion of ritually impure animals (dogs and pigs) and ritually unclean persons. The Deuteronomic statute may also be tied to ritual meals associated with the ancestor *cult or with Canaanite or Mesopotamian *fertility rituals (see women mourning for *Dumuzi/Tammuz in Ezek 8:14).

26:14. offerings for the dead. See the comments on Numbers 3 and Deuteronomy 14:1-2 on *rituals associated with the ancestor *cult. In this case the assurance is given that the sacrificial meal has not been contaminated by unclean persons or polluting actions, such as giving a portion as an offering to the dead. This might include food provided for the spirit of a dead person, to strengthen it for its journey to Sheol (as seen in Tobit 4:17) or to learn something of the future (Deut 18:11). In addition, an association between eating "sacrifices offered to the dead" and the worship of the Canaanite god *Baal is made in Psalm 106:28. Either purpose would place reliance on powers other than *Yahweh, and both were therefore condemned by the biblical writer as polluting and leading to destruction.

27:1-8
Setting Up the Altar on Mount Ebal

27:2. monuments on stones coated with plaster. Ancient writing techniques included ink on papyrus (Egypt), a stylus on clay tablets (Mesopotamia), an inscribing tool on stone and a stick on wax-coated wooden boards. Engraving in stone could be very time-consuming, so one variation for longer inscriptions was to coat the stone surface with plaster and then write in the soft plaster. Inscriptions of this type have been found in the Palestine region at Deir Allah (see comment on Num 22:4-20) and Kuntillet Ajrud (see the comment on Asherah poles in 7:5).

27:4. Mount Ebal. Gerizim and Ebal are the mountains that flank the town of Shechem in the central hill country, Gerizim (elevation 2,849 feet) to the south, Ebal (3,077 feet) to the north. The altar spoken of here is actually constructed in Joshua 8. Some archaeologists believe that the remains of this altar have been found. It is a structure on one of the peaks of Mount Ebal about twenty-five by thirty feet with walls about five feet thick and nine feet high made of fieldstones. The fill is dirt and ashes, and what appears to be a ramp leads up to the top. The structure is surrounded by a courtyard, and animal bones litter the site. Pottery on the site goes back to 1200 B.C.

27:5. altar built with fieldstones; no iron tool. These instructions parallel those found in Exodus 20:25. Iron tools were used for dressing the stone—shaping it to make a sturdier structure. Altars of dressed stone have been found in Judah (the best example is at Beersheba). This altar was not supposed to be attached to a sanctuary, and perhaps the use of unhewn stone helped keep that distinction. There is a fieldstone altar in the court of the Arad fortress sanctuary dating from the monarchy period.

27:6-7. purpose of the altar. It appears that

this altar was not intended to be a permanent installation (another reason to use fieldstones), but was set up for the purpose of the celebration ceremonies of this occasion. It is specifically fellowship offerings (see comment on Lev 3) that are offered here—no purification or reparation offerings.

27:8. law on monumental stones. *Hammurabi's laws were inscribed on a diorite stele eight feet tall and displayed publicly for all to see and consult. Royal inscriptions often were placed in prominent locations. Memorial inscriptions in our culture are used on tombstones, cornerstones of buildings and at various historical sites. The purpose in these cases is for people to see, take note and remember. Treaty documents in the Near East, in contrast, were often stationed in holy places that were not accessible to the public. Here the purpose was to put the agreement in writing before the gods in whose name the agreement had been sworn.

27:9-26

The Recitation of Covenant Curses

27:12. Mounts Gerizim and Ebal. See comment on 11:29.

27:15-26. curse recitation. The curses here are not statements of what will happen to the one breaking the *covenant but statements calling down unspecified curses on particular types of covenant-breaking conduct. This section constitutes a solemn oath entered into by the people concerning secret violations. Such oath-taking ceremonies regularly accompanied international treaties.

27:15. use of idols. See comment on 4:15-18.

27:16. dishonoring parents. Honoring and respecting parents consists of respecting their instruction in the *covenant. This assumes that a religious heritage is being passed on. The home is seen as an important and necessary link for the covenant instruction of each successive generation. Honor is given to parents as representatives of God's authority and is for the sake of covenant preservation. If parents are not heeded or their authority is repudiated, the covenant is in jeopardy. In this connection, notice that this commandment comes with covenant promise: living long in the land. In the ancient Near East it is not the religious heritage but the fabric of society that is threatened when there is no respect for parental authority and filial obligations are neglected. Violations would include striking parents, cursing parents, neglecting the care of elderly parents and failing to provide adequate burial. (See Ex 20:12.)

27:17. importance of boundary stones. See comment on 19:14.

27:19. justice for vulnerable classes. A major aspect of Israelite legal tradition involves making provision for groups classified as weak or poor: widows, orphans and the resident alien (see Ex 22:22; Deut 10:18-19; 24:17-21). Concern for the needy is evident in Mesopotamian legal collections as early as the mid-third millennium and generally addresses protection of rights and guarantee of justice in the courts.

27:20-23. incest and bestiality. Incest was abhorrent in most other societies as well (see, for example, the prohibitions in *Hittite laws). The exception is Egypt, where it was a common practice in the royal family (but little attested elsewhere) as a means to strengthen or consolidate royal authority. This concept is also seen among *Elamite kings. Bestiality was practiced in the context of *ritual or magic in the ancient Near East. It occurs in the mythology of *Ugarit (and was probably ritually imitated by the priests) and is banned in legal materials (especially the Hittite laws).

27:25. taking bribe to kill innocent. What is uncertain in this context is whether the curse concerns a payment made to an assassin (thus giving a variation on the previous verse) or a bribe made to a judge or witness in order to condemn an innocent man of a capital crime and thus have him executed (cf. 1 Kings 21:8-14). The temptation for judges and government officials to accept bribes is found in every time and place (see Prov 6:35; Mic 7:3). Taking bribes becomes almost institutionally accepted in bureaucratic situations as competing parties attempted to outmaneuver each other (see Mic 3:11; Ezra 4:4-5). However, at least on the ideal level, arguments and penalties are imposed to eliminate or at least lessen this problem. Thus *Hammurabi's code (law 5) places harsh penalties on any judge who alters one of his decisions (presumably because of a bribe), including stiff fines and permanent removal from the bench. Exodus 23:8 forbids the taking of bribes and the perversion of justice as an offense against God, the weak and innocent, and the entire community (see Is 5:23; Amos 5:12).

28:1-14

Covenant Blessings

28:2-11. ancient Near Eastern treaty curses and blessings. Curses and blessings are standard elements of the ancient treaties of the third, second and first millennia B.C., though they vary in specificity and proportion from

one period to another. Since the treaty documents were confirmed by oath in the names of deities, the curses and blessings were usually those that were to be brought by the deities rather than by the parties to the treaty. Here that is of little difference because God is a party to the *covenant rather than simply the enforcer of it. Many of the curses found here are found in similar wording in the *Assyrian treaties of the seventh century B.C. Similarities can also be seen in the Atrahasis Epic, where, prior to sending the flood, the gods send various plagues on the land. These include the categories of disease, drought and famine, sale of family members into slavery, and cannibalism.

28:15-68

Covenant Curses

28:22. pathology in the ancient Near East. Affliction by various diseases is one of the curses found in *Assyrian treaty texts. Pathology in the ancient Near East was always considered in the light of supernatural cause and effect. Generally either hostile demons or gods angry at the violation of some taboo were considered responsible. "Wasting disease" probably included tuberculosis (rare in ancient Israel) as well as other diseases characterized by the same outward symptoms; verse 22 also includes categories of diseases characterized by fevers and inflammation; verse 27 describes a variety of skin diseases; and the symptoms of verse 28 are common with syphilis (in the ancient Near East generally the nonvenereal type). The categories of pathology can therefore be seen to be symptom related.

28:23. bronze sky, iron ground. An *Assyrian treaty curse from the seventh century B.C. (Esarhaddon) is very similar to this, not only using the analogies of bronze and iron but elaborating that there is no fertility in iron ground and no rain or dew comes from bronze skies.

28:25-29. devoured, infected, insane, plundered. Esarhaddon's treaties likewise include a series very similar to this and in nearly the same order. These, then, were typical ingredients of a curse section of a document such as this.

28:27. boils. Boils again represent a symptom, not a disease. The symptoms are not given in enough detail for specific diagnosis (guesses have included smallpox, chronic eczema, skin ulcers, syphilis and scurvy), but it is the symptom more than the disease that is the curse. This same symptom is the sixth plague in Egypt (Ex 9:8-11) and the affliction that tormented Job (Job 2:7-8), as well as being named among the skin diseases in Leviticus 13 (vv. 18-23).

28:40. olives dropping off. The oil of the olive is derived only from the black, ripe fruit. Olive trees normally lose a large percentage of the potential fruit due to the blossoms or the green olives dropping off the tree. The small proportion left can be further depleted by drought or disease, causing heavier dropping off. This curse is not found in *Assyrian texts because sesame seed oil was used in Mesopotamia.

28:42. locusts. The Aramaic Sefire treaty has a seven-year locust curse included in its list. Locusts were all too common in the ancient Near East and were notorious for the devastation and havoc they brought. The locusts breed in the region of the Sudan. Their migration would strike in February or March and would follow the prevailing winds either to Egypt or Palestine. A locust will consume its own weight each day. Locust swarms have been known to cover as many as four hundred square miles, and even one square mile can teem with over one hundred million insects.

28:48. iron yoke. Yokes, usually made of wood, consisted of a bar across the nape of the animals' necks. The bar had pegs placed down through it on either side of each animal's head. The pegs were then tied together under the chin. The iron yoke would likely be one that featured iron pegs, the part most liable to break.

28:51. grain, new wine, oil as staple products. Besides being the three most significant staple products of the region, grain, new wine and oil represent the main produce of the three major harvesting seasons (grain in the spring-summer, grapes in the fall and olives in the winter). The oil referred to here is olive oil. It was also one of the principal exports of the region, since olives were not grown in either Egypt or Mesopotamia.

28:53. cannibalism. Cannibalism is a standard element of curses in *Assyrian treaties of the seventh century B.C. It was the last resort in times of impending starvation. This level of desperation could occur in times of severe famine (as illustrated in the Atrahasis Epic) or could be the result of siege, when the food supply had become depleted, as mentioned in this text and anticipated in the treaty texts. Siege warfare was common in the ancient world, so this was not as rare an occasion as might be presumed. An example of this drastic measure can be seen in the biblical record in 2 Kings 6:28-29.

28:56. touch the ground with the sole of her foot. The author is showing that the most gen-

teel, refined woman imaginable, one who would not even dream of walking around barefoot, would be so desperate that she would begin cannibalizing her family.

28:58. book. We tend to think of a book as having pages, a binding and a cover. Books of that sort did not exist in the ancient world. The term used here can refer to any document from inscription to scroll, from papyrus to clay tablet to stone.

28:68. returning to Egypt in ships. *Assyrian kings of the seventh century coerced their vassals into supplying troops for their military campaigns. One way then for Israelites to return to Egypt in ships would be in the Assyrian campaigns launched from the Phoenician coast in which they were obliged to take part. This represents continued oppression by foreign enemies, as the curses have detailed. Another possibility would include falling victim to Egypt's slave trade in Syro-Palestine, where the slaves were often transported by ship.

29:1-29
Covenant Renewal

29:5. clothes and sandals not wearing out. See comment on 8:4.

29:6. no bread or wine. The Lord's provision for them instead of bread and wine was manna and water. The inclusion of strong drink here is unusual—the only individuals restricted from this were serving priests (Lev 10:9) and those under a *Nazirite vow (Num 6:3).

29:7. Sihon and Og. These battles are initially recorded in Numbers 21. Sihon is known only from the biblical records, and archaeology has little information to offer regarding his capital city or his kingdom. There is also no extrabiblical information from historical sources or archaeology to shed light on Og. For information about Heshbon and Bashan, see comments on Numbers 21:25-28, 33 and Deuteronomy 3:1.

29:19-21 the secret violator. The concept that one who keeps a violation secret will nevertheless be vulnerable to the curses is found in Aramaic (Sefire) and *Hittite treaties, where the curse includes the destruction of the violator's name (family).

29:23. land of salt and sulfur. Salt and Sulfur (sometimes translated "brimstone"; see Gen 19) are both minerals that are detrimental to the soil. They are the two most evident in the Dead Sea region known for its infertility and associated with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

29:24-25. reason identified for punishment. This same question and similar answer are found in an *Assyrian text of the seventh century where the Assyrian king Assurbanipal describes his reasons for putting down an Arab revolt that had violated the terms of a treaty. The Arabs had broken the oaths they made before the Assyrian gods.

29:29. secret things. In the ancient world there were areas of knowledge that were believed to belong only to the gods. In a hymn to Gula, the craft of a physician is identified as a secret of the gods.

30:1-20
Response to Curses and Blessings

30:2-5. forgiveness clause. Unlike the treaties of the ancient Near East, the *covenant as represented in Deuteronomy has a forgiveness clause that offers second chances when the covenant has been violated. Repentance and recommitment to the terms of the covenant would result in restoration. Such mercy was not impossible with ancient treaties, but there is no example of such a possibility being explicitly included in the written document.

30:6. circumcise the heart. This is of course not asking for a physical surgical procedure. *Circumcision had been adopted as a sign of commitment to the *covenant and acceptance of its terms. As such it could be applied to the heart as a reflection that the outer *ritual had permeated the inner being.

30:19. heaven and earth as witness. See comment on 4:26.

31:1-8
Commissioning of Joshua as Moses' Successor

31:2. life expectancy in ancient Near East. In Egypt the ideal length of life was 110 years; in a wisdom text from *Emar in Syria it was 120. Examination of mummies has demonstrated that the average life expectancy in Egypt in this general period was between 40 and 50, though texts speak of some reaching 70 and 80. Mesopotamian texts of several different periods mention individuals who lived into their seventies and eighties, and the mother of the *Babylonian king Nabonidus was reported to have lived 104 years.

31:4. Sihon and Og. For details on these two kings and the battles against them, see comments on Numbers 21.

31:9-13
Instructions for the Reading of the Law

31:9. writing down laws. From the laws of

*Ur-Nammu (probably compiled in actuality by his son Shulgi) around 2000 B.C. through the laws of *Lipit-Ishtar, *Eshnunna and *Hammurabi and the *Hittite laws in the first half of the second millennium, to the *Middle Assyrian Laws toward the end of the second millennium, rulers made it a practice to compile laws and write them down as evidence that they were fulfilling their duty of maintaining justice.

31:10. reading the law every seven years. Several *Hittite treaties contain clauses requiring periodic public reading of the document—one stipulates three times a year, while others are less specific, saying "always and constantly."

31:10. year of canceling debts. The sabbatical year featured remission of debts. See comment on 15:1-6.

31:10. Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles is the fall harvest feast that commemorates the wandering in the wilderness. See comment on 16:13-17.

31:14-29

Future Rebellion

31:15. pillar at the entrance of the tent of meeting. Prior to the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus, the tent of meeting was outside the camp and served as a place of revelation (see the comment on Ex 33:7-10). However, now that the tabernacle is in operation, it also is referred to as the tent of meeting. The Lord again appears in a pillar of cloud. In the ancient world a bright or flaming aura surrounding deity is the norm. In Egyptian literature it is depicted as the winged sun disk accompanied by storm clouds. *Akkadian uses the term *melammu* to describe this visible representation of the glory of deity, which in turn is enshrouded in smoke or cloud. It has been suggested that in Canaanite mythology the *melammu* concept is expressed by the word *anan,* the same Hebrew word here translated "cloud," but the occurrences are too few and obscure for confidence. See comment on Exodus 13:21-22.

31:22. covenant song. Songs of all sorts are known throughout the ancient Near East from the first half of the third millennium. One *Assyrian list of songs about a century before David includes titles of about 360 songs in dozens of different categories. Songs concerning the *covenant are also present in the book of Psalms (e.g., Ps 89).

31:26. contents of the ark. The only objects placed inside the ark were the tablets with the law on them (10:2, 5). In Egypt it was common for important documents that were confirmed by oath (e.g., international treaties) to be deposited beneath the feet of the deity. The Book of the Dead even speaks of a formula written on a metal brick by the hand of the god being deposited beneath the feet of the god. There were a number of objects placed *before* the ark, including a jar of manna (Ex 16:33-34) and Aaron's rod that budded (Num 17:10). Here the book of the law is added to them.

32:1-43

The Covenant Song of Moses

31:30. covenant song. See comment on 31:22.

32:4. rock metaphor. Used in 2 Samuel 22:3 as a divine epithet, *rock* could also carry the meaning "mountain" or "fortress." It is used in Israelite names both as a metaphor for God (Zuriel, Num 3:35, "God is my Rock") and as a divine name (Pedahzur, Num 2:20, "Rock is my redeemer"). It is used of other deities in *Aramaic and *Amorite personal names, and its application to other gods is hinted at here in verses 31 and 37. As a metaphor it speaks of safety and deliverance.

32:8. Most High (Elyon). In the Old Testament the term *Elyon* is usually used as an epithet for *Yahweh (see comments on Gen 14:17-24). There is no convincing evidence thus far of *Elyon* as the name of a deity in the ancient Near East, but it is fairly common as an epithet for various gods, particularly *El and *Baal, the principal gods in the Canaanite pantheon.

32:8. deity granting nations inheritance. In Israelite theology *Yahweh had assigned each nation its inheritance (5:2, 9, 19; Amos 9:7), though there is also some accommodation to the concept that each god gave territory to his people (Judg 11:24). It was not uncommon for kings in the ancient Near East seeking expansion of territories to claim that deity had assigned or delivered land to them. In Israel the territorial assignment was uniquely based on a *covenantal bond with *Yahweh.

32:10. apple of the eye metaphor. "Apple" is the English idiom, not the Hebrew one. The pupil is referred to here as a sensitive, protected and significant part of the body.

32:11. eagle behavior. Though the eagle cannot be ruled out, the bird named here is more usually taken to be the griffin vulture, with a wingspan of eight to ten feet. While Bible reference books often report how the eagle carries its young on its wings when they grow weary of flying, or catches them on their wings when they are fluttering in failure, this behavior has been difficult for naturalists to confirm through observation. In fact most ea-

gles and vultures do not take their first flight until three or four months of age, at which time they are nearly full grown. Furthermore, observations by naturalists have consistently confirmed that the first flight is usually taken while the parents are away from the nest. Alternatively, if the metaphor here concerns a vulture, it may be political in nature. In Egypt, Nekhbet was the vulture goddess who represented Upper Egypt and served as a protecting deity for Pharaoh and the land. Israel was protected in Egypt until Yahweh brought them to himself. Nekhbet was depicted as particularly maternal and was believed to assist at royal and divine births. Significant building of her temple in el-Kab (capital of third nome in Upper Egypt) took place in the Eighteenth Dynasty toward the end of the Israelite stay in Egypt, so we know that she was a popular goddess at that time. It is conceivable that the imagery of this verse was not drawn from actual observation of the behavior of vultures but from elements in the depiction of the vulture goddess, Nekhbet, whose characteristics are here transferred to *Yahweh (see v. 12, "no foreign god was with him"). The first half of the verse would then introduce the metaphor of the vulture that cares for and protects its young. The second half of the verse speaks of the Lord's care and protection of his people using the imagery that was familiar from Egyptian metaphors of care and protection. Additionally, in Mesopotamia the *Tale of Etana* includes an eagle that carries *Etana and then repeatedly lets him go and catches him on its wings. (See Ex 19:4.)

32:13. heights of the land metaphor. Cities were typically built on hills because of their natural defensibility, and armies chose hills as strategic points of control. The metaphor of treading on the heights therefore is one that speaks of victory and security.

32:13. source of honey and oil. While most honey spoken of in the Old Testament is the syrup from the date palm, mention of the rock here suggests bees' honey from honeycombs in the rocks. Olive trees, which were the main source of oil, were able to grow in rocky soil because they could thrive with minimal amounts of water.

32:14. rams of Bashan. The region of Bashan (see comment on Deut 3:1) was well known for its choice livestock. The prime grazing land of the area provided a natural diet that produced animals of the highest quality.

32:15. Jeshurun. The word *Jeshurun* is built from a root related to the one used in the name Israel, and it is a poetic way to refer to Israel.

32:17. sacrifice to demons. This word for demon is used elsewhere in the Old Testament only in Psalm 106:37, but it is a well-known type of spirit/demon *(shedu)* in Mesopotamia, where it describes a protective guardian mostly concerned with the individual's health and welfare. It is not the name of a deity, but a category of being (like *cherub* would be in the Old Testament). A *shedu* could destroy one's health just as easily as it could protect it, so sacrifices to keep it placated were advisable. They are depicted as winged creatures (similar to the cherub; see comments on Gen 3:24 and Ex 25:18-20), but they do not have idols (as the gods have idols) by which they are worshiped (see comment on Deut 4:28 for how this worked).

32:22. foundations of the mountains. In the ancient worldview the netherworld, the realm of the dead, was down beneath the earth where one found the foundations of the mountains, especially those mountains that were believed to support the dome of the heavens. Though the Israelites clearly use the language of this conceptual worldview, it is difficult to distinguish between beliefs and poetic usage.

32:23-25. divine punishment in the ancient Near East. Famine, disease, wild beasts, war —these are the tools of the gods when they desire to punish their human subjects. Throughout history and literature the apparent randomness of these "acts of God" led them to be considered signs of divine displeasure. Atrahasis and the *Gilgamesh Epic both contain accounts of the gods trying to reduce human population through these means prior to the flood. In contrast to the Old Testament, where the offenses are identified that would lead to these judgments, in the ancient Near East the judgments would indicate only that some deity was angry about something, leaving the people to figure out what offense might have been committed. Examples include the *Hittite prayer of Mursilis, where he prays that a plague might be abated, several *Sumerian and *Akkadian texts of lamentations over the fall of a major city, and Egyptian Wisdom Admonitions (Ipuwer). These all view various national calamities as the punishment of the gods. Perhaps the most striking example is the Erra Epic, in which civilization itself is threatened by the anarchy and havoc wreaked by the violence of Erra (the *Babylonian deity Nergal). The text of Deuteronomy 32, however, must also be understood in the context of its treaty form, where the punishments are not random, arbitrary or unexplained. Rather, they are commensurate with

the violation of the terms of the agreement.

32:33. poisonous serpents. The allusions in the second half of verse 24 are generic, speaking of carnivorous or ferocious beasts on the one hand and creatures with poisonous bites or stings on the other. The latter are not limited to snakes, of which there were a few poisonous species around, but could also include scorpions.

32:38. food and drink of the gods. A common view of sacrifices in the ancient Near East was that they served as food and drink for the gods, who needed their sustenance (see comments on Lev 1:2). This view was rejected in the ideal Israelite worldview (see Ps 50:7-15), though many Israelites would have probably accepted the concept. This text is mocking the idea that gods who have needs would be adequate for deliverance.

32:39. no pantheon. Most religions of that day had a pantheon, a divine assembly that ruled the realm of the gods, the supernatural and, ultimately, the human world. There would typically be a deity who was designated head of the pantheon, and he, like the other gods, would have at least one consort (female partner). The first commandment forbids Israel to think in these terms. *Yahweh is not the head of a pantheon, and he does not have a consort—there are no gods in his presence. This verse goes further to insist that there is no other god exercising power or competing for jurisdiction and authority. Just as blessing and prosperity is not the result of a benevolent deity's managing to hold back demonic forces and chaos, so punishment is not the surge of malevolent power to overwhelm the protector. All happens within Yahweh's plan—an impossible concept in the pagan polytheism of the rest of the world.

32:44-52
Conclusion and Instructions to Moses

32:49. Abarim range and Mount Nebo. The Abarim range extends east of the mouth of the Jordan River and on around the northern end of the Dead Sea (see Deut 32:49). It forms the northwestern rim of the Moabite plateau. The specific peak in this range from which Moses will view the Promised Land is Mount Nebo, 2,740 feet in height. Pisgah and Nebo are identified as the two peaks of Jebel Shayhan, about five miles northwest of Medeba and about a mile and a half apart. They stand about ten miles from the Jordan River.

32:50. Mount Hor. The death site for Aaron (although 10:6 identifies his death with Moseroth). The traditional location is near Petra at Jebal Nabi Harun, but this is not "on the border of Edom." Another possibility is Jebal Madrah, west of Kadesh and near the Edomite border, but it lacks sufficient water sources.

32:51. Meribah Kadesh in the Desert of Zin. Kadesh Barnea is in the wilderness of Zin (see comment on Num 13:26). This is where the incident in Numbers 20 occurred when Moses struck the rock for water. Meribah means "quarreling," and it is a name applied to both instances when water was brought from the rock.

33:1-29
The Blessing on the Tribes

33:1. patriarchal pronouncements. In the biblical material the patriarchal pronouncement generally concerns the destiny of the sons with regard to fertility of the ground, fertility of the family and relationships between family members. Blessings or curses pronounced by the patriarch of the family were always taken seriously and considered binding, even though they were not presented as prophetic messages from God. They were usually given when the patriarch was on his deathbed. This chapter is most reminiscent of Genesis 49, when Jacob blessed his sons, the forefathers of the tribes Moses now blesses.

33:2. Seir. Seir is generally considered the mountainous central region of Edom (elevations generally over 5,000 feet) between Wadi al-Ghuwayr on the north and Ras en-Naqb on the south.

33:2. Mount Paran. Mount Paran is considered by most a poetic variation for Mount Sinai/Horeb.

33:5. Jeshurun. See comment on 32:15.

33:8. Thummim and Urim. These were devices used by the priests to give *oracular messages. See the comment on Exodus 28:30.

33:17. bull/ox metaphor. The bull and ox are symbols of fertility and strength. As such, the latter term is used as a title of *El, the head of the Canaanite pantheon. Both elements are included in this blessing on the Joseph tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim. One *Ugaritic text describes the gods *Baal and Mot as strong, goring like wild bulls, and the *Babylonian king *Hammurabi describes his own military might in terms of an ox goring the foe.

33:22. Bashan. The region of Bashan is centered in the area of the upper Yarmuk River, east of the Sea of Galilee. Its northern border is Mount Hermon. Dan's territory was originally in the south by the Philistine coast, but the

Danites moved north to the region of the city called Dan north of the Sea of Galilee and contiguous to Bashan.

33:24. bathing feet in oil. Washing feet was a constant need and an act of hospitality in the dusty terrain. Only the wealthy and genteel, however, would regularly make use of (olive) oil for the washing. Compare John 12:3. This metaphor speaks of prosperity.

33:25. bolts of the gates. The locking system on gates and doors usually included a bar (wood or metal) that slid into openings in the posts. Brackets that held the bar firmly to the doors are probably what is referred to by the "bolts" of this passage. The gate could be breached by applying a battering ram to the center where the doors met in order to break the bar. Brackets would make the bar much harder to break, but they in turn could break. Brackets of bronze or iron could make a gate much harder to break through.

34:1-12

The Death of Moses

34:1. Nebo and Pisgah. See comment on 32:49.

34:1-3. view from Mount Nebo. At this point the Mediterranean Sea is about sixty miles west, but it cannot be seen because the hills on the west side of the Jordan obscure the view. On a clear day one can see Mount Hermon, about a hundred miles to the north, the mountains to the northwest that flank the Jezreel Valley (Tabor and Gilboa), the mountains of the central hill country (Ebal and Gerizim) and to the southwest as far as Engedi.

34:1-3. the boundaries of the land. Even though the land has not been distributed yet, this viewing of the land is described partially by tribal territories, to be distinguished from the geographical descriptions given in Deuteronomy 1:7. The description moves from Moses' point toward the north and then counterclockwise through the land.

34:6. Baal Peor. The Wadi Ayun Musa at the foot of Mount Nebo is generally considered to be the Valley of Beth Peor, with the site Khirbet Ayun Musa as probably the town.

34:7. apocryphal literature concerning the death of Moses. Jude 9 speaks of a dispute over the body of Moses, and apocryphal and rabbinic literature speculated about it in a number of places, particularly in *The Assumption of Moses* (of which manuscripts are no longer known) and *The Testament of Moses* (known from one Latin manuscript from the sixth century A.D.). The former speaks of Moses ascending directly to heaven, while in the latter it is implied that he dies a natural death. Deuteronomy makes it very clear that he died, and there is nothing remarkable in the account. The text leaves it somewhat ambiguous who buried Moses, but it is clear that the grave site is unmarked and unknown.

34:8. plains of Moab. This is the broad plain or steppe region immediately north of the Dead Sea and east of the Jordan River, just opposite the "plains of Jericho" (Josh 4:13). Its location serves as the jumping-off point for entrance into Canaan. (See Num 22:1.)

HISTORICAL LITERATURE

Introduction

We find a wealth of ancient Near Eastern material to illuminate the historical literature of the Old Testament—far more than for other genres of Old Testament literature. Among these ancient resources are items we may classify as royal inscriptions, chronographic texts and historical literary texts. *Royal inscriptions* preserve an account of the achievements of kings, particularly their military exploits and their building projects. *Chronographic texts* delineate a sequence of historical events ranging from simple lists of kings to court chronicles or military annals. *Historical literary texts* are mostly poetic, epic narratives that recount the experiences of kings. These texts are occasionally carved in stone (on cliff faces or on stone reliefs or statues) but are more often inscribed on clay tablets. Some chroniclers kept records on small rectangular shaped tablets, while others used large slabs or even barrel, cylinder or brick-shaped clay polygons.

If a record of events is to be preserved for future generations, it must at some point become part of a text. But writing that record as a text requires the compiler, whether consciously or subconsciously, to work under a set of guiding principles. We call this set of guiding principles *historiography,* and it will vary from culture to culture, even from historian to historian. How history writers feel about the appropriate form, content and structure for preserving a record of events contributes to this historiography, but these are only surface issues. What is important about the events of the past? Why is the account being compiled? How do events come to pass? What causes or forces drive history? Are there patterns in history? Is there design in history? The answers to these questions play a significant role in determining how history is written. It goes without saying that different individuals, different *cultures,* will answer such questions in different ways. Thus any

given historical record represents a particular perspective about the events of the past. The shape of any given historiography is determined by the questions the compiler seeks to answer. We cannot legitimately speak of "right" perspectives or "wrong" perspectives concerning history. To do so would assume a commonly accepted absolute criterion. Perspectives, perceptions and feelings exist or do not exist. It is rarely a simple matter to label them right or wrong. In this light *any* historiography should be referred to as "perspectives on history." Any historiography must in some sense be viewed as an editorial column.

When we study historiography, we must discover what purposes authors have in writing their documents. Otherwise we will not know how to use their work as we reconstruct the history of a period. It is important not to assume that their ideas of writing history were the same as current western ideas. When history is written in Western culture, it is often understood to be history for history's sake (even though that is sometimes not the case). One of the values of contemporary society is the belief that it is essential to record, evaluate and thereby preserve the events of the past—just for the record. Along with that comes a desire to reconstruct "what really happened" and to identify cause and effect.

In most ancient historiography "what really happened" appears to be far less important. A large majority of the documents that supply us with historical information are generated through the sponsorship of the royal house. These documents are designed to serve the king, not the objective interests of the historian. Royal reputation is a far greater value than reliability. Our modern terminology calls this propaganda. The historiography of the ancient Near East, whether represented in royal inscriptions or chronicles, king lists or annals, has by all accounts a propagandistic agenda. As with campaign speeches of our day, truth can be useful to the royal house, but it is not its prime objective. Propaganda is greatly enhanced when it has truth in its favor; but if it only has statistics or other random "facts" it will make do. The perspective on truth that these texts take will present the king in the best light. The recorder is trying to provide answers to the question "Why should the king be considered good and successful?" In most cases it cannot be determined whether concealment or disinformation are part of the strategy, but negative information is uniformly lacking. When accounts of a particular battle are available from both sides, it is not odd for each to claim victory. It was common practice for a king to alter inscriptions by putting his own name in place of his predecessor's (even if it was his father). An ancient king would rarely admit to a defeat, and negative assessments of a reign come rather from later kings who may be seeking only to legitimate their own rule. Historiography among ancient cultures was largely a self-serving enterprise.

Israel's historical literature has features similar to chronographic texts and contains a few isolated examples that can be compared to royal inscriptions or historical literary texts. But the purpose of Israel's literature is theological. It is selective, as all historical writing must be, and it has an agenda. It is not interested in preserving events for history's sake. Its purpose is to document Yahweh's action in history and his control of the flow of events. In these documents the nation is more important than the king, and God is the main focus. Israel's identity and function as Yahweh's covenant people is the backbone of the entire historical cor-

pus. Thus we could say that whereas the objective of much of ancient historiography is to offer the desired understanding of the accomplishments of the king, the objective of Israelite historiography is to offer the desired understanding of the accomplishments of God.

It is also important to realize that the ancient world had a different view of deity's role in history than is common in Western culture. Until the Enlightenment it was common for a person's worldview to be thoroughly supernaturalistic. The role of deity was admitted, and the belief in occurrences that defied natural explanation was commonplace. With the Enlightenment a significant shift occurred. The resulting historical-critical method suggested that we should accept as true only that which can be empirically proven. The new historiography was concerned only with natural cause and effect in history. This is largely the view adopted by our contemporary Western culture.

The worldview of society around us thus differs dramatically from the worldview of the ancient historians. The way in which history is written today would seem quite foreign to ancient authors. The simple recital of facts and events would be meaningless to them unless the information was put to some use. While the ancients would not deny the existence of natural cause and effect in history, they were much more interested in the divine role in history. A modern historian's response to Israelite historiography might be "it has not provided information that is reliable"; the Israelite historian's response to modern historiography might be "it has not provided information that is worthwhile."

When we study the historiography of a pre-Enlightenment culture, then, it is important to recognize the worldview that drives that historiography and to respect the integrity of it. The worldview represented in Israel's historiography is one in which the directive activity of God is of primary importance. This view extends far beyond the recognition of occasional supernatural interventions to see God's activity in natural occurrences as well. In fact, it insists that all events are woven into the plan of God, which is the driving force of history.

Israel's historiography holds much in common with neighboring ancient cultures. Historical records in Mesopotamia, while not claiming to be revelation from deity, nonetheless show great interest in discerning the activities of the gods. The polytheistic nature of Mesopotamian religion, however, impedes the development of any concept of a singular divine plan encompassing all of history. At best the reigning dynasty may identify a divine plan in establishing and sustaining that dynasty. Some documents look back into the distant past to see a pattern that led to the present (e.g., the Weidner and the Akitu Chronicles). These typically concern not what the deity has done but what has been done to the deity. In Mesopotamia it is assumed that deity plays an active part in the cause and effect process that makes up history. The gods are capable of intervention and are expected to intervene. The causation of the gods and the intervention of the gods are understood to be ad hoc rather than in accordance with any overarching plan or grand design. As in the Mesopotamian view, Israel counted God as the cause of every effect and as actively intervening to shape events. Israel's record of history was not intended to be a record of events but a record of the ways in which God had acted in history. There is no secular Israelite historiography.

In the supernaturalistic view of the ancient world, events were revelation, the result of divine activity. Unfortunately, those events required interpretation to discern why the gods were doing what they did. Such interpretation was not provided in the polytheistic cultures surrounding Israel. Mesopotamians were left to their own devices to discern what the gods were up to. In Israel's view, not only events but historiography was revelation. That is, God took it upon himself not only to act but to provide an interpretation of his acts, communicating why they were done and what purposes they served. In this way Yahweh was both the cause of the events and the source of the interpretation of the events. In theological terms we would say that the general revelation of history was supplemented by the special revelation of historiography.

In summary then, Israel shared with the ancient world the idea that events are revelation—the evidence that the gods were at work. This approach stands in contrast to Western historiography. But Israel distinctively believed that its historiography was also revelation, a novel view in contrast to both modern and other ancient historiography.

JOSHUA

1:1-18

Joshua's Commission

1:4. territory of the promised land. The "wilderness" circumscribes the southern and eastern boundaries of the land. The Lebanon and the Euphrates are the northern boundaries on both east and west. The Euphrates in similar descriptions of the boundaries of the land (see comment on Deut 1:7) refers to the area where the river turns north in the region of Emar. The Great Sea, the Mediterranean, marks the western boundary. The Hittite country most likely refers to Syria, where many Hittite groups settled after the fall of the Hittite empire about 1200 B.C.

1:8. Book of the Law. We tend to think of a book as having pages, a binding and a cover. Books of that sort did not exist in the ancient world. The term used here can refer to any document: from inscription to scroll, from papyrus to clay tablet to stone. The Book of the Law is the copy of instructions given to Moses in Deuteronomy and put in front of the ark (see comment on Deut 31:26).

1:16-18. pledge of loyalty. In international relations as they are known from the documents of the ancient Near East, when a new king came to the throne, vassals of the previous king were asked to subscribe to loyalty oaths professing their allegiance to the new king. This practice is attested between the pharaohs of Egypt and the city-state kings of Palestine during this period.

2:1-24

Spies in Jericho

2:1. Shittim. The full name of this site was Abel Shittim (Num 33:49), and it was the jumping-off point for Joshua's spies and for the Israelites' entrance into Canaan (Josh 2:1; 3:1; Mic 6:5). Josephus places it seven miles from the Jordan River. Its actual location is uncertain, but it may be Tell el-Hammam on the Wadi Kefrein.

2:1. Jericho. Jericho is located by an oasis (er-Riha) about five miles west of the Jordan River along the Wadi Kelt and six miles north of the Dead Sea. It guards the strategic passageway between the Jordan valley and the central hill country to the west (including Jerusalem, about fifteen miles west-southwest, and Bethel, about the same distance west-northwest), as well as the major ford between the Jabbok and the Dead Sea. Though it averages only four to six inches of rain per year, Jericho is supplied with ample water from the spring system today called Ain es Sultan. The tell of the ancient city is Tell es Sultan. It is 825 feet below sea level, the lowest city in the world. The oblong-shaped mound covers an area of about ten acres, with a circumference of about half a mile. A city of that size would have housed perhaps as many as two thousand people, though more would have lived in surrounding farms and villages. See comment on 6:1 for archaeological information.

2:2. spies in the ancient Near East. Spies in the ancient Near East regularly collected information about enemy movements and troop sizes. It would not be unusual for spies to infiltrate the enemy forces by posing as deserters or refugees. In reconnoitering a city they would be interested in defenses, food and water supply, number of fighting men and general preparedness for attack or siege. Most important was to find out what they could about the source of the water supply. If that could be cut off or compromised, a siege would have a much better chance of success.

2:3. city-state kings. Canaan at this time was not a unified political entity. Instead it was made up of many small "kingdoms"—city-states, usually including a major fortified city plus the small villages and farms in the region. Each such city-state would have its own king and its own army. The Amarna letters from the fourteenth century are the correspondence between many such Canaanite city-states and the Egyptian pharaoh of whom they were vassals.

2:5. closing city gate at dusk. Closing the city gate at dusk was not an unusual practice for walled towns, but it was much more rigorously observed when an enemy was at hand. Hittite records speak of the diligence with which this was undertaken. The highest ranking officials in the town personally supervised the locking and sealing of the gate. Since the gates were massive structures with chambers between the several entrances, watchmen and even officers slept right by the gate.

2:6. house architecture. The typical Israelite house known mostly from 1200 on is called a four-room house. It was a rough stone or baked brick structure about thirty feet square.

It had an open courtyard surrounded by rooms (sometimes two stories) with a flat roof. Less is known about the earlier Canaanite houses, though they still featured an open courtyard with rooms arranged around it. Outside walls would be made of larger stones piled up (sometimes only one row thick, other times several feet thick) with smaller stones stuck in the cracks. The wall was usually coated on the outside with mud and on the inside with plaster. Doors were wooden and turned on a stone socket beneath the ground. There were often no windows. The rooms were usually separated from the courtyard by a row of wooden or stone pillars, perhaps with curtains hung as dividers. The roof would be made of wooden beams laid across the walls, covered with twigs and straw and coated with clay. The dirt floors were sometimes coated with plaster, though stone slabs would be put down in the kitchen area.

2:6. stalks of flax. Flax is a plant used for making linen. Young plants are used for high quality cloth and ripe, tougher plants for sturdy material such as rope. Although there is reference to the cultivating of flax in the Gezer calendar, much of it was imported from Egypt. The harvested plants need to be laid out to dry before "retting," a process involving soaking in stagnant water to separate the usable fibers. The stalks must then be laid out to dry thoroughly before the process can continue. The smell and the sogginess would have made hiding here a distinctly unpleasant experience, perhaps equivalent to burying oneself in a pile of pig slops.

2:7. fords of the Jordan. Without bridges, the places where a river could be forded served as strategic locations. From the southern end of the Sea of Galilee to the Yarmuk River, the Jordan is not easily fordable. From the Yarmuk south to the Wadi Jalud (Herod Stream) are a number of fording places, especially from the region of Beth Shan coming out of the Jezreel Valley across into Gilead. South of this area the mountains come up closer to the rift valley until the confluence with the Jabbok, with the fords at Adam just below it. The terrain then becomes difficult on either side of the Jordan until one reaches the fords by Jericho nearly twenty miles further south.

2:10. Sihon and Og. There is no historical information on Sihon and Og outside the Bible. They are the two Amorite kings who were defeated by the Israelites in Transjordan. For more information see the comments on Numbers 21:21-35.

2:11. Rahab's Confession. Rahab expresses fear of Israel's God, Yahweh, and acknowledges him as God in heaven and on earth. In the context of ancient Near Eastern religious thought, this places Yahweh in the category of cosmic deity and recognizes him as a powerful national patron god. The report the Canaanites have heard suggests that he can influence the weather as well as bodies of water, disease and the animal world. Though her confession expresses how impressed they all are with the range of Yahweh's authority and power, it is far from an expression of monotheism. She has neither renounced her gods nor offered to dispose of them. She has not affirmed any loyalty to Yahweh but has requested his help. She shows no knowledge of the obligations of the law, and we have no reason to think she is aware of the revolutionary religious system that was developing in Israel. In short, her speech does not suggest that she has risen much above her polytheistic perspective—but she knows power when she sees it. The dread of a deity as a divine warrior was often believed to precede a powerful, successful army into battle. Egyptian texts attribute this terror to Amun-Re in the inscriptions of Thutmose III, and Hittite, Assyrian and Babylonian texts all have their divine warriors who strike terror into the hearts of the enemy.

2:15. houses on the wall. Houses built into the side of the city wall were common to this period. This benefited the city by adding extra width and support for the wall and benefited the resident by providing a firm wall to support the house. Excavations at Jericho have discovered houses built on the plaster rampart between the two walls with their backs up against the inside of the outer wall (see comment on 6:1).

3:1—4:24

Crossing Jordan

3:1. Shittim. See comment on 2:1.

3:4. two thousand cubits. Two thousand cubits is a little over half a mile.

3:10. the inhabitants of the land. The list here is similar to that occurring frequently in the Pentateuch. In the list of the seven people groups that inhabited Canaan three are well known, while the other four are barely known at all. Canaan may be mentioned as early as the Ebla tablets (twenty-fourth century), but the earliest certain reference is in the material from Mari (eighteenth century). The *Canaanite* people were the principal inhabitants of the fortified cities of the land, though they do not seem to have been native to the land. The kings of this area refer to themselves in the Amarna Letters (mid-second millennium) as

Kinahhu, equivalent to a term *(Kinanu)* also used in Egyptian inscriptions of this period. The well-known *Hittites* were from Anatolia, modern Turkey, but groups occupying sections of Syria and Canaan were also called Hittites and may or may not be related. The Hittites in Canaan have Semitic names, while the Hittites of Anatolia were Indo-European. The *Hivites* are sometimes connected to the Horites, in which case they may be Hurrians. There is still debate as to whether the term *Perizzites* is ethnic or sociological (those living in unwalled settlements). *Girgashites* are little known, though they are attested in the Ugaritic texts. *Amorites* (known in Mesopotamia as *Amurru* or *Martu)* are known from written documents as early as the middle third millennium. Most scholars think that they had roots in Syria and came to occupy many areas in the Near East. The term can be used to refer to a geographical area ("westerners") or to ethnic groups, though not necessarily related to one another. Some Amorites were nomadic, but there were Amorite city states in Syria as early as the end of the third millennium. The *Jebusites* occupied the region later associated with the tribe of Benjamin, notably the city of Jerusalem, and are often related to the Perizzites, who were located in the same region. There is no mention of the Perizzites, Hivites or Jebusites outside the Bible.

3:16 parting of the Jordan. This is springtime (see 4:19), and the melting snow from the Anti-Lebanon mountains often creates a flood stage for the Jordan. Mudslides as a result of flood waters undercutting the cliffs or from seismic activity occasionally interfere with the flow of the Jordan at the very place mentioned here in the text (once as recently as 1927). Those recorded have generally blocked the Jordan for a couple of days.

3:16. Adam in Zarethan. Adam is modern Damiya on the east side of the Jordan just south of where the Jabbok River flows, eighteen miles north of the fords at Jericho. The steep banks of the Jordan are particularly susceptible to mudslides because of the large amount of water flowing together here from the two rivers. Zarethan is often identified either with Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, about twelve miles further north, or with Tell Umm Hamad on the north side of the Jabbok.

3:17. on dry ground. There is an interesting inscription of Sargon II of Assyria (eighth century) where he claims that he led his army across the Tigris and Euphrates at flood stage as on dry ground.

3:17. the role of the ark. In the divine warrior motif, the deity is fighting the battles and defeating the deities of the enemy. In Assyria Nergal is the king of battle and Ishtar is viewed as a war goddess. The Canaanite Baal and the Babylonian Marduk are divine warriors. This is not to be viewed as "holy war," because in the ancient Near East there was no other kind of war. In most situations prayers would be made and omens asked to assure the god's presence. Standards or statues of the deity were usually carried to symbolize their presence. The ark, as Yahweh's standard, represents the Lord as clearing the way before the Israelites and leading the armies into Canaan. This concept is not very different from the Assyrian belief that the gods empowered the weapons of the king and fought before him or at his side.

4:13. forty thousand men. The word translated "thousand" can sometimes refer to a military division. The latter may be intended here, though it is a complex issue. For more information see the comment on Exodus 12:37. Compare this number to the estimated population of Jericho, fifteen hundred or two thousand.

4:13. the plains of Jericho. Jericho is about five miles from the Jordan, and there is a broad flat area across the entire region between.

4:18. return to flood stage. If the stoppage was caused by a mudslide up river, a tremendous amount of water would have backed up, and when the blockage was broken up by the force of the water, the renewed flow would have been considerable.

4:19. tenth day of first month. The last chronological notation we had was in Deuteronomy 1:3, the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year. After that address Moses went up to the mount and died (Deut 32:48), and then the people mourned for thirty days (Deut 34:8). We would assume that it is now the first month of the forty-first year, just two months after the death of Moses. The first month is Nisan (spanning March-April), time for the Passover celebration. It is a good time for military activity because the invading troops can be sustained from crops in the field. If the early date for the exodus is accepted (see date of the exodus sidebar in Exodus 12), the date is right around 1400 B.C. If the later date of the exodus is correct, it is around 1240.

4:19. Gilgal. The site of Gilgal is currently unidentified. Some guesses put it to the northeast of Jericho near Khirbet Mefjir, where there is a decent water supply, a significant outcrop of flint (see 5:2) and remains from ancient times (but only after 1200). Another biblical Gilgal has been identified with Khirbet ed-Dawwara, located in the middle of a circle circumscribed

around Jericho, Ai, Gibeon and Jerusalem, no more than six miles from any of them. But this is not considered a likely site for this Gilgal.

5:1-12
Circumcision and Passover

5:1. Amorite and Canaanite Kings. The region at this time was comprised of many small city-states, each with their own king, army and territory. Amorites occupied the hill country, while Canaanites were in the coastal plains. The Canaanite cities were more strategically located, since the major trade route from Egypt came up the coast (for more information on the trade routes see sidebar on pages 70-71). The Israelites were much more successful gaining control of the hill country than they were the plains. The Amarna letters give us a good deal of information about the city-states of Canaan in the fourteenth century. In many of these letters the kings are appealing to Egypt to send more troops to help them against the Apiru/Habiru who are stirring up trouble. *Habiru* is a term used to describe dispossessed peoples in over 250 texts spanning the second millennium and ranging from Egypt to Anatolia to east of the Tigris. Certainly the Israelites (Hebrews) would have been counted among the Habiru. The most prominent kings in the region of Palestine from the Amarna archives are Milkilu (Gezer), Abdi-Heba (Jerusalem), Lab'ayu (Shechem) and Abdi-Tirshi (Hazor). The Egyptians had a number of administrative cities, including Gaza and Joppa on the coast and Beth Shan where the Valley of Jezreel (and the trade route) goes to the Jordan.

5:2. flint knives. The earliest tools and weapons known from the Stone Age were flakes of stone produced by striking flint at the proper angles. The edges of these flakes were extremely sharp, easily accessible and reasonably durable. A flint flake was used for the process of circumcision in Israel and Egypt even after metal tools and weapons were readily available. The use of stone blades may reflect either a long tradition that precedes the ready availability of metal blades or simply the need for many blades at once. It has been suggested that the text refers to obsidian, which was valued for the smooth sharp edges it afforded.

5:2. circumcision. Circumcision was practiced widely in the ancient Near East as a rite of puberty, fertility or marriage. Egyptian reliefs from as early as the third millennium depict the circumcision of adolescents by priests using flint knives. Although the Israelites are not the only people in the ancient Near East to circumcise their sons, it is used to mark them as members of the covenantal community. When used in relation to marriage, terminology suggests it was performed by the new male in-laws, indicating that the groom was coming under the protection of their family in this new relationship. Performed on infants it is more a ritual scarring than something done for health reasons. The fact that blood is shed also signifies that this is a sacrificial ritual and may function as a substitution for the human sacrifice that was practiced by other people. Circumcision can be seen as one of many cases where God transforms a common practice to a new (though not necessarily unrelated) purpose in

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EGYPTIAN INFORMATION ABOUT CANAAN AND ISRAEL

From the rise of the eighteenth dynasty in the mid-sixteenth century B.C., the Egyptians established a foothold in Canaan that waxed and waned over four centuries. Military expeditions were common, and in some periods Egyptian presence was established in terms of garrisons at critical points along the trade routes. During the reign of Thutmose III (fifteenth century), Syria-Palestine became an Egyptian province. After a period of decline in the Amarna period (fourteenth century), the early part of the nineteenth dynasty (early thirteenth century) brought renewed military activity, with Canaan secured as a base of operations against the Hittites in a struggle for the control of Syria. Aside from the Amarna texts, which provide invaluable information about the political situation in Canaan and the significant role of Egypt in the region, Egyptian records have provided other pieces of information that contribute to this period. (1) Itineraries from Egyptian campaigns often make reference to cities that the Bible also mentions. Thutmose III lists over one hundred cities of Canaan. Sometimes these itineraries can help locate a city because it will identify the cities on either side of it. In addition, there are some cities for which excavations show no occupation for this period, but the Egyptian itineraries name them so we know they were occupied. (2) Egyptian reliefs from the thirteenth century depict Canaanite fortresses and fortified cities of the same sort that must have been encountered by Joshua. (3) The famous victory stele of Merenptah (second half of thirteenth century B.C.) is the earliest reference to Israel in extrabiblical sources. Discovered in 1896, the black granite monument, standing seven and a half feet tall, details the campaigns of the pharaoh against the Libyans and Sea Peoples. It then mentions victories over Ashkelon, Gezer, Yanoam and Israel as part of the plundering of Canaan. One Egyptologist (F. Yurco) has suggested that these campaigns of Merneptah are also engraved on the walls at Karnak. If he is correct, this would constitute the earliest depiction of Israelites.

revealing himself and relating to his people.

5:2. "again." One might well wonder how an individual could be circumcised again. This could refer to initiating the rite of circumcision a second time (see v. 5) or to a more radical surgical procedure. Egyptian circumcision involved only a dorsal incision rather than a total removal of the foreskin. Verses 5-8 argue against this latter explanation.

5:3. Gibeath Haaraloth. Gibeath Haaroloth means "hill of foreskins." If this is meant to refer to a place name, its location is unknown.

5:6. milk and honey. The land of Canaan is described as a land "flowing with milk and honey." This refers to the bounty of the land for a pastoral lifestyle but not necessarily for agriculture. Milk is the product of goat herds, while honey represents a natural resource, probably the syrup of the date rather than bees' honey. A similar expression to this is found in the Ugaritic epic of Ba'al and Mot, which describes the return of fertility to the land in terms of the wadis flowing with honey. Egyptian texts as early as the Story of Sinuhe describe the land of Canaan as rich in natural resources as well as in cultivated produce.

5:10. Passover. Passover celebrated the deliverance from Egypt and also may have represented a purification ceremony in preparation for the conquest. See comments on Exodus 12:1-11.

5:12. manna. For a full discussion of Manna see comment on Exodus 16:4-9. The fact that manna has been provided through all the different terrains that Israel has passed through suggests something far different from what the various natural explanations can provide.

5:13—6:27
The Conquest of Jericho

5:13. commander. The supernatural commander that Joshua encounters is another indication that Yahweh has taken charge and is going to be responsible for their military success. Just as Moses had an encounter at the burning bush that communicated God's plan for the exodus, so Joshua's encounter is providing God's plan for the conquest. The message brought by the commander includes the strategy for Jericho (reported beginning in 6:2). In the ancient Near East war was usually presented as originating from divine instructions and following a divine plan. Divine visitations on the eve of battle are not common in ancient Near Eastern literature. The divine word commanding the battle comes instead in the form of an oracle, while the divine presence is seen in the battle itself. In the Ugaritic Epic of Keret, however, the god El comes to King Keret in a dream with instructions for battle. Another closer parallel is when the Babylonian king Samsuiluna (eighteenth century B.C.) receives supernatural messengers from Enlil giving him instructions for a number of campaigns against Larsa and Eshnunna. Neither of these, however, are on the eve of battle—the armies have yet to be mustered.

6:1. Jericho. Settlement at Jericho goes back to the ninth millennium B.C., giving it the designation of the oldest city in the world. The site has occasioned much controversy, and archaeological interpretation has been complicated by significant amounts of erosion, which tends to confuse the layers that archaeologists depend on and totally obliterate large amounts of evidence. Excavations by Kenyon in the 1950s concluded that city 4 was violently destroyed (signs of earthquake and fire) about 1550 (at the end of the Middle Bronze period) and was then only sparsely and occasionally occupied until the ninth century. This poses a problem for both the late and the early date of the exodus and conquest. Most significant was the absence of Late Bronze imported Cypriote pottery. It has been argued, however, that there are many pottery samples of local ware from the Late Bronze period (1550-1200). There are still many unanswered questions about the archaeology of the site. City 4 was surrounded by a stone revetment wall (about fifteen feet high and topped by a mudbrick wall at least another eight feet high) supporting a plastered rampart that sloped up about fifteen feet to a second, upper wall also made of mudbrick. If city 4 is not the city overthrown at the time of Joshua, it is nonetheless likely that the walls of city 4 were still being used. There were houses built on top of the plaster rampart between the two walls. The city is not mentioned in the Amarna texts or in the Egyptian itineraries of the period. See comment on 2:1 for geographical information.

6:3-4. seven days marching in silence. In the Ugaritic Epic of Keret (which would likely have been known to the people of Jericho) Keret's army arrives at the city of Udm and is instructed by the god El to stay quiet for six days and to shoot no weapons, and on the seventh day the city would send out messengers and offer tribute if they would leave.

6:4. the role of the priests. The priests are necessary in order to maintain the sanctity of the ark. The importance of their lead role is to offer one more reminder that this is Yahweh's battle, not the Israelites'. For the ark's symbolism see the comment on 3:17.

6:4-5. trumpet signals. The trumpet referred to here is the rams' horn *(shofar)*. The *shofar* is

capable of a variety of tones but cannot play a tune, so it is used primarily for signals in worship or warfare. The ram's horn was softened in hot water, then bent and flattened to produce its distinctive shape. In warfare signaling was done in various ways. Fire signals were common both along garrison lines as well as in the open field. Basic commands were at times communicated by upraised staff or javelin. Trumpet signals are attested in Egypt in the Late Bronze Age (this time period) in both military and religious contexts. A preset code would include some combination of long and short blasts.

6:20. city walls. The fortification techniques developed in the Middle Bronze period and continuing in use in the Late Bronze included steep earthen slopes (some reaching fifty feet) at the foundation of the walls and a ditch around the outside dug to bedrock. These features would both hamper the approach of siege machines and prevent tunneling. The walls, made of mudbrick on stone foundations, were ten to twenty-five feet wide and perhaps thirty feet high. Hittite texts preserve an account where in similar fashion a deity carried out retributive justice by causing walls (wooden in this case) to fall down.

6:21-24. devoted to the Lord *(ḥerem).* The "ban" is sometimes chosen as the English word to represent the concept of total destruction required of the Israelites. Just as there were some types of sacrifices that belonged entirely to the Lord while others were shared by priest and offerer, so some plunder was set aside as belonging solely to the Lord. Just as the whole burnt offering was entirely consumed on the altar, so the ban mandated total destruction. Since the warfare was commanded by Yahweh and represented his judgment on the Canaanites, the Israelites were on a divine mission with Yahweh as their commander. Since it was his war, not theirs, and he was the victor, the spoil belonged to him. Although the divine warrior motif occurs throughout the ancient Near East, the *ḥerem* concept is more limited—the only other occurrence of the term is in the Moabite Mesha inscription, but the idea of total destruction is also in the Hittite material. Some sites, such as Gezer, feature a distinct burn layer in association with the Late Bronze period. Under siege conditions sanitation is at its worst and disease is often rampant. The practice of burning everything after the defeat of a city thus also had an element of health connected to it. The best analogy for us to understand *ḥerem* is to think in terms of radiation. A nuclear explosion would destroy many things and irradiate much more. The abhorrence and caution with which we would respond to that which has been irradiated is similar to what is expected of the Israelites regarding things under the ban. If radiation were personified, one could understand that once something was given over to it, it was irredeemable. It was this condition that Achan exposed himself to by taking things under the ban.

6:21. the edge of the sword. The expression used in the Bible referring to the "mouth" or "edge" of the sword reflects the fact that at this time period swords were not straight with two edges. The blade was straight coming out of the haft, but the sharp edge was along the outer side of a curved, sickle-shaped section. This was not a stabbing but a striking weapon.

6:26. curse on rebuilding. Assyrian inscriptions commonly express an intention that a destroyed city never be rebuilt, but not accompanied with an oath as here. In a Hittite document concerning the conquest of Hattusha early in the second millennium, Anitta pronounces a curse on any king who would rebuild the city.

6:26. connection of building and losing children. See 1 Kings 16:34. It used to be thought that the dedication of a house would feature human sacrifice of a child from the family. This was used to explain the incidence of skeletal remains of children buried under the thresholds of houses. This interpretation has been largely abandoned, and some researchers now see a connection between the curse and the disease schistosomiasis (bilharzia). This disease is caused by a blood fluke carried by snails of the type found in abundance at Jericho. It infects the urinary tract and affects fertility and child mortality.

7:1-26
The Results of Achan's Sin

7:1. devoted things. See comment on 6:21-24.

7:1. corporate responsibility. In the ancient Near East a person found his or her identity within the group. Integration and interdependence were important values, and the group was bound together as a unit. As a result, individual behavior would not be viewed in isolation from the group. When one Israelite sinned, the group shared the responsibility. In addition to reflecting the perspective of society, this corporate responsibility was also a result of the covenant relationship that Israel had with the Lord. The law included many guidelines for individual behavior and when individual violations occurred the benefits of the covenant were in jeopardy for all Israel.

7:2. Ai. The city of Ai is usually identified with the site et-Tell, a twenty-seven-acre tell located nine miles west-northwest of Jericho, about ten miles north of Jerusalem. The major occupation of the site was during the third millennium (Early Bronze), and it was destroyed well before the time of the patriarchs. This site shows no further sign of occupation until a very small village (covering about six acres) was established there sometime after 1200 B.C., using what remained of the Early Bronze walls for defense. There is therefore no indication that this site was occupied during any of the potential periods of the conquest. This archaeological record has made some doubt the authenticity of the biblical record, while others doubt whether this is truly the city of Ai. Over the last century many alternative sites have been and continue to be considered, but no strong candidates have yet emerged.

7:2. Beth Aven. The town of Beth Aven has not been identified with any certainty. The way it is introduced in the texts suggests it was more prominent than Ai. Tell Maryam is often considered the prime candidate. It has not been excavated, but surveys have turned up Iron Age remains. Hosea is thought to use Beth Aven as an alternate name for Bethel (4:15; 5:8; 10:5).

7:2. Bethel. See comment on 8:9.

7:5. stone quarries. Some translations have the Israelites fleeing to the stone quarries (NIV; the word means "breaks"; others render it a place name, Shebarim). Stone quarries were common in the area, but this is not the usual word for quarries. One archaeologist (Z. Zevit) has suggested that the word should be translated "ruins," referring to the ruins of the Early Bronze city wall that lay further down the slope from this smaller Late Bronze settlement. The text does not say the men of Ai chased the Israelites *from* in front of the gate (though many translations do); they chased them "past the gate to the ruins." In this case, the gate may also be the Wadi gate from the Early Bronze city.

7:6. mourning. Mourning practices generally included tearing one's robe, weeping, putting dust and ashes in one's hair, and wearing sackcloth. Sackcloth is made of goat or camel hair and was coarse and uncomfortable. In many cases the sackcloth was only a loin covering. The official period of mourning was thirty days, but it could continue as long as the mourner chose to continue to grieve.

7:7-8. Amorites and Canaanites. The Amorites and Canaanites are the main inhabitants of the land. For ethnic background see the comment on 3:10; for political background, see comment on 5:1.

7:13. consecration. Consecration consisted of steps taken to make oneself ritually pure. This process primarily entailed washing and avoiding contact with objects that would render one unclean. It typically preceded ritual action. For Israel this included sacrifices, festivals or procedures in which Yahweh was involved, such as war and oracular procedures.

7:14-18. oracular selection procedure. The text does not mention the mechanism by which groups or individuals are singled out, though some translations supply "by lot." In Israel, however, lots were typically used when a random quality was desired. Here, in contrast, they are seeking an oracle in which a question is put to God in order to receive divine guidance or information (see comment on Gen 24:12-21). The presentation of a tribe or clan before the Lord would pose the question, "Is the guilty party in this group?" If a process is used similar to the Urim and Thummim (see comment on Ex 28:30), an answer would only be given divine standing if it defied the odds (for instance, if the same results were repeated several times). In the ancient Near East lots were sometimes used to receive oracles, though in most cases oracles were pursued through divination (such as examining the entrails of a sacrificed animal for favorable or unfavorable indications). In light of the consecration that precedes the process, it is possible that there is no mechanism but rather direct communication from Yahweh.

7:21. Achan's plunder. The precious metals from the Canaanite cities had been assigned to the sanctuary, so Achan was taking what properly belonged to the Lord. There are five or six pounds of silver and about a pound and a half ingot of gold in Achan's treasure trove. That represents what it would take the average worker a lifetime to earn. The Babylonian robe of this period was fringed and draped over one shoulder, with the edge carried over the arm.

7:25. stoning as execution. Stoning is a communal form of execution and the most commonly mentioned form of execution in the Bible. It is used to punish crimes against the entire community that constitute violations of the covenant (apostasy, Lev 20:2; sorcery, Lev 20:27) and requires all those persons who have been offended to participate. Because it cannot be determined which individual's stone caused the death of the condemned, no one person must bear the guilt for that death. Mesopotamian texts do not mention stoning but employ drowning, impalement, beheading and burning as forms of execution.

7:25. entire family executed. The punishment

for violation of the ban was to be put under the ban. The ban required the obliteration of the family line. The law had forbidden children to be punished for the sins of their parents (Deut 24:16), but that was intended to curtail some very specific practices. For instance, in Hammurabi's laws if a man brought about the death of another man's son, the penalty would be that the perpetrator's son would be put to death. Another example would be where blood vengeance would extend its range to the family of a murderer. The law was intended to put restrictions on the civil law system. This incident is an entirely different category in that God is personally judging the case. Obliteration of the family line was a punishment only God could dole out.

7:26. Valley of Achor. The identification of the Valley of Achor is uncertain. One suggestion is el-Buqeia in the Judean desert about ten miles southeast of Jerusalem, running north-south just west of Qumran. Unfortunately this seems too far from Jericho in the wrong direction to suit. The other occurrences of Achor locate it on the border between Judah and Benjamin (see 15:7). El-Buqeia is too far south for that, but something in the vicinity of Jericho/Ai/Gilgal (such as Wadi Nu'eima) would be too far north.

8:1-29

Defeat of Ai

8:1. Ai. See comment on 7:2.

8:2. ambush. The strategies employed by Israel often fall into the category of indirect warfare, characterized by ambush, pretend retreats, decoys, infiltration and the like, rather than lengthy siege or pitched battle. Such tactics are known from the ancient Near East in the Mari texts (eighteenth century), the Egyptian Papyrus Anastasi (thirteenth century) and a Middle Assyrian text (tenth century).

8:3. thirty thousand fighting men. Thirty thousand appears an exorbitant number to send against a town that would probably not have more than a few hundred soldiers. It certainly is impractical for a successful ambush. Verse 25 translates that twelve thousand people of Ai were killed. Ai is presented as a small town with few men (7:3). If it was smaller than Jericho, its entire population would be less than a thousand. All of this suggests that the word translated "thousand" in these passages should be rendered by its alternate meaning, "companies" or "divisions." Rather than a specified number, it has been suggested that each clan supplied a division with the number varying dependent on the size of the clan. Later in history these companies were standardized as having a thousand, but here there may be as few as ten in a division. In the first attack on Ai in 7:4-5 there were three "thousand" sent and they treated it as a massacre when thirty-six were killed. In the Amarna letters the kings of the city states would beg Egypt for ten or twelve soldiers to reinforce their armies. For difficulties with the number of the Israelites see comment on Exodus 12:37. For further discussion of large numbers see comments on 2 Chronicles 11:1; 13:2-20.

8:9. Bethel. Bethel is just listed as a location nearby until verse 17, when the men of Bethel become involved in the chase. There is no mention of destroying the city of Bethel, though the king is mentioned as defeated in 12:16. In Judges 1 it comes under specific attack by the tribes of Joseph. Bethel is usually identified with Beitin just over 10 miles north of Jerusalem, about a mile and a half west of et-Tell, the traditional site of Ai. There was a major fortified city on the site during the Middle Bronze Age that was destroyed in the mid-sixteenth century. It was grandly rebuilt in the Late Bronze age, and there is evidence of two destructions during that period (1550-1200). Some have contested whether Beitin is Bethel, because it has been difficult to find a satisfactory adjoining site for Ai (see comment on 7:2). The main alternative is Bireh, a mile or two south of Beitin.

8:9-13. battle positions. The ten-mile march by the ambush contingent was done under the cover of darkness. They secured a position on the far side of the city (the west; Jericho and Gilgal were east of Ai). The main army marched west the next morning through the Wadi el-Asas that led them to a camp in the valley or on the slope of the hill to the north of Ai. When the soldiers of Ai came out, the Israelite army fled east, back toward their base, allowing the ambush to unfold.

8:18. javelin. Javelins of Joshua's time had a metal head attached to a short wooden shaft. Later javelins were thrown with the aid of a loop to make them spin, giving greater distance and accuracy, but these are unknown in this period. Many have suggested that the weapon described in this text is not a javelin but the well-known sickle sword (for description see the comment on 6:21).

8:25. twelve thousand killed. Probably referring to twelve divisions. See note at 8:3.

8:28. burning the city. The site of et-Tell shows no indication of destruction by fire in the Late Bronze period, nor was the Iron Age settlement destroyed by fire. See discussion of the archaeological problems with Ai at 7:2.

8:29. hanging the king. In 10:26 the kings were executed first, then hung, suggesting that this was not a manner of execution but a treatment of the corpse (see 2 Sam 21:12 compared with 1 Sam 31:10). Many believe it refers to impalement on a gibbet, as was known to be practiced later by the Assyrians and Persians. Exposing the corpse was also occasionally practiced by the Egyptians. It represented a final humiliation and a desecration (see Is 14:19-20; Jer 7:33; 8:1-3), for most ancient peoples believed that proper, timely burial affected the quality of the afterlife. See comment on 1 Kings 16:4. In the Gilgamesh Epic Enkidu, returned from the netherworld, reports to Gilgamesh that the one who died unburied has no rest and that the one who has no living relatives to take care of him can only eat what is thrown into the street. A Babylonian curse relates burial to the uniting of the spirit of the dead with loved ones. We know that even Israelites believed that proper burial affected one's afterlife because they, like their neighbors, buried their loved ones with the provisions that would serve them in the afterlife; most often pottery vessels (filled with food) and jewelry (to ward off evil), with tools and personal items sometimes added.

8:29. raising a cairn. Cairn burials were common in Palestine around 2000 B.C., mostly in the southern areas of the Negev and the Sinai, which are dry and rocky. Canaanite burials of this period featured multiple-use tombs in which whole families would be buried together in rock-cut chambers at the foot of vertical shafts. The tombs would typically be provided with all of the accessories of daily life.

8:30-35
Covenant Renewal at Ebal

8:30. function of altar. It appears that this altar was not intended to be a permanent installation (another reason to use fieldstones) but was set up for the purposes of the celebration ceremonies of this occasion. It is specifically burnt offerings and fellowship offerings (see comment on Lev 3) that are offered here—no purification or reparation offerings.

8:30-31. modern find on Ebal. Some archaeologists believe that the remains of the altar on Mount Ebal have been found. It is a structure on one of the peaks of the mountain about twenty-five by thirty-five feet, with walls about five feet thick and nine feet high made of fieldstones. The fill is dirt and ashes, and a ramp leads up to the top. The structure is surrounded by a courtyard, and animal bones were found at the site. Pottery on the site goes back to 1200 B.C.

8:31. altar built with fieldstones; no iron tool. These instructions parallel those found in Exodus 20:25. Iron tools were used for dressing the stone—shaping it to make a sturdier structure. Altars of dressed stone have been found in Judah (the best example at Beersheba). This altar was not supposed to be attached to a sanctuary, and perhaps the use of unhewn stone helped keep that distinction.

8:32. law on monumental stones. Hammurabi's laws were inscribed on a diorite stele eight feet tall and displayed publicly for all to see and consult. Royal inscriptions often were placed in prominent locations. Memorial inscriptions in our culture are used on tombstones, cornerstones of buildings and at various historical sites. The purpose in these cases is for people to see, take note and remember. Treaty documents in the Near East, in contrast, were often stationed in holy places that were not accessible to the public. Here the purpose was to put the agreement in writing before the gods in whose name the agreement had been sworn. For information regarding stones serving as boundary markers and land grant documents, see comment on 1 Samuel 7:12.

8:34. public reading. In cultures where many people were illiterate and where virtually no one would have possessed written materials (other than basic family documents) in their homes, the public reading of documents that were of religious, cultural or political significance was important. Several Hittite treaties contain clauses requiring periodic public reading of the document—one stipulates three times a year, while others are less specific, "always and constantly."

9:1-27
The Gibeonite Agreement

9:1. the political situation in the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 B.C.). The Late Bronze Age was a period of political stalemate among major international powers. Egypt exercised control over Palestine for most of the period and often desired to extend its control into Syria, where important land and sea trade routes merged. A second major power in the region was the Hurrian coalition known as Mitanni that occupied a broad arc of the northern region between the Tigris and the Mediterranean. As Mitanni slid into decline and eventually broke up (around 1350), it was replaced by a growing Assyrian power along the upper Tigris, extending eventually to the Euphrates. The Hittite Empire took advantage of the decline of Mitanni to ex-

tend its control south from Anatolia and competed with Egypt for control of the important corridor between the seaports of Phoenicia and the river trade of the Euphrates. All during this time southern Babylonia was under the control of the Kassites. These major power struggles all left the petty city-states of Palestine little hope of achieving political significance. The region was nevertheless strategically important, providing administrative and supply garrisons for Egypt and continuing as the only option for overland trade routes into and out of Egypt.

9:1. the Amarna letters. The Amarna letters archive contains nearly four hundred letters written primarily from Canaanite city-state kings to Egyptian pharaohs Amenhotep III and Akhenaten during the first half of the fourteenth century B.C. They were discovered at Tell el-Amarna, the site of Akhenaten's capital city along the upper Nile, almost two hundred miles south of Cairo. The letters offer the best insight available into the political situation of the time. The petty kings of Canaan are little worried by all of the international struggles described in the previous comment. They are much more concerned with the threat posed by the Habiru (see next comment), against whom they seek Egyptian aid. In these texts they show their anxiety that various of the leading kings in the area may defect and align themselves with the Habiru. Such realignment would be a great temptation in light of the neglect that characterized Egypt in this period. This same concern can be understood in the context of the Israelite conquest. The city-state kings would have been very distraught at the thought of this enemy gaining control of a fortified city.

9:1. Habiru. *Habiru/Apiru* is a term used to describe dispossessed peoples in over 250 texts spanning the second millennium and ranging from Egypt to Anatolia to east of the Tigris. In many of the Amarna letters the kings of Canaan are appealing to Egypt to send more troops to help them against the Habiru, who are stirring up trouble. Certainly the Israelites would have been counted among the Habiru, and it is possible that the term *Hebrew,* in some of its uses, developed from the term *Habiru* (see comments on Gen 14:13 and Ex 21:2). The wide geographical region in which the Habiru occur in the first half of the second millennium, when Israel is in Egypt, makes it impossible to associate the Habiru exclusively with the Israelites.

9:3. Gibeon. The city of Gibeon is usually identified with the modern el-Jib, located six miles northwest of Jerusalem and about seven miles southwest of Ai. The excavations there have discovered a double water system constructed as early as the Judges period. The earlier of the two systems involved cutting straight down through the limestone some thirty-five feet (descended by a stairway spiraling down the wall) to a tunnel, allowing the inhabitants of the city to have access to spring waters at the base of the mound. A second, later system provided a stepped tunnel leading to another (more reliable) spring. This water system is strong evidence that the site is Gibeon, because of the well-known "pool of Gibeon" (see 2 Sam 2:13). The identification is further confirmed by jar handles found at the site with the city's name inscribed on them (although it should be noted that jar handles with other cities' names stamped on them were found as well, explained by the city's major industry: wine export). Little has been found that can be dated to the period of the conquest, but the excavations (done in the late fifties) covered a very limited area on the site. The city of Gibeon is noted in few extrabiblical sources. Pharaoh Sheshonk I (late tenth century B.C.) added Gibeon to a list of captured (or visited) towns during a successful military campaign into Palestine.

9:3. strategy of a ruse. Though there are no examples of a ruse of this exact nature, the literature contains numerous examples of dishonesty and deception in the course of treaty making in the ancient world.

9:7. Hivites. The Hivites are often confused or interchanged with the Horites, and together they are both identified as Hurrians. The Hurrians were Indo-European tribes that had united in the political kingdom of Mitanni from about 1500-1350 B.C. (see comment on 9:1 on the political situation). Some of the correspondence between the Hurrians of Mitanni and the Egyptians is preserved in the Amarna archives. The Hurrians were one of the principal ethnic groups in the Hittite Empire as well as the major ethnic group in the town of Nuzi. In Egyptian documents of this period, Canaan is often referred to as the land of Hurru.

9:10. Sihon and Og. There is no historical information on Sihon and Og outside of the Bible. They are the two Amorite kings who were defeated by the Israelites in Transjordan. For more information see the comments on Numbers 21:21-35.

9:10. Ashtaroth. Ashtaroth is identified here as the capital city of Bashan. It is mentioned prominently in Egyptian texts of this period, the Amarna letters (as ruled by Ayyab) and later Assyrian texts, and some think it occurs in a text from Ugarit as a place where the god El reigns. Known today as Tell 'Ashtarah, it is located on the Yarmuk River about twenty-

five miles east of the Sea of Galilee.

9:14. inquiring of the Lord. Inquiring of the Lord was done through the use of oracles, which, in Israel, usually used a mechanism such as the Urim and Thummim. See comment on 7:14-18.

9:17. cities of Gibeon. Two of the three cities of Gibeon can be identified with some confidence. Kephirah is modern Khirbet el-Kefireh, five or six miles west and a bit south of Gibeon. Kiriath-Jearim, a few miles south of Kephireh, is Tell el-Azhar. Beeroth is generally looked for north of Kephireh toward the Bethel/Ai area, perhaps at el-Bireh or Nebi Samwil.

9:18. the binding nature of oaths. In a culture where the gods were considered active and powerful and were feared, oaths took on a very serious nature. Vows could be mitigated (Lev 27; Num 30), but oaths bound those who had sworn them with the threat of divine vengeance. If an oath was not kept, the invoked deity's name was being held as worthless and powerless. The fourteenth-century Hittite king Murshili saw war and plague as the result of broken treaties that had been sealed by oaths. That Joshua was right to treat this oath as sacred is clear from 2 Samuel 21, where this same oath was broken with dire consequences.

9:26. woodcutters and watercarriers. For the sacrificial fires to be maintained and the purifying waters to be constantly replenished, much labor was involved. This task of providing wood and water was delegated to the Gibeonites. The menial nature of the work gave them permanent lowerclass status in the servitude they had chosen.

10:1-43

The Defeat of the Southern Coalition

10:1. Adoni-Zedek. This name is quite similar to the king of Jerusalem in Genesis 14, Melchizedek (Melchi = "my king"; adoni = "my lord"). There are no extrabiblical texts that offer information about him.

10:1. Jerusalem in the Amarna texts. There are six letters in the Amarna texts (see comment on 9:1) from Abdi-Heba, king of Jerusalem, to the pharaoh requesting military support. He warns that Egyptian control in the area is in jeopardy, both from the Habiru as well as from the other city-state kings, who are less than loyal and are taking advantage of Egypt's unresponsiveness. Jerusalem is one of the key cities in the region and is competing with Shechem for control of the hill country.

10:1. Late Bronze Age remains in Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem in this period occupied only the north-south ridge covering about ten acres that runs south of the modern city walls. The population would not have exceeded one thousand. The top of the ridge is only about four hundred feet
wide and about fifteen hundred feet long. Remains from the Late Bronze period are sparse and confined to area G at the northeastern rim of the ridge. The finds there include the foundations of an identified structure and a massive stone terrace.

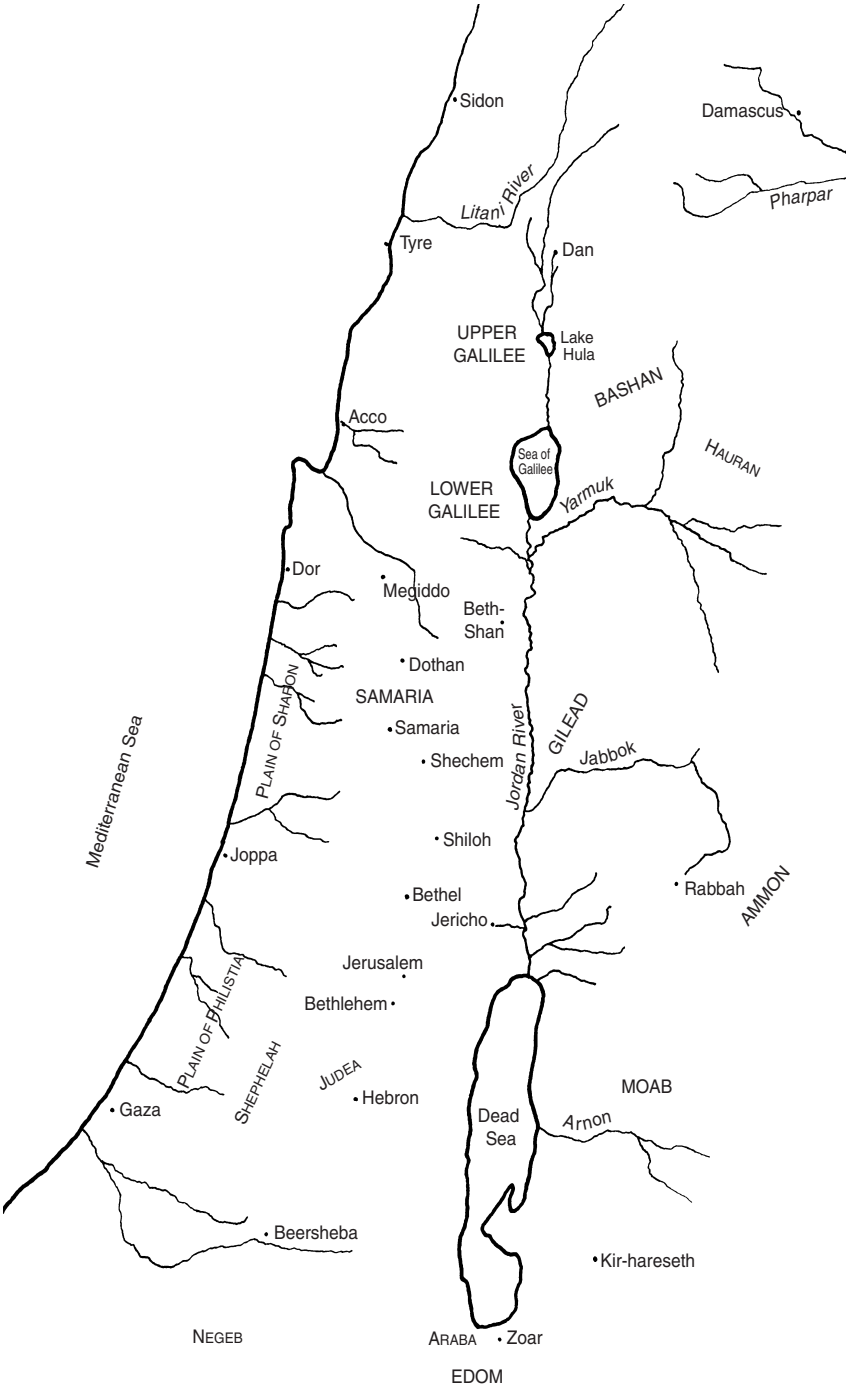
10:2. strategic location of Gibeon. One of the major passes from the hill country to the plains, from the Beth Horon pass into the Valley of Aijalon, was in the area controlled by Gibeon. With Jericho, Ai and Bethel already defeated, that gave Israel control of the primary lateral route across Palestine (from the Jordan rift to the coast).

10:2 royal cities. Royal cities would be the administrative centers of larger districts. The Egyptians had a number of cities during the Amarna period where their governors were housed, such as Gaza and Beth Shan. Cities like Shechem and Hazor could also have been considered royal cities because of the large areas they controlled. Gibeon's strategic location and fortifications give it the potential to be such a city.

10:3. the allies: Hoham, Piram, Japhia and Debir. None of these are known from contemporary sources, but all are the types of names well documented in this period. Compare, for instance, the name Japhia to the king of Beirut in the Amarna texts, Yapa'-Hadda. Names often made a statement about deity; Yapa'-Hadda means (the god) Hadda has appeared. Such names were often shortened by dropping the god's name. Even closer is the name of the king of Gezer in the Amarna texts, Yapahu.

10:3. Hebron. Tell Hebron is the site of a twelve-acre ancient city about twenty miles south of Jerusalem. Excavators have found no evidence of Late Bronze Age occupation, and it is not named in the Amarna texts, but Egyptian itineraries of Rameses II (thirteenth century) list Hebron among the cities of the region. For more information see comments on Genesis 13:18 and Numbers 13:22.

10:3. Jarmuth. Jarmuth is identified with Khirbet el-Yarmuk, about fifteen miles southwest of Jerusalem. The four-acre acropolis was occupied by a Late Bronze Age city strategically located between the Elah and Sorek valleys, the two passageways from the Shephelah (low hills between the hill country and the coastal



Map 2. Map of Major Cities and Regions of Palestine

plains) to the cities of the coast.

10:3. Lachish. Located about thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem, Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) is one of the major cities of the Shephelah, covering some thirty acres. Along with Hebron it guarded the passage into the hill country. In the Amarna texts Abdi-Heba of Jerusalem claims that Lachish, along with Gezer and Ashkelon, had delivered provisions to the Habiru (tribute or alliance?). Another letter indicates that the Habiru had killed the king of Lachish, Zimredda. Other kings mentioned in the texts are Shipti-Balu and Yabni-Ilu. There are five letters in the archive from the kings of Lachish. Excavations at the site have uncovered a Middle Bronze Age city with impressive fortifications destroyed by fire at the end of that period (middle 1500s). The Late Bronze occupation of the Amarna period established a sizable though probably unfortified city. There is no evidence of destruction during this period (and the biblical text suggests none). There was a large temple on the site throughout this period.

10:3. Eglon. Tell Aitun, about seven miles southeast of Lachish between Lachish and Hebron, is most likely the site of Eglon. There is no mention of this city in extrabiblical sources, and the site has not been excavated.

10:5. Amorites. See comment on 5:1.

10:6. Gilgal. Location is unknown; see comment on 4:19.

10:9. march from Gilgal to Gibeon. Since the location of Gilgal is unknown, it is difficult to judge the length of the Israelites' march. Jericho to Gibeon is about fifteen miles, so the march certainly would not exceed twenty miles and may be as short as five miles.

10:10. Beth Horon, Azekah, Makkedah. The Beth Horon pass is guarded by the twin cities of Beth Horon: Upper Beth Horon, Beit Ur el-Foqa (about two miles northwest of Gibeon), and Lower Beth Horon, Beit Ur et-Tahta (about a mile and a half further to the northwest, and about a thousand feet lower in elevation). It has been suggested that this is the city referred to as Bit Ninurta in the Amarna letters. The pass leads into the Aijalon Valley (referred to in the Amarna texts as Ayyaluna), the major route from the hill country to the coastal plains. Once in the Aijalon Valley the Amorites turned south, crossing the Sorek Valley heading southeast about twelve miles to Azekah (about a mile west of Jarmuth) overlooking the Elah Valley. From there they continued south about fourteen more miles to Makkedah. This route runs along the flanks between the hill country and the Shephelah. Makkedah is identified as Khirbet el-Qom, about halfway between Lachish and Hebron and only about three miles northeast of Eglon, so this is centrally located to several of the cities of the coalition. Limited excavation has been done at the site, with no Late Bronze finds reported. Azekah is Tell Zakariya, where there is evidence of a Canaanite settlement but little light shed on that level from archaeology.

10:11. hailstones. The occurrence of hailstones as divine judgment in conquest accounts is not unique. In a letter to his god (Assur), Sargon II of Assyria reports that in his campaign against Urartu (714 B.C.) the god Adad stormed against his enemies with "stones from heaven" and so annihilated them. This battle included a coalition that fled through the passes and valleys pursued by Sargon, with the enemy king hiding at last in the clefts of his mountain.

10:12. Gibeon and Aijalon. The relative positions of the sun and moon are important to the interpretation of this passage. Gibeon is east and Aijalon is west, suggesting that the sun is rising and the moon is setting. During the phase of the full moon, the moon sets in the west shortly after the sun rises in the east.

10:12-13. sun and moon as omens. In the ancient Near East the months were not standardized in length but varied according to the phases of the moon. This lunar calendar was then periodically adjusted to the solar year so as to retain the relationship of months with the seasons. The beginning of a month was calculated by the first appearance of the new moon. The full moon came in the middle of the month and was identified by the fact that the moon set just minutes after the sun rose. The day of the month on which the full moon occurred served as an indicator of how many days the month would have. It was considered a good omen if the full moon came on the fourteenth day of the month, because then the new crescent would be seen on the thirtieth day and the month would be the "right" length and all would be in harmony. If "opposition" (moon and sun simultaneously on opposite horizons) occurred on the fourteenth, it was considered to be a "full-length" month made up of full-length days. Thus days were viewed as longer or shorter based on the way the month was going. Verse 13 reports that the sun and moon did not behave as they would have on a full-length day. As a result of these beliefs, the horizon was observed very carefully in the middle section of the month, hoping for this opposition of sun and moon to come on the propitious day (fourteenth). Opposition on the wrong day was believed to be

an omen of all sorts of disaster, including military defeat and overthrow of cities. In this way the movements of the sun and the moon became monthly omens of good fortune or ill. In the ancient Near East great significance was attached to these omens and they were often used to determine whether battle should be done on a particular day or not. As noted in the above comment on Gibeon and Aijalon, the positions reported in Joshua for the sun and moon suggest that it is near sunrise in the full moon phase.

10:12-13. terminology in the celestial omens. The Mesopotamian celestial omens use verbs like *wait, stand* and *stop* to record the relative movements and positions of the celestial bodies. When the moon or sun do not wait, the moon sinks over the horizon before the sun rises and no opposition occurs. When the moon and sun wait or stand, it indicates that the opposition does occur for the determination of the full moon day. The omens in the series known as Enuma Anu Enlil often speak of changing velocities of the moon in its course to effect or avoid opposition with the sun. Likewise in verse 13 the text here reports that the sun did not hurry but instead stood in its section of the sky. It should be noted that the text does not suggest the astronomical phenomena were unique, but instead, verse 14 says plainly that what was unique was the Lord accepting a battle strategy from a man ("the Lord listened to a man"). A Mesopotamian lamentation (first millennium) shows this same type of terminology for divine judgment when it speaks of the heavens rumbling, the earth shaking, the sun lying at the horizon, the moon stopping in the sky and evil storms sweeping through the land. Joshua's knowledge of the Amorites' dependence on omens may have led him to ask the Lord for one that he knew would deflate their morale—for the opposition to occur on an unpropitious day.

10:13. Book of Jashar. It is inferred that the Book of Jashar contained ancient poetic accounts of heroic deeds (the only other reference to it is in 2 Sam 1:18). The title Jashar could be the adjective *upright* or a form of the Hebrew verb *sing*. It has not been preserved.

10:16-43. conquest narratives in the ancient Near East. Egyptian war diaries (day books) record military campaigns in much the same way that Joshua does. The combination of longer narratives with short reports using standard, repeated phrases is attested in the records of Thutmose III. Studies of Hittite and Assyrian campaign reports also demonstrate much stylistic similarity. The claims that deity has commissioned the campaign and intervened to bring victory, as well as the reports of pursuing, subduing and conquering to bring about complete and utter defeat of the enemy are all common elements. This suggests that the biblical author was well aware of ancient Near Eastern scribal style and practice.

10:19. prevent reaching cities. Makkedah is only a few miles from each of the cities of Lachish, Eglon and Hebron. Joshua would rather prevent the kings from reaching their cities, where they could rally a defense. Without leadership the cities would be easier to conquer.

10:24. foot on the neck symbolism. The Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (thirteenth century) "puts his foot on the neck of" individual conquered kings as well as (symbolically) on that of conquered lands, clarifying that they have thus become his footstool. As a result the symbolism of making one's enemies their footstool (Ps 110:1) can be related to the action here.

10:26. exposure of the corpses. The kings were executed first, then hung, suggesting that this was not a manner of execution but a treatment of the corpse (see 2 Sam 21:12 compared with 1 Sam 31:10). Many believe it refers to impalement on a gibbet as was known to be practiced later by the Assyrians and Persians. Exposing the corpse was also occasionally practiced by the Egyptians. It represented a final humiliation and a desecration (see Is 14:19-20; Jer 7:33; 8:1-3), for most ancient peoples believed that proper, timely burial affected the quality of the afterlife (see comment on 8:29).

10:29. Libnah. The town of Libnah, on the way from Makkedah to Lachish, is usually identified with Tell Bornat, strategically located by the Wadi Zeita guarding the best route to Hebron from the coast. There have been no excavations there, but surveys have turned up both Late Bronze and Iron Age evidence on the site. Others identify it with a site five miles further east, Khirbet Tell el-Beida (nine miles northeast of Lachish).

10:33. Gezer. Gezer, modern Tell Jezer, is a thirty-three-acre mound at the west end of the Valley of Aijalon, some twenty-five or thirty miles north of the area of concentration. Its army is defeated, but the city is not conquered in this campaign (see 16:10). It is one of the cities listed as conquered by Pharaoh Merenptah and was one of the most important cities in Canaan in the Amarna texts, where there are ten letters to the pharaoh from its king, Yapahu. Extensive excavations have been carried out at the site. A heavily fortified Middle

Bronze city was destroyed by fire at the end of that period (perhaps the destruction claimed by Thutmose III, fifteenth century). The Late Bronze city was surrounded by a wall that was twelve or fourteen feet wide and over fifteen feet high.

10:33. Horam. Horam, king of Gezer, is not known from any other texts of the period, though it is a typical West Semitic name.

10:36. destruction of Hebron. For general information about Hebron see comment on 10:3. Since there has been no occupation level from the Late Bronze Age uncovered at Hebron, archaeology can shed little light on the destruction by Joshua and the Israelites. Since Hebron is the site of a modern town, there are many areas that are not available for excavation.

10:38. Debir. Debir is Khirbet Rabud, a fifteen-acre site about eight miles southwest of Hebron. A fortified Canaanite city in the Late Bronze Age, it has a commanding location along the Wadi Hebron that goes from Beersheba to Hebron. Excavation has been limited to two trenches, so there is not much information concerning the destruction by Joshua.

10:40. region and extent of conquest. The cities that have been described in this passage are all in the southern hill country and the southern Shephelah. Cities such as Gezer and Jerusalem are not mentioned as being attacked. The description given in the verse circumscribes this region. Since the kings who controlled the region had been defeated, the territory was now considered to belong to the Israelites. The use of hyperbole in describing the total nature of the destruction is common in conquest accounts. The text itself demonstrates that it is hyperbole in Joshua 15:13-16, where inhabitants of Hebron and Debir are mentioned. This type of hyperbole is used in reference to Israel in the Merenptah Inscription, where it is claimed that there are no descendants of Israel remaining, and in the Mesha Inscription, where Israel is described as utterly perished forever. Such statements are the rhetoric indicative of military victory and can be found in Hittite, Egyptian and Assyrian accounts of campaigns. This does not suggest the account is inaccurate, deceptive or misleading, for any reader would have recognized this well-known rhetorical style for reporting the results of battle.

10:41. Kadesh-barnea to Gaza. Kadesh- barnea represents the border between the Negev section of the promised land and the Sinai wilderness. Gaza (about sixty miles directly north) represents the border between Palestine and Egyptian territories in the Sinai along the coast of the Mediterranean. Together these serve as the southwestern border of the land.

10:41. Goshen to Gibeon. Goshen does not refer to the territory by the same name in the delta region of Egypt but to an area in the hill country of Judah, as indicated by 11:16 and 15:51, where it stands with the southernmost sites in the hill country. Gibeon represents the northernmost acquisitions of the southern campaign. Together these serve as the eastern border of the territories conquered in this campaign.

11:1-15
The Defeat of the Northern Coalition

11:1. Jabin. This may be another name that has been shortened by dropping the god's name (see comment on 10:3 on the allies). A similar name is found in the Amarna texts for the king of Lachish, whose name is Yabni-Ilu ("[the god] Il created"). In the Mari texts (eighteenth century B.C.) the king of Hazor is named Yabni-Addu ("[the god] Adad created"). The name may also be referred to on an itinerary list from Rameses II, where Ibni is named as the king of Qishon. Qishon is possibly the same as Qedesh, where Deborah and Barak fight against a king named Jabin also connected to Hazor (Judg 4:1-13).

11:1. Hazor. Hazor (Tell el-Qedah) is located about ten miles north of the Sea of Galilee along the major trade routes of the region. The upper city on top of the tell was about 25 acres, while the lower city covered another 175 acres, making it one of the largest cities in the fertile crescent. The tell was about 140 feet high. The Middle Bronze wall around the upper city was of mudbrick and was 23 feet wide. Parts of the lower city were defended by a rampart wall and fosse (dry moat). Hazor is the most important city in the region in the Amarna texts. Hazor's king in the Amarna texts, Abdi-Tirshi, claims loyalty to Egypt, though he is named as one of those siding with the Habiru. He is also accused of taking cities from Ayyab, king of Ashtaroth (see comment on Deut 1).

11:1. Madon. Because of textual variations most have accepted that Madon is the same as Merom, mentioned here in verse 5 as the site of the coalition camp. The currently favored location for Merom is Tell Qarnei Hittin, about five miles west of Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee. Excavations at the site have discovered a Late Bronze fortress that was destroyed in the thirteenth century. Both Thutmose III of Egypt (fifteenth century) and Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria (eighth century) claim to have taken

Merom. The king, Jobab, is not known from any other sources.

11:1. Shimron. Shimron (Shamhuna of the Amarna texts, also in the itinerary of Thutmose III) is Khirbet Sammuniya at the western end of the Jezreel Valley, five miles west of Nazareth and seventeen miles southwest of Qarnei Hittin. There have been Late Bronze Age remains found at the site.

11:1. Acshaph. Acshaph (Akshapa of the Amarna texts, also in the itinerary of Thutmose III) has been tentatively identified as Tell Keisan, about twelve miles north-northwest of Shimron, about three miles from the Mediterranean coast on the plain of Acco. Papyrus Anastasi I (thirteenth century) confirms a location on the plain of Acco, though it leads one to expect a site a bit further south than Keisan. There have been Late Bronze Age remains found at the site.

11:2. regions. The description of the region in verse 2 is very uncertain, but it appears to cut a swath from Hazor and the Sea of Galilee on the east angling southwest through the Galilee region to the coast at Naphoth Dor. The latter is probably one of the names of the town of Dor (Khirbet el-Burj), which was an important seaport in the Late Bronze period. Kinnereth could refer either to the town on the northwest shore of the lake or to the lake itself. The Arabah is the Jordan rift valley.

11:3. people groups. For discussion of these people groups see the comment on 3:10.

11:3. Hivites in Mizpah. The region of Mizpah is the valley that comes south through the Huleh basin flanked on the east by Mount Hermon. The Hivites that lived in there were most likely Hurrians resettled from the Mitanni region. See comment on 9:7.

11:4. chariots in the Late Bronze Age. Canaanite chariots of the Late Bronze Age were light vehicles with almost no armor and wheels with four spokes. They were drawn by two horses. These are in contrast to the iron chariots of the next period, which were armored and featured six-spoke wheels to carry the extra weight.

11:5. Waters of Merom. If Merom is properly located at Qarnei Hittin (see comment on Madon at 11:1), then the Waters of Merom would be either a spring near the site or a river nearby. There is a wadi that runs through the valley north of the site.

11:6. hamstringing horses. Horses could not be mercifully shot as they are today, and the Israelites had no use for them and no means of caring for them; they certainly did not want their enemies to have continued use of them. Hamstringing involves cutting through the rear tarsal tendon in the hock joint (the equivalent of the human Achilles tendon).

11:8. path of pursuit. The path of pursuit appears to circumscribe the area known as Upper Galilee going west to the coast through the Turan Valley and the Valley of Iphtahel (the valleys north of Nazareth), then up the coast to the territory of Sidon, whose southern border is the east-west section of the Litani River (Misrephoth Maim?), east to where the Litani River swings from north-south into the Huleh Valley (the Valley of Mizpah, Marj 'Ayyun), then south again to Hazor to lay claim to the cities of the defeated kings.

11:11. destruction of Hazor. Hazor's upper and lower city were destroyed by fire in the thirteenth century B.C., and the lower city was never reoccupied. Solomon's building at the site was limited to the upper city.

11:12. royal cities. Royal cities would be the administrative centers of larger districts. The Egyptians had a number of such cities during the Amarna period where their governors lived, such as Gaza and Beth Shan. Cities like Shechem and Hazor could also have been considered royal cities because of the large areas they controlled. Gibeon's strategic location and fortifications give it the potential to be such a city.

11:13. built on their mounds. The mounds referred to here are the tells that characterize many ancient sites. A city was more defensible if it was built on elevated ground, but in addition to the natural mound, as each successive occupation level was destroyed or abandoned, the rubble was flattened for the reconstruction of the city. As one layer piled on top of another century after century, an artificial mound, or tell, rose higher and higher. Some sites have more than twenty occupation levels, and the task of the archaeologist is to peel through these layers to reconstruct the history of the site.

11:16—12:24

Summary of the Conquest

11:16-17. extent of the conquest. Verse 16 names the geographical areas of the land that covers all but the coast from Galilee in the north to the Negev in the south. Verse 17 uses two landmarks to designate the conquered territory. Mount Halak is near the Edomite border on the south and is generally identified as Jebel Halaq, along the Wadi Marra between Beersheba and the wilderness of Zin. Baal Gad is the northern boundary in the vicinity of Dan/Laish north of Hazor, sometimes identified as Banias, just east of Dan. The Valley of

Lebanon is often considered the same as the Valley of Mizpah (see comment on 11:8), joining the Litani Valley to the Huleh Valley. For the totality of the language see the comment on 10:40.

11:21. Anakites. The descendants of Anak are generally considered "giants" (see Num 13:21-33; Deut 2:10-11; 2 Sam 21:18-22), though the description "gigantic" may be a more appropriate line of thinking. There is no sure mention of the Anakites in other sources, though a possibility exists in the Egyptian execration texts. Additionally, the Egyptian letter on Papyrus Anastasi I (thirteenth century B.C.) describes fierce warriors in Canaan that are seven to nine feet tall.

11:21. Hebron, Debir, Anab. Hebron and Debir were identified in the comments on 10:3 and 10:38 respectively. Anab is also in the hill country of Judah and is probably Khirbet Unnab es-Seghir (Tell Rekhesh) about fifteen miles southwest of Hebron. It is referred to in Egyptian texts of the period, and surveys have identified Iron Age remains.

11:22. Gaza, Gath, Ashdod. Gaza, Gath and Ashdod become three of the five capital cities of the Philistine rulers along the southern coastal plains. Ashdod is about three miles from the coast, directly west of Jerusalem. It is mentioned in the Ugaritic texts, and excavations have demonstrated a large Late Bronze settlement on the site. Gaza is two miles from the coast, about twenty miles southwest of Ashdod. The modern city prevents significant excavation, but the city is well known in extrabiblical sources of the biblical period. Gath, Tell es-Safi, is further inland by the Elah Valley where it enters the Shephelah, five or six miles west of Azekah. There has been little modern excavation on the site.

12:1-24

List of Defeated Kings

12:1. Arnon to Hermon. The Transjordanian area said to be conquered stretched from the Arnon River (border between Moab and the kingdom of Sihon) in the south to Mount Hermon in the north (see Deut 3:8), a distance of about 130 air miles. This type of geographic range would be similar to the Dan to Beersheba designation in Palestine.

12:2-3. geographical area. Since the exact location of biblical Heshbon is still un-known (Tell Hesban does not contain materials related to the Conquest period), it can only be said to lie near the northern end of the Dead Sea in Moabite territory (see comment on Num 21:25-28). The eastern region of Sihon's rule ranges from Aroer, a border city located on the lip of the Arnon Valley and controlling the trade and travel route through that area, through the portion of Gilead south of the Jabbok River. Along the eastern side of the Jordan Valley, Sihon is said to rule north of the Jabbok as far as the Sea of Chinnereth (Sea of Galilee), and south as far as the northeastern shores of the Dead Sea, within the slopes of the Pisgah range, directly across from Jericho.

12:4. Rephaim. The Rephaim appear in the biblical text as either the spirits of the dead (Ps 88:10-12; Is 26:14) or, as in this text, as one of the original peoples in the Transjordanian area of Bashan (Gen 14:5; Deut 3:13). They were known for their tall stature (Num 13:33; 2 Sam 21:16) and, like the Anakim and Emim of Moab, were displaced by the invading Israelites. King Og, with his huge iron bed, is designated as the last of these people, another indicator of their demise during the Israelite conquest. The origin of the Rephaim's association with the dead may be found in the Ugaritic legends of ancient kings and heroes (see Is 14:9). Their ties to Transjordanian peoples may be remnants of Ugaritic lore about that area and may also be tied to the god or eponymous ancestor Rapah (see Deut 3:11, 13 for parenthetical information on the Rephaites).

12:4-5. geographical area. The compass of Og's territory stretches from the Mount Hermon range and Bashan in the northern section of the Transjordan to the Yarmuk River in the south. He reigns in Ashtaroth (Tell Ashtarah, twenty-five miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee) and Edrei (which is mentioned in the annals of the Egyptian pharaoh Thutmose III, lies on one of the Yarmuk tributaries and is located at Der'a, in modern Jordan). The eastern border of Og's domain is Salecah, possibly modern Salkhad (see comment on Deut 3:1-11).

12:7-8. geographical area. This list of conquered territory west of the Jordan River is a repetition of Joshua 11:16-17. Such repetition further strengthens the Israelite claim on the land, based on the covenant of Genesis 15:19-21, and provides the basis for its distribution to the tribes. The southern boundary is Mount Halak (modern Jebel Halaq) near the region of Edom, and the northern border is Baal-gad near the base of Mount Hermon on the border of Lebanon. Some additions are made in terms of geographical features, such as "the mountain slopes" (see Josh 10:40; possibly the decline toward the Shephelah or in

the Judean desert angling toward the Dead Sea) and "the desert," an area later occupied by the tribe of Judah (see Josh 15:61).

12:9-12. list of kings. The list of conquered kings roughly follows the sequence of the Israelite conquest in Joshua 6—11. Thus Jericho and Ai (beside Bethel, see Josh 7:2) appear in Joshua 6—8. The kings of the southern Canaanite coalition are listed in verses 10-12 and are found in Joshua 10:3, 23. Assyrian inscriptions occasionally list the lands and kings conquered by a particular king in the course of his campaign. Tiglath-Pileser I, for instance, tells of forty-two lands conquered over a period of five years. Shalmaneser I reports that he destroyed fifty-one cities.

12:13. Debir. See the comment describing Debir in Joshua 10:38.

12:13. Geder. The site of Geder is unknown. Some suggest that this is a scribal error for Gerar, a Canaanite city in the western Negev region. However, one of Solomon's officials is identified as a Gederite in 1 Chronicles 27:28, indicating that it is the actual name of a city. One suggestion is Khirbet Jedur about seven miles north of Hebron.

12:14. Hormah. With its name meaning "destruction," it is possible that this site name has been applied to several places. It appears to be located in the southern Negev region of Judah, but its exact location is still in dispute (among the suggestions are Tell el-Milh, seven miles northeast of Beersheba, and Tell Masos, seven miles east of Beersheba). The name is associated with Israel's initial defeat in Numbers 14:45 as well as a victory over Arad (Num 21:1-3).

12:14. Arad. The site of Tell 'Arad is eighteen miles east northeast of Beer-sheba in the southern Negev region. There are a number of small sites associated with this settlement, and it is possible that the Arad of Joshua was actually Tell Malhata, four miles east of Tell 'Arad, or possibly Tel Masos (Khirbet el-Meshash), about seven miles east of Beersheba. Ceramic evidence or its absence from these sites, however, has led to a variety of opinions. It can be noted that Tell 'Arad was virtually abandoned at the end of the Early Bronze Age after being a major, fortified site with significant Egyptian influence. There is also evidence of the appearance of an unfortified village during the Iron Age (eleventh century B.C.), which might correspond to the settlement of the Kenites mentioned in Judges 1:16.

12:15. Libnah. See the comment describing Libnah in Joshua 10:29.

12:15. Adullam. Located in the Shephelah in southern Judah, about sixteen miles southwest of Jerusalem, Adullam has been identified as Tell esh Sheikh Madhkur. Although it only appears here as part of the list of conquered kings, the site is associated with David (1 Sam 22:1) and is among the list of the fortified cities of Solomon (2 Chron 11:7). In prophetic tradition, Micah mourns its destruction during the Assyrian invasion (Mic 1:15).

12:16. Makkedah and Bethel. See the comments on 10:10 for Makkedah and on 8:9 for Bethel.

12:17. Tappuah. Identified with the hilltop site of Tell Sheikh Abu Zarad, nine miles southeast of Nablus, Tappuah was a border town between the tribal areas of Ephraim and Manasseh (see 16:8; 17:7-8). Another town by that name is also mentioned in 15:34 in Judah, but it has not been positively identified.

12:17. Hepher. Although the city-state of Hepher has not been positively identified, it was most likely within the northeast segment of the tribal allotment of Manasseh, perhaps as far north as the Dothan valley and the Gilboa range. Recent archaeological survey in that region suggests Tell el-Muhaffar as a possible site for Hepher (see 17:2-3 for ties between Hepher and the allotment of Zelophehad).

12:18. Aphek. Mentioned in the annals of the Egyptian pharaohs Thutmose III (c. 1490-1436) and Amen-hotep II (c. 1447-1421), this Aphek was located on the Sharon Plain and is identified with Tell Ras el-'Ain, at the source of the Yarkon River near modern Tel Aviv. It is also the site of at least two major battles between the Israelites and the Philistines (1 Sam 4:1; 29:1).

12:18. Lasharon. It is possible, based on the Septuagint reading, that Lasharon is simply a geographic indicator for Aphek, since that site name is used elsewhere for other cities (see Josh 13:4; 1 Kings 20:26-30). If it is a separate site, it is most likely to be located near Philistine territory.

12:19. Madon and Hazor. See the comment on 11:1 dealing with these conquered cities.

12:20. Shimron, Meron and Acshaph. See the comment on 11:1 dealing with these conquered cities.

12:21. Taanach. Although founded about 2700 B.C. at Tell Ti'innik, about four miles northwest of Megiddo on a crest above the Jezreel Valley, Taanach does not appear in extrabiblical records until the fifteenth-century annals of Pharaoh Thutmose III in his account of the Battle of Megiddo (c. 1468 B.C.). It is one of several Jezreel sites that are regularly included in the lists of conquered cities in this rich, disputed area. Its inclusion in Joshua's conquest list thus follows that pattern. Although

it was originally a part of the tribal allotment of Asher, later references describe it as part of Manasseh (Josh 17:12; Judg 5:19). Based on excavation reports, Taanach experienced its greatest period of importance during the mid-third millennium and between the seventeenth and fourteenth centuries B.C. It was only sparsely settled during the twelfth century B.C., following the collapse of Egyptian control of the area and the incursion of the Sea Peoples. However, a new defense system was constructed in the tenth century, indicating a resurgence of population during the monarchy period.

12:21. Megiddo. Since Megiddo commanded the western entrance to the strategic Valley of Jezreel, the Plain of Sharon and the coastal international trade route between Egypt and Mesopotamia, it claimed the attention of many ancient rulers. Founded around 3300 B.C. near two springs, Megiddo was destroyed and rebuilt twenty times as Egyptian (annals of Thutmose III, Seti, Rameses II; El Amarna letters), Hittite and Mesopotamian armies contended to control it and the economic link through Syro-Palestine. The destruction of the Late Bronze city (stratum VIIA) of the twelfth century probably coincides with the break in Egyptian suzerainty following the incursion of the Sea Peoples (based on the discovery of Philistine pottery). Other than in this list of conquered kings, Megiddo is not mentioned in the conquest narrative. It was assigned to Manasseh (Josh 17:11) but was not captured by the Israelites (Judg 1:27) until the monarchy period (1 Kings 4:12; 9:15).

12:22. Kedesh. This place name appears in several geographic contexts, including within Galilee (Tell Qades) and Naphtali near Megiddo (Judg 4:11; 5:19; Tel Abu Kudeis). Its appearance at this point in the list suggests a site in the Jezreel Valley, but it is not possible to make an exact determination.

12:22. Jokneam. Identified with Tel Yoq-neam, this site is located just northwest of Megiddo at the exit of the Wadi Milh in the Jezreel Valley on the border of Zebulun (Josh 19:11; 21:34). It was founded in the Early Bronze period and continued to be occupied until the Ottoman era. Its strategic importance is documented by its inclusion in the conquest list of Thutmose III. The city was destroyed in the thirteenth-century upheaval and again at the end of the eleventh century, perhaps as part of the Israelite expansion to the north.

12:23. Dor. The coastal city of Dor was most likely founded during the thirteenth century B.C. as part of Rameses II's attempt to increase trade between Syro-Palestine and the Aegean. The Philistines subsequently settled here (evident in the Egyptian story of Wen-Amon's journey), and then it was taken by Solomon and served as one of his administrative centers (1 Kings 4:11). It was in the tribal territory of Manasseh but not conquered until the monarchy period (Josh 11:2; Judg 1:27).

12:23. Goyim/Gilgal. There are several cities identified as Gilgal, and they are found throughout ancient Canaan. The identifier Goyim, "Gentiles," is not particularly helpful, although some, using the LXX reading, tie the name to Harosheth Haggoyim in Judges 4:2. Since it appears between Dor and Tirzah on the list in Joshua, this may indicate a location in the eastern quadrant of the Sharon Plain.

12:24. Tirzah. Generally identified with Tell el-Far'ah (seven miles northeast of Nablus in the central highlands), Tirzah's only biblical appearance prior to the monarchy period is in Joshua's list of conquered kings. Its association with Manasseh is based on a woman named Tirzah in the genealogy (Num 26:33; Josh 17:3). Settlement began in the Neolithic period with the largest city dated to about 1700, with thick walls and a citadel. Its Iron Age heights were reached when it served as Israel's capital (1 Kings 15:21), but the shift to Samaria left it a minor post.

13:1-33

Division of Transjordan

13:1. boundary lists in the ancient Near East. There are several Hittite treaties that offer similarities to the boundary lists found in Joshua 13—19. In the treaties the boundary lists indicate the frontiers of the land that is entrusted to the vassal by the suzerain. Even though the land technically belongs to the suzerain, he offers local control to the vassal and delineates the boundaries of the land that defines this legal relationship. It is land that is designated as territory to be protected in loyalty to the suzerain. The most extensive boundary list is found in the treaty between the Hittites and their vassal district Tarhuntassa (in south-central Anatolia). The purpose of the lists in these two treaties is to specify which territory belongs to Tarhuntassa and which territory belongs to its neighbors, the other vassal districts. This would be similar to the purpose of Joshua 13—19, to distinguish which territory belongs to which tribe. It is the role of the suzerain to define the frontiers in this way, and it demonstrates the suzerain's control of the vassals and their land.

13:2-5. the land that remained. The summary statement of territories that remained to be

conquered is divided into three regions: (1) Philistia, including the five major Philistine city-states, and the area to the south that borders on Egypt at the Wadi el-'Arish (see Josh 15:4); (2) the Phoenician coastal zone; and (3) Byblos and the Lebanon mountain zone east of Syria. This final area was never conquered by the Israelites, although commercial and diplomatic ties did exist (1 Kings 9:19). The Phoenician city-states of Tyre and Sidon in the second region were assigned to Asher but never conquered (Judg 1:31). However, they were certainly allied with the governments of David and Solomon (1 Kings 5:1; 9:11-13). Within Philistia are the settlements of a segment of the Sea Peoples. Excavations at several of these sites (most recently at Tel Miqne/Ekron) demonstrate destruction levels consistent with their incursion and the displacement of Canaanite inhabitants (for the Avvim, see Deut 2:23). Of these cities, only Gath has not been positively identified (Tell esh-Sheri'ah and Tell es-Safi have been proposed, with the latter being most likely).

13:6. geography of. This statement reiterates the geographic region of Phoenicia, although it refers to it entirely as Sidonian. It is possible to see this verse as part of the geographic summary in Joshua 13:5, but it may also be a summary statement. In any case, it proves a northern border to the region actually said to be conquered by Joshua (for Misraphoth Mayim see Josh 11:8).

13:9-13. geography of. For discussion of this geographic description of Transjordan, see the comments on Joshua 12:2-6 and Deuteronomy 3:8-17.

13:9. Medeba plateau. This fertile tableland, within the Mishor (northern Moab), lies about twenty-five miles south of Amman, Jordan. It was assigned to Reuben and was the scene of numerous battles between Israelites and Moabites for control of this area (Judg 3:12-30; 1 Sam 14:47; 2 Sam 8:2; 1 Chron 19:7).

13:10. Heshbon. See the comments on Numbers 21:26-30 dealing with the Amorite kingdom of Sihon in this region of Moab.

13:17-20. locations in. The list of captured cities within the kingdom of Sihon (Heshbon, Jahaz, Edrei, Dibon, Medeba) also appears in Numbers 21:21-35. Numbers 32:33-41 also lays claim to cities within this region for Reuben, Gad and Manasseh. Bamoth Baal is also found within the Balaam cycle of stories (Num 22:41), and several of these sites appear in the list of Levitical cities (Josh 21). Location for sites not discussed elsewhere include Beth Baal Meon with Ma'in (four miles southwest of Medeba); Kedemoth with Khirbet er Remeil or 'Aleiyan (fifteen miles southeast of Medeba); Mephaath with Khirbet Nef'a (four miles south of Amman), Tell Jawah (five miles south of Amman) or, most likely, Umm er-Rasas (almost twenty miles southeast of Medeba); Sibmah with Khirbet qurn el-Kibs; Zereth Shahar with Khirbet ez-Zarat (near the shore of the Dead Sea); and Beth Peor with Khirbet 'Uyun Musa.

13:21. Midianite chiefs. The list of defeated Midianite chiefs or princes is also found in Numbers 31:8, where they are referred to as kings. Evi and Reba only appear in these identical lists, while Zur is referred to as a tribal chief in Numbers 25:15 (1 Chron 8:30), and Hur is the name of an Israelite chief in Exodus 17:10. Rekem is a fairly common personal name (1 Chron 2:43-44; 7:16) as well as a place name (Josh 18:27). The names may also be associated with specific places ranging from southern Transjordan to northern Arabia, thereby tracing control of the trade routes of that region.

13:22. Balaam. See the comments on Balaam in Numbers 22 and the comment on Numbers 25:3, which discusses the incident at Baal-Peor and may be the basis for the account of Balaam's death here in Joshua 13.

13:24-29. geography of Gad. The territory assigned to the tribe of Gad includes most of Gilead. This region is located to the south of the Jabbok River as far as the hill country near Amman. The Aroer listed here is near Amman (Rabbah), not the southern site mentioned in Joshua 13:16. Jezer is probably to be identified with Khirbet es-Sar (about eight miles from Hesbon), and Betonim is located at Khirbet el-Batne about three miles southeast of es-Salt. Mahanaim is most often identified with Tell Heggag in the Jabbok valley just south of Penuel, and Lo-Debar (NIV: Debir) may be a little north of there, but its exact site is unknown (see Amos 6:13). Of the other sites listed, Beth Haram is either Tell er-Rameh or Tell Iktanu at the confluence of the Wadi Hesban; Beth Nimrah is either Tell el-Blebil or Tell Nimrin; Succoth is probably Tell Deir 'Alla on the Jabbok; and Zaphon is Tell es-Sa'idiye on the Wadi Kafrinji.

13:30-31. geography of Manasseh. The description of the territory assigned to the eastern half of the tribe of Manasseh is not as detailed as that for Gad. It has parallels in Numbers 32:39-42 and Deuteronomy 3:13-14. In general the area extended from Mahanaim, also a northern boundary point for Gad, northward through much of Bashan (see Josh 12:4 and 13:11-12) as far as Mount Hermon. The "settlements of Jair" cannot be identified

since they would have been tent encampments (see Num 32:41; Deut 3:14; 1 Chron 2:22), but they would have been scattered throughout Bashan. For Machir as a descendant of Manasseh, see Genesis 50:23 and Numbers 26:29. This tribal segment would have been associated with northern Gilead (see Num 32:39-40; Judg 5:14).

14:1—19:51

The Distribution of the Land

14:6. Kenizzite. The Kenizzites were a non-Israelite tribal group, geographically and ethnically tied to the Kenites, Calebites and Othnielites (see Gen 15:19; Num 32:12; Judg 1:13). Their territory included the region southwest of Hebron and reaching south of the Dead Sea in the vicinity of Edom. These smaller tribal groups were eventually absorbed into the tribe of Judah after the establishment of the monarchy.

14:15. Anakites. See the comment on 11:21.

14:15. Hebron. See the comment on 10:3.

15:2-4. geography of Judah's southern boundary. Judah's southern border is the same as that of the nation in Numbers 34:3-5. It extends from the southern end of the Dead Sea, on the border with Edom, to the Desert of Zin (see Num 13:21; 20:1) and eventually west to the Mediterranean Sea. "Scorpion Pass" may be identified with Naqb es-Safa (see Num 34:4). Kadesh-barnea was the staging point from which the Israelites traversed the wilderness and from which they began the conquest (see Num 13:26; Deut 1:19, 46). It is most likely located at 'Ain el-Qudeirat on the Wadi el-'Ain in the northern Sinai. The villages of Hezron, Addar and Karka have not been located, although they may be associated with wells or springs near Kadesh-barnea, and the site of Azmon is also uncertain, though it has been identified with Ain Muweilih, another of the springs in the area. For the Wadi (or Brook) of Egypt, the Wadi el-'Arish, see Joshua 13:3. The various directional qualifiers in the list of place names are very general and give only an approximation of direction and exact location.

15:5a. Judah eastern border. The eastern border of the tribal territory of Judah is the Dead Sea. It extended from its southern end bordering on Edom, northwest to Jericho and the Wadi Qelt, and on to the hill country of Bethel. The reference to the "mouth" implies the confluence of the Jordan River into the Dead Sea at a point 1285 feet below sea level. Like many ancient nations, Judah utilized a natural barrier to mark its border.

15:5b-11. Judah northern border. The northern border begins at the "mouth of the Jordan" and extends northwest to Jericho and the Wadi Qelt. It passes just to the south of Jerusalem (Jebus) and then on to Kiriath Jearim (Deir el-Azhar) by way of the Judean hills to Beth Shemesh (Tell el-Rumeileh) on to the border of Philistia on the "northern slope of Ekron" (Tel Miqne). It then passes through the Sorek Valley westward to Jabneel (2 Chron 26:6; later Jamnia) and the Mediterranean Sea. Reference to Gilgal is problematic since this site is generally thought to lie north of Judah's territory (Josh 5:9). The Pass of Adummim, literally "ascent of blood," is Tal'at ed-Damm. En Shemesh refers to a well south of Jerusalem and has been identified with 'Ain el-Hod to the east of the Mount of Olives. En Rogel is found at the meeting of the Kidron and Hinnom Valleys east of Jerusalem. Nephtoah is identified with Lifta, two miles northwest of Jerusalem.

15:7. Debir. See the comment on this name in Joshua 10:3. There Debir is identified as the king of Eglon and part of a Canaanite coalition defeated by Joshua. It is also noted as a city name in Joshua 10:38. In this case Debir is a place name but is not to be identified with the city in Joshua 10:38. It may be identified with Thogret ed-Debr, northeast of Jerusalem.

15:15. Kiriath Sepher. This is the Canaanite name for the site later known as Debir (see Judg 1:11-12). The name means "city of the book" or "town of the treaty," and may thus reflect either a local scribal school or possibly the site of a treaty. The biblical references indicate that the city was located southwest of Hebron in the southern portion of the Judean hill country. Recent excavation indicates its likely site is Khirbet Rabud.

15:13-19. land grant. Caleb's grant of land to Othniel and his daughter Acsah is typical of feudatory grants in the ancient Near East. Very often kings or princes would offer land grants to military officers as a reward for services rendered as well as a means of bringing uncultivated land into production and increasing the tax base (evident in some of Hammurabi's laws). This practice was also used by governments to facilitate the settlement of tribal peoples who might otherwise become a problem to the peace and economic activity of the kingdom (a practice seen in the Mari texts). The fact that this land grant is coupled with an offer of a marriage (see 1 Sam 17:25; 18:17) simply adds weight to the importance of the task of conquering the Anakim. Since the assigned land is quite arid, Acsah's request for water sources (see Gen 26:17-33) is

not out of line and holds her father to a more honest position than was originally the case.

15:21-32. southern towns of Judah. These southern towns center on Beersheba and stretch from the Edomite border to Sharuhen (see Josh 19:6) on the Mediterranean coast. Of those that have been identified, Kabzeel (2 Sam 23:20; Neh 11:25) may be Tell Gharreh between Beersheba and Arad; Jagur may be Khirbet el-Gharrah, nine miles east of Beersheba; Kinah is identified with Horvat 'Uza, three miles southwest of Arad; Kerioth Hezron may be Khirbet el-Qaryatein, four miles north of Arad; Amam may be Be'er Navatim near Beersheba; Moladah may be Khirbet el-Waten, six miles east of Beersheba; Baalah may be Tulul el-Medbah near Tel Masos; Madmannah is tentatively identified as Khirbet Tatrit; Sansannah may be Khirbet esh-Shamsaniyat in the Negeb plains; and Rimmon may be Tel Halif, eight miles northeast of Beersheba (see Neh 11:29; Zech 14:10).

15:33-47. western towns of Judah. The list of Judah's western towns and villages in the Shephelah is arranged in four groups, with a north-south orientation centering on Lachish. The last group, which includes Philistia and its major city-states (Ekron, Ashdod, Gaza), was assigned to Judah in name only since it was not forced into submission until the monarchy. Of those that can at least tentatively be identified, Jarmuth (see Josh 10:3) is Khirbet Yarmuk, sixteen miles west of Jerusalem; Zenan may be 'Araq el-Kharba near Lachish; Lachish is Tell ed-Duweir (Josh 10:3) and was massively fortified during the monarchy period; Eglon remains unknown (its traditional identification with Tell el-Hesi is unfounded); Libnah may be Tell es-Safi or Tell Bornat; Ether is Khirbet el-'Ater; Ashnah is Idhnah; Nezib is at Khirbet Beit Nesib, eight miles northwest of Hebron; and Keilah is Khirbet Qila in the eastern portion of the Shephelah (Amarna Tablets: *Qiltu*?).

15:48-60. hill country towns. The Judean hill country, which lies in a narrow, north-south strip between the Judean wilderness on the east and the Shephelah tableland on the west, contained five (six in the LXX) districts with their towns and villages assigned to the tribe of Judah. Of those that have been tentatively identified, Shamir is el-Bireh; Jattir is Khirbet 'Attir (see 1 Sam 30:27); Anab is Khirbet 'Anab; Anim may be Khirbet Ghuwein et-Tahta, seven miles southwest of Hebron; Holon is at Khirbet 'Illin; Arab is located at er-Rabiyeh; Dumah may be at Deir ed-Domeh (possibly Udumu in EA 256); Beth Tappuah is at Taffuh, three miles west of Hebron; Zior is at Si'ir, five miles northeast of Hebron; Maon may be Tell Ma'in, just south of Hebron (see 1 Sam 25:2); Carmel is at Khirbet el-Kermel; Juttah is at Yatta; Gibeah may be el-Jeba' southwest of Jerusalem; Beth Zur is Khirbet et-Tubeiqah, four miles north of Hebron; Gedor may be Khirbet Jedur; and Rabbah may be the Rubutu mentioned in Egyptian conquest lists and Amarna texts.

15:61-62. wilderness towns. The arid band of land along the western shore of the Dead Sea comprised the Judean Wilderness (see Ps 63:1). High cliffs and deep-cut valleys mark the area immediately along the shore. Further inland the eastern slopes of the hill country descend over three thousand feet in a space of about ten miles. This drastically effects the climate and effectively cuts off annual rainfall amounts needed to support farming or large permanent settlements. Life here was only possible near springs and wells and thus there are only six towns mentioned. Of these Beth Arabah (possibly 'Ain el-Gharabeh on the north bank of the Wadi Qelt, three miles southeast of Jericho) and En Gedi have been located with any confidence. The latter is identified with the oasis with hot springs at Tell ej-Jurn on the western shore of the Dead Sea. Some have identified Secacah with Khirbet Qumran.

16:1-4. Joseph tribes' boundaries. Touching on the northern boundary of Judah at the Jordan River, near the Dead Sea and Jericho, and on the border of Benjamin, which included the city of Jericho, this territory extended north of that city. Its border then continued on toward the hill country and Bethel through the arid region known as the desert of Beth Aven (see 18:12). The boundary extended westward to Gezer (see 10:33) and eventually to the Mediterranean Sea. This latter section would have been only nominally within Israelite territory.

16:2. Bethel/Luz. The connection between Luz and Bethel involves more than a name change (see Gen 28:19; Josh 18:13; Judg 1:23). They may have been originally two sites, but the importance of cultic site of Bethel in later history eclipsed Luz and combined them. Both would have been at or near the site of Beitin (see comment on 8:9).

16:5-9. Ephraim's boundaries. With its southern boundary already delineated in verses 1-4, Ephraim's border extended as far north as the area around Shechem and then swung east and south toward Tanaath Shiloh (Khirbet Ta'nah el-Foqa) and Janoah (Khirbet Yanun). Sites identified in this region include Ataroth (possibly Tell Sheikh ed-Diab or Tell-Mazar) and Naarah (Tell el-Jisr near Jericho or Khirbet

Mifgir). The western end of their territory included Tappuah (possibly Sheikh Abu Zarad; see Josh 17:7-8).

16:10. forced labor. It was a common practice to employ subject people as work gangs or menial laborers (see Josh 9:27). Forced labor is also one of the abuses of power attributed to kings and tyrants, who conscript men to do corvee labor, building roads, bridges and city walls (see 1 Kings 5:13-14; 12:4; charge against Babylonian king Nabonidus in the Cyrus Cylinder, sixth century B.C.). In this period the practice is seen in the Amarna texts employed by the king of Megiddo.

17:3-4. Zelophehad's daughters. See the comment on Numbers 36:1-13, which deals with the inheritance by daughters.

17:7-11. territory of Manasseh. The dimensions of this tribal territory are rather vague, speaking of the territory immediately north of Ephraim, in the vicinity of Shechem, and extending to a point contiguous with Asher. There is some overlap of territory, at least in the sense that the city of Tappuah (see Josh 12:17) belonged to Ephraim while the surrounding region was assigned to Manasseh (see Josh 16:9). The western boundary was the Mediterranean Sea, and the eastern border touched the region of Issachar. Again cities or their inhabitants in other tribal territories are assigned to Manasseh, all but Dor in the Plain of Esdraelon (see Josh 12:21). They are Beth Shan (Tell el-Husn), Megiddo (Tell el-Mutesellim), Ibleam near Nablus, Dor on the coast south of Mount Carmel, Endor (seven miles southeast of Nazareth), and Taanach (Tell Ti'innik, four miles northwest of Megiddo)

17:16. iron chariots. As in Judges 1:19, the use of iron chariots by the enemy is given as the reason for the Israelites' failure to completely conquer areas of Canaan. Iron technology was introduced by the Hittites and the Sea Peoples in the twelfth century B.C. However, it did not become widespread in Syro-Palestinian culture until the tenth century. References to iron chariots in the conquest narrative most likely refer to the use of iron fittings to strengthen the chariot basket or iron-shod wheels. It is possible that studs or projectile points were added to make this engine of warfare heavier and more of a factor when rammed into lines of infantry. However, maneuverability and the strength and size of the horses pulling the chariots would have limited the actual amount of iron employed.

17:16. Beth Shan. The site of Beth Shan stands at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley and guards that important trade route's entrance into the Jordan Valley. It was assigned to Manasseh but was not captured during Joshua's time because of the inhabitants' use of iron chariots. It continued as an independent Canaanite enclave into the monarchy period (1 Sam 31:10-12) but was incorporated into Sol-omon's administrative districts (1 Kings 4:12). This is a double site, with a Roman-Byzantine city (Scythopolis) built at the base of the tell. Archaeological investigations have shown almost continuous occupation of the site since Chalcolithic times (4500-3300), and the water supply (Wadi Jalud), arable land and strategic location have insured that its population prospered, generally under Egyptian rule (starting with Thutmose III in the sixteenth century) and later under the Sea Peoples and Israelites.

18:1. Shiloh as cultic center. Shiloh (Khirbet Seilun), in a fertile valley within the Ephraimite hills between Bethel and Shechem, was occupied throughout the Iron Age and at several points in its history had significant architectural features. These included a gate complex and what may have been a temple complex. A destruction level in the mid-eleventh century may coincide with the capture of the ark in 1 Samuel 4:1-10 by the Philistines. Indications of premonarchic religious activity at this site come from Judges 21:19-23, and later traditions (Ps 78:60; Jer 7:12-15) suggest that it had served as a cultic center prior to the construction of the temple in Jerusalem.

18:4-8. ancient mapmaking. Mapmaking goes back at least into the third millennium B.C. Clay tablets have been found with maps etched onto their surfaces. Most notable are the maps of the Mesopotamian city of Nippur (from about 1500 B.C.), and a Babylonian map of the "world" (middle of the first millennium B.C.). From Egypt there is a mining map that dates to the time of Rameses II (thirteenth century B.C.).

18:6-10. casting lots. The practice of casting lots to determine God's will is a form of divination. See the comments on "Urim and Thummim" in Exodus 28:30 and on the use of lots in Numbers 26:55. Since the tribes are listed in their logical order of priority, it can be inferred that lots were not used to choose which tribe got to pick first. Instead the tribes sent their representatives in prescribed order, and the lot was cast to see which parcel of land that tribe received. In the ancient Near East, division of a father's property among his heirs was customarily accomplished by the eldest choosing his parcel and the rest being divided by lot.

18:11-20. Benjamin's allotment. Benjamin's territory lay between that of Judah and Jo-

seph, with Judah's northern boundary being roughly the same as Benjamin's southern border. The northern boundary follows that of Ephraim until it reaches Kiriath Jearim instead of extending on to the Mediterranean. In this way space is reserved for the tribal territory of Dan. The description runs east to west (from the Jordan River's entrance into the Dead Sea). It extended from just north of Jericho, through the hill country and then south toward the mountain slope of Luz (Bethel) and on to Beth Horon and Kiriath Baal (also known as Kiriath Jearim), which was the terminus point for the western boundary. The fact that its boundary ran through the valley of Hinnom means that Jerusalem was in Benjaminite territory.

18:14. Beth Horon. This is a twin city (upper and lower): Upper Beth Horon, Beit Ur el-Foqa (about two miles northwest of Gibeon), and Lower Beth Horon, Beit Ur et-Tahta (about a mile and a half further to the northwest and about a thousand feet lower in elevation). It has been suggested that this is the city referred to as Bit Ninurta in the Amarna letters. The Beth Horon pass leads into the Aijalon Valley (referred to in the Amarna texts as Ayyaluna), the major route from the hill country to the coastal plains. Although it is unclear whether the Beth Horon mentioned in Joshua 16 and 18 is the upper or lower, it is possible that their dual importance in guarding the trade route made them of equal importance and thus undifferentiated in the mind of the biblical writer.

18:15. Kiriath Jearim. Located eight miles north of Jerusalem at Deir el-Azhar, Kiriath Jearim, or "city of woods," lay at the point of intersection for the tribal territories of Benjamin and Judah. It is referred to as Baalah in Joshua 15:9 and as Kiriath Baal in Joshua 15:60 and 18:14. The city figures in the conquest narrative (Josh 9—10) and in the story of the ark's temporary retirement (1 Sam 6:19—7:2).

18:21-28. Benjaminite cities. Although several of the cities are unknown, others have been identified: Parah is Khirbet el-Farah, northeast of Anathoth; Ophrah is et-Taiyibeh, four miles northeast of Bethel; Geba may be Khirbet et-Tell, seven miles north of Bethel; Gibeon is generally identified with el-Jib, four miles northwest of Jerusalem (see Josh 9:3-5); Ramah is er-Ram, five miles north of Jerusalem; Beeroth may be el-Bireh; Mizpah may be Tell en-Nasbeh; Kephirah is Khirbet Kefirah, southwest of el-Jib; Mozah may be Khirbet Beit Mizze, west of Jerusalem; and Gibeath-Kiriath may be a high place known as the "hill of Kiriath Jearim" (see 1 Sam 7:1-2).

19:1-9. Simeon's allotment. Since the territory of Simeon is said to be "within the territory of Judah," this tribe may have been destroyed or assimilated very early, leaving only the memory of its original holdings. Most of its cities are in the Negev and two (Ether and Ashan) are in the Shephelah (see comments on Josh 15:21-32). Of those not mentioned earlier, Beth Marcaboth, "house of chariots," and Hazor Susah, "village of horses," may be functional titles rather than place names and may be equated with Madmannah and Sansannah (Josh 15:31).

19:8. Baalath Beer. This site may be the same as Bealoth in 15:24 (see Baal in 1 Chron 4:33) and was probably located just east of Beersheba. The reference to "Ramah in the Negev" suggests a "high place" or cultic site (see 1 Sam 30:27).

19:10-16. Zebulun's allotment. Although not listed, the primary orientation point for this territory is Nazareth. The boundaries and most of the cities radiate from this city both east and west. The northern boundary is about twelve miles west of Tiberias and six miles northeast of Nazareth at Rimmon (modern Rummaneh). Sarid, probably Tell Shadud (five miles southeast of Nazareth) is another orientation point looking west. From there the boundary extends along the Kishon to Jokneam (see Josh 12:22). The eastern limit stretches as far as the territory of Issachar, about two miles southeast of Nazareth. Sites mentioned in this area are Dobrath (Daburiyeh near Mount Tabor) and Japhia (Yafa, southeast of Nazareth). The only connection Zebulun has with the coast (despite Gen 49:13 and Deut 33:18-19) is by way of trade with Acre, perhaps through the nearby city of Nahalal (Tell en-Nahl). Its territory did not stretch to the Mediterranean.

19:15. Bethlehem. This site, northwest of Nahalal in Zebulun, is not to be confused with the southern site of Bethlehem in Judah. The judge Ibzan was buried here (Judg 12:9-10). A modern Arab village in the vicinity still retains the name Beit-Lahm.

19:17-23. Issachar's allotment. This territory lay primarily in the valley of Jezreel, north of Manasseh, east of Asher and south of Naphtali. Its northern border extended from Mount Tabor to the Jordan River, just south of the Sea of Galilee. The strategic and volatile nature of this area is shown by its mention in the Egyptian annals of pharaohs Thutmose III (Anaharath and Kishion) and Seti I (Remeth = Jarmuth, perhaps the same as Mount Yarmuta, six miles north of Beth Shan). Other sites which have been identified are Jezreel, which is Zer'in

northwest of Mount Gilboa; Chesulloth = Chisloth-Tabor (see Josh 19:12) is modern Iksal, two miles southeast of Nazareth; Shunem is Solem, three miles northeast of Jezreel.

19:24-31. Asher's allotment. Situated on the Plain of Acre, Asher lay west of Zebulun and Naphtali and extended as far north as the Phoenician ports of Tyre and Sidon. Again this is an area that figures prominently in Egyptian royal annals. Thutmose III lists Helkath (possibly Tell el-Harbaj or Tell el-Qassis), Acshaph (see Josh 11:1), Mishal (near Mount Carmel) and Allammelech, and Rameses II lists Kanah (seven miles southeast of Tyre) among captured Canaanite towns. Identified sites include Cabul (Kabul); Ebron (Khirbet 'Abdeh, ten miles northeast of Acco); Ummah may be Acco; this Rehob (not the same site as in Josh 19:28) may be Tell el-Gharbi, seven miles east of Acco. Mention of Tyre and Sidon do not necessitate actual control. More likely the border was more theoretical than real, although it is possible that villages associated with these city-states may have been controlled by Israel at various times.

19:29. Aczib. Located north of Acco, Aczib was allotted to Asher but was never captured (Judg 1:31). Excavations at the site demonstrate it to be a flourishing commercial center from the Middle Bronze I through the Roman period. It was sacked and rebuilt a number of times, and reached its largest extent in the eighth century B.C. before being destroyed by Sennacherib in 701. This site is not to be confused with the city mentioned in 15:44 as allotted to Judah in the Shephelah.

19:32-39. allotment for Naphtali. Mount Tabor is the principal reference point for this tribal territory. The southern boundary of Naphtali follows the Wadi Fajjas as far east as the Jordan River. There is some dispute over this based on the location of the "large tree" in Zaanannim (see Judg 4:11), but a southern perspective is most likely. Sites along this line which have been identified are Heleph (Khirbet 'Arbathath near Mount Tabor); Adami Nekeb (Khirbet et-Tell); Jabneel (Tell en-Na'am); and Lakkum (Khirbet el-Mansurah). The exact location of Hukkok is disputed but most identify it with Yaquq, just west of the Sea of Galilee. Other identified sites include Adamah (possibly Hajar ed-Damm, two and one-half miles northwest of the confluence of the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee); Iron (Yarun, on the Lebanese border); for Hazor see the comment on 11:1; Kedesh is north of the now drained Lake Huleh.

19:40-48. allotment for Dan. Although Dan has a fairly large territory to the west of Benjamin, taking in the coastal region from the Brook Sorek to the Yarkon River near Joppa, it is unlikely that the tribe occupied more than a fraction of the land. Most of this area was controlled by the Philistines and later by the Assyrians. During Solomon's time it comprised his southwest district and was annexed to Judah. An example of this is their city of Beth Shemesh (Tell er-Rumeileh), which was later listed as a Levitical city in Judah (21:16). Other Danite sites located include Shaalabbin (east of Gezer, possibly Selbit; see Judg 1:35); Aijalon is probably Yalo, five miles east of Gezer (mentioned in the Amarna texts); Timnah (Tell el-Batashi, five miles northwest of Beth Shemesh); Gibbethon (possibly Tell el-Melat; mentioned in the campaign list of Thutmose III); Bene-Berak appears in Sennacherib's annals and is located near the Arab village el-Kheiriyah near Joppa; Rakkon may be either a river or possibly Tell er-Reqqeit near Joppa.

19:47. Leshem. The tribe of Dan probably migrated under pressure from the Philistines (see Judges 18). They went north to Leshem (Laish), which was renamed Dan and subsequently became a major cultic center under King Jeroboam. The city site (largest in that region at about fifty acres) was located north of the Huleh basin on the road north to Damascus and has the benefit of a spring which is one of the sources of the Jordan River. Its importance is found in its listing in the Egyptian execration texts and in the Mari letters.

19:50. Timnath Serah. Also known as Timnath Heres (Judg 2:9), this is the portion allotted to Joshua after all of the tribal territories had been apportioned. The variation in name may be the result of this process, since *serah* means "leftover," and popular etymology might have transformed an original place name. It is located within Ephraim, but it was a political enclave belonging solely to Joshua and his household. It has been identified with Khirbet Tibnah, about twelve miles southwest of Shechem. Excavation has shown a fairly large settlement that was rebuilt in the Iron I period (see Josh 19:50).

20:1-9 Cities of Refuge. See comment on Numbers 35.

21:1-45
Levites' Cities

21:1-2. Levitical cities concept. See the comment on Numbers 35:1-5.

21:3-40. distribution of towns through territory. The legislation in Numbers 35:1-5 that sets aside the revenue from towns and pasturelands for the support of the Levites is im-

plemented here by the casting of lots—a means of divine determination. However, there is an uneven distribution of towns among the tribes, and it is not based on the population size of the tribes. One possibility is that the distribution has more to do with the size of the clans of the Levites.

21:3-40. Levitical cities. While some of the Levitical cities are well known as cultic centers (Hebron, Shechem) and some, like Anathoth, have connections with later Levitical groups (the descendants of Abiathar), many of the cities are in frontier or border areas and thus may be "colonies" or outposts. Thus in verses 11-15, the sites are along the Philistine border, and verses 28-35 contain cities along the northern and coastal boundaries of Israel, which were controlled by powerful Canaanite city-states like Megiddo, and verses 36-39 describe the area east of the Jordan that was lost to Israelite control after the reign of Solomon. Among the cities in this list, which do not appear earlier and have been identified, are Jattir (Khirbet 'Attir, thirteen miles southwest of Hebron); Eshtemoa (es- Samu', eight miles southwest of Hebron), whose excavation has shown Iron Age deposits); 'Ashan (Khirbet 'Asan, just over a mile northwest of Beersheba; rather than Ain, 1 Chron 6:59); Juttah (Yatta, five miles southwest of Hebron); Geba (Jeba, six miles northeast of Jerusalem); Almon (Khirbet Almit, a mile northeast of Anathoth); Eltekeh (Tell el-Melat, northwest of Gezer) is mentioned in Sennacherib's annals of the year 701; Aijalon (Yalo, twelve miles northwest of Jerusalem); Abdon (possibly Khirbet 'Abdeh, four miles east of Achzib); Kedesh (Tell Qedes, six miles north of Hazor, with occupation levels more marked in Early Bronze and sporadic in the Iron Age); Dimnah (possibly Rummaneh, six miles northeast of Nazareth).

21:16. Beth Shemesh. This town was located on the Philistine border in the Valley of Sorek in the northeastern section of the Shephelah. It is identified with Tell er-Rumeilah, and excavation has shown nearly continuous occupation from Middle Bronze I to the Roman period. Its most prominent role in the biblical narrative occurs in 1 Samuel 6:9-15 in the story of the capture of the ark. An eleventh-century destruction preceded its occupation as an Israelite administrative post during the United Monarchy (not fortified by Rehoboam and perhaps unoccupied during part of the ninth century). The appearance of Egyptian scarabs of Amenhotep III and Rameses II, as well as a Ugaritic tablet, attests to the trading contacts of this strategically placed city.

21:18. Anathoth. Located at Ras el-Kharrubeh, about three miles northeast of Jerusalem, Anathoth was a Levitical city within Benjaminite territory. It is the site of exile for Abiathar and his clan (1 Kings 2:26) and the home of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 1:1). Survey excavations show occupation from Iron I to the Byzantine period.

21:21. Shechem. See the comments on Genesis 12:6, Joshua 24:1 and Judges 9:1.

21:21. Gezer. The site of Gezer, which guarded the strategic road from the coast to Jerusalem, is identified with Tell Jezer, five miles southeast of Ramleh. Earliest occupation at the site was in the Chalcolithic period (3400-3300 B.C.), but there was a long period of abandonment between 2400-2000 B.C. In the Middle Bronze period, Gezer was rebuilt and after 1800 became a major fortified site. A "high place" was constructed some time after 1650, with ten standing stones or monoliths erected in a north-south line. The destruction of this occupation level may be associated with the campaign of Thutmose III (c. 1482). Another high period occurred during the Amarna age, when Gezer served as one of the principal centers of Egyptian control in Canaan. The Philistines controlled the site during the Iron I period of the twelfth-eleventh centuries. The first Israelite occupation took place during Solomon's reign (1 Kings 9:15-17), and excavations have identified the typical Solomonic casemate walls and multichambered gate, which were also found at Megiddo and Hazor.

21:24. Gath Rimmon. This city has been identified with two nearby sites, Tell Abu Zeitun and Tell Jerishe. Both are within a couple of miles of the Mediterranean near modern Tel Aviv and close to the Yarkon River. It is possible that both are correct, since many times one site will be abandoned for a time and the city relocated nearby with the same name. This site may be the Gath mentioned in Thutmose III's city list as *knt,* and it may have also been mentioned in the El Amarna tablets as Giti-rimuni.

21:38. Ramoth in Gilead. Originally allotted to Gad, Ramoth in Gilead was also designated as a city of refuge (Deut 4:43) and in the Joshua list as a Levitical city. Its exact location is unknown since the text is not explicit and there are a number of tells along the Syrian border that could match its description. The most likely choice is Tell Ramith, three miles south of Ramtha on the modern border between Syria and Jordan, which has produced Iron Age deposits.

21:43-45. universal statements in conquest accounts of the ancient Near East. Summary statements which proclaim total conquest

and complete subjugation of an area according to divine plan and the valiant efforts of the god's ruler are fairly common in the royal annals of the ancient Near East. For instance, the Assyrian king Sennacherib's recording of his third campaign (which included the siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.) contains not only a list of cities conquered (the type of list also found in the Merneptah Stele, the Moabite Stone and many other inscriptions), but also a concluding statement which indicates the magnitude of his accomplishment. Similarly, the Armant Stele (1468 B.C.) of Pharaoh Thutmose III contains a summary "of the deeds of valor and victory which this good god performed on every excellent occasion." Such statements were one of the common literary features included as part of the code of conquest annals in the ancient Near East (for further discussion see comment on 10:40).

22:1-34
Misunderstanding with the Transjordan Tribes

22:8. nature of plunder. A successful conquest resulted in a large and varied plunder taken from defeated cities and peoples. The list of items here is fairly typical of the ancient economy and objects of value. The injunction to share the loot signifies the unity of the tribes in their common effort and was conducive to later cooperation (see 1 Sam 30:16-25).

22:9. Shiloh. See the comment on 18:1 for its role as a meeting place and cultic center for the Israelites.

22:10. Geliloth. There is an interchange of names between Geliloth and Gilgal in 18:17, and it is possible that that is also the case here (Codex Vaticanus does replace Geliloth with Gilgal). However, the concern here seems to be with the erection of an unauthorized altar on the very edge of Canaan by tribes who live east of the Jordan. Nearly all identifications for the site of Gilgal place it a little northeast of Jericho on the Jordan River.

22:9-34. the ambiguity of the altar (dual functions). The building of an altar by the tribes of Gad and Reuben raises a concern on the part of the other tribes, who lived west of the Jordan River, that these Transjordanian groups were seeking to establish a rival cultic site to Shiloh. What is unusual about the dispute is that the priest Phineas is the principal character rather than Joshua, and that further emphasizes the ritual concerns of the story. However, the Gileadite tribes are quick to note that they have not built an altar for sacrifice but only as a monument to their covenantal alliance with Yahweh and the other tribes (see 4:19-24). Its "imposing" size is thus explained as a monumental signal of unity rather than religious rivalry. In this way, Gilgal retains its role as rallying point for treaty-making (9:6-15), but Shiloh, and later Jerusalem, claims the role of sacrificial center.

22:11-20. covenant violation as cause for war. It was standard to include a stipulation in treaty documents that violation of any of the terms or covenants of the agreement was grounds for war. For instance, in the treaty between Pharaoh Rameses II and the Hittite king Hattusilis III (c. 1280 B.C.), the kings place a curse on the violator of their alliance and call on a list of gods as witnesses. The charges made against the Reubenites and Gadites suggest a tie to the covenant which requires not only military allegiance during and after the conquest but also recognition of the cult center at Shiloh. The emphasis placed on this site may reflect priestly rather than political concerns. Here the rivalry between tribes was apparently based on a misunderstanding of intentions or perhaps a concern for free passage across the Jordan River (see Judg 12:1-6).

22:17. sin of Peor. The reference made here is to the sin of idolatry committed by the Israelites in worshiping the Baal of Peor (see the comments on Num 25:3, 4, 6, 8). The assumption being made is that the unauthorized altar built by the Reubenites and Gadites was a potential influence that would lead to false worship and a resumption of God's wrath (a plague results in Num 25).

22:34. naming of altars. The naming of places and monuments to commemorate important events is quite common in the Bible. For instance, Hagar's theophany in Genesis 16:7-14 results in the name Beer Lahai Roi ("well of the Living One who sees me") for a nearby well. Similarly, in Judges 6:24 Gideon names a newly rebuilt altar "The LORD is Peace."

23:1-16
Joshua's Charge to the Leaders

23:1. chronology. There is no real indication in the text whether Joshua's "final sermon" to the leaders of the people occurred immediately after the incidents in Joshua 22 or even whether this is the precursor to the covenant renewal ritual in Joshua 24 (note also the lack of a geographical designation). Most important, perhaps, is the tie between the end of the conquest (God's promised "rest") and the end of Joshua's leadership.

23:2. categories of leaders. Moses had ap-

pointed a group of officials to serve as judges in Exodus 18:21-22 to relieve some of the burden of leadership. During the conquest the various leaders of the tribes and clans are mentioned on several occasions: elders (Josh 7:6; 8:33), judges (8:33), officials (1:10; 3:2; 8:33). These individuals provided counsel to Joshua on administrative and military issues, carried out his orders in organizing and keeping order in the camp, but their appearance in the text is also ceremonial. Elsewhere in the text, the leaders serve as representatives of the people on important ritual and covenant-making occasions (see Ex 24:1; Num 11:16). In addition, their legal role is mentioned frequently (Deut 16:18; 19:16-18; 21:1-4, 20).

23:13. oppression metaphors. The lure of other cultures and their gods are metaphorically compared to traps, the sting of a slaver's whip and tearing thorns that can blind the traveler. This is an often repeated warning against succumbing to syncretism (Ex 23:33; 34:12; Num 33:55; Deut 7:16). While this metaphor has the ring of a local wisdom saying (see Ps 69:22; Prov 29:6), it has been tied to the covenant relationship and the consequences of disobedience.

24:1-27
Covenant Renewal

24:1. Shechem. Located thirty-five miles north of Jerusalem in the Ephraimite hill country, Shechem (Tell Balatah) dominated a pass and trade route between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Its archaeological history contains twenty-four strata of occupation reaching from the Chalcolithic to the Hellenistic period. During the Middle Bronze Age, the Hyksos apparently administered or controlled the city, building huge ramparts and a temple. Egyptian resurgence in the area in the sixteenth century B.C. totally destroyed the Middle Bronze III city. However, it was rebuilt in the Late Bronze, when it is mentioned in the El Amarna texts as the base for the local king Lab'ayu, who professed allegiance to Egypt but created a mini-empire in northern Canaan (c. 1400 B.C.). There are no destruction levels leading into the Iron Age and thus the city may have come under Israelite control without major conflict (it is absent from Joshua's list of conquered cities—12:7-23). Its choice as the site of Joshua's covenant renewal ceremony may be the result of previous associations with the ancestors (Abram's altar in Gen 12:6; Jacob's land purchase in Gen 33:18-20, and the rape of Dinah in Gen 34). It is also possible that the ceremony took place in or near the Canaanite sanctuary on the city acropolis as the Israelites proclaimed the supremacy of their God over Canaanite deities (for additional information see comment on Judg 9:1).

24:1. categories of leaders. See the comment on 23:2.

24:2-27. covenant-treaty format. This covenant renewal ceremony follows the same format as that used for treaties in the ancient world and for the book of Deuteronomy. For discussion see the sidebar on ancient Near Eastern treaties and covenants at the beginning of Deuteronomy (p. 172).

24:2. pagan roots of Israel. The original home of the ancestors was in Mesopotamia, a land with polytheistic religious traditions. It is indicated here that Abram and his family worshiped many gods, including the patron gods of their city as well as ancestral deities and individual gods whose properties were to cure illness or provide fertility. They were only weaned of these practices by the covenantal promise made to Yahweh (see the sidebar on the religion of Abraham in Gen 12). This is important evidence to demonstrate that Abram was not the heir to a long, unbroken tradition of ancient monotheism.

24:2. land beyond the river. This designation is a technical term applied to the region west of the Euphrates River. For example, Haran, the city to which Terah migrated in Genesis 11:31, was west of the Euphrates. Technically, so was the city of Ur, but the province, as suggested by the campaign annals of Mesopotamian kings and later Persian administrative documents (see Ezra 7:21) implied the northern stretches of the Euphrates and west into Syria and Phoenicia-Palestine.

24:5-7. the Red Sea. See comments on Exodus 13—14 for further information.

24:8. the land of the Amorites. For more information see comments on Numbers 21:21-35.

24:9-11. Balaam and the Moabites. For more information see comments on Numbers 22—24.

24:11. hornet. The exact meaning of the word translated "hornet" is uncertain. The Septuagint (the oldest Greek translation of the Old Testament) reads "hornet" or "wasp," and many commentators accept this as a symbol of divine intervention, which helped prepare the way for the Israelite conquest. Insects are often used as metaphors for armies, for instance, bees and flies (Is 7:18-19) and locusts (Joel 1—2). However, some interpreters see this word as a wordplay on Egypt (see comment on Ex 23:28) or a reference to Egypt by means of an insect that was used to symbolize lower Egypt. This would suggest a previous inva-

sion of Palestine by the Egyptians that aided the Israelite cause. Other interpreters have translated the word as "plague" or "terror."

24:1-27. covenant renewal ceremonies. There are four identifiable covenant renewal ceremonies in the biblical text, and each represents not only a reaffirmation of the stipulations of the covenant but also the inauguration of a new phase in Israelite history (see Ex 24:1-8; 2 Kings 23:1-3, 21-22; Neh 8:5-9). Each contains an assembling of the people, either a recitation of the mighty acts of God or a reading of the law, a reaffirmation of the people's allegiance to the covenant and a sacrifice or festival celebration. Joshua's actions at Shechem place a final stamp on the past (the exodus and conquest) and signal a future in which the people will settle in the Promised Land.

24:26. stone and oak. Standing stones and sacred trees or groves are a part of Canaanite (see the Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat) and early Israelite cultic sites (see for stones Gen 28:18-22; Ex 24:4; 2 Sam 18:18; for trees Gen 12:6; Deut 11:30; Judg 6:11; 9:6; 1 Sam 10:3). Although both will be condemned in later traditions (Ex 23:24; Lev 26:1; Deut 12:2; 2 Kings 16:4), their use here is quite natural. It is also possible that they serve as monumental reminders of major events (as do the twelve stones noting the crossing of the Jordan River in Josh 4:2-9). They also separate the covenant renewal ceremony from the Baal temple at Shechem.

24:28-33
Death and Burial of Joshua

24:30. Mount Gaash. Although its exact location is unknown, Mount Gaash would have been in the hill country of Ephraim, south of Timnath Serah (Khirbet Tibneh). That would place it about twenty miles southwest of Shechem.

24:32. Israelite ancestor burial tracts in Canaan. The original burial tracts used by the ancestors were both purchased from the local inhabitants. The first was the cave of Machpelah, purchased by Abraham from Ephron the Hittite near Hebron. This served as the burial place for Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Jacob. Only Rachel was not buried here because of her sudden death during childbirth near Bethlehem (Gen 35:19). The pillar Jacob raised over her tomb is typical of the tumulus burials of nomadic peoples in that area. The account in Joshua notes the burial of Joseph on the plot of land near Shechem that Jacob had purchased from Hamor as a grazing area. As immigrants, the ancestors would not have been able to simply bury their dead in family tracts. They had to buy the land first and thus gain title in perpetuity; otherwise their graves might be disturbed or become inaccessible. The burial of Joshua and Eleazar, however, stand in contrast to this practice, since they were buried in land claimed through conquest and allotted to them and their descendants.

24:33. Gibeah. The burial site of Aaron's son Eleazar was in the Ephraimite allotment. Eusebius placed it about five miles north of Gophna. However, there are a number of sites named Gibeah, and what the text refers to may simply be the "hill of Phineas," a local name which is presently unidentifiable.

JUDGES

1:1—2:5
Attempt to Possess the Land

1:1-2. oracular information. Prior to military engagements, it was common practice for ancient Near Eastern army commanders to seek divine aid and information through oracles and omens (see 20:18). For instance, the assumption in the Assyrian royal inscription is that war occurred "by the command of the god Ashur." However, in order to learn the nature and urgency of this call, a variety of divination practices were utilized: the examination of an animal's organs, the casting of lots or the observation of natural phenomena such as the flight of birds or cloud formations. The oracle or response would often determine (1) whether they would fight that day and (2) what tactics to employ.

1:3. territory of Simeon and Judah. The allotment assigned to Simeon in Joshua 19:1-9 was in the southern area of Palestine and "within that of Judah." The pairing of these two neighboring tribes in this episode makes logical sense. However, Simeon is eventually absorbed by the more prominent tribe of Judah. Thus Judah's offer to aid them to conquer their allotment became, in effect, an invitation

to tribal oblivion for Simeon.

1:4. Bezek. This is the site of a battle with the Canaanites and Perezzites in which Judah and Simeon defeat their leader Adoni-Bezek. Although no geographical information appears in Judges, the place name also appears in the Saul narrative (1 Sam 11:8-11). This text indicates an open plain suitable for a military muster, no more than twelve or fifteen miles southwest of Jabesh Gilead (El Maklub), just east of the Jordan River. Survey of the hill country between Shechem and the Jordan Valley indicates Khirbet Salhab as a likely location (with Iron Age deposits evidenced) for ancient Bezek.

1:6. cutting off thumbs and big toes. Like the blinding of the right eye in 1 Samuel 11:2, this act of mutilation was designed both to humiliate prisoners and to insure they could never serve as warriors again. Unsteady on their feet and unable to grasp a sword, spear or bow, these men could only beg to survive. Assyrian reliefs from the time of Shalmaneser III (ninth century) depict prisoners being mutilated and dismembered.

1:7. picking up scraps under the table. These mutilated and helpless prisoners had no resort but to beg at their captor's table. They were kept on display as a sign of the power of their conqueror, eating scraps like dogs under the table (Ugaritic parallels include the god El treating enemy gods in this manner). The irony in this passage is that Adoni-Bezek was reduced to the same condition as the seventy kings he had previously mutilated.

1:7-8. Jerusalem. Despite the description of the sacking and burning of Jerusalem in this passage, all other references to that city and its Jebusite inhabitants during the settlement period indicate a failure to occupy the site by either Judah (Josh 15:63) or the tribe of Benjamin (Judg 1:21). In Judges 19:10-12 it is still considered a foreign city. The lack of archaeological evidence for this period (post-El Amarna breakup and post-Sea Peoples disruption) leaves the question unanswered. Some commentators suggest an unfortified area of the city was attacked and burned, but there is no way to prove this assertion. It will remain for David to finally conquer the city and transform it into the Israelite capital (2 Sam 5:6-10).

1:9. geography. The orientation of this verse suggests a generally southern movement, including the southern range of the hill country of Judah in the direction of Hebron and the northern range of the Negev desert westward toward the Shephelah and the Philistine coastal area. What is implied is an attempt to capture as much as possible of the area allotted to Judah (Josh 15:1-12, 21-63) and to Caleb (Josh 15:13-19).

1:10. Hebron. Located at Jebel er-Rumeidah, twenty-three miles northeast of Beersheba and nineteen miles southeast of Jerusalem, Hebron sat at the conjunction of roads from the Shephelah, the western Negev and Jerusalem. The text mentions an earlier name, Kiriath Arba (see Gen 23:2; Neh 11:25), possibly a clan center of the Anakites (Josh 14:15, 15:13). For additional information on this site, see the comment on Joshua 10:3-5.

1:11. Debir. Located southwest of Hebron in the southernmost part of the Judean hill country, Debir in the early Iron Age may have been an outpost of the invading Sea Peoples (if the Anakim of Josh 11:21 were not Canaanites). It is most likely situated at the Khiriath Rabud. See the comments on Joshua 10:3, 38-39 and 11:21.

1:12. daughter as reward. While this is not a frequent occurrence, the idea of "status-elevation" through an otherwise unavailable marriage arrangement would be appealing to some ambitious men. For instance, David is able to marry into Saul's royal household as a result of Saul's offer of a daughter and David's eventual conquest of Goliath (1 Sam 17:25). The feat involved here and in the Goliath incident is considered both difficult and dangerous. Thus the extraordinary offer of a valuable marriage contract is made to entice a hero to step forward. Othniel already has a high status in his relationship to Calelo, but there was still greater prestige to be gained.

1:14. request for a field. Having obtained a wife through the conquest of Kiriath Sepher, Othniel is now urged by his wife Acsah to ask for a piece of land with which to support his household. This could be considered a dowry since it is not mentioned earlier in the narrative. Daughters, however, did not generally obtain land as part of their dowry or as an inheritance (see, however, Num 36:1-13). Thus the request for land had to be made by a male kinsman. Additionally, Othniel is a prized vassal who has previously done exemplary military service and could be in line for a land grant (similar cases are found in Mari texts). There is a Babylonian boundary marker from this period that depicts a father transferring land rights to a daughter.

1:14. getting off donkey. Interpretation of this action is varied. Some believe Acsah made a noise (clapped her hands) to both draw her father's attention and as a sign of derision at the land grant made to her husband. Another suggestion is that by alighting from her donkey

she became a supplicant, once again her father's daughter asking for a favor. Certainly, unwatered land was worthless; Acsah's embassy is to insure her household's survival.

1:15. upper and lower springs. This may refer to water sources that may be tapped by shallow excavations in wadi beds or by drilling deep well shafts in places where the water table is much lower. It is also possible that specific geographical locations are being refer-enced in the Negev region, but no current location can be discerned for this.

1:16. Kenites. The Kenites were one of several tribes or clans which inhabited the deserts of the Sinai peninsula and the area south and east of the Negev as far as the Gulf of Aqabah (Gen 15:19; 1 Sam 27:10; 30:29; 1 Chron 2:55). It is also possible, based on the placement of Heber's camp in Judges 4:11, that the Kenites ranged as far north as the Jezreel Valley. Their connection to Moses and Jethro (Hobab) goes back to Exodus 3:1. They are portrayed as herders (Judg 5:24-27), caravaneers and itinerant metalworkers. This latter skill is deduced from the etymology of their name, which can mean "to forge." See the comment on Numbers 24:21-22.

1:16. City of Palms. Based on the description in the text and its association elsewhere (Judg 3:13), this is most likely Jericho, the ancient oasis city just eight miles northwest of the Dead Sea (Tell es-Sultan). Its existence and fertility (boasting many palm trees as well as cultivated fields) is based on the continual flow of the springs of 'Ain es-Sultan and 'Ain Duq. Earliest occupation of the site began in the Mesolithic period (c. 9000-8700 B.C.), and eventually the population and importance of the city grew to such an extent that a complete mudbrick wall system was constructed during Early Bronze III (c. 2700 B.C.). There are some breaks in occupation due to invasion and conquest (as at the end of the Early Bronze III, c. 2500 B.C., and again during the early part of Late Bronze Iib, c. 1350 B.C.). At the time of the judges, the site was sparsely occupied and may have only served as an outpost or perhaps a caravan stop. It will not be rebuilt as a city site until the ninth century B.C. (see 1 Kings 16:34).

1:16. Arad. Located at Tell 'Arad in the Beersheba Valley, twenty miles south of Hebron, this site was first occupied in the Chalcolithic period, and the lower city (situated around a natural depression that functioned as a cistern/well combination) expanded during the Early Bronze Age due to extensive economic contacts with Egypt. An unfortified settlement was constructed on the upper tell during the Iron Age. Its occurrence and the remains of a cultic area or courtyard in addition to housing may be signs of the Kenite occupation of this area mentioned in Judges and in 1 Samuel 27:10. The upper tell of Arad contains a total of seven strata during the Iron Age, with a fortress and temple complex constructed in the tenth century B.C.

1:17. Zephath (Hormah). This is one of the Negev villages captured by Judah and Simeon in the Judges account of the conquest. It was renamed Hormah, "destruction," by the Israelites (see also Num 21:3, which places it near Arad). It has been identified with Tel Masos and Tel Ira, both in the region between Arad and Beersheba.

1:18. Gaza. Located in the southwest section of Canaan's coastal plain and on the important international highway ("Way of the Philistines" or Via Maris), Gaza (Tell Harube) functioned as Egypt's provincial capital in Canaan from 1550-1150 B.C. It is mentioned in the annals of Pharaoh Thutmose III and the El Amarna texts. After the invasion of the Sea Peoples, it became the most important of the five Philistine cities and figures in a number of the conflicts between these people and the Israelites (6:3-4; 16:1-4). The text concerning its capture by Judah is uncertain. The Septuagint states that they did not capture Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron, and this seems to be confirmed by 1:19, which says the Israelites were unable to conquer the cities of the plain.

1:18. Ashkelon. One of the main cities of the Philistine Pentapolis, Ashkelon is located about ten miles north of Gaza and functioned as a seaport for much of its existence. Its strategic location brought it to the attention of the Egyptians, who wished to control Canaan and the highways north, beginning in the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000-1800 B.C.), when the city appears in the Execration texts. During the El Amarna period (fourteenth century B.C.), Ashkelon's ruler was a vassal of Akhenaton and wrote several letters to that pharaoh. Merenptah also lists the city among his conquests in his victory stele (c. 1208 B.C.) and depicts its capture on the walls of the great temple at Karnak. Although it was allotted to Judah, this city and the other Philistine cities of the plain were not con-quered by the Israelites.

1:18. Ekron. Assigned in the lists to both Judah (Josh 15:11) and Dan (Josh 19:43), Ekron lay on the border between the Shephelah and the Central Hill Country. It is identified with Tel Miqne, about twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem in the frontier area separating Philistia from Judah. Although there are traces of

occupation as far back as the Chalcolithic, excavations have shown the first major city site appears in the Late Bronze Age, when contact with Egypt and Cyprus are indicated by ceramic and scarab (Nineteenth Dynasty) remains. The abrupt shift in the material culture resulting from the Sea Peoples invasion of the twelfth century B.C. led to expansion of the city and a new population group. During the first millennium, under Assyrian and Babylonian domination, Ekron became a major industrial city, producing huge quantities of olive oil in its refineries. Its appearance in the list in Judges indicates its place as a major Philistine city and one not captured by Judah (Judg 3:1-4).

1:19. iron chariots. The use of iron chariots is ascribed to Israel's enemies in Canaan, especially the cities of the plain, throughout the conquest period (see the comments on Josh 17:16 and Judg 4:3). They reflect a higher level of technology and greater wealth than that of the Israelites (see 1 Sam 13:19-21) and as such a major threat to the success of the conquest. The actual amount of iron used may have been very small, but its appearance as decoration, reinforcements or as wheel sheaths may have been enough to strike terror in their enemies. In this passage, the mention of iron chariots suggests a realistic appraisal of the military situation which kept the Israelites bottled up in the hill country where chariots would be of less use. Certainly, there are assurances that the tribal forces, with the help of God as the Divine Warrior, would be able to overcome this obstacle (Josh 17:18; Judg 4:7). However, the archaeological record as well as the admission here that some areas were never conquered indicates a rationalization for failure based on the physical reality of the situation. It will only be when Israel acquires iron technology and military parity with the Philistines that this dreaded weapon will lose its ability to frighten them.

1:20. sons of Anak. These were among the inhabitants of Canaan at the time of the conquest. Their territory centered on Hebron (Josh 21:11), and they were said to be men of great size (Deut 2:10; 9:2) and greatly feared by the Israelites (Num 13:28, 33). Their expulsion from Hebron by Caleb may have marked at least one success in displacing a native people from the area of Judah. Subsequently, the surviving Anakim may have taken refuge in the Philistine cities of Gaza, Gath and Ashdod. See the comment on Joshua 11:21.

1:21. Jebusites. First mentioned as descendants of Canaan (Gen 10:16), the Jebusites were probably non-Semitic peoples, related to Hittites or Hurrians, who moved into this region during the early second millennium. They inhabited the hill country along the southern border with Benjamin (Josh 15:8) and the city of Jebus (Josh 15:63; 2 Sam 5:6). Jerusalem, but not Jebus, is mentioned in the El Amarna texts, and Jebus also does not appear in the Execration texts. The statement that the Benjaminites could not conquer the city is reinforced by the Levite's refusal to stop in an "alien city" of non-Israelites in Judges 19:10-12. After David captured Jerusalem, the Jebusites apparently were either assimilated or eventually lost their ethnic identity as an enslaved people (2 Sam 5:6-9).

1:22-23. Bethel. The strategic location of Bethel (modern Beitin), on a crossroads that bisected the central hill country just north of Jerusalem, made it a natural target for the Israelites and later conquerors as well (Joseph's [i.e., Ephraim's] mention here may reflect later tribal alliances subsequent to its allotment to Benjamin; see Josh 18:22). Its role as a sanctuary site has long standing in the biblical narrative (see the comment on Gen 28:19), and excavations have revealed a Middle Bronze cultic installation at the site. It will eventually become one of the two major cultic centers during the divided monarchy (1 Kings 12:29-33). The description of its capture, which is not mentioned in Joshua, may be based on the use of a postern gate (a minor passage used when the city gates were closed for the night) such as that found in the excavations at Ramat Rahel (just south of Jerusalem). Excavations indicate a massive destruction level at Bethel dating to the late thirteenth century B.C.

1:26. Luz in the land of the Hittites. The reference to the Hittites has generally been equated with Syria or the area of Lebanon, two regions that were a part of the Hittite empire prior to the Sea Peoples' invasion in 1200 B.C. It is also possible that the new city of Luz was simply established further north within Palestine and west of Bethel (see Num 13:29; Josh 16:2).

1:27. Beth Shan. Identified with Tell el-Husn, Beth Shan is located at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley in northern Canaan. Like Megiddo on the western end, it serves as a guardian of the important Via Maris highway. Settlement began in the Chalcolithic period and was nearly continuous up until the present. A second city lies at the base of the tell, built during the Hellenistic period as one of the Decapolis cities and greatly expanded during Roman and Byzantine times (Scythopolis). Excavations seem to indicate that, unlike many Late Bronze sites, Beth Shan was not de-

stroyed by the Sea Peoples, and Rameses III continued to maintain control of this important commercial center during the first half of the twelfth century B.C. The biblical text notes that Saul did not conquer this city (1 Sam 31:10-12), and it is only in Solomonic times that it is added to Israelite territory (1 Kings 4:12).

1:27. Taanach. See the comment on Joshua 12:21 for discussion of this northern Canaanite city.

1:27. Dor. See the comment on Joshua 12:23 for discussion of this coastal city in northern Canaan.

1:27. Ibleam. This fortress site (Khirbet Bel'ameh) is situated at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley and functioned as one of a group of cities guarding that important transportation link. It is listed as one of the cities that the tribe of Manasseh was unable to conquer (Josh 17:11-12), but it does have some significance as an Israelite outpost during the divided monarchy (2 Kings 9:27). Its strategic importance is confirmed by its mention in the conquest list of Thutmose III (c. 1504-1450 B.C.).

1:27. Megiddo. See the comment on Joshua 12:21 for discussion of this major city located at the western entrance to the Jezreel Valley.

1:29. Gezer. See the comment on Joshua 21:21 for discussion of this major city, which linked the coastal plain and Philistia with the central hill country and Jerusalem.

1:30. Kitron. Assigned to Zebulun, the most likely location for this site is in the northwestern portion of the Jezreel Valley. Other suggestions, which place it more in the Acco Plain (Tell Qurdaneh and Tell el-Far) simply because this would have been a factor favoring Canaanite military tactics, are less likely based on current information.

1:30. Nahalol. Although its exact location is uncertain, a case has been made to equate this city of Zebulun's allotment with Tell en-Nahl, five miles east of the Mediterranean Sea near Haifa. Etymological similarities in the name and the appearance of artifactual remains covering the Early Bronze to the Arabic periods favor this identification, but its placement in Asher's territory creates a geographic problem that has not been resolved.

1:31-32. territory of Asher. See the comment on Joshua 19:24-31 for a discussion of Asher's tribal allotment.

1:33. Beth Shemesh. See the comment on Joshua 21:16 for discussion of this city located in the northeastern section of the Shephelah as it borders on Philistia.

1:33. Beth Anath. The precise location of this site is still unknown. The most likely claimant at this point is Safed el-Battikh in the upper Galilee region. The city was apparently mentioned in Egyptian records from the time of Thutmose III, Seti I and Rameses II, and appears to lie on the route between Hazor and Tyre.

1:34-36. Amorites. See the comment on Numbers 21:21 for discussion of this ethnic group which existed in Canaan prior to the formation of Israel. Their cultural and linguistic influence on Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine is perhaps the most pervasive of any people, creating the high civilization of Hammurabi's Babylon and maintaining their cultural identity, at least in some regions, until the beginning of the Iron Age.

1:35. Mount Heres. The "mountain of the sun" has often been equated with Beth Shemesh (see Josh 21:16) or Ir Shemesh (Josh 19:41). That is, however, not certain, and the site itself may be one of several villages identified just southeast of Yalo (five miles east of Gezer). As part of Dan's tribal allotment, it would have been located in the southeastern area of the Valley of Aijalon.

1:35. Aijalon. This site, assigned to Dan (Josh 19:42), is probably to be equated with Yalo, situated five miles east of Gezer at the western end of the Valley of Aijalon. Its strategic importance, lying on a major road leading into the hill country, is confirmed by its mention in the El Amarna texts and its appearance in Saul's campaigns (1 Sam 14:31).

1:35. Shaalbim. This city in the territory of Dan (Josh 19:42) has been identified with Selbit, three miles northwest of Aijalon. It was later incorporated into Solomon's second administrative district (1 Kings 4:9) and may have served, like Aijalon, as a fortress guarding the passage through the Valley of Aijalon.

1:36. Scorpion Pass. This refers to a pass southwest of the Dead Sea, the Neqb es-Safa, which may have first been used by the Egyptians as they traveled to the copper-mining area near the Arabah and Eilat (see Num 34:4; Josh 15:3).

1:36. Sela. Although its identification is uncertain, its placement in association with the Scorpion Pass suggests a location to the southwest of the Dead Sea. Because its name means "the rock," some commentators equate it with either Petra, the Nabatean rock city, or with modern Sela', two miles northwest of Buseira. Excavations, however, have not revealed deposits earlier than the ninth century B.C. for these sites.

2:1-5. Bokim. This site is named for the weeping of the Israelites after they were rebuked by

God's angel for failing to obey the covenant and failing to wage total war against the Canaanites. Its location is unknown, although the text suggests placement just west of the Jordan River near Gilgal.

2:6—3:6

The Cycles of the Judges

2:9. Timnah Heres. See the comment on Joshua 19:50 (Timnah Serah) for this place name, which is associated with Joshua's portion of the land within the boundaries of Ephraim. It is identified with Khirbet Tibnah, fifteen miles southwest of Shechem, which contains extensive evidence of a village site during Iron I and II.

2:9. Mount Gaash. Associated with Timnah Heres and Joshua's allotment of the land, this mountain has not been identified. It should, however, be located within a range of fifteen to twenty miles southwest of Shechem in the territory of Ephraim. The hilly terrain in that region makes exact identification difficult (see 2 Sam 23:30).

2:11-13. Baals. The use of a plural form here does not indicate a large number of different Canaanite gods. Rather it refers to various local manifestations of the same storm and fertility god Baal. Gods were generally tied to local sites (high places, shrines, cities). This also seems to be the case with Yahweh (Bethel, Jerusalem and Shiloh are all associated with God's name or presence). Baal, which means "lord," occurs as a divine name as early as the eighteenth century B.C. in Amorite personal names from Mari. Some would offer examples as early as the late third millennium. By the fourteenth century it was used by Egyptians to refer to the storm god. The name is also evident in texts from Alalakh, Amarna and Ugarit as the personal name of the storm god, Adad. Baal was a fertility deity and was a dying (winter) and rising (spring) god. In the mythology of Ugarit he is pictured in combat with Yamm (the sea) and Mot (death). His consorts are Anat and Astarte.

2:13. Ashtoreths. The plural form of Astarte, the consort of Baal within the Canaanite pantheon, is indicative of her appearance in various local manifestations. She was both a fertility goddess and a goddess of war. The singular form of the name only appears in 1 Kings 11:5 and 2 Kings 23:13, where it refers to the chief goddess of the Phoenician city of Sidon. In fact there are several female deities who are mentioned as Baal's consort (Anath, Ashtoreth, Asherah) in Ugaritic and Phoenician texts. Astarte's popularity among the Canaanites may reflect a merging of these other goddesses into her person or simply a local preference. The cult of Astarte also appears in Egypt during the New Kingdom (perhaps due to greater contact with Canaan) and in Mesopotamia.

2:11-19. relationship cycle. The idea of a cycle of relationship with deity is a common pattern in the ancient Near East. The sequence of certain types of behavior alienating deity, making him angry and leading to devastation of the country, followed by the land recovering divine favor, bringing restoration, is offered as a common explanation of rise and fall. It can be observed, for instance, in Assyrian king Esarhaddon's account of the destruction of Babylon (carried out by his father, Sennacherib, in the seventh century). Differences would include (1) that the offenses in the Esarhaddon text were ritual offenses, and (2) that there is no raising up of a deliverer, though it is clear that Esarhaddon fashions himself in that role.

2:16-19. judges. In English the term *judge* is used to describe an official who maintains justice within the established court system. The Hebrew term used in the context of this book describes an individual who maintains justice for the tribes of Israel. This justice comes in bringing protection from foreign oppressors. Maintaining international justice was often the role of the king. What made these judges unlike kings was that there was no formal process for assuming the office, nor could it be passed on to one's heirs. There was no supporting administration, no standing army and no taxation to underwrite expenses. So while the actual function of the judge may have had much in common with the king, the judge did not enjoy most of the royal prerogatives. Just as a king also judged civil cases, the judges may have had some of that responsibility (see 4:5), but this would have been a minor role. The judges did not serve as heads of government in general but did have the authority to call out the armies of the tribes. Prior to the monarchy, no one from any one tribe would have been able to exercise such authority over another tribe. God was the only central authority. Therefore, when a judge successfully rallied the armies of several tribes, it was seen as the work of the Lord through that judge (see 6:34-35). Only the establishment of kingship assigned a permanent human central authority over the tribes.

3:3. five rulers of the Philistines. After the invasion of the Sea Peoples (c. 1200 B.C.), a group known as the Philistines settled along the Coastal Plain and in the Shephelah region of Canaan. Eventually five major city-states

emerged: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron (Josh 13:2-3). Destruction levels found in excavations at Ashdod and Ashkelon indicate the overthrow of Egyptian garrisons about 1150 B.C. and the resettlement of the area by the Philistines. While their city-states and attendant villages were independent politically, they often functioned as a coalition in their dealings with Israel and other states (see 1 Sam 6:16; 29:1-5). At their height, the Philistine coalition expanded northward to Tell Qasile (on the coast at the Yarkon River) and east through the Jezreel Valley to Beth Shan. It is only the emergence of a strong monarchy under David and Solomon that eventually holds Philistine hegemony in check in the rest of Palestine.

3:3. Canaanites. See the comment on Genesis 15:19-21 for discussion of these inhabitants of Canaan prior to the conquest. In the Judges context, *Canaanites* is used as a generic ethnic term to designate one of four groups of people who are neighbors of the invading Israelites (Philistines, Hivites, Phoenicians [Sidonians]). This is a much reduced list from that found in Genesis 10:15-18 and 15:19-21, and is probably more reflective of the major political groups with which the Israelites had to deal.

3:3. Sidonians. The Sidonians are listed in Genesis 10:15 as descendants of Canaan. However, in the context of the Judges period, they represent the people of Lebanon and Phoenicia, which bordered on the northern edge of the Israelite tribal allotments. The city-state of Sidon was a major seaport on the Mediterranean coast, twenty-five miles north of the other important Phoenician seaport, Tyre. It is mentioned in the Ugaritic Epic of Keret (c. 1400 B.C.) as well as in the El Amarna texts and the campaign lists of Pharaoh Thutmose III. Its later associations with Israel are diplomatic (Jer 27:3) and commercial (Is 23:2).

3:3. Hivites. See the comment on Genesis 34:2 for a discussion of these people of Canaan and their possible relation to either Hurrian or Hittite settlers.

3:3. Lebanon Mountains. These heights extend for over one hundred miles north-south and rise to an elevation of over ten thousand feet. The western slopes of these mountains receive as much as sixty inches of rain and snow a year and thus provide fertile ground for agricultural pursuits. The extensive cedar forests that also existed in antiquity were the direct result of this pattern of Mediterranean climate. Although the eastern slopes do not receive as much rainfall, there are a number of rivers and springs that make their more gentle slopes fertile in the Beqa' Valley region.

3:5. peoples of Canaan. The list of nations with which the Israelites had to contend in Canaan is found in several other places, with some variations (see Gen 15:19-21; Deut 7:1 lists seven nations, including the Girgashites, which are excluded in Judges). For discussion of the individual groups, see the comments on Judges 3:3 (Canaanites); Genesis 23:3-20 (Hittites); Judges 1:34-36 and Numbers 21:21 (Amorites); Genesis 15:20 (Perizzites); Genesis 34:2 (Hivites); and Judges 1:21 (Jebusites).

3:7-11
Othniel

3:7. Baals and Asherahs. These Canaanite fertility deities often appear together. They represent the bounty of rain and the growth of crops in the fields. See the comments on Judges 2:11-13 for discussion of them as a danger to the Israelites' adherence to the covenant.

3:8. Aram Naharaim. The region identified with Aram Naharaim is the northern portion of the Euphrates in eastern Syria and the Habur triangle region within which Nahor and Haran are located (see Gen 24:10). This is the area where the Hurrian empire of Mitanni was located from 1500-1350. The Hittites had begun action against Mitanni as early as 1365, and the middle of the fourteenth century brought the breakup of the Hurrian kingdom, creating refugees and displaced tribes from the region. Cushan-Rishathaim's name, though admittedly hebraized, shows similarities to common Hurrian names of the period (Kuzzari-rishti). It is possible, then, that this first threat comes from a displaced tribe trying to find a new homeland rather than from a foreign conqueror trying to enlarge his empire.

3:12-30
Ehud

3:12-13. Moabites, Ammonites, Amalekites. Moab and Ammon were Transjordanian kingdoms that had genealogical ties to the Israelites (see the comment on Gen 19:30-38). Their appearance here as rival states probably reflects the growing border tensions resulting from the expansion of the Israelite tribes. The Amalekites are always portrayed as sworn enemies of Israel (see Num 24:20; Deut 25:17-19). Although tied to the Sinai peninsula and Midian in some narratives, they seem to have also ranged into the southeastern portion of Canaan and into the hill country of Samaria. As such, they would be a useful ally for any encroaching enemy such as Eglon's Moabite force.

3:13. City of Palms. The reference once again, as in Judges 1:16, is to the oasis site of Jericho, just north of the Dead Sea. It was a natural stronghold for any force attempting to control the Judean wilderness and the roads leading into the central hill country.

3:15. left-handed. The appearance here and in Judges 20:16 of left-handed Benjaminites suggests a practice of teaching ambidextrous use of weapons by that tribe. However, being left-handed was sufficiently unusual that it could be used as a strategic factor, allowing Ehud to enter Eglon's presence with a concealed weapon.

3:15. tribute. When one state or other political entity conquered another or extended hegemony over its affairs, the result was the exaction of tribute payments from the subject people (see 2 Sam 8:2; 1 Kings 4:21; 2 Kings 17:3-4). This could take the form of precious metals (by weight or as jewelry or implements), farm produce (a significant portion of the harvest), or labor service. Not surprisingly, this draining of the economy was unpopular and was generally the reason for revolt or warfare. Extrabiblical documentation for this practice is widespread. For instance, the annals of the Assyrian kings often include lists of items received as tribute: the "Black Obelisk" inscription of Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.) contains Jehu's tribute to Assyria of silver, gold, lead and hard woods; Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 B.C.) received elephant hide, ivory, linen garments and other luxury items from his vassals in Damascus, Samaria, Tyre and elsewhere.

3:16. Ehud's sword. The dagger fashioned by Ehud was probably made of bronze. At only eighteen inches in length and straight, it was less likely to be detected by Eglon's Moabite guards. This also allowed it to be doubled-edged, unlike the more common "sickle-swords" of that era, which were designed for chopping, not thrusting. Since the blade was made to be punched into its victim, it would not have had a cross piece, only a grip or wrapped surface for the wielder to hold. Thus it could be forced completely into the body of Eglon, killing him quickly, and very little blood would result from what was in essence a corked wound. Like so many other factors in this narrative, this was an unusual weapon, used by a left-handed man, and designed for a single purpose: assassination.

3:16. strapped to right thigh. Since Ehud was left-handed, it would be natural for him to strap his dagger on his right thigh. Thrusting weapons must be drawn across the body in order to be placed on guard immediately. However, since most people are right-handed, Eglon's guards would be less careful about checking what to them would be an awkward placement for a weapon.

3:19. the idols near Gilgal. These images (perhaps either standing stones or carved idols) may mark the boundary between Israelite (Ephraim/Benjamin) territory and that held by Eglon at Jericho. It is possible that a Canaanite sanctuary existed at Gilgal and that the tribute brought by Ehud would have had to be brought here in order that the gods could witness this show of submission. However, subsequent action (and its second mention in Judg 3:26) suggests that this is just Ehud's turning-back point prior to returning to Eglon's court.

3:19. secret message. Eglon's reaction to Ehud's proffered secret message (sending his attendants away), suggests that this is considered an important and prized piece of information. It is unlikely he was expecting to receive the report of a spy but rather an oracle from a god. Otherwise he would have wanted his advisors to hear the news. Ehud had singled him out with the title "O king" and then confirmed his desire by stating that the message was from Yahweh (v. 20). Just as Ehud's people had submitted to him, Eglon now expected divine word of future conquests and favor (in a prophecy text from Mari the king is given a secretive warning of a revolt). In this way Eglon's ambition led to his demise.

3:20. king rising from seat. This statement has been included in the translation based on the reading from the Septuagint. It provides an extra piece of narrative action. Certainly, by rising to a standing position, Eglon made himself a better target for Ehud's stabbing thrust in 3:21.

3:23. architecture. The architectural features of Eglon's audience chamber are predicated on a term which does not appear elsewhere but may be translated "the upper chamber over the beams." This implies a raised platform, reached by a staircase, within a larger audience chamber. There were apparently doors which separated this private room from the larger area and since it was the king's private meeting area it probably contained a toilet facility, which was at times a display of pride. Thus when Eglon drew Ehud up the stairs and into this room, closing and locking the door behind them, Ehud was able to dispatch him in private. He was then able to escape by removing the toilet seat and descending through the floor into the latrine below (the NIV translates it "porch") and out through the "janitor's door" into the larger audience

room. His departure through the portico would not have aroused the guards waiting there, and they would have been slow to investigate the king's absence due to the fecal smell emanating from his inner chamber.

3:24. smell. At the point when Ehud stabbed Eglon, the murdered man's anal sphincter exploded, creating a smell similar to that associated with a bowel movement. Eglon's guards hesitated to interrupt the king while he was relieving himself (see similar euphemistic reference in 1 Sam 24:3) and thus gave Ehud time to escape and rally his troops.

3:26. Seirah. This site or geographic features has not been positively identified. Its proximity to the "idols near Gilgal" (see Judg 3:19) suggests the area just north of Jericho in the Jordan Valley. Such a spot would have been sufficiently close to rally the Israelites to attack the Moabite garrison at Jericho.

3:28. fords. To hold the fords (shallow crossing) of the Jordan River was to effectively control passage of armies from Canaan into Transjordan and vice versa (see comment on Josh 2:7). Ehud's strategy was to prevent the evacuation of Eglon's garrison and to hold off any reinforcements that might come from the direction of Moab. Similar strategic use of the fords is also found in Judges 12:5-6 when Jephthah held them against the Ephraimites and in Rameses II's depiction of the Battle of Kadesh against the Hittites (c. 1285 B.C.).

3:31
Shamgar

3:31. Shamgar. There is no reason to think of Shamgar as an Israelite or as a judge. The Philistines were moving from the north toward Egypt at the end of the thirteenth century, and the Egyptians undoubtedly would have used mercenary bands to engage them. Shamgar could well have been the leader of such a band (perhaps Apiru, see comment on Josh 5:1). His military intervention would have benefited Israel as much as Egypt. Nevertheless, he was used by the Lord as an instrument of salvation.

3:31. son of Anath. This designation or title for Shamgar may indicate his dedication to or association with the Canaanite goddess Anath, who was a patron of warriors. Shamgar's name may well be Hurrian (although some suggest it is West Semitic and therefore Canaanite). Thus he may be a mercenary, like Jephthah or David's thirty mighty men (2 Sam 23:8-39). The title has been compared to the Haneans in the Mari texts, who are warlike mercenaries from the shrine of Hanat (=Anat). There is additionally an Egyptian warrior in the thirteenth century who is identified as son of Anat, and also an arrowhead from Late Bronze Age Palestine engraved with Ben Anat. All of these suggest a military class designated by this title.

3:31. Philistines. As the Sea Peoples began to settle in Syro-Palestine after their successful invasion of all of the Near Eastern coastal areas (except for Egypt, where Rameses III barely drives them off), they had to contest the area with its local inhabitants (see Judg 3:3). The Philistines, one of these Sea People contingents, must have faced a variety of opponents, including the Israelites. In this case, a unit of six hundred Philistines is attacked by Shamgar. The story could be read to suggest that he alone slew them all with an oxgoad. However, it does not rule out the possibility that he was a local Canaanite or Hurrian mercenary leader (well-known enough to also appear in the Deborah narrative in Judg 5:6) whose exploits at least indirectly aided the Israelites by destroying a common enemy.

3:31. oxgoad. The term *malmad* appears only in this story. It could refer to the goad or cattle guide used by herdsmen to direct their animals. If it had a fire-hardened or metal point, it could also serve its wielder as a short spear or pike when no formal weapon was available. Like many of the makeshift weapons used in Judges, it reflects a less technologically advanced culture.

4:1-24
Deborah and Barak

4:2. Hazor. Mentioned as an important city in both the eighteenth-century Mari texts and the fourteenth-century El Amarna letters, Hazor (Tell el-Qedah) stood at a strategic point in northern Galilee (ten miles north of the Sea of Galilee) on the road between Damascus to Megiddo. The Joshua account describes it as "the head of all those kingdoms" (Josh 11:10), and in both Joshua and in Judges, its king Jabin is defeated (Josh 11:13; Judg 4:24; see also 1 Sam 12:9). Archaeological investigations do show a major destruction level in the thirteenth century, which could be the result of attacks by either the Sea Peoples, the Israelites or some other group. Subsequently the city was refortified by Solomon (1 Kings 9:15) and remained a major center of commerce and a key to Israel's northern border until the Assyrian conquest (2 Kings 15:29). See the comment on Joshua 11:1 for additional information.

4:2. Harosheth Haggoyim. It is uncertain

whether this place name, translated "forests of the nations" in the Septuagint, is a city site or a forested region in Galilee. Attempts have been made to identify it with various sites (Tel el-Harbaj and Tell Amr), but the archaeological evidence is not conclusive. Similarly, there is no definitive reason to equate it with Muhrashti of the El Amarna letters. From the description in the text, it appears to either be a staging area or rallying point within the Jezreel Valley, perhaps within a zone under the control of Philistines (Sisera's name is non-Semitic). It may simply refer to that area of the Galilee region under the control of Sisera, who appears to be a military governor allied with Jabin of Hazor.

4:3. nine hundred iron chariots. The number of chariots involved in this engagement is so substantial that some have considered it exaggerated. Exaggerated figures were sometimes used in the ancient Near East to magnify the strength of an opponent and serve as a means to add greater glory to the commander or deity when the victory is won. Other examples of suspected hyperbole in the annalistic style of writing occur in the Assyrian Annals of Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.), which list 3240 chariots among his enemies, and in Thutmose III's claim to have captured 892 chariots at the battle of Megiddo. Other large numbers of chariots in biblical accounts can be found in 1 Samuel 13:5 (30,000/3,000 in Septuagint); 1 Kings 10:26 (1,400 chariots); and 1 Chronicles 19:7 (32,000 chariots). For more information on the use of iron fittings, see Judges 1:19.

4:5. holding court. Deborah is the only figure portrayed in the book of Judges as actually functioning in a judicial position. She hears and decides cases and provides answers to oracular inquiry under a palm tree which served as a landmark for that region. The description of her "court" is similar to that found in the Ugaritic epic of Aqhat (c. 1500 B.C.), which depicts King Danil sitting on a threshing floor before the city gates, judging the cases of the widows and orphans (Aqhat III.i.20-25).

4:5. between Ramah and Bethel. Ramah, in the tribe of Benjamin, is identified with er-Ram, three miles north of Jerusalem, and Bethel (Beitin) is another four miles north along the road into Ephraimite territory. This well-traveled route would be a likely place for a judge or prophet to sit and hold court.

4:6. Kedesh. See the comment on Joshua 12:22 for this site identified with Tell Qades, northwest of Lake Huleh in the upper region of the Galilee.

4:6. mustering at Mount Tabor. Its distinctive shape, a flat-topped promontory rising above the northeastern end of the Jezreel Valley (about two and a half miles from Nazareth), and its position at the juncture of the tribal territories of Zebulun, Issachar and Naphtali (Josh 19:22) made Mount Tabor a logical rallying point for troops from these tribes. From its summit it is possible to see south to Mount Gilboa and west to Mount Carmel. It would also be neutral ground where sacrifices and other cultic activities might be performed prior to a battle or at its conclusion (see Judg 8:18 and 1 Sam 10:3). Should an enemy detect their movements, the tribes would also hold high ground from which to fight and remain safe from Sisera's chariots. The actual battle, however, will take place to the south at the Wadi Kishon.

4:7. luring Sisera to Kishon. The Kishon River lies south of Mount Tabor near Taanach (see Josh 12:21). Although this is a flat plain that would ordinarily favor the use of chariots by Sisera's forces (see Judg 1:19), the river was apparently overflowing its banks due to heavy rainfall (Judg 5:20-21). This would have muddied the battlefield to the extent that the chariots would have been bogged down and become deathtraps. The genius of luring the enemy into an area where they would be overconfident and then surprised by the condition of the terrain provided the edge needed by the Israelites.

4:10. ten thousand men. It is difficult to determine whether this number should be read as ten thousand men or as ten divisions. The Hebrew terms are ambiguous. Often a clan would send a division of armed men, and these would likely have numbered far less than a thousand each. For more discussion see comment on Joshua 8:3.

4:11. Kenites. For discussion of these people, who ranged throughout the area from Galilee south to the Negev and the Sinai, see the comments on Numbers 24:21-22 and Judges 1:16.

4:11. tree of Zaanannim. Heber's campsite would be on the southern border of Naphtali (Josh 19:33), and its association with a landmark or sacred tree parallels it in the story to Deborah's palm (Judg 4:5). It was most likely near Mount Tabor and within the territory of Kedesh. This would place it north of the battle scene and within the capacity of a fleeing man like Sisera to reach.

4:12-13. Sisera's strategy. Having received reports of the deployment (possibly from Kenite allies—see Judg 4:17) of Barak's allied forces at Mount Tabor, Sisera marshaled his troops and chariots and sent them east through the Jezreel Valley into the Plain of Esdraelon.

They would have passed the sites of Megiddo (not yet reoccupied at this period) and Taanach as they drove toward the Kishon River. It is at this point that Sisera's strategy came apart due to the combination of rushing water in the wadi bed and the heavy rains that turned the plain into a quagmire.

4:14-16. Israel's strategy. Apparently, the strategy commanded by Deborah and carried out by Barak was to gather the combined tribal forces at Mount Tabor, a point on the fringe of their territories, from whose heights a clear view of the area could be seen. It provided protection should they be detected too soon and forested cover for their forces. Once they had been able to lure Sisera's army toward them through the Jezreel Valley and into the plain near the Kishon River, the Israelites could make a rushed attack on them as they floundered in the mud and water of the overflowing wadi. The strategy, as portrayed in Judges 4—5, is dependent upon divine intervention (a storm) and the giving of the exact moment in which to strike from Deborah, Yahweh's representative.

4:18-21. Jael's hospitality. In the "world-turned-upside-down" theme employed in Judges, many customs or everyday actions are reversed (see the correct sequence of events in a hospitality situation in Gen 18:2-8). Thus a woman instead of her husband offers Sisera hospitality. As a guest Sisera is not supposed to ask for anything, but he asks for both a drink as well as sentry duty on Jael's part. Finally, murdering a guest is never a part of the protocol of hospitality. However, Jael may have been justified in killing Sisera, since he was a potential threat to her as well as the honor of her household.

4:21. tent peg and hammer. The weapons Jael employed to kill the sleeping Sisera were ones with which she was quite familiar, since she undoubtedly used them to erect her tent each time they made camp. They would have easily come to mind, and the stroke, driving the peg through the skull into the ground, would have been a natural one for her.

5:1-31
Deborah's Song

5:1-3. singing victory songs. One way to celebrate victories and commemorate them for years to come is to compose and sing songs. They could be employed as immediate tributes to conquering heroes (see Judg 11:34 and 1 Sam 18:6-7) or serve as lasting parts of oral tradition (see the "Song of the Sea" in Ex 15:1-18). Victory songs are known in the ancient Near East such as that in the Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta (Assyria, thirteenth century B.C.) concerning his campaign against the Kassite king Kashtiliash. The song records how Tukulti-Ninurta requests divine aid on the basis of their previous relationship and how the gods come to his aid. It also includes a section of taunt against the enemy king who fled from the battle. Just as Deborah's song parallels the prose account in chapter 4, ancient Near Eastern literature offers several examples (in addition to the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic) of battle accounts being preserved in both prose and poetry (other examples come from Tiglath-Pileser I and Rameses II, both thirteenth century, and Thutmose III, fifteenth century).

5:6-7. troubled times. The lawless period associated with Shamgar and Jael, in which individual acts of heroism were the only moments of brightness, was characterized by roads so dangerous and subject to attack by bandits that merchants and farmers had to take hillside tracks and Israel's warriors were nowhere to be seen. Such troubled times are part of the "world-turned-upside-down" theme here and in the visions of Balaam found inscribed in plaster at Tell Deir ʾAlla in the eastern Jordan Valley.

5:8. no shields or spears. The low level of technological development among the Israelites and their lack of the implements of war is also mentioned in 1 Samuel 13:19-22. They may have been forced to turn in all their weapons by their Philistine and Canaanite overlords, or they may simply have lacked the knowledge necessary to make them. In any case, Deborah's song implies their subjugation was also due to their worship of other gods and Yahweh's wrath.

5:10. riding white donkeys. Only the wealthy merchants could afford these prized animals. The call here is to have all classes, those who ride and those who must walk because of their poverty, to join in the song of praise for Yahweh who will deliver the people.

5:11. singers at watering places. The song to Yahweh is to be sung even louder than the cry of those who vied to water animals at wells and caravan stops. These men would cry out the news or a favorite story, perhaps accompanied by cymbals or other instruments. By entertaining travelers and carrying water, they could earn a small living and transmit stories.

5:14. roots in Amalek. In the list of tribes answering Deborah's call is a group from Ephraim associated with the hill country of the Amalek at Pirathon (see Judg 12:5). While it is possible that the wide-ranging Amalekites are referred to in this passage, it makes more

sense to simply see this as an area within Ephraimite territory.

5:14. Makir. This passage and 1 Chronicles 7:14 both indicate that Makir (Machir) was a tribal group dwelling in the area between Ephraim and Zebulun, near the Kishon River.

5:19. Taanach. Five miles southeast of Megiddo and about the same distance west of Mount Gilboa, Taanach is one of the fortified cities that guarded the Valley of Jezreel (see comment on 6:33). It is mentioned in Pharaoh Thutmose III's reports of the Battle of Megiddo (fifteenth century B.C.) and possibly referred to in passing in the Amarna tablets. There was sparse occupation during the twelfth century, but there is a destruction layer dated about 1125.

5:20. the stars fought. In Near Eastern and Mediterranean traditions various gods (Egyptian Resheph; Mesopotamian Nergal; Greek Apollo) are associated with heavenly bodies (planets, stars, comets). They are occasionally viewed as leaving their courses to join in human battles, confound enemies and bring plagues to animals. As early as the end of the third millennium, Sargon's texts refer to the sun dimming and the stars going forth against the enemy. The Gebal Barkal stela of Thutmose III also mentions the aid of stars flashing from the sky to confuse and decimate his Hurrian enemies (see the use of stars and scepters in Num 24:7). It should be noted, however, that the stars in the Judges passage have no personalities connected to them and serve simply as Yahweh's messengers and tools, not as personified deities. See further the comments on Joshua 10:12-13.

5:21. the flooding of Kishon. The Kishon River is either the Wadi al-Muqatta, which serves as a drain for the Jezreel Valley flowing west to the Mediterranean, or the Wadi el-Bira, which flows east from Mount Tabor to the Jordan River. In Deborah's song, the river functions as an integral part of the battle strategy. With the aid of the stars in heavens, a source of rain in Ugaritic and Mesopotamian epic, the battle at the Kishon was decided by an unusual summer storm that sent torrents of water flooding in the Kishon River. As the banks overflowed, the saturated ground eliminated the effectiveness of Sisera's chariots. The story is very similar to that in Exodus 14:19-25, in which the pharaoh's chariots are disabled and destroyed by the returning waters of the Red Sea.

5:26. head crushing. In the Canaanite literature from Ugarit, the goddess Athtart (biblical Ashtaroth) is known as a warrior goddess who crushes the head of her opponents.

5:28. mother waiting at the window. There is a real poignancy about a woman, either mother or wife, standing and waiting for her husband or son to return from battle. While she must try to maintain her dignity and cast about for scenarios that will help rationalize the lateness of that return (vv. 29-30), she can only peer expectantly from the latticed window. Sometimes the window holds her captive in a cloistered universe, and sometimes it frames her as champion of a lost cause (see Michal in 2 Sam 6:16 and Jezebel in 2 Kings 9:30-32).

5:30. plunder. Warfare in the ancient world was justified by divine command or national honor. However, the impetus that drew kings and common soldiers to battle was the taking of plunder. The spoils of war meant riches, power and the subjugation of the enemy (see Deut 31:11-12; 20:14; Josh 11:14; 1 Sam 14:30-32).

6:1—8:35
Gideon

6:1. Midianites. The Midianites are a people living in the southern portions of the Transjordan region. They are described as the descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25:106), and in the Joseph narrative they operate as traders and caravaneers (37:25-36). Moses joins the Midianite clan of Jethro after fleeing Egypt (see comment on Ex 2:15), but the Midianites do not join the Israelites in the conquest of Canaan. In the Balaam narrative the Midianite elders are allied with the Moabites and participate in the hiring of the prophet to curse Israel (Num 22:4). Midianite territory originally centered in the region east of the Gulf of Aqaba in northwest Arabia, but Midianites ranged west into the Sinai Peninsula as well as north into Transjordan in various periods. Though their early history appears to be seminomadic or Bedouin in nature, archaeological study has revealed villages, walled cities and extensive irrigation in this region beginning as early as the Late Bronze period (the time of the exodus and the early judges). There is, so far, no reference to the Midianites in ancient texts, though they are sometimes identified with the *Shasu* mentioned frequently in Egyptian literature.

6:2. hiding in caves. With few fortified cities, the Israelites' only protection was to hide out in the hills, where they could preserve their supplies and their families. In this region they are most likely to have used the caves from the Carmel range into the Iron Hills flanking the Valley of Jezreel on the southwest.

6:3. invasion at harvest time. The timing of the invader was very important. If harvest time had passed, the villagers would have stored and hidden all of their grain and could withstand attack more easily. If the grain was still in the fields, the invader would have ample provisions and the villagers none. This would suggest April or May as the time of the invasions. The villages could easily be crippled if they were deprived of their year's supply of grain, so what the invaders did not use or steal, they destroyed. The trampling of the fields would also jeopardize future seasons.

6:3. Amalekites. See the comment on Numbers 24:20. The Amalekites wandered through vast stretches of land in the Negev, Transjordan and Sinai peninsula. They are unattested outside the Bible, and no archaeological remains can be positively linked to them. However, archaeological surveys of the region have turned up ample evidence of nomadic and seminomadic groups like the Amalekites during this period.

6:5. camels. It is important not to infer what the text does not state. It clearly indicates that the Midianites had innumerable camels, but it does not suggest that they used them as the equivalent of war horses in cavalry units. In fact evidence concerning the domestication of the camel does not suggest cavalry use for a couple of centuries yet. Nonetheless the saddle types used in this period do indicate that camels were being used effectively for transportation and as beasts of burden.

6:8. prophet. This is the first unnamed prophet in the biblical text. For discussion of various aspects of prophecy and prophets see the comments on Deuteronomy 18:14-22. Here he is seen as a defender of the covenant, and his message focuses on worshiping Yahweh exclusively. Ancient Near Eastern prophets often had messages that included admonitions regarding who should receive worship and how.

6:11. the Angel of the Lord. In the ancient world direct communication between heads of state was a rarity. Diplomatic and political exchange normally required the use of an intermediary. The messenger that served as the intermediary was a fully vested representative of the party he represented. He spoke for that party and with the authority of that party. He was accorded the same treatment as that party would enjoy were he there in person. While this was standard protocol, there was no confusion about the person's identity. All of this treatment simply served as appropriate recognition of the individual that he represented. Gifts given were understood to belong to the represented party, not the representative. Words spoken to the representative were expected to be reported back in accurate detail and were understood as having been spoken directly to the represented individual. When official words were spoken by the representative, everyone understood that he was not speaking for himself but was merely conveying the words, opinions, policies and decisions of his liege. In the same way the Angel of the Lord serves as the messenger or royal envoy endowed with the authority of the sender of the message.

6:11. Ophrah. The site of Ophrah has not been located with any certainty. The leading contender is the modern Affuleh between Megiddo and the Hill of Moreh in the Valley of Jezreel. Trees were often associated with oracles and theophanies, and sometimes marked places of worship (see Gen 12:6; 21:33; 35:4; Judg 4:5; 9:37; Is 1:29; Hos 4:13).

6:11. threshing wheat in a winepress. Threshing floors were large areas of dirt or stone that were usually out in the open so that the breezes could be used to blow away the chaff. They would generally be used by the whole community. Threshing was done mostly in June and July, using a stick or by walking cattle over the sheaves. A winepress was a square or circular pit hollowed out of rock big enough for a few people to walk around in. Threshing activity in a winepress would be much less conspicuous than on a threshing floor.

6:12. mighty warrior. The epithet used by the angel has often been translated "mighty warrior" (NIV), and that is acceptable when it is in a military context. There are, however, a number of people that are so described in community contexts (see Ruth 2:1; 1 Sam 9:1, both of which the NIV translates as "man of standing"). In these cases it designates the person as a responsible, upstanding individual in the community.

6:15. weakest clan, least in family. Gideon's comments about the impotence of his clan and his own lack of standing in the family have to do with authority. He has no authority to call out soldiers from his own clan or family, let alone from other tribes. The prerogatives of command came only with status, of which he is claiming to have none.

6:16. together/as one man. The NIV translates this phrase as if it applies to the Midianites' weakness before Gideon. An alternative would be that despite Gideon's lack of official authority the Israelites would fight in concert, unified behind his leadership.

6:19. Gideon's offering. When Gideon describes what he wants to bring, he uses a gen-

eral word for "gift" that is not necessarily indicative of a sacrifice, although when it is connected to a meal it usually has sacrificial overtones. It is the same word used for the offerings of Cain and Abel (see comment on Gen 4:1-7) and describes one of the categories in the sacrificial system (grain offerings, see Lev 2). The fact that the kid is prepared as meat and brought to the place rather than brought live and slaughtered there suggests more a meal than a sacrifice. The contents of this meal included goat meat and broth and unleavened bread (having been made quickly). An ephah is about half a bushel, which would make ten flat cakes of eight or ten inches in diameter, a very generous provision for the hard times they were experiencing.

6:20. put on rock. It is the angel that instructs Gideon to place the meal on a rock, where it is consumed, thus changing it from a meal to a sacrifice. Rocks were at times used as altars (1 Sam 14:32-34), but usually with the intention of allowing the blood to drain from the slaughtered animal, which would not be an issue here.

6:25. second bull, seven years old. The text may speak of two bulls (not in NIV, but see NASB). The second is offered as a sacrifice, and some infer the first must have been used to help tear down the altar. Only a few male bulls were needed to sustain a herd, so many males were slaughtered at a young age. Only the best stock would be kept for breeding. A seven-year-old bull must therefore have been a prime breeding bull. The sacrifice of this bull would have been extremely significant. Some bulls were kept for work animals, but these were usually castrated to make them more manageable and docile. If there are two animals here, the first was probably a gelded draft animal.

6:25. altar to Baal. Though the altar is said to belong to Gideon's father, the response of the town suggests it was a community shrine. There are a number of Canaanite temples that have been found in Israel (Hazor, Lachish) and a few open air sites from this period such as the "Bull Site" a few miles east of Dothan. Objects found at the sites, however, tend to be *masseboth* (standing stones, see comment on Gen 28:18-19) and incense stands rather than altars. One of the earliest Israelite altars is the tenth-century fieldstone altar at Arad that is about eight feet square and almost five feet high.

6:25. Asherah pole. Asherah can be either the name of a fertility goddess or the name of a cult object (as here). The goddess was popular in the polytheistic deviations in Israel and was sometimes considered a mediator of Yahweh's blessings. An indication of this belief is found in the inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom. In Canaanite mythology she was the consort of the chief god, El. She appears in Mesopotamian literature as early as the eighteenth century, where she is consort of the Amorite god Amurru. The cult symbol may or may not have born a representation of the deity on it. The pole may represent an artificial tree, since Asherah is often associated with sacred groves and is portrayed as a stylized tree. Sometimes the cult object can be made or built, while on other occasions it is planted. We have little information of the function of these poles in ritual practice.

6:31. Joash's defense. Gideon's father, Joash, confronted with villagers seeking vengeance on behalf of the affronted Baal, suggests that this is not a matter for the community to punish but for Baal himself to avenge. When a desecration has taken place, it is deity's role to judge (see Lev 10:1-3; 1 Sam 6:19; 2 Sam 6:7). He declares that anyone who takes the matter of revenge into his own hands will be judged by his clan as guilty of bloodshed and subject to clan retribution. In the ancient Near East it is more common to see the god coming to the defense of his temple or image. So, for instance, the Weidner Chronicle reports how Marduk carried out his retribution on those whose performance of the rituals was unacceptable. In similar fashion Marduk seeks to restore to Babylon the image of himself that was carried off by the Elamites. These retributions, however, were all carried out by human beings claiming to be instruments of the gods' vengeance. It is this pretence that Joash wished to avoid.

6:33. Valley of Jezreel. The Valley of Jezreel gets its name from the town of Jezreel at the east end of the valley. This fertile plain divides the Carmel range from lower Galilee, extending southeast with the Kishon River from the Acco plain above Carmel to pass between the Hill of Moreh and Mount Gilboa and into the Jordan valley by Beth Shan. It ranges from five to ten miles wide across its fifteen-mile length (Jokneam to Jezreel). Major trade routes came into the valley by way of Nahal Iron at Megiddo, so the valley was sometimes referred to as the plain of Megiddo, or, later, Armegeddon. It was a natural staging ground for battles, and many took place there during biblical times, including Deborah and Barak's battle with the Canaanites (Judg 4), the battle of Mount Gilboa between Saul and the Philistines (1 Sam 31), and the battle between Josiah and Pharaoh Necho (2 Kings 23:29). It was

also the location of Thutmose III's famous battle of Megiddo in the fifteenth century to subdue the land of Canaan.

6:34-35. the Spirit of the Lord in Judges. When the Spirit of the Lord is attached to any activity in Judges, it is usually to the calling up of an army. In a tribal society with no centralized government, it was difficult to get other tribes to stand with one or two that might be facing problems. The measure of a leader in such situations was his ability to compel others to follow even though he had no office of command over them. In Israel this was a mark of the power of Yahweh, for it was he alone who had the authority to call out the armies of the tribes. Yahweh was the only central authority. It was therefore a clear indication of the Lord's authority at work in someone when they exercised authority that was only Yahweh's by calling out the armies (see Judg 11:29; 1 Sam 11:6-8). This was one of the distinguishing features of the Judges of Israel.

6:36-40. fleece oracles. In an oracle a yes-no question is posed to deity and a mechanism of some binary nature is used so that deity can provide the answer. In Israel the priest carried the Urim and Thummim to use in oracular situations (see comment on Ex 28:30). That is apparently not available, so Gideon must be more creative and use a natural mechanism for the oracle (see Gen 24:14 and 1 Sam 6:7-9 for other occurrences). His yes-no question is whether or not the Lord is going to use him to deliver Israel. His oracular mechanism is based on what would normally happen to a fleece on a threshing floor overnight. Since the fleece is soft and absorbent and the threshing floor is rock or hard dirt, one would expect the fleece to be damp and the ground of the threshing floor dry. That would be the normal behavior of nature. In this case such a response would indicate a "yes" answer to his oracular question. Gideon has already been informed of the Lord's intentions by the angel and is just offering an opportunity for the Lord to inform him if the plan has changed. When the events of the first night turn out exactly how one would expect them to under normal circumstances, Gideon wonders if maybe this "silence" might just mean the Lord wasn't paying attention. He therefore switches the indicators so that the unusual occurrence would represent the "yes" answer—the fleece dry and the threshing floor wet. The thought behind this is that if deity is providing the answer, he can alter normal behavior and override natural laws in order to communicate his answer. In the ancient Near East, when they wanted a natural mechanism for oracles, they tended to use the liver or kidney of sacrificed animals (a divinatory practice called extispicy; see comment on omens at Deut 18:10).

7:1. spring of Harod. The spring of Harod is at the base of the northern slope of Mount Gilboa, about a mile and a half east of the town of Jezreel. This is at the narrow pass at the east end of the Valley of Jezreel.

7:1. hill of Moreh. The hill of Moreh is directly north of Mount Gilboa and south of Mount Tabor. It blocks off the northeastern corner of the Valley of Jezreel. Traffic to Beth Shan and the fords of the Jordan there would swing south of the hill of Moreh to go through the pass where Gideon and his men are gathered. The Midianites were camped in the valley just west of Moreh about four or five miles from the spring of Harod and very close to Ophrah, Gideon's hometown (see comment on 6:11).

7:3. Mount Gilead. This is a very obscure reference that many believe represents a problem in the scribal transmission of the text. Mount Gilead usually refers to an area east of the Jordan which is difficult to fit in here.

7:5-6. styles of drinking water. Those who drink water in a kneeling position with their heads in the water to lap it up are (1) an easy target, (2) unaware of any enemy movement while they drink, and (3) susceptible to leeches. The alternative is to lie down flat (where one presents less of a target) and to keep alert, bringing water to the mouth while continuing to look around.

7:13. dream. Dreams were commonly believed to have significance in the ancient world. Not only did the Midianite soldiers take it as an omen, but so did the eavesdropping Gideon. Although the interpretation of dreams was often something best left to an expert because of the obscurity of the symbolism, some dreams were fairly transparent. It would not take an expert to discern that the barley loaf represented the farmer and the tent represented the nomad. For more on dreams see comments on Genesis 40:5-18; 41:8-16; and Deuteronomy 13:1-5. The concept of an overheard word as providing (inadvertently) an omen of encouragement is also found in the *Odyssey* as a slave girl expresses the wish that this would be the suitors' last meal.

7:16-21. Gideon's strategy. Gideon's three companies would have been positioned on the three sides of the camp, north, west and south (the hill of Moreh was on the east). The torches that they each have are made of material such as reeds that would smolder until exposed to the air and waved. The pitchers

cover the glow of the smoldering torch until the proper moment. When all three divisions were deployed in their proper positions, the ram's horns were sounded. Usually only a few of the soldiers carried trumpets for signaling because hands were needed for weapons and shields. Likewise, for night battle, a certain number would be assigned to hold the torches that would illuminate the battle area and block retreat at the perimeter. It would be expected, then, that the trumpet blowers and torch holders would represent only a small percentage of the army, with the rest charging in to fight. Therefore, when the Midianites heard the blast of three hundred trumpets and saw the myriad of torches around the perimeter, they naturally assumed there was a massive army that would be charging into the camp, whereas Gideon had instructed his men to hold their positions around the perimeter.

7:22. fighting one another. It is a common motif that one of the ways a deity achieves victory is by throwing the enemy into confusion. An example in Egyptian literature occurs in the myth of Horus, where at Edfu Horus confuses the enemy so that they begin to fight one another until none remain.

7:22. Beth Shittah. The most common choice for the location of this town is the village of Shatta about six miles east of Jezreel heading toward Beth Shan. Therefore the Midianites have fled around the south end of the hill of Moreh to try to get across the fords of the Jordan along the Beth Shan Valley.

7:22. Zererah. Zererah is elsewhere known as Zarethan (Josh 3:16) and Zeredah. Most now identify it with Tell es-Sadiyeh eight miles further south from Abel Meholah, on the east side of the Jordan along the south side of the Wadi Kufrinje.

7:22. Abel Meholah, Tabbath. Abel Meholah is located on the west bank of the Jordan somewhere south of Beth Shan. The most likely candidate is Tell Abu Sus eleven miles south of Beth Shan at the southern end of the Beth Shan Valley where the Yabis river enters the Jordan from the east. Pottery shards from this period have been found in surveys at the site. Tabbath is less certain. It is often identified as Ras abu Tabat, though that seems too far south, very close to Tell es-Sadiyeh rather than Tell Abu Sus.

7:24. Beth Barah. The identification of this site is unknown, but it is obviously along the Jordan valley, apparently at a fording place near Abel Meholah.

8:1. Ephraim's complaint. Even though land had been assigned to each of the tribes, there were still frequent land disputes between them. Military activity of the sort conducted by Gideon could be expected to yield available territory that would previously have been controlled by the Midianites. The Ephraimites do not want to be left out should there be apportionment of additional territory. There is also the issue of plunder, which everyone could be expected to want a share of.

8:5. Succoth. Succoth is located at Tell Deir Allah about a mile north of the Jabbok River, about three miles east of the Jordan River. Remains from this period (Iron Age I) have been found on the site. The area on the top of the tell is comparable to one and a half football fields, about one and a quarter acres. It was a small settlement that was involved in a bronze-smelting industry.

8:6. hands in our possession. It was a common practice for a hand to be cut off each dead enemy so that a count of the casualties inflicted could be made. Egyptian monuments from this period depict piles of hands gathered after battle. Since the Midianite kings are not yet dead, the men of Succoth are unwilling to side with the resistance.

8:8. Peniel (Penuel). Penuel is located about five miles east of Succoth along the Jabbok River at modern Tell ed-Dhahab esh-Sherqiyeh. Surveys have provided evidence of settlement during this period, but the site has not been excavated.

8:9. tower in the town. Since the site of Penuel has not been excavated, remains of this tower have not been found. Iron Age sites, however, did often feature such towers as part of their fortifications. For example, excavations have shown that the town of Succoth had such a tower at the end of the judges period that was almost twenty-five feet in diameter. Such towers could be part of the gate structure, lookout posts along the walls, or, more frequently in this period, inner citadels in the area of the local shrine.

8:10. Karkor. The site of Karkor likely should not even be translated as a place name. In the text it has the definite article (which is unusual for place names), and the word means "level ground." It should almost certainly be identified as the Beqa'a basin. This is a broad, flat depression about five miles long, two miles wide, oriented on a southwest to northeast axis about seven miles northwest of modern Amman (biblical Rabbah).

8:11. route of the nomads. A local route climbed out of the Jabbok valley heading south from Penuel and moved southeast to intersect with the southwest corner of the Beqa'a basin. But the "route of the nomads" would be more off the beaten track. This verse

says they went *east* of Nobah and Jogbehah. The location of Nobah is unknown, but Jogbehah is usually identified with Jubeihat about six miles northwest of Amman. It is located on an elevated ridge at about the middle of the southern side of the broad Beqa'a basin. If Gideon went to the east of Jogbehah, he must have been skirting the northeast end of the Beqa'a. This suggests that the "route of the nomads" followed the Jabbok east for several miles before heading south and swinging around to the south side of the Beqa'a from where the attack was made. This route would be about twenty miles from Penuel and about seventy from the initial encounter at Moreh.

8:13. Pass of Heres. Like Karkor above, the word "Heres" has a definite article and therefore is probably not a proper name. *Heres* means "sun," but that does not help identify the location. If the reconstruction of the comment on 8:11 is correct, the pass may be located heading out of the basin on the southwest. It may refer either to the ascent out of the basin itself or to the ascent along the road from the Beqa'a basin to the watershed a couple of miles northwest of Beqa'a toward Succoth.

8:14. writing among the general population. The languages such as Sumerian, Egyptian, Akkadian and Hittite that used cuneiform and hieroglyphics were syllabic and used hundreds of different signs. This made reading and writing something that only professional scribes could take the time to learn. Alphabetic script was invented in the middle of the second millennium and made popular literacy achievable, since it used less than thirty signs. Slaves in the mines of the Sinai region (the turquoise mines of Serabit el-Khadem) left alphabetic inscriptions (proto-Sinaitic) as early as the seventeenth century B.C. It is therefore not unlikely that Gideon could easily find someone who could write down the names of the leaders.

8:14. elders. The elders represent the ruling council of the town. In small towns this group may be comprised of the two eldest males from each household. That may be the case here, since 77 are identified and given the size of the site (see the comment above at 8:5) a population of 200-250 would be expected, 30 to 35 dwellings. Ugaritic uses 77 figuratively parallel to 66 to represent a large number. For another potentially representative use of 77, see comment on 8:30.

8:16. punishing with thorns. The verb used here and in verse 7 always means "to thresh" in the Old Testament. It is used figuratively of the destruction of enemies in a number of passages (see Mic 4:13). Gideon threatens to thresh/destroy the leaders *along with* briars and thorns. This may refer to a method of execution or, alternatively, to a dishonorable treatment of the corpses. Note that the men of Peniel are executed as well.

8:18. men killed at Tabor. There has been no mention of any fighting at Tabor. When the ambush occurred and the Midianites were backed up against the hill of Moreh, the main route of the flight took them to the south of the hill (see comment on 7:22). If there was fighting at Tabor, it means that some may have tried to escape around the north side of the hill to get to the Jordan via the Wadi Tabor. It can be inferred from verse 19 that Gideon had deployed some of his family to hold that pass and block their retreat.

8:20-21. execution by a minor. Execution with a sword can be very drawn-out and painful if the executioner does not know where to strike or lacks the strength or confidence to drive the sword home. Although it was an honor that Gideon offered to his son, it is easy to understand why the kings would prefer a skilled and practiced hand to do the job.

8:21. camel crescent ornaments. It is believed that these represented the moon. Some have been found in excavations at sites such as Tell al-Ajjul. Earrings also were often crescent-shaped, like the many examples found at Tell el Fara and Tell Jemmeh.

8:26. seventeen hundred shekels. In Genesis 24:22 a gold nose ring is said to weigh half a shekel. If earrings were about the same size, seventeen hundred shekels would represent thirty-four hundred earrings. This would be the equivalent of over forty-two pounds of gold.

8:27. golden ephod. An ephod was part of the priestly wardrobe (see comment on Ex 28:6-14) and in both Egypt and Mesopotamia was reserved for clothing images of deity and for high-ranking priests. Exodus 39:3 explains the process by which gold was worked into each thread used to weave the garment. It is likely that this ephod was also made of golden threads rather than of solid gold. Since Gideon had had success with oracles (6:30-36) and since the ephod is elsewhere closely associated with oracles (it contains the Urim and Thummim, see comment on Ex 28:30, and was used for oracular consultation in 1 Sam 30:7-8), it can be inferred that this ephod was intended to function as an oracular device. People who wanted to ask information of deity would come (pay their fee) and receive an answer (through the mediation of the specialists, Gideon and his family).

8:30. seventy sons, many wives. The wives of

an ancient ruler usually represented political alliances. Towns, city-states, tribes or nations who wished to ally themselves with a ruler or come under his protection sealed the treaty with a marriage of a daughter of their chief family to the suzerain. This was an act of loyalty on the part of the vassal, who would then have a personal stake in preserving the dynasty. The large number of sons indicated the strength of the family line, for with that many it would be assured of not dying out. This would be important for a ruler because the family usually occupied key positions in the administration. A large family would theoretically be able to secure the future of the dynasty. Some have considered seventy as simply a conventional indication of a large indeterminate number. Besides the several biblical examples, the Ugaritic myth concerning Baal's house speaks of the goddess Athirat (=Asherah) having seventy sons, and in the Hittite myth of Elkunirsa and Ashertu Baal claims to have killed Ashertu's (=Asherah) 77 (88) children.

8:32. family tomb. Burial practices of this period featured multiple burials in cave tombs. The body was laid out on its back with personal objects arranged around it.

8:33. Baal-Berith. Baal-Berith means "lord of the covenant" and is the designation of the deity worshiped in Shechem (about thirty miles south of Ophrah, where one of Gideon's concubines was from). There is no extrabiblical attestation of this epithet, but see comment on 9:46 on El-Berith.

9:1-57

Abimelech

9:1. Shechem. The site of Shechem has been identified with Tell Balatah, east of modern Nablus and thirty-five miles north of Jerusalem. Perhaps because of its proximity to two nearby peaks, Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, it has had a long history as a sacred site. The strategic position of Shechem, at the east entrance to the pass between these mountains, also made it an important trading center. As early as the Middle Bronze I Period Shechem is mentioned in the Egyptian texts of Pharaoh Sesostris III (1880-1840 B.C.). In the Amarna period (fourteenth century) Shechem was one of the major cities of Canaan and the city flourished. Jerusalem's governor complains to Pharaoh that Shechem's governor, Labayu, has given the area over to the Habiru (for more information see comments on Josh 5:1 and 9:1). The settlement was about six acres surrounded by a circular wall with a gate at the east and a temple on the acropolis. The Iron Age of the judges period found little change in the city. It is not conquered by Joshua, and accordingly there is no evidence of destruction. It is likely that the temple on the acropolis is the temple of El-Berith mentioned in verse 46. The evidence of the destruction recounted in verse 49 can be seen in the form of debris and ash marking the end of stratum XI, dated to about 1125.

9:2. primogeniture in Israel. In the ancient Near East primogeniture is not always the rule. In many texts it is clear that the children divide the inheritance evenly. With regard to succession to rule, in some cultures brothers had priority over sons. In others it was up to the king to designate who his successor would be, and in some cases the subjects had to consent. In Israelite culture the firstborn was generally assumed to have certain advantages, but neither inheritance nor succession inevitably fell to the firstborn.

9:4. seventy silver shekels. The temple treasury pays out seventy shekels for the seventy lives of Gideon's sons. This is an indication of how cheaply they were valued (compare a fifty-shekel-per-male ransom price in Lev 27:3 and the typical twenty shekels for which a slave might be bought).

9:4. temple of Baal-Berith. For Baal-Berith see comment above at 8:33. For this period there is only one confirmed temple found by archaeologists inside the city of Shechem (though other buildings have been interpreted by some as possibly being temples). Whether this one is the temple of Baal-Berith or the temple of El-Berith (see v. 46), or whether these are two designations for the same temple, is a matter of some dispute that cannot be resolved based on the information available at this time.

9:4. use of mercenaries. A town of Shechem's size would have had a population of perhaps a thousand people and therefore a potential army of maybe two to three hundred. Nevertheless, most of these would have been uncomfortable with the task of execution for which these mercenaries were hired. Mercenaries are often motivated by the potential for plunder. In a situation such as this that would not be the case. In the Mari military organization in the eighteenth century B.C. it is thought that the temples provided the financial backing for military activity that was supported by the deity.

9:5. ritual execution. The comment that the sons of Gideon were executed "on one stone" suggests ritual execution. Sacrifices usually took place on an altar and a large rock was at

times used for a makeshift altar (see comment on 6:20). This might further have connection to the huge standing stone that was the focus of the courtyard of the acropolis temple at Shechem in this period. The execution of competitors for the throne is well known through the ancient Near East and, indeed, throughout history. But there are no known examples of ritual execution of claimants to a throne as human sacrifice in the ancient Near East.

9:6. pillar in Shechem. The translation "pillar" represents an emendation of a difficult Hebrew word. An alternative that has been suggested on the basis of archaeology is that the word should not be emended but translated as a technical architectural term referring to a palisade.

9:6. Beth Millo. The Beth Millo makes most sense as the fortified temple precinct on the town's acropolis (see comment on 9:46). A millo is generally considered an area where fill dirt has been used to create an artificial elevated platform.

9:7. Mount Gerizim. There is no doubt that someone positioned on the flanks of Mount Gerizim could make themselves heard in Shechem. Gerizim is just south of the city and the natural acoustics would accommodate such a confrontation. There is a natural outcropping of rock on the lower section of the flank not far from Shechem that is often identified as a potential point. The ruins of a temple from centuries before would have been there at this time.

9:8. tree parables. There is an Old Babylonian fable from early in the second millennium called The Tamarisk and the Palm. The two trees are arguing which is superior by exploring what each has to contribute to the king's palace. Also of interest is the section of the Love Lyrics of Nabu and Tashmetu in which the shade of various trees (cedar, cypress, etc.) stands as a metaphor of protection for the king. In the Sumerian myth Lugal-e, Ninurta is opposed by an enemy that the plants have named king over themselves.

9:9-13. olive tree, fig tree and vine. These are three of the most productive members of the economy of Palestine. Olive oil, figs and wine are among the staple products of the region and constituted the primary exports. They therefore represented domestic prosperity and successful foreign relationships—both the result of a competent king's rule.

9:14. thornbush. Many consider this to be prickly boxwood, which, with its very tiny leaves, has no shade to offer unless one would sit in the middle of a thicket of it—a very unpleasant experience. In the dry climate of Palestine fires can be frequent in the brush. Such brush fires would in turn generate enough heat to kindle a fire among the larger trees. The Aramaic Wisdom of Ahiqar contains a conversation between the bramble and the pomegranate tree.

9:21. Beer. Be'er in Hebrew means "well," and there are many towns with names that include the word (such as Beersheba). It is therefore difficult to identify this town with any confidence. The most common suggestion is the town of el-Bireh north of Shechem in the Jezreel Valley near Gideon's hometown of Ophrah.

9:25. robbers in the hills. One of the advantages of a city strategically located on a trade route is the merchant traffic that flows through the town, selling goods, buying local goods to merchandise elsewhere and bringing business and tariffs to the town. Setting robbers in the hills would serve to make Shechem an unattractive station for traveling merchants and would deprive Abimelech of the tariff income that he would collect. This strategy then is designed to bring ruin to Abimelech by crippling trade.

9:26. Gaal and his brothers. The band of Gaal and his brothers has every appearance of one of the small dispossessed clans that were common during this period. Having been driven from their own cities or homeland, they take to the road as a traveling guild or as mercenaries for hire, looking for a new location in which to settle. In the Amarna letters this type of group is labeled "Habiru."

9:28. mixed population disputes. Hamor, Shechem's father, is taken as a reference to the native population that lived in Shechem since the days of the patriarchs (see Gen 34). It appears, then, that Gaal is stirring up dissension between the Israelite population and the Hivite (Hurrian?) population. Abimelech had made his case for being appointed as ruler on his own mixed heritage (see 8:31 and 9:2). Just as his membership in both groups had allowed for his acceptance by both, it now provides a basis for his rejection by both.

9:35-37. shadows from the mountains. Zebul and Gaal are standing at the east gate of the town looking east. From that vantage point there is the Askar plain directly in front of them and hills to the southeast (Mount el-Urmeh) and northeast (Mount el-Kabir). The rising sun would leave both the western flank of the northern hill and the northern flank of the southern hill (both forested) in shadow. The remains of a fortress settlement from this period have been found at the top of Mount el-Urmeh, which could have been the location of

Abimelech's headquarters (Arumah, v. 41).

9:42. attacking those who went out to the fields. The phrase used here to describe the activity of the people can refer to going out in the fields for agricultural activities (as in 9:27) but can also refer to "taking the field" in military campaign (see 2 Sam 11:23; 18:6). Though Gaal has been driven from the city, there is apparently a contingent that wants nothing more to do with Abimelech and is embarking on a military operation.

9:43-44. ambush. It is likely that the ambush group coming down to the gate of the city came off the flanks of Mount Gerizim, which is south of the city, to get behind those going out, who were met by frontal assault from the other two divisions.

9:45. scattering salt. Though this practice is not attested elsewhere in the Bible, early Hittite documents refer to scattering cress over a devastated city, and in thirteenth-century Assyrian texts Shalmaneser I scatters salt on a destroyed city. Both substances are referred to in one of the curses found in the Aramaic Sefire treaty. None of these texts offer explanation for the purpose of this action. Some have thought that its intention was to render the fields infertile. But not all salts accomplish that, and the part on which salt was scattered was not the fields but the city. Furthermore, this would not explain the alternate use of cress. In the Old Testament as well as the rest of the ancient Near East, salt is used for consecration (see comment on Lev 2:11-13). This would suggest that the practice was a ritual for purification or consecration of the city to deity. Additionally, salt impedes the action of yeast (leaven), and since leaven was a symbol of rebellion, salt could easily represent that which inhibited rebellion. Finally, salt is symbolic for that which is infertile. In a Hittite treaty, the testator pronounces one curse that says if the treaty is broken may he and his family and his lands, like salt that has no seed, likewise have no progeny.

9:46. temple of El-Berith. The comparable title *il brt* is attested in one of the Hurrian hymns among the tablets from Ugarit. El was the chief god of the Canaanite pantheon and "berith" means covenant. It has been suggested that there may have been a syncretism of religious beliefs among the mixed Israelite/Canaanite population of Shechem, combining elements of Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, with El, the Canaanite deity. The remains of a temple of this period have been found on the acropolis at Shechem (see comments on 9:1 and 9:4). This temple was 108 feet by 92 feet and was fortified with walls 18 feet thick. A standing stone *(massebah)* stood in the courtyard. Others have suggested that the sacred site on nearby Mount Ebal (see comment on Josh 8:30-31) should be identified with the El-Berith shrine (since the retreat there appears to take place after the city has been destroyed, v. 45), but there is no evidence of any fortress there.

9:47. Mount Zalmon. Mount Zalmon is otherwise unknown in the Old Testament. Some have suggested that it refers to Ebal or Gerizim, but it is difficult to understand why a different name would be used here. Another possibility is that it refers to the next ridge across the valley south of Gerizim.

9:50. Thebez. Thebez has been identified with modern Tubas, about nine miles northeast of Shechem, based on early Christian writings (Eusebius). No archaeological work has been done at the site.

9:51. central tower. A common feature of towns of this period was a second fortified area inside the town—a citadel of sorts. These often took the form of a tower at the highest point of the town, perhaps also including the temple area and the storehouses and treasuries.

9:53. upper millstone. The millstone was made up of two stones, usually basalt. The lower millstone was heavy (sometimes nearly one hundred pounds), a flat or slightly curved stone upon which the grain was laid and then ground into flour with the second, lighter, stone, which weighed four or five pounds and was shaped to the hand of the worker.

10:1-5

Minor Judges: Tola and Jair

10:1. "minor" judges. The text never refers to these as "minor" judges—that is a much more modern designation, used to refer to those judges who are not recorded as being involved in military activity. The nature of their "judging" must then be identified in other ways. It was the king's duty to establish justice, and that is also the nature of the role of these "judges." This is not so much done through a judiciary system, though that is included, but through all the many aspects of ruling. These then are local rulers. See comment on 2:16.

10:1. Shamir. Shamir has been identified by some as Samaria, the later capital of the northern kingdom. If it is not Samaria, the location is unknown.

10:4. thirty sons, thirty donkeys, thirty towns. Besides referring to physical sons, this terminology could refer to vassals (see 2 Kings

16:7) or those at one's service (see 1 Sam 25:8; 2 Kings 8:9). In this case Jair would be identified as having a territory of thirty towns under his control, each with its own ruler (they generally rode donkeys) who was his vassal. There is a Hittite myth that tells of the queen of Kanesh bearing thirty sons in a single year.

10:4. Havvoth Jair. Havvoth Jair means "settlements of Jair" and refers here to the settlements in the region east of the Sea of Galilee in Gilead between the Yarmuk and Jabbok rivers.

10:5. Kamon. Though there have been many different suggestions for the location of Kamon, there is little to go on for evidence for any of them.

10:6—12:7
Jephthah

10:6. list of gods. Baals and Ashtoreths (=Astarte) refer to the Canaanite deities, while all the other deities are referred to by nation rather than by name, though it is not necessary to think in terms of national gods with political associations. These were more likely fertility gods and other nature gods. This shows the syncretism within Israel and her continued polytheistic mindset. The polytheism of the ancient world was an open system. It was considered foolish to ignore or neglect any god who could potentially bring either harm or blessing.

10:8. Gilead. Gilead is the region in Transjordan bordered by the Jabbok River on the south (though at times extending as far south as the Arnon) and the Yarmuk River on the north.

10:9. Ammonites. The Ammonites lived north of the Moabites in the region around the Jabbok River. They are known from Assyrian records as Bit-Ammon and as the land of Benammanu. They were settling this territory just around the time of the Israelite wanderings.

10:17. Mizpah. There are several different sites that go by the name of Mizpah. The most familiar is located in the tribal territory of Benjamin and is identified as modern Tell en-Nasbeh about six miles north of Jerusalem, but this is too far away to muster troops for a battle in Gilead. Mizpah in Gilead is most likely the place where Jacob and Laban had made their agreement (Gen 31), but this site is likewise unknown. The Gilead where the Ammonites camped may be the town of Gilead, modern Khirbet Jel'ad about six miles south of the Jabbok.

10:18. military governors. In times of military threat, territories governed by elders or tribal leaders were willing to submit themselves to a military governor who would provide protection and perhaps rid them of their enemies. A parallel to this political necessity can even be seen in the stories about the gods. In the Babylonian Creation Hymn to Marduk, Marduk becomes the chief of the pantheon when he agrees to take responsibility for meeting the military threat presented by the younger gods. It is this sort of arrangement that is believed to have been the sociological stepping-stone to the development of kingship in the ancient Near East.

11:1. mighty warrior. The text refers to Jephthah as a "mighty warrior" (NIV). The terminology used here is not just military in nature but can refer to a person of repute or one who has standing in the community—a responsible person. In this context, however, it is likely that his reputation is built on his military success. This is the same phrase used to describe Gideon in 6:12.

11:2. illegitimate sons driven from household. It should be noted that it was not any family shame or humiliation that resulted in Jephthah's being driven out. With the existence of temple prostitutes and polygamy it would be fairly common for children of different mothers to be in the same household. Here the text makes it clear that it was the inheritance that motivated the expulsion. Whether Jephthah, as the firstborn, had rights to a double portion, or whether they were dividing equally (see comment on primogeniture at 9:2), elimination of one party would increase the shares of the others.

11:3. land of Tob. Tob has been identified with et-Tayibeh in the region between Edrei (Der'a)

THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN THE EARLY IRON AGE

In the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 B.C.) there was an ongoing struggle between major political powers seeking control of Palestine (see comment on Josh 9:1). With the arrival of the Sea Peoples around 1200 (see comment on Judg 13:1), all of the major powers were either wiped out (e.g., the Hittites) or neutralized (Egypt). Moving into the Iron Age (just about this point in the book of Judges), the power stalemate has been replaced by a power vacuum. The absence of major powers vying for control of the region allowed the smaller states to test their strength, develop and build regional "empires." The Philistines were able to take advantage of this early in the period. Then David and Solomon were able to build a substantial empire in Syro-Palestine without needing to be concerned about political powers in Mesopotamia, Anatolia or Egypt.

and Bozrah (Busra ash-Sham) in western Gilead, about twenty miles west of Mount Hauron. Though no excavations have been conducted on the site, it is possibly named in Thutmose III's city list of this period.

11:8-10. position offered to Jephthah. The initial offer by the elders would have set Jephthah up as the military governor of Gilead, though apparently still operating under the authority of the elders. In verse 9 Jephthah negotiates to be in authority also over the elders, a step closer to the idea of kingship (compare how Abimelech was made king in the region of Shechem in chap. 9 and David's kingship over just Judah in 2 Sam 2:1-4).

11:12-13. negotiating territorial dispute. Basic to the understanding of the negotiation is the recognition that the Ammonites and Jephthah share a concept of divinely granted eminent domain. The gods are the ones who give rights and possession to the land, and appeal is made to the gods to judge the case and, eventually (in war), to defend the territorial distribution. The question of rights to the land did not turn on who was there first, but on the evidence that deity had given the land and on his ability to preserve the possession of the land for his people.

11:15-23. Jephthah's claims. The Israelites had taken the land from the Amorites, not the Ammonites. Though the Ammonites might be able to claim that the Amorites had taken the land from them, Jephthah's point would be that Yahweh had taken the land away from the Amorites and given it to Israel. Any prior claims the Ammonites may have had were nullified by the amount of time that Israel has been in possession of the land with no claim having been made. For details of the geographical issues presented by Jephthah, see the corresponding comments in Numbers 21.

11:24. Chemosh. Chemosh is best known as the national god of the Moabites, and in the ninth-century Moabite stone (Mesha Inscription) he is said to bring victory in battle, as Yahweh is depicted as doing for Israel. The Ammonite national deity is generally Milcom (1 Kings 11:5, 33; NIV, Molech). Although Chemosh was adopted as the national deity of the Moabites, the occurrence of the variant form, Kamish, in a deity list from Ebla, where he had a temple, suggests he was on the register of Semitic gods in third-millennium Syria, long before the Moabites. One Assyrian deity list associates Chemosh (Kammush) with Nergal, the god of the netherworld. There is not yet any firm identification of what natural phenomenon Chemosh was related to, nor is there any uncontested depiction of him on archaeological finds.

11:26. chronological note. Jephthah identifies the Israelite possession of the land as having already a three-hundred-year history to it. Although this is undoubtedly a round number, it supports a date for the conquest in the fifteenth rather than the thirteenth century (see sidebar concerning the date of the exodus at Ex 12). Jephthah is generally dated to around 1100 B.C. and cannot be placed much later if space is to be left for Samuel, Saul and David. Though the Bible's integrity would not be jeopardized if Jephthah were misinformed or exaggerating, it is difficult to believe his argument would carry any force if Israel had really been in the land only half that time.

11:29. Spirit of the Lord. The Spirit of the Lord is again associated with the raising of an army (see comment on 6:34-35). Though Jephthah has been given authority to command in Gilead, he has no such formal role in other areas of Manasseh, including the area of Bashan (north of Gilead) as well as considerable territory west of the Jordan.

11:29. troop movement. Since the site of Mizpah is uncertain, there is nothing here specific enough to reconstruct Jephthah's muster of the troops.

11:30. vows. A vow is a conditional promise, usually of a gift to be made to deity (for more information see comments on Gen 28:20-22; Lev 27:2-13; and Num 30:2-15). Parallels to Jephthah's vow can be found in classical literature in the vow of Idomenus, king of Crete (roughly contemporary with Jephthah). The storm that threatens him as he returns from the sack of Troy leads him to make a vow much like Jephthah's and results in his sacrifice of his son. Often appropriate sacrifices to request divine aid would be offered prior to battle (see 1 Sam 13:8-12). If there was no possibility or opportunity for this prior to battle, one might envision the type of vow made by Jephthah. An alternative for Jephthah could have been to devote the plunder to the Lord (compare Num 21:2), but perhaps that would be inappropriate for towns outside of Israelite territory.

11:31. what Jephthah expected to meet him. While it is true that the Israelite house accommodated animals, animals do not go out to meet someone. Dogs were not kept in houses, were not kept as pets and were unsuitable for sacrifice. Furthermore, a simple animal sacrifice would not be suitable for the extent and significance of the victory Jephthah has achieved. It can therefore be concluded that Jephthah is anticipating a human sacrifice (on human sacrifice in the ancient Near East see

comments on Gen 22:1-2; Deut 18:10).

11:31. burnt offering. In all of the over 250 occurrences of the term used here, it refers to an actual sacrifice literally burnt on an altar. It is never used figuratively or symbolically. For a discussion of the burnt offering see comment on Leviticus 1:3-4. It is the word used in Genesis 22:2 and in 2 Kings 3:27, where human sacrifice is in view.

11:33. area of conquest. The area of Jephthah's conquest is said to include twenty towns, with three named specifically. Archaeologists have found many small fortified settlements in this region from this time that featured round watchtowers. It is likely that many of these twenty settlements were of this type. There is a well-known Aroer just north of the Arnon gorge where it turns south, on the southern border of Ammonite territory, but it is likely that this is a different town by that name closer to Rabbah (as in Josh 13:25). Abel Keramim probably is the town called *krmm* in Thutmose III's list of cities, but the identity of the site is unknown. Minnith, on the basis of later Greek sources, is placed between Heshbon and Rabbah. A tentative identification suggests Umm el-Basatin. Though there is some uncertainty about the sites, what is clear is that Jephthah did not simply expel Ammon from Israelite Gilead but invaded Ammon and conquered many of its fortified garrisons, mostly between Rabbah and Heshbon.

11:34. victory celebration. The practice of maidens going out to greet returning victors with song and dance is attested in the celebration for Saul and David (1 Sam 18:6-7) and partly by Miriam's song in Exodus 15:20-21. The "tambourine" his daughter played has been identified in archaeological reliefs as the tambour, a small drum (leather stretched over a hoop) that would not have the tinny rattle sound of modern tambourines.

11:34. only child. In the popular religious belief in the ancient Near East the veneration of ancestors by succeeding generations was important to the comfort one would enjoy in the afterlife. Such concepts were sometimes held by Israelites as well, though not endorsed. Within the context of the covenant, the end of a family line meant the forfeiture of the land that had been granted as a share of the covenant. In either worldview, the death of the only child was devastating on the philosophical as well as the personal emotional level.

11:35. tearing clothes in grief. Along with placing ashes in the hair, the tearing of clothing was a common form of mourning in the ancient Near East. One example outside the Bible is found in the Ugaritic epic of Aqhat (c. 1600 B.C.), in which the sister of the hero tears her father's garment as she foretells a coming drought. Such an act often implied grief over the death of a relative, friend or prominent individual (2 Sam 3:31). However, it also was a sign of impending ruin, as in the Ugaritic example, Numbers 14:6 and here.

11:35-36. breaking vows. Since a vow is a religious act, drawing the deity into compact with the worshiper, it may not be broken under penalty of God's displeasure (see Ex 20:7 and the injunction not to "misuse" God's name). Though a vow could not be broken, the law allowed for the mitigation of vows, especially those involving persons (see comment on Lev 27:2-8). This loophole was apparently unknown to Jephthah.

11:37. roaming the hills for two months. In Canaanite mythology from Ugarit *(Baal and Mot)* the virgin goddess Anat roams the hills mourning for lost fertility, since Baal is dead. The motif of roaming the hills for lost fertility is therefore a possible connection with Jephthah's daughter's request. In early Mesopotamian practice it was the god Dumuzi (Tammuz), the "quickener of the child in the womb," who had died and was lamented. The time period of two months likely correlates with one of Israel's "seasons." The Gezer calendar (tenth century) divides the year into eight periods: four of two months' length and four of one month's length. The second two-month period (for sowing) consisted of winter months when concerns about fertility would be most prominent.

11:39. fulfillment of the vow: women serving at tabernacle? It has been suggested by some interpreters that instead of being slaughtered as a sacrifice Jephthah's daughter was consecrated to serve in the tabernacle in a state of celibacy. There are examples of lifelong dedication to sanctuary service (Samuel in 1 Sam 1:28) and of women serving at the sanctuary (Ex 38:8; 1 Sam 2:22). But there are no examples of women serving the sanctuary in a vow of celibacy or in lifelong consecration. In the ancient Near East as a whole, dedication to the sanctuary generally involved prostitution rather than celibacy (see comment on Deut 23:17-18). This sort of dedication has been viewed as comparable to sacrificing a son. Perhaps most significant is the class of women referred to as *naditu* in the Old Babylonian period (1800-1600). They were connected with the temple as "bride of the god" and were therefore prohibited from marriage, though they were not necessarily celibate. Hammurabi's laws mention situations where a man marries a *naditu,* but in such situations she did

not bear children.

11:40. commemoration. The verb that the NIV translates "commemorate" is uncertain (the only other occurrence is in Judg 5:11, NIV: "recite"), yet it offers the only description of this annual observance. As a result commentators can only speculate as to its nature. Without any clear indication of its nature, it is difficult to suggest parallels in the ancient world. In the Old Babylonian period the *naditu*s (see above comment) yearly performed rites on behalf of those who had died childless. The context of this passage suggests the four-day observance was in some way a period of mourning for lost fertility (see comments on 11:37 above).

12:1. Zaphon. The general location of Zaphon is clear enough, but there is still no consensus about its precise location. Joshua 13:27 lists it next to Succoth in Gad's territory. It is commonly identified with Tell el-Qos a couple of miles north of Succoth (Tell Deir ʿAllah).

12:1. Ephraimites' complaint. The Ephraimites are inclined to be contentious (see with Gideon, 8:1 and comment there), but while Gideon is able to assuage them, here the complaint escalates into civil war. None of the territory taken from the Ammonites had been allotted to Ephraim, but their allotted territory was across the Jordan from the Ammonite lands. It should also be remembered that the tribes of Israel were set up as individual entities joined together by their common faith and heritage. The only formal leadership they recognized was the leadership of their national God, Yahweh, and the tribal leadership of elders and clan heads. Jephthah represented a departure from that because he was given a formal position of rule (see comment on 11:8-10). This may have been viewed as a threat to other tribes.

12:4. Gileadites as renegades. The Ephraimites attempted to nullify any territorial claims by the Gileadites by negating their tribal status. Historically Gilead was one of the clans from the tribe of Manasseh. By identifying them as mixed stock (Ephraim and Manasseh), they were classifying them as squatters on the land with no rights to territory as full-fledged clans and tribes would have. This was a land grab by the Ephraimites.

12:5. fords of the Jordan. The fords referred to here would be those by the town of Adam just south of the confluence with the Jabbok River (see comment on Josh 2:7).

12:6. variations in ancient Hebrew pronunciation. Pronunciation of some consonants varies between the related Semitic languages of the ancient Near East. In one of these variations the Hebrew consonant *shin* (sh) combines two consonants from Ugaritic (similar to Canaanite), *sh* and *th.* So the Hebrew word for three, *shalosh,* in Ugaritic is *thalath* and in Aramaic is *talat.* Most significant is the fact that Ammonite also featured the *th* consonant variant. It is this type of variation in pronunciation that distinguished the Ephraimite and Gileadite speech. This is not so much dialectical as it is regional variation. As is always the case, consonant sounds that are not native to one's own speech dialect are difficult to reproduce without practice. G. Rendsburg has worked out the most likely scenario to fit the details of both linguistics and context. The Ephraimites would generally have pronounced the word "shibboleth," while the Gileadites, sharing Ammonite practice, would have pronounced it "thibboleth." When the Gileadites confronted the suspected Ephraimites, they challenged them to pronounce "thibboleth," for which the Ephraimites could only manage "sibboleth." The word *shibboleth* can mean either ears of corn or the torrent of a river. The latter makes more sense in the context.

12:8-15 Minor Judges: Ibzan, Elon, Abdon

12:8. "minor" judges. We know nothing of these three individuals from any other sources in or out of the Bible. For discussion of office see comments on 10:1 and 2:16.

12:8. Bethlehem. Bethlehem here is generally considered to be not the one in Judah a few miles south of Jerusalem but the one in the territory of Zebulun in the hills of Galilee just north of the Valley of Jezreel. The only indicator leading to this decision is that Elon and Abdon are also from this general area.

12:9. political marriages. The wives of an ancient ruler or his children usually represented political alliances. Towns, city-states, tribes or nations who wished to ally themselves with a ruler or come under his protection sealed the treaty with the marriage of a daughter of their chief family to the suzerain or his son. This was an act of loyalty on the part of the vassal, who would then have a personal stake in preserving the dynasty. The large number of sons indicated the strength of the family line, for with that many it would be assured of not dying out. This would be important for a ruler, because the family usually occupied key positions in the administration. A large family would theoretically be able to secure the future of the dynasty. Verse 9 indicates a vast web of political associations.

12:11. Aijalon in Zebulun. The well-known town and Valley of Aijalon is in the territory allotted to Dan and is therefore different from that referred to here. This site is unidentified.

12:13. Pirathon. Pirathon has been identified with the village of Farata six or seven miles south-southeast of Samaria.

12:14. forty sons and thirty grandsons on seventy donkeys. It is difficult to tell whether these sons and grandsons represent political alliances (see comment on 10:3) or the size of the clan that he ruled (see comment on 12:8 above). The reference to the donkeys favors the former and the reference to grandsons favors the latter.

13:1-25
The Birth of Samson

13:1. Philistines. The group of Philistines that are well-known through the narratives of Judges and 1 and 2 Samuel came into the Palestine area with the migration from the Aegean region of the group known as the Sea Peoples about 1200 B.C. It is the Sea Peoples that are generally thought to have been responsible for the fall of the Hittite Empire and the destruction of many cities along the coast of Syria and Palestine, such as Ugarit, Tyre, Sidon, Megiddo and Ashkelon, though the evidence for their involvement in those areas is circumstantial. Their battles with the Egyptian Pharaoh Rameses III are depicted on the famous wall paintings at Medinet Habu. It is this vast people movement that is also reflected in the Homeric Epic of the siege of Troy. Coming from Crete, Greece and Anatolia, they probably used Cyprus as a base from which to launch their attacks. Following the repulsion of the Sea Peoples from Egypt, the tribe that came to be known as the Philistines settled on the southern coast of Palestine, where they established their five capital cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron (Tell Miqne), Gath (Tell es-Safi) and Gaza.

13:2. Zorah. Zorah is identified with the modern Sar'a about sixteen miles west of Jerusalem in the Sorek Valley, which was the major pass from the coastal plains through the Shephelah to the hills around Jerusalem.

13:2. barrenness. The inability of a wife to bear children often made her vulnerable to her husband's whims, for most marriage contracts allowed for her to be divorced on such grounds. Alternatively it often led to the taking of other wives, who, upon producing children, would assume a more favored status within the family. This text is not, however, concerned with family politics or psychological tensions. The previous barrenness of Manoah's wife is one element that helps to demonstrate the supernatural aspect to Samson's life and career.

13:4-5. Nazirite vow. As with most vows in the ancient Near East, the Nazirite vow typically represented a conditional agreement with deity that was concluded with offertory gifts in response to a favorable answer to a petition. What distinguished the Nazirite vow was the period of abstinence preceding the offerings. Samson's situation is even more notable in that the period of abstinence is not the usual days or weeks, but his entire lifetime. For more information on the details of the Nazirite vow, see the comments on Numbers 6:1-21.

13:5. ritual importance of hair. There is a Phoenician inscription from the ninth century reporting the dedication of shaven hair by an individual in fulfillment of a vow made to the goddess Astarte. It is of importance that in the biblical text there is no discussion of what should be done with the hair that is cut. It is neither dedicated as in the above inscription, nor is it deposited in the temple as in some cultures. The dedicated hair is uncut, not cut. Hair (along with blood) was one of the main representatives in ancient thinking of a person's life essence. As such it was often an ingredient in sympathetic magic. This is evident, for instance, in the practice of sending along a lock of the presumed prophet's hair when the prophecies were sent to the king of Mari. The hair would be used in divination to determine whether the prophet's message would be accepted as valid.

13:15-16. hospitality meal. Hospitality custom required that all strangers who approached a dwelling were to be offered the opportunity to rest, refresh themselves and eat a meal. This was done to assure the friendship of the stranger. This would be particularly true of someone who was offering such prophetic portents as here described. What is particularly generous here is the fresh meat, an item not usually found in the daily diet.

13:17. importance of the name. Someone's name was believed to be intimately connected to their being and essence. A name was believed to be important for magical purposes or hexing. The giving of one's name was an act of favor, trust and, in human terms, vulnerability. The Ten Commandments had prohibited Israel from attempting to use Yahweh's name in magical ways to manipulate him. But here it is neither evil intent nor invocation that are intended by Manoah. The text indicates that Manoah did not realize that the visitor

was supernatural. If a prophet, the individual's reputation could be enhanced and his sponsorship provided for by someone pleased with the accuracy and benevolence of his pronouncements. Such rewards could only be given if the individual's identity were known.

13:19. grain offering. The word used to describe the grain offering means "gift" or "tribute." The offering is used in situations where respect or honor are intended. The same term is used the same way in Ugaritic and Akkadian (Canaan and Mesopotamia). It is typically found on occasions of celebration rather than the context of sadness or mourning. In formal settings a small portion was burnt on the altar as a token of the gift to the Lord, while the remainder was given to the officiating priest. The ingredients of this offering were grain, oil and incense. The grain was the grits or semolina left in the sieve after wheat was ground into flour. The oil was olive oil, used as shortening in cooking and easily combustible. The incense was frankincense, which was made from the gum resin of a type of tree found only in southern Arabia and Somaliland. The grain offerings used a small amount that was entirely burnt in a slow smolder (For more information see comments on Lev 2).

13:19. sacrifice on rock. By placing the food on a rock, it is changed from a meal to a sacrifice and is consumed. Rocks were at times used as altars (1 Sam 14:32-34), usually with the intention of allowing the blood to drain from the slaughtered animal.

13:22. taboo of seeing God. The concept of deity having an awesome, unapproachable appearance was not limited to Israelite theology, for in Mesopotamia the gods displayed their power through their *melammu,* their divine brilliance. This display, however, though it struck terror in the heart, was not seen as being fatal. It is also clear in the biblical text that there is nothing like the *melammu* attached to the messenger, because his supernatural identity is not recognized by Manoah. Parallels to this taboo are unattested in ancient Near Eastern literature.

13:24. Samson's name. Samson's name is a form of the noun that in Hebrew means "sun." Just a couple of miles south of his home is the town of Beth Shemesh, house/temple of the sun. The solar cult is known to have existed among the religious aberrations in Israel (2 Kings 23:11), and some have suggested that Yahweh was at times depicted as the sun in relief (the incense stand from Taanach) and in literature (e.g., Ps 80:2-3; Deut 33:2).

13:25. Mahaneh Dan. Mahaneh Dan means "camp of Dan" and therefore most likely does not represent an established settlement. Zorah and Eshtaol (Khirbet Deir Shubeib) are only about a mile apart, but there is a spring by the Wadi Kesalon running between the two towns that may be the area referred to here.

14:1—16:31
Samson's Exploits

14:1. Timnah. Timnah is located about five and a half miles west along the Sorek Valley from Samson's home in Zorah. It is modern Tell el-Batashi, situated about halfway between Zorah and the Philistine city of Ekron. Excavations at the site show occupation during this period but offer little insight into the biblical narrative.

14:2. parent arranged marriages. Throughout the ancient Near East marriage was viewed more as a clan partnership (often with economical motivations) concerned with family status than as a romantic matching of couples who had feelings for one another. As a result the arrangements for these partnerships were in the hands of the head of the family. The parents decided when marriage should take place and who the mate should be. Often arrangements were made when the spouses-to-be were still children. Endogamy, marriage to someone from the same tribe or village, was the common practice, especially in Israel where land holdings were tied to tribal affiliation. Even when an individual would have the freedom to make a choice on his own, the parents would then have to carry out the negotiations for the financial arrangements concerning bride price (see comment on Gen 29:18-20) and dowry (usually property), both constituting assets that become attached to the wife. Bride price is discussed much more than dowry in the ancient Near East and in the Bible.

14:3. uncircumcised. Circumcision was practiced by many different peoples in the ancient Near East (see comment on Gen 17:9-14) but not by the Philistines. The comment here has little to do with physical attributes or sociological practices, but is an ethnic designation that for the Israelites is a sign of the covenant.

14:5-6. lion. Kings and heroes of the ancient world often boast of their lion-hunting skills. A familiar scene in Egyptian paintings is Pharaoh astride his chariot facing lions with bow or spear in hand. Assyrian kings likewise claim hundreds of lions as hunting trophies. A relief from Tel Halaf (about 900 B.C.) pictures a warrior using a sword to fight a lion. Killing a lion with bare hands is a feat attached to other ancient heroes as, for instance, the Sumerian

king Gilgamesh and Heracles of Greek legend. Lions were common in the forested regions of Palestine, and in this time period the whole region surrounding the Sorek Valley between Zorah and Timnah was forested.

14:6. Spirit of the Lord. In previous appearances in the book the Spirit of the Lord has been involved at the point where the authority to raise an army was a strategic issue (see comments on 6:34-35 and 11:29). In those cases the Spirit endowed the judge with an authority that could only be given by God. In Samson's situation not authority but physical ability is involved. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson on a number of occasions (see 14:19 and 15:14), but not every time he performs an unusual feat. The common denominator is that the Spirit is involved in each situation when he attacks or is attacked.

14:10. feast for bridegrooms. This was the second stage in the marriage process, which took place some time after the proclamation of espousal had been formally made. The traditionally seven-day feast was climaxed by the consummation of the marriage, which may have taken place after the first night of the feast. A ceremony under a canopy is indicated in biblical materials (Ps 19:4-5; Joel 2:16). The Ugaritic tale of King Keret features a wedding feast when he marries Huray, but little detail is given.

14:11. thirty companions. The bridegroom's companions would be those from the clan or village of the bride who came forth to support the union. Their obligations are unclear but may involve providing security for the bride by committing to see that she was treated fairly in her new family and perhaps by accepting liability for the woman's support should her husband abandon her. At the beginning of verse 11 there is a variant reading of "Because they feared him" instead of NIV "When he appeared." If this variant is correct, there may be an implication that there was some intimidation that brought out so many, thus also supporting the claim of verse 15 that the companions were coerced to come in order to be robbed.

14:12. riddles. Riddles are characteristically based on two levels of meaning inherent in the words used. One level would involve the common word usage, while the solution to the riddle would require unraveling a more obscure meaning of the words. It has been suggested that the common level of meaning in Samson's riddle would have been either something crude (related to the results of overindulgence at a banquet) or something erotic (related to the imminent consummation of the marriage), though either of these would appear too metaphorical to be able to constitute a common level of meaning. In Greek legend of this period Mopsus engaged Calchus, a leader of the Achaeans leaving the sack of Troy, in a riddle contest. The intriguing connection here is that Mopsus is later credited with the founding of Ashkelon.

14:13. thirty sets of clothing. The thirty outfits spoken of here would be fine apparel used for special occasions. The equivalent today would be thirty three-piece suits. In the same way that a shirt would be worn under a suit, the linen garments referred to here would be worn under the embroidered outer cloak.

14:14. honey in the carcass. The motif of bees building their hive in the carcass of a large animal is known from literature in the Aegean region (where the Philistines originated), so this riddle should have been one the Philistines could solve.

14:18. riddles answering riddles. Samson's friends answer his riddle, while at the same time posing their own riddle that gives a clue as to how they procured the answer. Honey and the lion answers Samson's riddle. But what is it that is sweeter than honey and stronger than a lion? A woman's enticement, of course. Samson demonstrates his skill at riddles by immediately solving theirs and responding with his own wordplay. "Plowing with someone's heifer" could be analogous to our expression "walk a mile in his shoes" but it also has the more insidious meaning of meddling with his wife.

14:19. Ashkelon. Ashkelon is located nearly forty miles down the coast south of Tel Aviv. It is a one-hundred-and-fifty-acre site that was heavily fortified as one of the five major cities of the Philistines. The Canaanite ruler during the Amarna period (fourteenth century) was Yidya, who was responsible for seven of the letters of the Amarna archive. The Philistines settled on the site around 1175 B.C. During the period of Samson's exploits (Iron Age I) Ashkelon had fortifications at least on the northern slope as well as a glacis (sloped area outside the wall to prevent easy access to the wall) and a mudbrick tower. From Timnah to Ashkelon would have been a journey of twenty-five miles. It is unclear why he would have gone there rather than to Ekron, Gath or even Ashdod, all much closer.

14:20. outcome of wedding: wife given to another. The giving of the wife to the companion does not suggest a secret side romance but would have been the normal course of action. The role of the companions at the wedding was to guarantee continued support should

the wife be deserted, as the family assumed had happened. A Babylonian prayer to Ishtar requests that an angry young man come back to his wife at his in-laws' house and the connected ritual is intended to result in conception.

15:1. wheat harvest time. The wheat harvest time was at the end of May in this section of the country.

15:1. taking young goat. Though the marriage was usually consummated the first night of the feast, the bride often did not go to live with the bridegroom at the end of the seven-day feast. For several months the husband would regularly bring a gift and visit the bride in her father's house (and stay the night) until all was ready for the move. In Babylon this was typically a four-month period, perhaps intended to be a probation period to see whether the bride could become pregnant.

15:4. three hundred foxes. The word translated by the NIV as "fox" is believed to be a more generic term that could also refer to jackals. From the practical standpoint it is likely that jackals are used here. Foxes hunt alone while jackals hunt in packs. Trapping this large a number of foxes would require not only great amounts of time but also cover a large range of territory. Acquisition of jackals would be a more manageable task in that whole packs could be captured at once. Both species were native to Palestine during this period.

15:5. shocks and standing grain. The stalks that have already been cut and are lying in piles awaiting the threshing process are the shocks. The standing grain is that which has not yet been cut. It was still some months until the grapes and olives would be harvested, but the fire did irreparable damage to those industries as well.

15:8. rock of Etam. There is a town near Bethlehem named Etam (2 Chron 11:6), but it is too far east to be involved here, and Samson is not in a town. The most common identification is with 'Araq Isma'in in the vicinity of Samson's hometown, Zorah, on the slopes of the Sorek Valley.

15:9. Lehi. It is uncertain whether Lehi (jaw) is a place name or a description. Akkadian uses the word for jaw to describe the boundary of a territory, and some have felt that the same occurs here in Judges, though it is unattested elsewhere in the Old Testament. Those who consider it a place name generally identify it with Khirbet es-Siyyagh in the hill country of Judah heading toward Jerusalem in the vicinity of Beth Shemesh. It is about two miles from Zorah and the rock of Etam.

15:13. new ropes. Ropes have been found preserved in Egyptian tombs made of green papyrus or of date-palm fiber. In Israel the stem of the sparrow-wort, a desert shrub, was one of the most suitable and convenient materials. New ropes would have been less brittle and therefore more resilient.

15:15. donkey's jawbone. The jawbone of a donkey would be about nine inches long and weigh a little less than a pound. It would be slightly curved and may well have had many of the teeth still in place to improve its effectiveness as a weapon.

15:19. provision of water. Sedimentary rock is known to feature pockets where water can collect just below the surface. By breaking through the surface the collected water can be released. The text does not explain in what way God opened up the rock.

15:19. En Hakkore. No spring has been located in this region that would suit the details of the passage.

16:1. Gaza. Gaza was one of the five major cities of the Philistines. It is located about twelve miles southwest of Ashkelon about three miles from the Mediterranean. In the Amarna period it was the most important center of Egyptian administration of the region. The 135-acre site is located at the southern entrance to the coastal plain, where it occupies the highest point in the region along the main trade route coming up from Egypt. Egyptian reliefs portray the city as well fortified in the thirteenth century, though the limited excavations have turned up little from the Old Testament period.

16:3. structure of city gates. The text mentions three parts of the gate: the gate itself, the posts and the bar. Two gate doors were generally set into stone sockets buried just under the ground. The posts flanked the gate on either side. They were made of wood and joined to the wall. During Iron Age I many cities did not have walls, but instead there were houses built close around the perimeter to serve that purpose. The bars slid across the gates and the end fit into an opening in the post. These bars could be locked in place by a series of small wooden dowels that slipped into holes on a block mounted on the gate. One could therefore not exit the city without a key once the gate was locked. Since the fortifications of ancient Gaza have not been found by archaeologists, it is difficult to be more precise about the details of this particular gate. Gate openings of this period were often as much as twelve feet wide, though some are as small as six feet.

16:3. hill facing Hebron. Hebron is nearly forty miles east of Gaza in a continual uphill climb. The text does not suggest that Samson

carried the gates to the vicinity of Hebron. The phrase used can often mean "on the way to" (see for instance Josh 13:3). He headed off on the road to Hebron and dumped the gates on a hill on the way.

16:4. Valley of Sorek. The Valley of Sorek is the area of most of Samson's activity. The main valley is about thirteen miles west of Jerusalem and is part of the wadi extending about thirty miles in a northwesterly direction from the hills around Jerusalem to the Mediterranean. It serves as the main pass between the coastal plain and the hills of Judah near Jerusalem.

16:5. rulers of the Philistines. The five rulers of the Philistines appear to be equal in authority. The term used to describe them is likely the Philistine term, and most scholars believe it has its roots in the language of the Sea Peoples (Greek or another Indo-European language). Until more information is found it is impossible to offer a clearer political analysis.

16:5. eleven hundred shekels of silver. Eleven hundred shekels of silver is an exorbitant sum—a king's ransom (see 2 Sam 18:12). Compare the ten shekels that was the standard annual wage of a laborer and the four to six hundred shekels that was paid for tracts of land. The 5500 shekels would equal 550 times the average annual wage. If we took $25,000 as an average annual wage today, that kind of offer would be in the $15 million category.

16:5. Philistine beliefs about Samson's strength. The Philistines believed there was a secret to Samson's great strength that needed to be discovered and that could be exploited to weaken him. This demonstrates that they considered supernatural or magical elements to be the source of his abilities. Samson understands this in that he offers magical solutions for binding him. Just as modern superstitions maintain that only silver bullets can be used to slay a werewolf, so in the ancient traditions certain materials had magical properties that could be used to counteract supernatural phenomena. This falls into the category of magic designated "rite of contact and transference" known from Hittite texts. In these rites, wool or cords of various colors or materials were used to neutralize magical properties.

16:7. fresh thongs. The fresh thongs or bow strings were sometimes made of the intestines of cattle. Sumerian literature refers to deriving bow strings from a sheep's leg (presumably the tendons) or from ram's gut, while Ugaritic literature refers to tendons from a bull's leg. They were usually laid out to dry before being put to use. Others have preferred to think of vines being used. The fact that seven are used also suggests a magical element to the procedure.

16:11. new ropes. See comment on 15:13.

16:13-14. loom weaving. There were two types of looms used in this period: the horizontal loom and the vertical loom. From the description given of Delilah's loom it appears to be the former type. Four stakes were driven into the ground in a rectangular pattern. The threads that would make up the warp of the fabric were tied at regular intervals to sticks on both ends, and the sticks were then used to stretch out the threads between the stakes. When the ends of each stick were braced behind the stakes, the threads would be stretched horizontal to the ground, taut for weaving. A shuttle would then be tied to the thread that was to be woven in as the woof of the fabric, with a bar being used to separate alternating threads of the warp to allow the shuttle with the woof thread to pass through. Once the woof thread was in place the pin would be used to tighten that row against the previous rows. Samson has now become quite creative for he is suggesting that his hair be substituted for the woof thread. This would, however, be a logical magical procedure in that the hair was considered to contain one's life essence and the weaving would be a binding action. When Samson jumps up, he pulls the whole loom with him, snapping the end sticks off the four stakes between which the fabric was stretched.

16:13. seven braids. It was a common style for men to have the hair bound or even curled in segments. Samson's hair was styled in seven such segments (one in the back and three on each side).

16:17. Nazirite. See comments in Numbers 6 for more information about the Nazirite vow and the significance of hair. Though Samson may have violated the vow on numerous occasions, such circumstances merely required the vow to be renewed. This was different in that the shaving of the hair was the way to bring the vow to an end.

16:17-19. cutting hair to deprive of invincibility. There are a few examples of this same concept known from early literature of the Aegean region reported by Apollodorus (second century B.C.). One account is of Nisus, king of Megara, whose long hair made him invincible. His daughter, Scylla, had fallen in love with his enemy, Minos, king of Crete (seventeenth century B.C.), so she cut off part of her father's hair so that Minos could achieve victory. A similar fate likewise befell Pterelaos, king of Teleboea (also reported by Apollodorus), whose hair, which made him

immortal, was shaved off by a daughter in love with the enemy. These stories may well have been known by the Philistines who were from the Aegean region, in which case the suggested course of action would have made perfect sense to them.

16:21. blinding prisoners. Most evidence comes from Mesopotamia, where it was common practice for prisoners of war to have either their eyes gouged out or their tongues removed.

16:21. bronze shackles. Both manacles and fetters were used in the ancient Near East, and bronze would have been the logical material to make them out of at this period. Even later in the Iron Age bronze continued to be used for this purpose (see Jer 39:7). It is likely that Samson had both his hands and his feet shackled in this way.

16:21. grinding mill. Grinding grain into flour was usually done with millstones and was the job of the lowest members of society. One of the basic "appliances" of any ancient household would have been the handmill (called a saddle quern) with two stones for grinding (see comment on Judg 9:53). Larger milling houses often served as prison workhouses in Mesopotamia, but each prisoner still used a handmill for grinding. The large rotary mill that could be powered by donkey or slave labor was not invented until after the Old Testament period. The palace at Ebla had a room containing sixteen handmills, inferred to be a place where prisoners ground grain. Grinding houses would include prisoners of war, criminals and those who had defaulted on their debts.

16:23. Dagon. There is evidence of Dagon as a important god within the Semitic pantheon of deities as early as the third millennium B.C. in Mari. Assyrians worshiped him in the first half of the second millennium, and in Ugaritic literature he is positioned as the father of Baal Haddu. His temple in the town of Ugarit was bigger that the temple of Baal. It is generally assumed, then, that the Philistines did not bring this god with them from their Aegean homeland but adopted him upon their arrival in their new territory. Dagon is often identified as a god of grain or of storm, but both of these remain somewhat speculative.

16:25. brought to entertain. The "entertainment" provided by Samson was probably not connected to his wit or his strength, but to his blindness. Putting obstacles in the way and striking or tripping him would be only a few of the cruel possibilities for tormenting a blind person in an unfamiliar place.

16:29. temple architecture. The temples at Tell Qasile (ancient name unknown, but occupied by Philistines; located within modern Tel Aviv) and at Beth Shan are the only Philistine temples from this time period that have been uncovered by archaeologists, though the temple at Lachish is also instructive. They commonly feature pillars that support the roof in a central hallway (perhaps partially open-air). The pillars in the temples of this period were often made of wood and stood on stone pedestals. They were held in place by the weight of the roof. The largest phase of Iron I temples at Tell Qasile was twenty-five by forty-five feet. The temple at Beth Shan features a central area with two pillars and measures nearly forty-five feet square. The Late Bronze acropolis temple at Lachish (Canaanite and slightly earlier) was of similar design, with two pillars in the central area, but was bigger, measuring about sixty by one hundred feet.

16:29-30. bringing down the house. The verb used in verse 30 suggests a twisting motion, from which we can infer that Samson turned the pillars off their stone bases, thus removing the support of the roof and causing its collapse.

16:31. Zorah and Eshtaol. Zorah is identified with the modern Sar'a about sixteen miles west of Jerusalem in the Sorek Valley, which was the major pass from the coastal plains through the Shephelah to the hills around Jerusalem. Zorah and Eshtaol (Khirbet Deir Shubeib) are only about a mile apart, but there is a spring by the Wadi Kesalon running between the two towns that may be the area referred to here.

17:1—18:31
Micah and the Danites

17:2. eleven hundred shekels. Although a very large amount (eight grams/shekel), it is not beyond the realm of possibility that this much silver could be involved here (compare the four hundred paid by Abraham for Machpelah and Gideon's spoils taken in Judg 8:26). It most likely represented the woman's dowry, received at marriage, that was to provide support should she be widowed or abandoned. It is also the amount paid to Delilah in 16:5 by the Philistine kings.

17:2. curse. The text is ambiguous enough to allow for either "oath" or "curse" with regard to the eleven hundred shekels of silver. It is possible that Micah's mother had pledged that amount to Yahweh, or it may be that she had placed a curse on whomever had taken it. In both cases God would have been called upon as witness (see Num 5:21 and Neh

10:29). The mother might well have been desperate to find her pledged funds and called upon God to help with the search. Micah's reassurance that he has the silver sounds less like a response of a dutiful son than it does of someone frightened of taboo (i.e. consecrated) items (see Josh 7:20-21).

17:2. changing curse to blessing. Like Balaam (Num 23:11), Micah's mother changes her curse into a blessing. She may have been disappointed to find that her son had taken the silver, but she quickly transposes one form of divine invocation into another. In this way, the potential harm is abetted (see 2 Sam 21:3).

17:3. consecrated to the Lord to make image. The making of sacred images was forbidden in Exodus 20:4. However, the lawlessness portrayed in the Judges period and common practice among the Canaanites makes it almost a certainty among the Israelites (see Gideon's ephod in Judg 8:27). Idols were carved out of wood or stone as well as cast from precious metals (see the golden calves in Ex 32:1-4 and 1 Kings 12:28). Molds for the casting of gods have been found at several Canaanite sites. It may be presumed that the material employed was consecrated at the beginning of the process, and certain rituals (the "mouth-opening" in Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts) and ceremonies were performed to bring the object to life. Then the final product was consecrated in the service of the god represented (see Ex 40:9-11 and Lev 8:10-11 for the consecration of the tabernacle).

17:5. shrine. Archaeological excavations at sites throughout Syro-Palestine have uncovered house-shrines. These private sanctuaries would have served the needs of households and perhaps extended families within a village culture (the plaster fragments from Tell Deir 'Alla may be associated with such a shrine as may the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions). In larger population centers, more formal temples and shrines also existed to serve as worship and sacrificial centers for all devotees and as a base of operations for the priestly community of the god. However, the biblical text makes a point that Micah's shrine was not a proper center for Yahweh worship, and the inclusion of an idol graphically demonstrates the danger of unsupervised local worship (see the law in Deut 12:2-7).

17:5. ephod. The ephod was part of the priestly garments to be worn exclusively by Aaron and other high priests (see the comment on Ex 28:6-14). It was probably an apronlike affair, made of special fabric and woven with a mixture of woolen and linen thread as well as gold. The breastplate containing the twelve stones representing the Israelite tribes was attached to the ephod (Ex 28:25). The association of the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim, the lots used in divining God's will, makes the ephod a part of this oracular procedure. As such it could have eventually been so closely associated with the divine that it too was worshiped (see Gideon's golden ephod in Judg 8:27). Micah's ephod is designed to add legitimacy to his personal shrine, and the fact that it is listed in association with his idols suggests it was also an object of worship (see Judg 18:14-31).

17:5. idols. Graven images of any sort are strictly forbidden by Exodus 20:4-6; 34:17. Yet the existence of idols made of metal, wood and stone was a continual reality in ancient Israel (see Is 40:19-20; Hos 8:4-6). It is therefore not surprising that Micah has created idols. However, the official sanction given to them by the Levite raises the scandal of the lawless Judges period.

17:6. no king. Given limited central authority, the judges were not able to undertake significant spiritual or social reform among the people, nor were they in a position to adjudicate intertribal squabbles. The priesthood, the tribal leadership and the judges are seen in the narrative to be part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Inauguration of a central, civil authority had the potential to resolve some of these problems, but only the appropriate view of kingship would result in progress. As 1 Samuel 8—12 will point out, there are drawbacks to kingship as well, and it is a dangerous mistake to treat a spiritual problem with a political solution.

17:7-10. family priests. Micah's original choice was to appoint one of his sons as the priestly administrator of his shrine. However, when the opportunity arose to install a Levite, he jumped at this opportunity to legitimize his sanctuary (note how it has gained a reputation in Judg 18:14-15). The use of the term "father" here implies ability to make true oracular answers to the yes and no questions posed to God through him (see the use of this term in 2 Kings 6:21; 8:9; 13:14). It might also be compared to the title "mother in Israel" given to Deborah in Judges 5:7. However, the practice of using local or family priests is eventually forbidden as the monarchy attempted to centralize all worship in Jerusalem (see 2 Kings 18:4; 23:5-9).

17:7-9. itinerant Levite. The Levites did not receive a specific territorial allotment because they were to serve all of the tribes as priests (Josh 18:7). Thus it is not out of character in this period for a young Levite to go on a jour-

ney and seek employment in his profession. There are some problems here with his association with Judah, but the historical context is uncertain.

17:10. priest's salary. There is no provision in the law for a priest to receive a salary. Exodus 28:1 and 29:26-28 describe the portion of the sacrificial offering that is to be set aside for the priests, and Joshua 21:3-40 lists towns and pasturelands allotted to the Levites for this sustenance. However, the offering of a specific amount of precious metal as wages functions more as a bribe or retainer for a prized employee.

18:1-2. Danite migration. The allotment assigned to the tribe of Dan was between that of Ephraim and Benjamin along the coastal plain (Josh 19:40-48). They would have been closest to and most immediately affected by the Philistines (see Samson's exploits in Judges 13—16) and may have eventually felt that they would never be able to effectively compete with this much stronger people.

18:5-6. oracle. One of the most common forms of divination employed in the ancient Near East involved asking a god a yes or no question. This might require the casting of lots or, as in this instance, inquiring of a prophet or priest at a shrine. While this might seem to eliminate ambiguity, the Levite's answer suggests that a question could be answered with a noninformative statement. In Mesopotamia, the *baru* priest sometimes used a "divining cup" (see Joseph in Gen 44:5) or might consult a body of omen texts to provide answers.

18:7. Laish. Located at the foot of Mount Hermon in the extreme northern portion of Israelite territory (also known as Leshem in Josh 19:47), the city was about one hundred miles from Dan's assigned territory. Laish was conquered by the Danites and renamed Dan. The site, which contains one of the sources of the Jordan River, has a long history, attested by Egyptian execration texts and in the Mari letters. It would not be surprising to see Phoenician (Sidonian) influence in this northern city. For more information see the comment on Dan in 18:29.

18:12. Kiriath Jearim. Listed as a city within Judah (Josh 15:60), the site is commonly identified with Tell el-Azhar, nine miles west northwest of Jerusalem, but this is unsubstantiated by archaeological finds or extrabiblical references. Its association with Mahaneh Dan in this verse puts it in this general area (see the comment on 13:25). This location places it only six miles from Gibeon, with which it is also associated (see comment on Josh 9:17).

18:14-27. pillaging the shrine. The practice of attacking and looting shrines and temples was simply part of warfare in the ancient world. Since these places were often storehouses of grain and other commodities and contained valuable objects made of precious metals, they were a natural target. The collecting of sacred images as "hostages" was also common (see 1 Sam 5:1-2) and is documented in the Mari letters (eighteenth century B.C.) as well as in the Cyrus Cylinder from the Persian period (c. 540 B.C.).

18:28. Sidon, Beth Rehob. At the time of the Danite conquest of Laish, it was a village controlled by the Sidonians (on the Lebanese coast). The exact location of Beth Rehob is unknown, although it most likely is to be found "near the entrance to Hamath" (Num 13:21), in the Huleh valley where it links with the Bekah valley of southern Lebanon.

18:29. Dan. Tel Dan (Tell el Qadi) is located at the foot of Mount Hermon and is watered by a number of springs which serve as one of the sources of the Jordan River. Its identification has been proven by the discovery of an inscription which invokes "the god of Dan." However, its original name was Laish (see Josh 19:47; Judg 18:7), and by that name it was mentioned in the Egyptian execration texts and perhaps in the Mari letters. The Middle Bronze period at the site saw the construction cover over thirty acres. An arched mudbrick gateway from this era testifies to the remarkable culture of the city. The conquest of the city in the early Iron Age is not evidenced by a destruction level, but there is material evidence (pottery, storage pits) of the introduction of a new population group in the Iron Age. No temple or shrine has been found from this period, but Jeroboam may have been following earlier tradition when he constructed a temple when the nation was divided in the tenth century (1 Kings 12:29-30).

18:30. tribal priesthood. The Levites were to serve as priests for all of the tribes. Thus it is not out of character to speak of Jonathan, the son of Gershom, as priest of the tribe of Dan. Jonathan came to his position by first serving as a household priest in Ephraim and officiating before idols, and then by consenting to the confiscation of these sacred images from Micah's house. In that sense he perpetuated a form of false worship along the lines of those priests condemned by Hosea for failing to convey the true knowledge of God to the people (Hos 4:6).

18:31. house of God in Shiloh. The shrine at Shiloh operated as a cultic center during the Judges period (Judg 21:19) and in the time of Samuel (1 Sam 1:3), but it was apparently de-

stroyed by the Philistines after the battle of Ebenezer (1 Sam 4:1-11). Mention in Psalm 78:60 and Jeremiah 7:12; 26:6-9 suggests the shrine there may have been rebuilt and used until Solomon built the Jerusalem temple. The site has been identified as Khirbet Seilun, about halfway between Bethel and Shechem. This seven-and-a-half-acre site is situated in a strategic location where it enjoys fertile land, a reliable water source and access to the main north-south route through the heartland of Israel. Substantial Iron Age I ruins have been found at the site, along with evidence of destruction by means of fire. Though remains of public buildings from this period have been found, no trace of the sanctuary has been identified. The probable location at the highest point of the tell has suffered from erosion and later settlement.

19:1—21:25
The Civil War Against Benjamin

19:1. Levites. For discussion of the role, function and provisions made for the Levites, see the comments on Numbers 16:10; Deuteronomy 14:27-29; 18:1-5; 18:6-8.

19:1. concubines. A concubine is a secondary wife who has probably come into the marriage without a dowry. Her children may only receive a portion of their father's estate if he chooses to publicly acknowledge them as his heirs (note how Abraham treated his sons by Keturah and his concubines in Gen 25:1-4). It is possible that this sort of arrangement became necessary when the first or principal wife was infertile (see the use of Hagar in Gen 16:1-4 and the maids of Leah and Rachel in Gen 35:21-22). However, in most cases in which a marriage contract is made with the father of a woman who will be considered a concubine, there is an assumption of a lesser status than a regular wife. Thus the Levite may have simply contracted for a sexual partner, since his social status would ordinarily have required a wife of certain attributes (see Lev 21:7). This may explain why he was in no hurry to bring his concubine home (Judg 19:2).

19:1. hill country/Bethlehem. The geographical distances involved are not great (perhaps thirty miles), but they do represent two tribal areas and in later terms the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. In any case it would have required at least a full day's travel to cover and thus explains why they must stop for the night after a later afternoon departure only got them as far as Jebus/Jerusalem (Judg 19:8-11). The text actually refers to "Mt. Ephraim" (NIV: the hill country of Ephraim) which may be identifiable as Jebel Asur, the most noticeable elevation in the region.

19:10. Jebus/Jerusalem. For discussion of the pairing of these city names see the comments on 1:7-8 and 1:21. The city would have been only about four miles north of Bethlehem.

19:12-14. Gibeah. Scholarly consensus now places the site of Gibeah at Jaba', about four miles northeast of Jerusalem. Jaba' sits on a hill above a canyon pitted with caves (see the Rock of Rimmon in Judg 20:47). Although it is described as a village in the tribal territory of Benjamin, Gibeah will later serve as Saul's fortress city when he becomes Israel's first king (see 1 Sam 10:26; Is 10:29). The travelers would likely have passed west of Jerusalem and then taken the road northeast through Anathoth to Geba.

19:15-17. city square hospitality. What is implied here is that no one met the Levite's party as they entered the village, unlike in Genesis 19:1, and they were forced to seek shelter in the *rehob* ("city square"). This place is a poor refuge for travelers. Having to spend the night there would be their last choice, and it would reflect on the poor hospitality of the town that strangers would have to shelter there. In Genesis 19 the angels' intention to go to the *rehob* suggests a testing of the community. The fact that the Levite in Judges 19 is forced to go to the *rehob* demonstrates a basic failure on the part of the citizens of Gibeah to offer him hospitality.

19:18. house of the Lord. It is possible that the Levite is either speaking of his own home in Ephraimite territory, where he may or may not perform any cultic functions, or to the shrine at Shiloh where the ark of the covenant is housed and a group of Levites provide official sacrificial duties (1 Sam 1:3).

19:21. foot washing. It is typical for the host to make a modest offer to the guest (usually water, food, shelter and a foot washing). This does not preclude more being given to the guest, but it does protect the host who may find himself in the dishonored position of offering more than he can deliver. In any case the host will make every effort to insure his guest's comfort, and this would include cooling and cleansing hot, dusty feet (see Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32).

19:24. daughter and concubine made available. The situation here may be intended to portray a skewed world in which no man or woman is safe from harm. The Ephraimite's invitation that the men do "what seems good to you" is suggestive of the final phrase in this narrative: Judges 21:25b—"everyone did as he

saw fit." It should be noted that women are legal extensions of their husbands in ancient Israel and thus would come under the same legal protections guaranteed to their husbands—as long as their husbands identified them as such. In this instance the Ephraimite apparently shifts his role from hospitable to inhospitable host by "callously" offering the Levite's concubine to the crowd in order to save his honor and perhaps his own life. Technically the concubine could not be legally separated from the Levite and should have been protected by the customs of hospitality to the same degree.

19:25. Levite gives concubine to crowd. This interchange is less dramatic than that in Genesis 19:9. The citizens of Gibeah simply ignore the Ephraimite's offer without accusing him of "playing the judge." There is a sense of urgency in the text, brought on by a lack of reasoning in the actions of the mob, which may explain the Levite's action of thrusting his concubine out the door and into the hands of the crowd. In both cases the life of the host is saved by his guest(s), but clearly the solution provided by Lot's guests is preferable to the Levite's. What is clear in both narratives is that the guest is forced to save his own life and that of his host. The irony of this reversal climaxes the narrative, although a sense of disgust lingers over the violence done to the Levite's concubine. She is a victim whose only attempt to assert her independence (her flight from her husband in Judg 19:2) was thwarted by her father, her husband and the failure of the citizens of Gibeah to carry out their proper role as host. The Levite chooses to sacrifice her to save himself.

19:29. cut up pieces sent. The Levite will perpetrate one last indignity on his concubine's body by carving her up into twelve pieces and then using them as grisly invitations to a general assembly of the tribes. There are clear parallels between this action and Saul's call to arms in 1 Samuel 11:7, in which he carved his oxen into twelve pieces.

20:1. Dan to Beersheba. This is the traditional geographic range given in the text for the north-south political limits of Israel. It represents a distance of approximately 160 miles.

20:1-3. assembly in Mizpah. This site in the tribal territory of Benjamin was a common assembly point in premonarchic Israel (Josh 18:26; 1 Sam 7:16). The name means "to watch," and the site may have been a military outpost or border fortress, and thus a likely spot for the type of encampment described in Judges. It may be identified with Tell en-Nasbeh, about six miles north of Jerusalem.

20:2. four hundred thousand soldiers with swords. As in many of the other passages that mention the size of an army, it is difficult to ascertain whether the Hebrew word ought to be read as "thousands" or "divisions" (for more discussion, see comment on Josh 8:3). Whatever the case may be, this is a large turnout in response to the summons. Population estimates for this period generally run in the 200,000 to 250,000 range, based on the number of settlements, the size of the settlements and the average number of inhabitants per acre of city space. The swords that are mentioned are probably bronze swords, since we know that Israel did not develop iron technology until the monarchy period.

20:3-8. the hearing and verdict. Some aspects of Israelite judicial procedure are followed in this episode. The chiefs or elders of the tribes are assembled to hear testimony. Once this has been given, a verdict is rendered (compare the case of the prodigal son in Deut 21:18-21). One major variation on this process is the fact that only the word of the Levite is given. Ordinarily, two witnesses are required for a verdict to be given (see Num 35:30; Deut 19:15). The judgment of the tribes in this case includes taking an oath to stay in the field until punishment has been administered. Such a united front is unprecedented in the Judges period, when the tribes often fight among themselves (Judg 12:1-6) or refuse to join a combined military effort (see Judg 5:15-17). The idea that honor has been violated or a great affront done that requires military action may be compared to David's vow after being rebuffed by Nabal in 1 Samuel 25:21-22.

20:9,18. direction of the lot. The casting of lots prior to battle forms an inclusio in the book of Judges. At the beginning of the book, God responds to the Israelites' question of "who will be the first to go up and fight?" with the name Judah (1:1-2). And, again, in this final episode Judah is directed to "go first" in the battle against Gibeah and the Benjaminites (20:18). The use of lots is common in Israelite tradition in situations of land distribution (see Josh 14:2; 19:1-51) and judicial procedure (see Josh 7:14-21; 1 Sam 14:41-42). It is a form of divination in which the decision, based on the cases of lots (dice, knuckle bones, incised ivory palettes, etc.) is provided by God's answer to a question (see the comments on Judg 1:1-2 and 18:5-6).

20:15. twenty-six thousand swordsmen. For discussion of the large numbers see the comment at 20:2.

20:16. seven hundred left-handed slingers. The number may reflect a special or elite con-

tingent of ambidextrous warriors (see the comment on Judg 3:15), who were such marksmen with their slings that they could turn the odds for an outnumbered army (see 1 Chron 12:2 for another group of Benjaminite heroes or elite troops who were experts with the sling).

20:26. fasting. Fasting is little attested in the ancient Near East outside of the Bible. It generally occurs in the context of mourning. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with making a request before God. The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about their spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and humbling oneself before God (Ps 69:10). After their second defeat by the Benjaminites, the other tribes gathered to seek God's advice, and in preparation for this query they fasted and made sacrifices in order to remove any sin or other obstacle that may have been the cause for this defeat. For similar efforts related to military action, see 1 Samuel 7:6 and 2 Chronicles 20:1-4.

20:26-28. ark at Bethel. This is the only reference to the ark in the book of Judges, and therefore for most of the book it is unknown where the ark is being kept or how it is being used. It is generally assumed that its location changed on a number of occasions during the period. In the beginning of 1 Samuel it is at Shiloh.

20:28. time period. Since the episodes in the book of Judges are not always in chronological order, it could be that these events occurred closer to the beginning of the settlement period. This would allow for a son of Aaron to still be alive and able to serve as priest before the ark at Bethel. If it relates to a later period, then this was probably Phinehas II, the predecessor to Eli at Shiloh.

20:29-36. ambush strategy. The use of decoying ambushes, such as that described in this episode, seems to have been a familiar part of Israelite military strategy. Joshua employs it in his second attack on the city of Ai (Josh 8:2-21), and Abimelech uses similar tactics in his capture of the city of Shechem (Judg 9:30-45). This strategy falls into the category of indirect warfare, characterized by ambush, pretend retreats, decoys, infiltration and the like, rather than lengthy siege or pitched battle. It would have been difficult for armies to besiege walled cities without siege engines or a large enough force to completely surround the city and prevent counterattacks or the escape of the citizens. Thus trickery was used to fool the city into opening its gates or into sending contingents of troops outside the walls that could be cut off by ambushes (see Jeroboam's unsuccessful strategy in 2 Chron 13:13-18). Such tactics are known from the ancient Near East in the Mari texts (eighteenth century B.C.), the Egyptian Papyrus Anastasi (thirteenth century B.C.) and a Middle Assyrian text (tenth century B.C.).

20:33. Baal Tamar. A site between Gibeah and Bethel which has not been conclusively identified. Among the possibilities are Khirbet Atarah, Ras et-Tavil and Sahre al Gibiyeh, all of which are within this general area. The city serves as the site of a diversionary battle which allowed another army of Israelites to attack Gibeah and destroy it.

20:35. 25,100 killed. The original Benjaminite muster was 26 divisions plus 700 trained warriors (v. 15). The number here in verse 35 is the total casualty count, which is broken down in the following verses. Of the divisions, 25 were wiped out, including 18 on the battlefield (v. 44), 5 during flight (v. 45) and 2 more in the "mop up" operation (v. 45). Of the 700 trained warriors, 100 were killed while 600 escaped and hid (v. 47).

20:45. rock of Rimmon. The limestone cliffs around the site of Gibeah/Geba are pitted with small caves from which ambushing soldiers could spring or in which these six hundred survivors could hide (see comment on Judg 19:12-14). This is the origin of the name "Pomegranate Rock," which is most likely identified with the el-Jaia cave in the Wadi es-Swenit, approximately one mile east of Gibeah/Geba.

20:48. decimating cities (incl. animals). Although the term is not used here, the action taken against the Benjaminite towns is precisely the same as a *ḥerem*, a holy war in which all persons, animals and property are destroyed as a sacrifice to God (see Josh 6:17-21 at Jericho and 1 Sam 15:2-3 and the *ḥerem* against the Amalekites). This would then account for the fact that only six hundred Benjaminites (hiding at the Rock of Rimmon) would have survived this devastation. It is an extreme form of warfare, and one that occurs only infrequently since it does not provide the conquering force any loot or slaves.

21:1. oath. Once again an unwise oath appears in the narrative (see previously Jephthah's oath in Judg 11:30-31). In their zeal to punish the Benjaminites, they had carried out a war of total devastation and had sealed the fate of their future existence by swearing not to intermarry with any survivors (see the importance

of keeping a vow in Num 30:2-15). This may have also been a security measure should there be future conflicts with the Benjaminites. However, the destruction had been so complete that the six hundred survivors were left without wives or other women to marry. Since the Israelites could not violate their oath without bringing God's wrath upon them, an alternative source of brides for the Benjaminites had to be sought.

21:4. built altar. If Bethel was only an assembly point for this episode and not the permanent cultic site for the ark, it is to be expected that a new Yahweh altar would have to be constructed for the use of the Israelites (see the legislation on construction of altars in Ex 20:24-26). It is also possible that a new altar would have been built in an open area or on a high place to accommodate the large numbers of Israelites assembled (see Gideon's new altar in Judg 6:26).

21:4. offerings. In order to purify themselves and make themselves worthy of God's attention, a new altar is constructed and burnt, and peace offerings are made (see Ex 20:24). This is done because they have placed themselves in a difficult situation after making an unwise vow. They are responsible for the near-extermination of the tribe of Benjamin. Now they regret that act and want to seek Yahweh's guidance on how to save Benjamin from extinction. Their act of building an altar and making sacrifices is proper (as it was in Judg 20:26) and elicits a response from God.

21:8-12. Jabesh Gilead. Most likely located at Tell Maklub, on the Yabis River in the northern Gileadite hill country, just east of the Jordan River. It was a strategic site, commanding the well-traveled wadi immediately below the city. As such it controlled much of the merchant traffic in that area (see 1 Sam 11).

21:5, 10. death for not attending. The Israelite tribes had taken an oath of solidarity. The assumption was that anyone who failed to assemble was taking the side of their enemy and thus deserved the same fate. Thus Jabesh Gilead was targeted for punishment as a fulfillment of the oath and, conveniently, as a source of brides for the six hundred remaining Benjaminites. Taking an oath such as this might be compared to Saul's statement in 1 Samuel 11:7 when he called for a mustering of Israelite tribes to save Jabesh Gilead from the Ammonites. He threatened to destroy the cattle of any man who failed to assemble for this campaign. The threat probably implied violence against the person as well. One Mari text provides a graphic example of this type of threat. The head of a criminal was carried on a pole as an indication of the fate of draft dodgers.

21:6. elders. In the absence of a king or other dominant leader, the tribes had to rely on the collective assembly of the tribal elders. They administered justice in the village culture (Deut 19:12; 21:2-6; 22:15) and served as representatives for the people at major gatherings (Josh 8:10; 1 Sam 4:3).

21:19. geography. The festival of Shiloh (Khirbet Seilun) must have been on the pilgrimage route between Bethel in the south and Shechem (Tell Balatah, about thirty miles north of Jerusalem) to the north. Lebonah was located north of Shiloh (possibly either El-Lubban or Lubban Sherqujeh). All of these directions by the elders suggest that none of them had been to this Canaanite festival.

21:21-23. girls of Shiloh. The idea of stealing brides also occurs in early Greek and Roman traditions and probably reflects a practice that was not uncommon in the ancient world. The festival in question was apparently a Canaanite fertility ritual associated with the harvest.

21:25. no king. This chapter concludes with the same statement which appears earlier, explaining the anarchic conditions in the Judges period by noting that no king ruled at that time (see the comment on Judg 17:6). This provides an exclamation to the entire book. The stories filled with violence and death were an obvious case for the necessity of the monarchy. The covenant was ignored, the people rebelled, and no law was above breaking in a time when everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Thus the only hope for peace and the rule of order was a reestablishment of the covenant and the imposition of strong leadership.

RUTH

1:1-22

To Moab and Back

1:1. chronological note. The story of Ruth is placed by the narrator in the time of the judges, but no indication is given as to when in this several-century period it took place. If the genealogy at the end of the book has no gaps (see comment on Gen 5:1-32), the events would best be placed in the second half of the twelfth century, roughly contemporary to Jephthah and Samson.

1:1. Bethlehem. Bethlehem is located about five miles south of Jerusalem. Bronze and Iron Age pottery has been found at the site, but little excavation can be carried out due to continuing occupation. The town was particularly susceptible to the climate because there was no spring and it relied on cisterns to gather water. The main produce of the area includes grain crops (wheat and barley) as well as olives and grapes.

1:1. going to Moab in time of famine. There are a number of wadis that cross the region of Moab, and the combination of adequate rainfall and porous soil makes it good for agriculture. The family of Elimelech would have traveled north to the area of Jerusalem and then taken the Jerusalem to Jericho road to cross the Jordan at the fords by Jericho. From there the road east up to Heshbon would connect them to the north-south King's Highway leading through the region of Moab. Depending on where they settled, the trip would have been seventy to one hundred miles and would have taken about a week.

1:1. Moab. The region of Moab, east of the Dead Sea, extended from the plains north of the Arnon River south to the Zered River. The region measures about sixty miles north to south and about thirty miles from the Dead Sea to the eastern desert. The "plains of Moab" north of the Arnon was a region that had belonged to Sihon (see Num 21) and had been distributed to the tribe of Reuben. Little is known of Moab during this period, though archaeological surveys have identified several dozen settlements during this time.

1:2. Ephrathites. "Ephrathite" could refer to either a geographical district or a clan ancestor. The fact that the designation could refer to individuals from differing tribes and clans would make it a potentially confusing designation, but geographical possibilities are equally uncertain.

1:3-5. plight of the widow. Widows in the ancient Near East had lost all social status and generally were also without political or economic status. They would equate to the homeless in our American society. Typically they had no male protector and were therefore economically dependent on society at large.

1:1-6. divine intervention. As would be the case for any natural occurrence, the Lord is seen as intervening to bring an end to the famine. In the ancient Near East, deity played the most important role in cause and effect, both in history and in nature. In our worldview we would be inclined to identify human or natural cause and effect first and then mention that "of course, God was behind it all." In the ancient Near East it would be the other way around. God would be identified as the cause behind famine or war, with natural or human causes given secondary notice, if mentioned at all. They would not rule out natural causes any more than we would rule out supernatural ones.

1:8. advantage of mothers' homes. Usually the place of protection is in the *father's* house rather than the mother's. Ruth 2:11 implies that Ruth's father is still alive. In its other appearances in the Old Testament (Gen 24:28; Song 3:4; 8:2) the mother's house has to do with preparations for marriage. This corresponds to the situation in both Mesopotamia and Egypt, where the mother was protector of the daughter and the one who advised and supervised in matters of love, marriage and sex. Therefore, Naomi's encouragement of the girls to return to their mother's home does not suggest seeking a place of legal protection, but rather a place that may provide a new family situation.

1:13. why would they wait for Naomi's sons? In Israel the law had established the institution of levirate marriage (see comments on Gen 38:6-26; Deut 25:5-10) wherein if a man died leaving his wife childless, his brother was responsible to impregnate the widow so that the family line of the deceased would not die out. Commentators have noticed, however, that in the scenario Naomi is presenting, the potential sons that could provide an heir for Ruth or Orpah would have a different father than their deceased husbands, so this would not qualify as levirate marriage. It is difficult to see, therefore, how this would preserve the line of Mahlon or Kilion. Nonetheless, such sons could at least provide legal

protection and care for the women in old age.

1:16-17. the nature of Ruth's commitment. Rather than having any evangelistic intentions, Naomi makes every attempt to chase Ruth back to her own gods. It was not unusual for women who married into foreign families to seek the continued protection of their native deities (see Gen 31:19; 1 Kings 11:8; 16:31). From the information the text gives, one could conclude that Ruth's acknowledgment of Yahweh just comes along with the adoption of a new people in a foreign land. Just as Ruth has stated that wherever Naomi travels or settles she will travel or settle, she has also affirmed that whoever Naomi's people or gods are will be her people and gods. This appears to be a commitment made to Naomi on the basis of a relationship with Naomi rather than a commitment made to Yahweh because she has been convinced of the theological superiority of monotheism and that Yahweh is the sole God of heaven and earth.

1:17. even death will not separate us. Contrary to many translations, Ruth here affirms that even in death she will not leave Naomi. What she means is that she intends to care for Naomi's burial and the rituals connected with death, and to be buried in the same place as Naomi. Being cared for in death would have been a typical concern to a childless widow, so this would be a significant commitment to Naomi. Ruth's decision to be buried in Naomi's land would show that she was totally setting aside her former allegiances and dependencies to cast her lot in with Naomi. Being buried in the same family tomb as Naomi would be further assurance that appropriate provisions would continue to be made for Naomi after death. Care for the dead was popularly believed to influence their existence in the afterlife.

1:19. the whole town. Bethlehem has never been a big town despite the important role it has in Israel's history. The population of the town would not have exceeded a couple of hundred in most periods and was likely considerably less at this time.

1:20. significance of names. In the ancient Near East a name was often given with a meaning in mind and with the hope that the name would characterize or imprint itself on the person's destiny. Unfortunately the name Naomi, "pleasantness," brings only irony as it appears to mock her ill-fortune. She suggests it would be a false claim to admit being Naomi after all the bitterness (Mara) she had experienced.

1:21. deity as cause of suffering. In the ancient world the gods were seen as behind all mundane daily occurrences and, therefore, certainly as determining the course of one's life. The cycle of nature (that had brought the famine) as well as disease and death were all in the hands of deity. It is natural, then, that Naomi identifies Yahweh as the source of her misery. It is important to note that this does not explicitly translate into blame. She does not proclaim her innocence or seek vindication, and she does not openly call into question God's justice. It is safe to assume, however, that she is not aware of any claim deity would have against her integrity and would be distressed that the reasons for Yahweh's actions against her were not evident. On the other hand, the general opinion in the ancient world was that the mortals rarely could discern what led the gods to do what they did. This puzzlement is a common theme of Mesopotamian wisdom literature.

1:22. beginning of the barley harvest. The barley harvest in this region would begin in mid- to late-April as the rainy season came to a close. It was the earliest of the major harvest seasons.

2:1-23

Ruth Meets Boaz

2:1. status of Boaz. Traditionally translations have identified Boaz as a "valiant warrior," but the NIV "man of standing" is probably a better choice. One's prominence could be achieved through military prowess (see Jephthah, Judg 11:1), but many of the people described by this phrase have no known military reputation. It is likely that the phrase has broader application (see comment on Judg 6:12).

2:2. poor gathering grain. Israel's law mandated provision for the poor and destitute by allowing them to follow the reapers in the fields to gather what was dropped or left behind (see comments on Lev 19:9-10 and Deut 24:19-22). This solution to a social problem required that the recipients work hard for their provision, and it therefore preserved the dignity that is sometimes forfeited by those who are entirely dependent on the generosity of others.

2:8. the field of Boaz. Since land was apportioned by tribe and clan and family, what would have looked like a single field may have had delineated tracts that belonged to various clan or family members. Stone markers would have identified the boundaries, and it would be very easy to pass from one family holding to another in what looked like one

field. Indeed, it would have been easiest for the poor to roam over the whole field to improve their chances of adequate returns. In contrast, Boaz has intentions that Ruth be more than adequately provided for.

2:12. refuge under the wings. The metaphor of taking refuge under the wings of deity is found also in Psalms (36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 91:4) and is consistently related to issues of care and protection connected to the covenant. The metaphor is also known from other ancient Near Eastern cultures, particularly Egyptian, where even the disembodied wings represent protection. Deities with wings are often portrayed overshadowing the king. Likewise an ivory from Arslan Tash dated to the eighth century shows characters in human form with wings protecting a figure in the center.

2:14. dipping bread in wine vinegar. The morsel that Ruth dips would most likely have been a grain cake of some sort, usually cooked in oil. The substance she dips it in had as a base the byproduct of the wine fermentation process. It was bitter tasting if used for a drink but here is used as a dressing or condiment of sorts and would have been enjoyable.

2:15-16. additional gathering privileges. Verse 16 uses some very obscure terminology in relaying Boaz's instructions to his workers, but it is clear that he has purposed to make Ruth's labor productive. Best estimates conclude that the workers are instructed to take some stalks out of their own harvested handfuls and leave them for Ruth to retrieve.

2:17. threshing the grain. The hard surface of the threshing floor often served the needs of an entire community. A stick or a rock would be used to beat the stalks to separate the grain from the chaff.

2:17. ephah. An ephah would amount to about two thirds of a bushel of grain. This has been calculated to be between thirty and fifty pounds of grain, which would have represented about a month's worth of the grain ration usually allotted to male workers.

2:20. kinsman-redeemer. The kinsman-redeemer's role was to help recover the tribe's losses, whether those losses were human (in which case he hunted down the killer), judicial (in which case he assisted in lawsuits) or economic (in which case he recovered the property of a family member). Since Yahweh had granted the land to the Israelites as tenants, they could not sell it, and if they mortgaged a portion of it to pay debts, it was considered very important to regain ownership as soon as possible. In this way the land remained within the extended family as a sign of its membership in the covenantal community. The importance of this inalienable right to land can be seen in Naboth's refusal to relinquish the "inheritance of my fathers" when King Ahab offered to buy his vineyard (1 Kings 21:2-3). In Mesopotamia (especially in the earlier periods) land was often owned by families rather than by individuals, so any individual would be limited in his ability to sell the property.

2:23. barley harvest and wheat harvest. The barley harvest ended in May and blended into the wheat harvest, which continued into June.

3:1-18
Ruth's Proposal

3:2. winnowing barley at the threshing floor. Winnowing was often done in the late afternoon, when the breeze had picked up after the day's heat. The process used a pronged fork on a long handle by which the threshed grain was tossed into the air. The breeze blew the lighter chaff a short distance away (it was later retrieved to be used as fodder), while the grain fell back to the threshing floor. The threshing floor was usually out in an open area to make maximum use of the breeze.

3:3. Ruth's ablutions. The perfume mentioned here consisted of scented oils that would have been commonly used at celebrations and other festive occasions. The scents were usually derived from imported plants.

3:3. why shouldn't Boaz know she is there? Some commentators have suggested that Ruth is fashioning herself as a bride, and thus to be seen would be to tip her hand. Most consider her remaining hidden to be an issue not of propriety but of appropriate timing.

3:7. lying at the end of the grain pile. The threshing floor would have been used by many members of the community, so there would have been others there winnowing besides Boaz. Each would have had his assigned traditional area, and each would sleep by his pile after the festivities so as to guard it until it could be carted away in the morning.

3:7-9. uncovering feet and the spreading of the garment. There are occasions in the Old Testament where the term "feet" is used euphemistically for the sexual organs. The expression "spread the edge of the garment" is likewise used with sexual overtones in a betrothal context in Ezekiel 16:8. The text of Ruth does not suggest a blatant sexual act but is provocative in its ambiguity.

3:9. what is Ruth asking? Ruth uses a phrase that elsewhere is used to refer to betrothal and marriage. It is also clear from Boaz's response in the next verse that she has requested mar-

riage. Naomi had not advised her to be this bold, but the outcome of marriage was certainly what Naomi had in mind.

3:12. why does it matter that there is a closer relative? The benefits that derived from functioning as a kinsman-redeemer required that a sequence of priorities be established. Closer relatives were therefore given the opportunity to exercise that function first.

3:14. why should it not be known a woman was there? Aside from the natural desire to preserve the reputation of both Ruth and Boaz (the word used in v. 13 for staying the night does *not* have sexual connotations), Boaz was anxious not to jeopardize the legal matters of the following day by any shadow of immorality.

3:17. six measures. The unit of the six measures is unspecified and therefore uncertain. It is unlikely that it would be six ephahs—that would be far too much for her to carry. Boaz may just have used shovelfuls or double handfuls.

4:1-16

A Husband and a Son

4:1. seat at the town gate. The gate area in Israelite cities was an open space that was the hub of activity. Merchants, visitors, messengers and judges all frequented that area and conducted their business there. It was a logical place to find someone you might be looking for. Since people heading out to their fields would pass through the gate area, Boaz hoped to encounter the individual he sought. Numerous excavations have produced gate plans showing that often there were benches lining the whole area where people could meet for their various purposes. Since only limited excavation has been done at Bethlehem, no gate from this period has yet been uncovered.

4:2. ten elders as witnesses. The elders, usually clan leaders or heads of household, served as the governing body of the city. Judicial and legal matters were in their hands. Here there is no legal judgment to pass, but they would oversee the legal transaction to assure that all was done according to law and custom, as well as serve as witnesses to the transaction.

4:4. why would he want to redeem the land? By redeeming Naomi's land the kinsman would have prospects for very soon enlarging his own permanent landholdings. Since Naomi had no heir, when she died, the land would revert to his family and be passed on to his heirs. The money put forth for the land would be an investment on future returns. If this was just a case of land redemption, it would have been a very attractive business proposal.

4:5-6. Why does Ruth's involvement change the situation? Once Boaz interprets the kinsman responsibilities as including marrying Ruth, the economic picture changes considerably. One could forgive the other kinsman for not realizing that Ruth came with the package deal. Only by a significant stretch in custom would he be considered to have any levirate obligations to Ruth (for review of levirate laws see comment on Deut 25:5-10), yet it is clear that that is involved by the reference in verse 5 to maintaining the name of the dead. If the kinsman must marry Ruth, the son that may be born to her would then be the heir to the property of Elimelech's family. In this case the money that is used to redeem the land is not an investment but simply reduces his family assets. Instead of serving to eventually enlarge his holdings of land, his money would be going to a charitable cause. He would also incur additional cost in providing for Naomi, Ruth and who knows how many additional children. It is even possible that Ruth's children would have a claim to a portion of his inheritance along with any children he already had. It is likely he is married; the economic impact on his family of redeeming Ruth is thus a chief criterion in his decision.

4:7-8. removal of sandal. Sandals were the ordinary footwear in the ancient Near East, but they were also a symbolic item of clothing, especially in the relationship between the widow and her legal guardian. This may have been due to the fact that land was purchased based on whatever size triangle of land the buyer could walk off in an hour, a day, a week or a month (1 Kings 21:16-17). Land was surveyed in triangles, and a benchmark was constructed of fieldstones to serve as a boundary marker (Deut 19:14). Since they walked off the land in sandals, the sandals became the moveable title to that land. By removing the sandals of her guardian, a widow removed his authorization to administer the land of her household. Land transfers in the Nuzi texts also involved replacing the old owner's foot on the land with that of the new owner.

4:9-10. nature of the transaction. By purchasing all of Naomi's property and goods, Boaz has undertaken the total care of Naomi and the obligation to support her in life and provide for her in death. By acquiring Ruth, he has obligated himself to give her the opportunity to bear children, the first of whom would then become the heir of Elimelech and his sons.

4:11-12. blessing. Blessings connected to marriage rarely address the relationship between husband and wife; instead they focus on children. The blessing of creation as well as the covenant blessing anticipated reproduction as the blessing of God. In the ancient world as a whole this is also true as can be seen in the blessing on King Keret in the Ugaritic texts—that his new wife would bear him seven or eight sons. Examples in the blessing on Boaz are drawn from Israel's national history (Rachel and Leah, see Gen 30) as well as from the tribal history of Judah (Tamar, see Gen 38).
4:15. responsibility of children. It is here suggested that the son will lift Naomi's spirits and console her after the loss of her husband and sons. Her grief over her previous loss would have been not only in terms of personal relationships, but also in terms of economic hardship and possibly even of afterlife issues that were popularly associated with ongoing rituals by descendants (see comment on Num 3:1). This grief would then be addressed, since it was expected that children would care for their parents in old age (providing food and shelter, legal protection and proper burial).
4:17. Naomi's son. Some have concluded that there was an official adoption of the child by Naomi. While adoption for legal purposes was a very common practice in the ancient world, the legal situation here would not have required an adoption. Another suggestion has been that the son is actually being turned over to Naomi's custody for her to raise, since he is a substitute son for her. While this is possible, it is most likely that there is simply a recognition that Naomi is the legal mother of the child and that she will play a significant role in his upbringing, while he will continue to provide for her in the next generation.

4:17-22
Genealogy

4:18. importance of family line. Here we discover that this incident that nearly resulted in a family of Israel dying out concerned none other than the family of David. The great King David came that close to never having been born. The genealogy is demonstration that God resolved the family crisis. Not only did the family of Naomi survive, but it prospered to become one of the great families in Israel. Survival of the traumatic Judges period (setting from 1:1) was through faithfulness and loyalty; faithfulness and loyalty in turn resulted in individuals such as David (result of 4:21).

1 SAMUEL

1:1-28
Samuel's Birth

1:1. Ramathaim in the hill country of Ephraim. There is a town called Ramah (modern er-Ram) in the territory of Benjamin about five miles north of Jerusalem and four miles south of Bethel. Since Ramah is given as the place of Samuel's home in 1:19, some consider this to be the site. The text, however, clearly locates Ramathaim in the hill country of Ephraim. This has long been associated with New Testament Arimathea about fifteen miles west of Shiloh.
1:2. polygamy in Israel. In Israel, as in most of the ancient world, monogamy was generally practiced. Polygamy was not contrary to law or morals, but was usually not economically feasible. The main occurrence of polygamy would be when the first wife was barren, but there are several other factors that encouraged the practice, including (1) an imbalance in the number of males and females, (2) the need to produce large numbers of children to work herds and/or fields, (3) the desire to increase the prestige and wealth of a household through multiple marriage contracts, and (4) the high rate of death for females in childbirth. Polygamy is most common among pastoral nomadic groups and in rural farming communities where it is important that every female be attached to a household and be productive. In the Bible most cases of polygamy among commoners occur prior to the period of the monarchy.
1:2. shame of childlessness. Since bearing children was a sign of God's greatest blessing (Ps 127:3), the inability to bear children was often viewed as a sign of God's punishment. Additionally, a woman's status in the family would be very tenuous if she had not borne children. A barren woman could be and often was discarded, ostracized or given a lower status. Mesopotamian prayers and legal texts

show that these same issues existed throughout the ancient Near East.

1:3. Shiloh. Whether Elkanah's home is Ramah in Benjamin or Ramathaim in Ephraim, the journey to Shiloh was about fifteen miles. For a family this would have been a two-day journey. The site of Shiloh has been identified as Khirbet Seilun, about halfway between Bethel and Shechem. This seven-and-a-half-acre site is situated in a strategic location enjoying fertile land, a reliable water source and access to the main north-south route through the heartland of Israel. Substantial Iron Age I ruins have been found at the site, along with evidence of destruction by means of fire. Though remains of public buildings from this period have been found, no trace of the sanctuary has been identified. The probable location for the sanctuary at the highest point of the tell has suffered from erosion.

1:3. annual sacrifice. The law called for three annual pilgrimages: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. Many interpreters consider the last to be the occasion for Elkanah's visits. Since the text does not specify the occasion of a pilgrimage feast, however, some believe that this was a traditional family ritual reflecting the piety of Elkanah.

1:3. priestly line of Eli. Eli was from the line of Aaron through his fourth son, Ithamar. At the beginning of the Judges period, the high priest was Phinehas, son of Eleazar, the eldest remaining son of Aaron. Aaron's first two sons, Nadab and Abihu, had been slain because of ritual violation (Lev 10). How the care of the tent of meeting and ark had switched from the Eleazar branch to the Ithamar branch is unknown.

1:4. giving portions of sacrifice. A number of the sacrifices provided an opportunity for a shared meal, especially the fellowship offering (see the comment on Lev 3:1-5). When a sacrificial meal was included, the officiating priest as well as the family of the celebrants would receive portions of the meat, a rare item in ancient meals. This would have the sociological status of a turkey dinner in America.

1:5. double portion for Hannah. The description of Hannah's portion is obscure in the Hebrew. Most translations identify it as a double portion (NIV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV), while other suggestions have been "only one portion" (RSV) and "special portion" (NLT). Many of the commentators favor "only one portion" because that sets up the contrast that makes most sense of the context.

1:7. sanctuary at Shiloh. Here the sanctuary is referred to as the "house of the Lord," which is ambiguous regarding the nature of the structure. In verse 9 it is referred to as a "temple," which implies a building. In 2:22 reference is made to the tent of meeting, that is, the tabernacle. This variation in terms suggests that the tent has either had a more durable structure built around it or has been erected inside a sacred enclosure that perhaps was previously Canaanite.

1:8. husband better than ten sons. Elkanah's attempt to console Hannah is weak. While their relationship on a human level could be argued to meet Hannah's emotional needs, there is much more involved here. First, there is the social stigma of barrenness. Second, there is the extension of the family into the future. Children were relied upon to care for parents in their old age, to provide proper burial and to carry on their memory. In some cases it was believed that one's comfort in the afterlife was dependent on provisions carried out by succeeding generations. Hannah's status in society and hope for the future are dismal. These concerns give Elkanah's well-meaning question an empty ring.

1:9. priest's seat by the entrance. Eli was perhaps too advanced in years to continue officiating, but he could still serve a public relations function, greeting worshipers at the entrance and offering advice or instruction. The piece of furniture described here could be translated "chair" but in most places refers to a throne or a seat of honor. In public settings benches would often be provided, while in residences a couch or stools would be more common. Excavations at Mari have provided many examples of stools in residences.

1:11. vows. Vows are voluntary, conditional agreements that are common in most of the cultures of the ancient Near East, including Hittite, Ugaritic, Mesopotamian and, less often, Egyptian. In the ancient world the most common context for a vow was when a request was being made to deity. The condition would typically involve God's provision or protection, while that which was vowed was usually a gift to deity. The gift would most frequently take the form of a sacrifice, but other types of gifts to the sanctuary or priests would be options. Fulfillment of a vow could usually be accomplished at the sanctuary and was a public act. In Ugaritic literature King Keret makes a vow in requesting a wife who could produce offspring. In return he offered gold and silver corresponding to his bride's weight.

1:11. hair cutting. Refraining from cutting hair is the most important element in the Nazirite

vow (see comments on Num 6). The Nazirite vow is usually restricted to a limited time period, but here, as with Samson, it is specified as being lifelong. The significance of hair to the vow is unknown, though hair (along with blood), was one of the main representatives in ancient thinking of a person's life essence. As such it was often an ingredient in sympathetic magic. This is evident, for instance, in the practice of sending along a lock of the presumed prophet's hair when the prophecies were sent to the king of Mari. The hair would be used in divination to determine whether the prophet's message would be accepted as valid.

1:13. silent personal prayer. Often prayers were accompanied by sacrifices. In this official act a priest would be paid a fee to offer the sacrifice and recite an appropriate prayer. Hannah, lacking funds for such an official undertaking, is praying on her own but is delighted to receive a favorable blessing from the priest, which she took as having the force of an oracle. In Mesopotamia the seer-priests would use divination to read omens on behalf of women praying for conception. There are numerous examples of spontaneous prayer in the Old Testament, though this is the only occasion where the prayer is specified as being silent. In the ancient Near East prayers tended to be formulaic and often had a basis in magical incantations. As a result we know little about silent spontaneous prayer.

1:19. nature of worship. The worship referred to here probably indicates participation in the daily morning sacrifice (see comment on Lev 6:8-13).

1:22-24. weaning age. Weaning generally took place between the ages of two and three and was accompanied by a celebration since it was a rite of passage. According to the Egyptian *Instruction of Any* a child was nursed for about three years.

1:24-25. nature of the sacrifice. The sacrifice offered by Elkanah and Hannah included a bull, flour and wine. According to Numbers 15:8-12 the flour and the wine were to accompany a bull offering. The text is more easily understood as referring to three bulls rather than to a three-year-old bull. This would be supported by the fact that they also bring three times the required amount of flour and wine. If there are three bull offerings to be made, this may indicate the generosity of Elkanah and Hannah.

1:28. lifelong dedication. As pointed out in the comment on 1:11, this length of dedication was abnormal for the Nazirite vow. Even so the length had been specified in the vow and was being fulfilled accordingly. Hannah is not only fulfilling her vow but is carrying out an ancient tradition. The first male offspring born to any mother was considered as belonging to deity. In the ancient Near East this concept sometimes led to child sacrifice to ensure fertility. Alternatively, in ancestor worship the firstborn would have inherited the priestly function for the family. In Israel it led to consecration—transferring the firstborn to the domain of deity for cultic service or to the temple for holy use. From that status the son may be redeemed, and Israelite law saw his place being taken by the Levites (Num 3:11-13). Because of her vow, Hannah did not follow through on the redemption proceedings. In Mesopotamia slaves were sometimes given as gifts to the temple for the rest of their lives, and Akkadian literature attests to a particular class of women who were dedicated for life to serve the temple as prostitutes. Gifts of children to the temple are evidenced in Sumerian texts from the beginning of the second millennium.

2:1-10
Hannah's Prayer

2:1. horn. The imagery of the horn is at times used in relation to posterity (see especially 1 Chron 25:5, but also Ps 132:17). It is also used to represent visible strength as a weapon capable of goring the enemy. Ceremonial crowns of gods and kings in Mesopotamia often featured horns.

2:6. grave. The word translated "grave" is the Hebrew *Sheol*. It was common belief in the ancient Near East that there was continued existence beyond the grave in a netherworld of some sort. It was considered an act of God's judgment to be sent there, but it was not seen as a place of ongoing reward or judgment. Since the grave was the means of entry into the netherworld, Sheol is often simply another way of speaking of the grave.

2:8. world upside down. The actions of God were often seen as bringing reversal to the world. This reversal could be in terms of the created world (mountains reduced to dust, valleys lifted up, sun going dark); the social world (the poor receiving honor, as here, the mighty being deposed); or the political world (empires tumbling). This world-upside-down motif was a way of expressing God's sovereign control. It could be used to convey judgment or reward and came to be connected with the future kingdom of God, where wrongs would be set right and a new order would take shape.

2:8. foundations of the earth. The foundations of the earth are sometimes viewed as pillars (Ps 75:4) and other times as water (Ps 24:2). Both possibilities have been suggested by interpreters of this passage, which contains the only occurrence of the word here translated "foundations." Both water and pillars are part of the ancient view of the structure of the world.

2:9. thundering from heaven. Thunder and lightning were considered to regularly accompany the presence of a deity in the ancient Near East, often in a battle setting. From the Sumerian Exaltation of Inanna, to the Hittite myths about the storm god, to the Akkadian and Ugaritic mythologies, the gods are viewed as thundering in judgment against their enemies. Baal is depicted as grasping a handful of thunderbolts. Thundering terminology is picked up in royal rhetoric as Hittite or Assyrian kings portray themselves as the instruments of the gods, thundering against those who have violated treaties or stood in the way of empire expansion.

2:10. kingship in this period. The reference to kingship here is surprising since Israel has not yet instituted a monarchy. Nevertheless, kingship was well known in the ancient world of this time, and segments of Israel had already dabbled with the idea (Judg 9). Furthermore, that kingship was a future expectation is reflected in passages such as Genesis 17:6; Numbers 24:17; and Deuteronomy 17:14-20.

2:11-36
The Decline of the House of Eli

2:13. three-pronged fork. Examples of the three-pronged fork have been excavated by archaeologists at Gezer. These bronze implements are short-handled with long, straight tines (like a pitchfork with a short handle) and date to the Late Bronze period. The term used here describes a similar utensil in Old Assyrian texts.

2:13-16. priestly practices. The text contrasts the normal procedure at Shiloh to the procedures used by Eli's sons. Both differ from the prescribed procedure in the Pentateuch (see Lev 7:30-34). The Pentateuch details which parts comprise the priest's share. The normal practice at Shiloh was for the priest to receive whichever part came up from the boiling pot on the end of the fork. Eli's sons insisted on taking what they wanted, when they wanted it. Their ritual offenses came in three areas: (1) their selection of the best parts for themselves; (2) their preference for the meat being roasted rather than boiled; and (3) their refusal to yield the fat for burning on the altar (Lev 3:16; 7:25).

2:18. linen ephod. The linen ephod is a garment reserved for the priesthood (see 2:28), so this is an indication that Samuel has become involved in an apprenticeship. The ephod was most likely a type of apron. Linen was the basic material, though higher ranking priests would have had gold thread woven into the fabric.

2:19. garment made by Samuel's mother. The robe described in this verse is likewise a priestly garment (see Ex 28:31-34) but is also worn by other people of standing and authority (kings, prophets, Job and his friends, God). It is identified as a garment characterizing priests in 1 Chronicles 15:27. It was typically fringed with a distinctive hem that indicated a person's standing.

2:22. women at the entrance of the tabernacle. In the ancient Near East there are many examples of women serving the temple in various capacities. From menial tasks to priestly duties, from celibacy to prostitution, from short-term periods as a result of vows to lifelong dedication—examples of all sorts are available. It is therefore difficult to identify the nature of the service that the women mentioned here are performing. The indictment of the sexual misconduct of Eli's sons suggests that the women were either involved in some duty of piety or were supposed to be virgins. It must be noted, however, that there is no evidence of religiously motivated celibacy in Israel, and the text does not describe the women as virgins. For further discussion see comment on Judges 11:39.

2:27. prophet. The role of prophet was well understood in the ancient Near East, as evidenced by over fifty texts found in the town of Mari that report various messages given by various prophets. Generally the prophet offered a message from deity. For more information see the comments on Deuteronomy 18.

3:1-21
Samuel Becomes a Prophet

3:3. the temple. The term used here suggests a building. For more information see comment on 1:7.

3:3. lamp of God. The menorah in the tabernacle was to remain lit all night (Ex 27:21; Lev 24:1-4), but it was never supposed to be extinguished, so the comment that it had not yet gone out would be pointless. On the other hand, we have seen that the practices at Shiloh did not necessarily follow what was stipulated in the Law. The phrase "lamp of God" is also used to refer to hope (2 Sam 21:17; 1 Kings 11:36; 2 Kings 8:19), and that would also make

sense in this context.

3:3. incubation dreams in the ancient Near East. In the ancient world it was believed that a person sleeping in the temple or its precincts may become privy to divine plans. Some would perform sacrificial rituals and spend the night in the temple in order to receive such revelation. This process is referred to as incubation. In early literature kings such as Naram-Sin and Gudea sought information through incubation. In the Judges period this practice is observable in the Ugaritic epics of Aqhat (where Daniel is requesting a son) and Keret (where Keret is requesting a son). Though Samuel is simply performing his regular duties and clearly has no expectation of revelation, his experience would be understood in light of the common association between temple and revelation. There are no known examples in the ancient Near Eastern literature of such unintentional incubation dreams.

3:4-10. Samuel's dream? Since Samuel gets up to go to Eli and speaks when the Lord arrives (v. 10), modern readers would not usually characterize his experience as a dream. Yet these elements are not contradictory to dreaming by ancient definitions. In ancient Near Eastern literature (examples from Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Hittite and even Greek) there is a category called auditory message dreams. Well-known dreams in this category would include those of the Egyptian king Thutmose IV (fifteenth century), Hittite king Hattushilis (thirteenth century) and Babylonian king Nabonidus (sixth century). In these examples the dreams were meant to validate either their kingship or tasks they are undertaking. In auditory message dreams the god appears (see v. 10) and sometimes startles the person awake. The content of the dream is a spoken message by the deity rather than events or symbolic images. There are a number of examples of the person responding verbally to the deity (e.g., Nabonidus). By ancient Near Eastern standards, then, Samuel's experience could be classified as a dream.

3:11-14. importance of repeated messages. The message given to Samuel is virtually the same as that pronounced by the man of God in chapter 2. The repetition of the message indicates its importance and verifies its truth. It also serves to provide affirmation of Samuel's prophetic calling.

4:1—7:1
The Capture and Return of the Ark

4:1. political climate in the early Iron Age. In the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200) there had been an ongoing struggle between major political powers seeking control of Palestine (see comment on Josh 9:1). With the arrival of the Sea Peoples around 1200 (see next comment), all of the major powers were either wiped out (e.g., the Hittites) or neutralized (Egypt). Moving into the Iron Age, the power stalemate was replaced by a power vacuum. The absence of major powers vying for control of the region allowed for the smaller states to test their strength, develop and build regional "empires." The Philistines were able to take advantage of this early in the period. Then David and Solomon were able to build a substantial empire in Syro-Palestine without needing to be concerned about political powers in Mesopotamia, Anatolia or Egypt.

4:1. Philistines. The group of Philistines that are well known through the narratives of Judges and 1 and 2 Samuel came into the Palestine area with the migration from the Aegean region of the Sea Peoples about 1200 B.C. It is the Sea Peoples that are generally thought to have been responsible for the fall of the Hittite empire and the destruction of many cities along the coast of Syria and Palestine, such as Ugarit, Tyre, Sidon, Megiddo and Ashkelon, though the evidence for their involvement in those areas is circumstantial. Their battles with the Egyptian pharaoh Rameses III are depicted on the famous wall paintings at Medinet Habu. This international upheaval is also reflected in the Homeric epic of the siege of Troy. Coming from Crete, Greece and Anatolia, the Sea Peoples may have used Cyprus as a base from to launch their attacks. Following the repulsion of the Sea Peoples from Egypt, the tribe that came to be known as the Philistines settled on the southern coast of Palestine. There they established their five capital cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron (Tell Miqne), Gath (Tell es-Safi) and Gaza.

4:1. Ebenezer and Aphek. Both of these sites are in the area of an important pass between the hill country and the plain. The area is about twenty miles west of Shiloh and north of Philistine territory (about twenty miles north of Ekron, the furthest north of the five major Philistine cities). Aphek is identified with modern Ras el-Ain, also called Tell Aphek, by the Yarkon River. It is named in Egyptian texts as early as the nineteenth-century Execration texts and appears in the itineraries of Thutmose III (fifteenth century). Excavations have uncovered evidence of Philistine settlement on the site in this period. The identification of Ebenezer is less certain. Many now believe that it is the site called Izbet Sar-

tah located on the edge of the hill country across the pass from Aphek and about two miles further east. The small settlement (half an acre) was established late in the Judges period and was abandoned early in the eleventh century. One of the oldest and longest proto-Canaanite inscriptions was found at this site. The ostracon has eighty-three letters but no coherent words, and has been identified as an abecedary (alphabet list). Some interpreters think it should be classified as early Israelite.

4:3-4. ark and cherubim. The ark was a wooden box, open at the top, approximately three to four feet in length and two and a quarter feet in both width and height, based on eighteen inches a cubit. It was overlaid inside and out with sheets of the finest gold. Four rings (also gold covered) were attached to the sides for the insertion of two gold-encrusted poles, which were used to carry the ark and protect it from the touch of all but the high priest. A golden cover, decorated with two winged cherubim, sealed the ark. The primary function of the ark was to store the tablets and to serve as a "footstool" for God's throne, thereby providing an earthly link between God and the Israelites. In Egyptian festivals the images of the gods were often carried in procession on portable barques. Paintings portray these as boxes about the size of the ark carried on poles and decorated with or flanked by guardian creatures. Biblical descriptions as well as archaeological discoveries (including some fine ivory pieces from Nimrud in Mesopotamia, Arslan Tash in Syria and Samaria in Israel) suggest the cherubim are composite creatures (having features of a number of different creatures, like the Egyptian sphinx), often four-legged animal bodies with wings. The cherubim appear in ancient art with some regularity, flanking the thrones of kings and deities. The combination of cherubim as throne guardians, chests as footstools and statements in the Old Testament concerning Yahweh being enthroned on the cherubim supports the concept of the ark as representing the invisible throne of Yahweh. The use of empty thrones was widespread in the ancient world. They were provided for use by deities or royal personages when they were present.

4:3-7. use of the ark in battle. In the divine warrior motif the deity is fighting the battles and defeating the deities of the enemy. In Assyria Nergal is the king of battle, and Ishtar is viewed as a war goddess. The Canaanite Baal and the Babylonian Marduk are divine warriors. This is not to be viewed as "holy war" because in the ancient Near East there was no other kind of war. In most situations prayers would be made and omens asked to assure the god's presence. Standards or statues of the deity were usually carried to symbolize their presence. Assyrian kings of the ninth and eighth centuries regularly refer to the divine standard that goes before them. The ark, as Yahweh's standard, represents the Lord as clearing the way before the Israelites and leading the armies into Canaan. This concept is not very different from the Assyrian belief that the gods empowered the weapons of the king and fought before him or at his side. Nearly every army in the ancient Near East included priests and diviners (as seen in the Mari texts), prophets (2 Kings 3) and portable sacred objects (Assyrian Annals of Shalmaneser III [858-824 B.C.]). In this way, the god(s) could be consulted on the battlefield or invoked to lead the soldiers to victory.

4:9-10. Philistine control of Israel. It is difficult to be certain how much of Israelite territory came under Philistine control at this time. Most estimate that it would have included from the Jezreel Valley south through the central hill country, skirting the Jerusalem hills but extending to much of the Negev.

4:10. thirty thousand Israelites slain. This is clearly a significant loss of life, but it is difficult to be certain of how to read the numbers. For further information see the comment on Judges 20:2.

4:12. Shiloh. The site of Shiloh has been identified as Khirbet Seilun, about halfway between Bethel and Shechem. This seven-and-a-half-acre site is situated in a strategic location where it enjoys fertile land, a reliable water source and access to the main north-south route through the heartland of Israel. Though this chapter does not say anything about the destruction of Shiloh by the Philistines, Jeremiah 7:12-15 suggests that it was destroyed at this time. Substantial Iron Age I ruins have been found at the site, along with evidence of destruction by means of fire.

4:12. dust on the head. Putting dirt, dust or ashes on one's head was a typical sign of mourning throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament period. It is a practice also known from Mesopotamia and Canaan. Many mourning rites function as a means for the living to identify with the dead. It is easy to see how dust on the head would be a symbolic representation of burial.

4:21. names with significance. The giving of names in the ancient world was a significant act. A name was believed to affect a person's destiny; so the person giving the name was exercising some degree of control over the person's future. Often the name expressed

hopes or blessings. At other times they preserve some detail of the occasion of the birth, especially if the occasion appeared significant. This name is built from the same noun/adjective that is attached to the ark as well as used to describe Eli (v. 18). Though the bearing of a son would have normally been viewed as significant, everything of national significance is gone—Eli, his sons and, especially, the ark. The future looks grim.

5:1. Ashdod. Ashdod is about three miles from the coast directly west of Jerusalem. The tell of the ancient site is about three and a half miles south of the modern city. It features a twenty-acre acropolis and a lower city of over one hundred acres. It is mentioned in the Ugaritic texts, where it is an important center of trade, and excavations have demonstrated a large Late Bronze Canaanite settlement on the acropolis. The Canaanite city was destroyed by the Sea Peoples. The site was then settled by the Philistines and became one of their five principal cities. The Iron Age settlement of Samuel's time period is represented in stratum X, which is Philistine in culture. At this time the city was well fortified and was beginning to expand from the acropolis to the lower city. No temple has yet been unearthed in that stratum.

5:2. Philistine temples. The Philistine temples of this period feature a holy place where the statue of the god was prominently displayed on a raised platform. For further information about Philistine temple architecture see the comment on Judges 16:29.

5:2. Dagon. There is evidence of Dagon as a important god within the Semitic pantheon of deities as early as the third millennium in Mari. Assyrians worshiped him in the first half of the second millennium, and in Ugaritic literature he is positioned as the father of Baal Haddu. His temple in the town of Ugarit was bigger that the temple of Baal. It is generally assumed, then, that the Philistines did not bring this god with them from their Aegean homeland but adopted him upon their arrival in their new territory. Dagon is often identified as a god of grain or of storm, but both of these remain somewhat speculative.

5:2. ark as trophy of war kept in temple. The ark would have been placed in the temple to indicate that Yahweh, Israel's God, was a defeated prisoner of Dagon. His inferiority had been demonstrated on the battlefield, and his subordination was represented in his humble servitude before his master Dagon. It is possible that it was believed that continuing opportunities for humiliation would result. This is very similar to how conquering kings treated captive kings (see comment on Judg 1:6-7). There are several examples in the ancient world of statues of a god being carried off as trophies of war. The Marduk statue is taken from Babylon by the Hanaeans (seventeenth century), by the Elamites (thirteenth century) and by the Assyrians (seventh century), and in each case is eventually recovered and restored to his temple. Additionally the statue of Shamash was taken from Sippar by the Suteans (eleventh century). In the eighth and seventh centuries this was a common practice of the Assyrians, and Isaiah prophesies that captivity will be the fate of the gods of Babylon (Is 46:1-2). Assyrian king Esarhaddon speaks of taking the gods of his enemies as booty.

5:3-4. importance of fall, hands and head. The repeated fall of Dagon was a clear indication that Yahweh was not defeated, inferior, subordinate or about to suffer humiliation. While the ark's presence in the temple of Dagon had been intended to humiliate, the cutting off of the hands and head of Dagon indicated destruction. The head of a conquered foe was typically displayed as evidence of his death (see 17:51-54) and cutting off hands was a way of counting casualties (see comment on Judg 8:6) as well as mutilation that demonstrated the powerlessness of the enemy. In a Ugaritic text, Anat, the goddess of battle, carries the heads and hands of her slain opponents away from the battlefield. In addition, this makes sense given how images were manufactured. In a Hittite prayer of this period, a promise is made to supply a life-sized statue of the king with head, hands and feet of gold, and the rest of silver. Since the images of the gods were generally clothed, more care and expense was afforded to the portions that would show. Images were often not cast in one piece but made in parts and joined together with tenons.

5:5. holiness of threshold. The threshold was typically made of a single stone that spanned the doorway, raised slightly from the level of the floor. Sockets were cut into the outer edges of the threshold on which the gates or door swung. The height of the threshold would prevent the doors from swinging out. Entryways were often considered both sacred and vulnerable. Superstitious belief held that stepping on the threshold would allow demons that haunted the entryway to gain admission. Perhaps that was the preferred explanation among the Philistines for Dagon's troubles. Similar superstitions have continued in the Near East and the Far East from Syria to Iraq to China, but ancient information concerning this superstition is lacking.

5:6. plague of the Philistines. The connection with rodents in the passage (5:6, in a sentence preserved only in the Septuagint; 6:4) suggests that the affliction is infectious and is possibly bubonic plague. The Hebrew term translated "tumors" could easily be used to represent the boils (buboes) that are symptomatic of the plague. There is some question, however, whether bubonic plague is attested in the ancient Near East at this early a date. As a result, others have proposed that the plague be understood as bacillary dysentery, which can be transmitted through food infected by mice. If this is correct, however, the connection of the swellings is unclear.

5:8. rulers of the five cities. The five rulers of the Philistines appear to be equal in authority. The term used to describe them is likely the Philistine term, and most scholars believe it has its roots in the language of the Sea Peoples (Greek or another Indo-European language). Until more information is found, it is impossible to offer a clearer political analysis.

5:8. Gath. Gath has been tentatively identified as Tell es-Safi, five miles south of Tell Miqne/Ekron. Of the five major cities of the Philistines it was the closest to Judah. There has been little excavation at the site, though it has been confirmed that there are Iron Age remains. The city was located by the Elah Valley, one of the principal passes from the coastal plain into the hill country surrounding Jerusalem.

5:10. Ekron. Ekron has been identified as Tell Miqne in the Sorek Valley, about twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem and fifteen miles from the Mediterranean. It features a forty-acre lower city, a ten-acre upper tell and a two-and-a-half-acre acropolis. Excavations since the early 1980s have given a good picture of this town, which, by the divided monarchy period, was known for its production of olive oil (with over one hundred processing plants). An inscription found on the site in 1996 (dated to the seventh century B.C.) provided the first example of the Philistine dialect of West Semitic using the Phoenician script. In this period it was fortified with a mud-brick wall over ten feet thick. A large public building (over twenty-five hundred square feet) from this period has been excavated that archaeologists believe to be a palace-temple complex. If they are correct, this is likely the building where the ark would have been housed and where the leaders would have met.

6:2. priests and diviners. Since it was now suspected that the supernatural power connected to Yahweh and the ark was more than the Philistines or their gods could handle, the specialists were consulted for their advice on what was to be done. Priests would have expertise in the treatment of holy objects and issues of purity, whereas diviners would be skilled in incantations, omens and magical procedures.

6:2. importance of proper procedures. The plagues that had followed the ark around Philistia made it clear that they were dealing with an angry god. Appeasement of the deity would require certain gifts and rituals. Popular belief would have expected that such appeasement would only work if acceptable gifts were offered, correct words were spoken, and appropriate actions performed. Incorrect procedures might prove entirely fruitless or might make the deity angrier still. This all took place in the realm of magic, a science that required precision.

6:3. guilt offering. For discussion of this offering see comment on 5:14-16 ("reparation offering"). One of the offenses this offering is designed to address is sacrilege, the desecration of sacred areas or objects. The crime addressed by the reparation offering was appropriating that which was holy into the realm of that which was profane. The Philistines were therefore admitting to desecrating the ark.

6:4-5. efficacious symbols of the plague. Making symbols of the mice and tumors was an act of sympathetic magic in which the representation of something stands for the reality. By sending the tokens back with the ark they were hoping to rid themselves of these divine punishments. Images of mice and other animals, believed to have been used in magical rituals, have been found in excavations throughout the ancient Near East.

6:4-5. role of rats. In the comment on 5:6 it was noted that some readings connect the plague to rodents. The Hebrew word used is often translated "mice" but is more generic and could refer to rats as well. Bubonic plague is spread through fleas that infest rats.

6:7-9. oracular mechanism. The success of this strategy would determine both whether they had assessed the problem correctly and whether their gift was acceptable to the deity they were seeking to appease. Besides offering a gift of appeasement and attempting to rid themselves of the plague through sympathetic magic, the Philistines are also asking for an oracle from Yahweh. They are doing this because sending the ark back is an admission that Israel's God is more powerful than theirs. Such an admission is humiliating, and they would not do it unless they were absolutely convinced that Yahweh was the cause of their

problems. That is what the oracle is intended to determine. In an oracle a yes/no question is posed to deity, and a mechanism of some binary nature is used so that deity can provide the answer. In Israel the priest carried the Urim and Thummim to use in oracular situations (see comment on Ex 28:30). In the ancient Near East, when they wanted a natural mechanism for oracles, they tended to use the liver or kidney of sacrificed animals (a divinatory practice called extispicy; see comment on omens at Deut 18:10). Here the Philistines use a natural mechanism for the oracle (see Gen 24:14 and Judg 6:36-40 for other occurrences). Their yes/no question is whether or not Yahweh, Israel's God, is the one responsible for the plagues. Their oracular mechanism is based on the normal behavior of cows. If the answer to the question is "no," the cows will act like normal cows: they will go to the barn to nurse their calves, or they will wander into the field. If the answer to the question is "yes," the Lord will override the natural behavior of cows: they will ignore their bulging udders and their hungry, bleating calves, and will trot merrily along the road straight to Israelite Beth Shemesh (uphill). The thought behind this process is that if deity is providing the answer, he can alter normal behavior and override natural laws in order to communicate his answer, just as he had done in sending the plague.

6:9. Beth Shemesh. Beth Shemesh was located in the border region between Israel and Philistia. It occupied about seven acres on a ridge overlooking the Sorek Valley that ran along the north side of the city. The journey from Ekron to Beth Shemesh followed the Sorek Valley and was about nine miles. The archaeological site is Tell er-Rumeilah west of modern Ain Shems. There is an Iron Age occupation level at the site dated to the mid-eleventh century, the time of Samuel. In this level a residence has been found with a spacious courtyard paved with flagstone surrounded by several chambers.

6:13. wheat harvest. The wheat harvest occupies the months of May and June in this region.

6:15. rock as altar. Other passages where a rock serves as an altar include Judges 6:20-21; 13:19; and 1 Samuel 14:33-34. By elevating the sacrifice off the ground in this way, the blood could drain. More often Israelite makeshift altars consisted of a number of large stones piled up.

6:19. putting seventy to death. There is considerable controversy concerning the number who died at Beth Shemesh. The NIV translates seventy, following a few Hebrew manuscripts. A more convincing array of manuscripts sets the number at 50,070. This is odd because the Old Testament generally rounds to even ten thousands. It is also unlikely because Beth Shemesh was a small country town that would have had a population of less than one thousand. Even the number seventy has been taken as a conventional indication of a large number (see comment on Judg 8:30).

6:19. punishment for looking into the ark. Despite popular modern speculation the text gives no indication of the mode of death for the offenders. Numbers 14:20 forbids even the priests to look *at* the ark. It would have been difficult for the people of Beth Shemesh to avoid that, but their curiosity led them to violate the sanctity of the ark by going well beyond an incidental glance. Restricted access to sacred space and holy objects was common in the ancient world (see comment on Lev 16:2), so treating the ark as a common object of curiosity would have been recognized as an act of desecration.

6:21. Kiriath Jearim. Listed as a city within Judah (Josh 15:60), the site is commonly identified with Tell el-Azhar, nine miles west-northwest of Jerusalem, but this is unsubstantiated by archaeological finds or extrabiblical references. Its association with Mahaneh Dan in Judges 18:12 puts it in that general area (see the comment on Judg 13:25). This location places it only six miles from Gibeon, with which it is also associated (see comment on Josh 9:17). It is about seven miles northeast of Beth Shemesh.

7:2-17
Defeat of the Philistines

7:3. foreign gods and Ashtoreths. Here the Ashtoreths are distinguished from the foreign gods. Ashtoreth is the name of the goddess known in Canaan as Ashtar or Astarte, the consort of Baal (see comment on Judg 2:13). The use of the plural here may suggest that all deities and their consorts should be disposed of.

7:5. Mizpah. Though several cities shared this name (it means something like "outpost" or "garrison"), this one in Benjaminite territory is the most well-known. It is often associated with the eight-acre site called Tell en-Nasbeh about eight miles north of Jerusalem. Mizpah at this time was an oval enclosure surrounded by a wall about three feet thick. It guarded the main north-south road between the hills of Judah and the hills of Ephraim.

7:6. pouring out water from a well. Though

wine libations are known from sacrificial texts, there are no other examples of ritualized water libations mentioned in the Old Testament. Rabbinic sources speak of water libation as one of the rituals practiced during the Feast of Tabernacles. In that context it is thought to accompany prayers for rain. In Mesopotamia water libations were among the offerings given to the dead, and they also poured out water from a well to ward off evil spirits when the well was dug. None of these possibilities makes sense in this context, where it is connected to repentance and purification.

7:6. fasting in religious practice. Fasting is little attested in the ancient Near East outside of the Bible. It generally occurs in the context of mourning. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with making a request before God. The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and humbling oneself before God (Ps 69:10). In connection with their repentance the Israelites fasted in order to remove any sin or other obstacle that may have led to their subjection to the Philistines. For similar efforts related to military action, see Judges 20:26 and 2 Chronicles 20:1-4.

7:6. Samuel's leadership. Samuel's leadership is described by the same term that serves as a title for the judges (see comment on Judg 2:16-19). This rounds out his credentials as prophet, priest and judge. The three roles are combined in this passage as he leads them in repentance in order to bring about their deliverance.

7:7. Philistine response. Why do the Philistines attack when the Israelites gather for a religious observance? In the ancient Near East rituals were generally performed prior to military initiatives. One of the ways that spies or informants could tell military action was afoot was when suspicious gatherings took place for rituals not connected with known festivals. Assyrian kings regularly received reports from their informants regarding a vassal king's involve-ment in rituals that could be suspected of being connected with battle preparations.

7:9. lamb for a burnt offering. Lambs were offered daily in the sacrificial system (see comment on Ex 29:38) and were also used for purification offerings (see Lev 12:6 and 14:10). Those offerings required one-year-old lambs. This lamb is a suckling, in Akkadian referred to as a spring lamb, and therefore offered the most tender meat. In one Assyrian text from the time of Ashur-Nirari V (eighth century) a spring lamb is used in an oath-taking ceremony connected to the making of a treaty.

7:10. thundering from heaven. Thunder and lightning were considered to regularly accompany the presence of a deity in the ancient Near East, often in a battle setting. From the Sumerian Exaltation of Inanna, to the Hittite myths about the storm god, to the Akkadian and Ugaritic mythologies, the gods are viewed as thundering in judgment against their enemies. Baal is depicted as grasping a handful of thunderbolts. Thundering terminology is picked up in royal rhetoric as Hittite or Assyrian kings portray themselves as the instruments of the gods, thundering against those who have violated treaties or stood in the way of empire expansion. For further information concerning the divine warrior see comments on Exodus 15:3; Joshua 3:17; 6:21-24; 10:11.

7:11. Beth Car. This site is mentioned only here and remains unidentified.

7:12. memorial stone. In the ancient Near East it was common practice to use stones, often inscribed, to mark boundaries. Babylonian *kudurru* stones were boundary markers that were sometimes inscribed with the details of the royal grant assigning rights to the land. They were public and legal indicators of ownership and were believed to enjoy divine protection. Like this stone, the *kudurru* stones were sometimes given names (for example, "Establisher-of-Permanent-Boundaries"). The Egyptians also erected memorial stelae to indicate the borders of their territory, especially that which had come to them by conquest. Examples are known throughout the second millennium. Both Babylonian and Egyptian examples usually had lengthier inscriptions on the stone describing summary accounts of the victory or stipulations or curses regarding the continuing possession of the land.

7:12. Shen. Many versions and translations read "Jeshanah," and most commentators consider this more likely. Shen is otherwise unknown, while Jeshanah is usually associated with Burj el-Isaneh. It seems less likely, however, that the Philistines would flee straight north (though they did have garrisons in that direction). It is possible that Shen ("tooth") is just a reference to a natural formation.

7:12. Ebenezer. The Ebenezer mentioned in 4:1 (Izbet Sartah) was about twenty miles northwest of Mizpah. The location named Ebenezer in this chapter is likely at a different place. Samuel is giving the name here and us-

ing the meaning of the name ("tone of help") to show that this Ebenezer represents victory rather than the humiliating defeat that had become associated with the other Ebenezer.

7:14. Ekron to Gath. The line from Ekron (Sorek Valley) to Gath (Elah Valley) is about five miles north-south. The coastal plain of the Philistines lies to the west of the line and the Shephelah leading into the hill country of Judah to the east. This verse probably indicates that those towns in the Shephelah that the Philistines had taken over were recovered.

7:14. Amorites. The Amorites along with the Canaanites were the primary inhabitants of the land prior to the coming of the Israelites and the Philistines. For some information about their background see the comment on Numbers 13:29.

7:16. Samuel's territory. The Bethel-Gilgal-Mizpah circuit appears to be all in the territory of Benjamin. There are several towns named Gilgal, including one listed on the northern boundary of Judah. If this is the correct Gilgal, Samuel's circuit would have started by traveling from his home in Ramathaim about fifteen miles southeast to Bethel. Two miles further south would get him to Mizpah, and from there Gilgal was nearly ten more miles. The return trip home would have been about twenty-five or thirty miles. There are sites named Gilgal closer to Bethel and Mizpah that may be intended here. In the Mari documents there is a diviner named Asqudum who regularly makes a circuit of four towns providing his services to the citizens.

7:17. altar at Ramah. The text does not specify whether this is an altar for sacrifice or a memorial altar (see comment on Josh 22:9-34). If it is an altar for sacrifice, it may be replacing the one that was in Shiloh and had been destroyed by the Philistines.

8:1-22

The Request for a King

8:2. role of Samuel's sons. Samuel was "judging" on the circuit mentioned in 7:16. This was not the sort of judging he had been involved in earlier in the chapter (7:6) but would have involved giving decisions concerning disputes among the people (see comments on Ex 18:13-27 and Deut 16:18-20). Samuel's sons were serving this type of function, not the delivering type of judges found in the book of Judges. Their territory was very remote (see next comment), rather than central as Samuel's had been.

8:2. Beersheba. Beersheba is located at the southern extremity of the land in the northern Negev at Tell es-Seba' (three miles east of the modern city). Archaeological finds from this period suggest that the site was in transition from being a temporary to a permanent settlement. Some of the first houses were just being built. The population would have been less than two hundred. Therefore this was a very minor appointment.

8:6. kingship in the ancient Near East. The kings of the ancient world enjoyed nearly limitless power and authority, and regularly claimed divine support for their rule. Kingship was believed to have been lowered from heaven and to have its roots in the original creation and organization of the world. The king functioned as vice-regent for the divine ruler, and it was his duty to preserve order and justice in society. He was entrusted with a divine stewardship over the people and the land. Kings were often considered to possess a divine office while they lived (understood differently in the various times and cultures) and to become gods when they died. Justice and law came from them. They often had priestly duties and were depicted as shepherds. The maintenance of the temples and provisions for them was an important obligation of the king. Throughout the ancient Near East kings were military leaders. They brought protection or deliverance for their people as well as acquiring other lands. These conquests brought access to additional natural resources and trade routes, as well as bringing plunder into the royal coffers and slave labor into the kingdom. Both of these would reduce the burden on the population of the country.

8:6. what the leaders want. The leaders of Israel have decided that they want a permanent head of government empowered with centralized authority over the tribes and commanding a standing army. They have concluded that their organization as a federation of tribes has put them at a military disadvantage. They believe that a king with a trained standing army at his command will level the playing field and enable them to successfully defend their land. They have been mistaken in assessing their problem as a political problem and consequently opting for a political solution. What Samuel seeks to clarify for them is that their problem is not political but spiritual. Their political solution will solve nothing unless it is accompanied by a spiritual solution.

8:7. divine king versus human king. In Israel's tribal structure there had been no provision made for a human centralized authority. Moses had provided prophetic authority and Joshua had been granted military authority, but no one had succeeded Joshua in such a position.

Moses had been understood to be the intermediary, giving God's instructions as God led the people. Likewise, as the book of Joshua repeatedly indicates, Joshua was subordinate to God's commander (Josh 5:13-15), and the victories were the Lord's victories. Each tribe had its leadership, but central authority belonged to the Lord and was his to give. The judges were those whom the Lord raised up and endowed with a recognized central authority (see comment on Judg 2:16-19). The fact that God was seen as raising up military leaders and that God was the one who brought the victories demonstrates that God was the one who was the king leading out the armies in battle. Victory in battle was assured if the Lord was pleased with Israel. By making their request, the leaders are implying that God has been less than successful in bringing victory and that somehow a king will do a better job.

8:11. prerogatives of kingship. Kingship requires a supporting administration. The administration must be housed and fed. Buildings need to be erected to house the administration, and land must be owned by the crown. A standing army must be raised, and it likewise must be housed and fed. The king must then have access to laborers and goods of every sort. Taxation and forced labor were the major means of providing for the monarchy and stood as royal prerogatives. This would bring about dramatic political and economic changes. This portrayal of kingship is similar to that known in the ancient Near East of this period, particularly observable in Ugaritic texts as the model of Canaanite kingship.

8:11. chariots and horses. Israel had not previously had cavalry or chariotry. This development within a standing army required the centralized authority of kingship. Training was required that only a permanent army could provide. Construction and care of the chariots and stabling and caring for the horses all required significant administrative oversight.

8:11. running before chariots. Those who run before chariots proclaim the presence of the king and protect the person of the king. In Hittite texts the gods are said to run before the king's chariot, leading to victory. The men who run before the king's chariot function as heralds (see 2 Sam 15:1; 1 Kings 1:5; 18:46).

8:12. infantry commanders. In the spontaneous calling out of an army in times of emergency (as previously practiced in Israel), trained commanders were not part of the picture. Part of a standing army, however, involves the permanent appointment of such officers. Such military divisions are also known from Assyrian and Babylonian military terms, where, for instance, one of the lower officers is the commander of fifty.

8:12. working the king's fields. Once an administration is set up, certain lands become royal lands (2 Chron 26:10). Land can become forfeit to the throne as a result of criminal activity, or land can come to the throne through lack of heirs to inherit ancestral property. This land would be farmed to provide food for the administration as well as to supply stockpiles against emergency. Those who work the land may be forced laborers (in a form of taxation), slaves from foreign peoples or debt slaves who have no other way to recover from losses.

8:12. making the king's weapons. The king's weapons would have included bow and arrow, sword, dagger, shield and javelin. At this period the Israelites had either not yet acquired iron-working technology or had been effectively prohibited from producing iron weapons, so their weapons would have been bronze. It was common even into the Middle Ages to have a royal smith who would even travel with the army to service the weapons of the king. The Nuzi texts list carpenters and bronze-workers among the palace staff.

8:13. cooks, bakers, perfumers. Cooks and bakers staffed the royal scullery. The extended family of the king and his administration (often from the extended family) would have to be regularly fed in royal style. Additionally there may have been prisoners of the king and household servants who would need at least meager provisions. Perfumers performed a number of different duties at the court. The king's garments were regularly perfumed, and spices were burnt in order to maintain a pleasing aroma around the palace. Additionally some spices were recognized as having medicinal value, in which case the perfumer might be performing the task of pharmacist. Assyrian texts and Egyptian tomb paintings both portray elaborate procedures for preparing these spices and ointments.

8:14-15. land confiscation. Attractive properties were frequent targets of royal confiscation. The king's administrators and favorites were rewarded and kept loyal in this way (see comment on 22:7). This practice is well-known from Hittite and Ugaritic materials as well as from Kassite period Babylon, where land grants to courtiers were very common.

8:16. commandeering of donkeys and slaves. It was not unusual for a king to commandeer a slave who caught his attention or stock animals that were noteworthy. The commoner would have little choice but to offer as a gift

that which had attracted the king.

8:17. tithe of grain and flocks as taxes. In Ugaritic literature the tithe is a fixed payment to the king made by each town and village. In earlier biblical passages the tithe was treated as something due the priesthood and the sanctuary. Here the tithe describes royal taxation.

9:1-27

Saul and Samuel Meet

9:1. status of Kish. Traditionally translations have identified Kish as a "valiant warrior," but the NIV "man of standing" is probably a better choice. Such prominence could be achieved through military prowess (see Jephthah, Judg 11:1), but many of the people described by this phrase have no known military reputation. It is likely that the phrase has broader application (see comment on Judg 6:12).

9:1. Benjamin. The tribe of Benjamin was descended from the youngest son of Jacob. Its more recent history was disreputable in that it had been nearly exterminated in a civil war during the Judges period (Judges 20—21). Its tribal allotment was small but strategically placed between the powerful tribes of Judah and Ephraim. Jerusalem, not yet in Israelite control but destined for greatness, was in Benjaminite territory.

9:2. Saul's appearance and stature. People in the ancient Near East placed high value on the stature and appearance of the king. The earliest kings were temporarily empowered warlords—mighty champions and fierce fighters. Even after kingship evolved into a permanent institution, the king who carried the aura of a great champion was the pride of his people. A few examples include Sargon of Akkad, described as mighty in battle; Tukulti-Ninurta of Assyria, who had no rival on the battlefield; Nebuchadnezzar, a valiant man strong in warfare; and Gilgamesh, a heroic warrior of great stature as well as beautiful in manhood.

9:2. Saul outside the Bible. As yet no mention has been found of Saul in any ancient Near Eastern inscriptions. He had little contact with other peoples except the Philistines, and there have been no significant finds of Philistine historical archives.

9:4-5. scope and distance of Saul's search. Saul lived in Gibeah, about six miles north of Jerusalem. The hill country of Ephraim was about fifteen miles northwest of his home. Though Shalisha and Shaalim are obscure, most interpreters identify them with Baal-Shalisha and Shaalbim respectively, which stand at the northwest and southwest extremities of the Ephraimite hill country. Just the circumference of this area would entail a sixty-mile trek, a large area to cover in this three-day search (v. 20). The region of Zuph is generally inferred (from 1 Sam 1:1) to be the region of Samuel's hometown in the hill country of Ephraim.

9:6. Samuel's reputation. It is intriguing that Saul, who lives only a stone's throw away from Samuel's hometown and within the circuit of Samuel's territory, appears ignorant of this nationally renowned figure. Rather than suggesting that Samuel's renown was less than reputed, it likely indicates the spiritual and political naivete of Saul.

9:6-9. role of the local "man of God." Though Samuel had a national reputation, to the local people among whom he had lived all his life he was like a village holy man. These holy men were supported by the gifts of the villages they served and would have been consulted on any number of minor personal matters. Areas of expertise would include issues of health and illness, rituals and prayers, legal and political affairs and a variety of other personal and community matters.

9:8. gift of silver. A quarter of a shekel of silver would have been the equivalent of a week or so of wages for the ordinary working man. This would be appropriate considering the value of the donkeys that had been lost.

9:9. terminology for prophets. Three terms are used in this passage: man of God, seer and prophet. The first is a general term that could apply to either of the others. The seer and the prophet were engaged in basically the same activity, but the structuring of the role in society was different (much like the difference between the offices of judge and king). Nevertheless, it is a terminological change that is noted here, not a sociological one.

9:11. coming out to draw water. Towns were usually situated on high ground in the vicinity of a water source (spring or well). In later periods tunnels were built to give secure access to the water sources, but at this period one would have to go outside the city walls to get the daily supply of water. Typically this would be done in the early evening rather than in the heat of the day.

9:12. high place. The high place (Hebrew: *bamah)* is a place of worship where an altar is functioning. It is typically not an open-air shrine but an indoor facility, housing sacred furniture and precincts large enough to accommodate a priesthood (we cannot assume that all of them were on high ground). The Mesha Inscription shows that such shrines

were also part of Moabite worship. Possible examples have been found at sites such as Megiddo and Nahariya.

9:12-13. sacrifice at the high place. Though the name of this town is not given, most assume that it is Samuel's hometown of Ramah (Ramathaim, see 1:1). After the fall of Shiloh he built an altar in Ramah (7:17), and with the ark in exile this was probably functioning as a central sanctuary. Sacrifices were typically occasions for meals, and that proves to be the case here as well. This may be a new moon sacrifice, which was a festive occasion (see comment on 20:5). Alternatively it could be an enthronement ceremony, specially called since Samuel had been forewarned of Saul's arrival.

9:13. blessing the sacrifice. No other passage in the Old Testament speaks of blessing the sacrifice. Blessing is usually the offering of kind words that it is hoped the deity will bring about. Since sacrifices were often associated with petitions, Samuel's blessing may have reflected the hope that the petition be granted.

9:21. Saul's objection. In the ancient Near East kings usually tried to attach some significance to their ancestry when none was evident, lest this weakness be used as a reason for revolt by some ambitious competitor. The lack of ancestry could label one as an imposter or pretender. The objection of genealogical unworthiness is not uncommon in the Bible, and, in fact, is sometimes worn as a badge (Amos 7:14). For information concerning the tribe of Benjamin, see the comment on 9:1. Nothing further is known of the status of Saul's clan.

9:22. hall where they ate. The portions of meat that were to be eaten by the priests and the worshipers were at times required to be eaten on the premises (for example, Lev 7:6). Since feasting was an important part of sacrifice and worship, sanctuaries provided rooms for that activity. The word used in this verse to describe this room is used elsewhere for the various rooms attached to the sanctuary in the temple complex. Archaeologists often find auxiliary rooms attached to the main sanctuary, but it is frequently not possible to determine what each room was used for.

9:23. choice cut of meat. The thigh (NIV "leg," v. 24) was considered one of the prime pieces of meat and was usually reserved for the officiating priest (Lev 7:32-34). Here Samuel yields it to his guest of honor.

9:25-26. sleeping quarters on roof. Though the presence of stairways and supporting pillars (among other evidences) show that many houses had second (or even third) stories, archaeologists are usually not able to recover more than the floor plan of houses in the remaining rubble of occupation levels. Second stories (rooms on the roof) were desirable for family activities and sleeping because they offered better ventilation.

10:1-27

The Anointing and Selection of Saul as King

10:1. anointing with olive oil. Anointing a king was common practice in some parts of the ancient Near East. Much of the evidence comes from Hittite sources describing enthronement ceremonies. There is no evidence of kings being anointed in Mesopotamia. In Egypt the pharaoh was not anointed, but he anointed his officials and his vassals. His anointing of them established their subordinate relationship to him and indicated his protection of them. This model would fit the idea of Saul being anointed as a vassal to God. But in 2 Samuel 2:4 it is the people who anoint David. This anointing suggests some sort of contractual agreement between David and the people he will govern. In Nuzi, individuals entering a business agreement anointed one another with oil, and in Egypt oil anointment was used in wedding ceremonies. For information on royal coronations see comment on 11:15.

10:2. Rachel's tomb at Zelzah. Locating this site is extremely complicated. Detailed study including attempts to reconcile many variants and difficulties offer two main possibilities. One is that the tomb should be located in the vicinity of Kiriath Jearim (see comment on 6:21). Kiriath Jearim is about fifteen miles south-southwest of Samuel's home. The second follows the supposed course of Saul's journey in this passage as he appears to be traveling east from Ramah to Geba. This would place Rachel's tomb along that road.

10:3. great tree of Tabor. Judges 4:5 refers to the "Palm of Deborah" where she held court, and Abraham pauses at the great tree of Moreh (see comment on Gen 12:6). Trees served as landmarks, meeting places and even sacred sites. Where the sun is hot and shade is desirable, trees can take on special significance.

10:3. worship at Bethel. Throughout much of Israel's history, Bethel was considered an important sacred site. The ark was housed there for at least part of the Judges period, and it was a place of altar and sacrifice (see comments on Judg 1:22-23; 20:26-28; 21:4).

10:3. products for sacrifice. Goats, bread and wine were the basic makings of a sacrificial

meal. By receiving consecrated bread, Saul is again being treated as a priest (see comment on 9:23) and being recognized as an honored personage.

10:5. Gibeah of God. The designation "of God" suggests there was some sort of shrine or sanctuary on this hill (Gibeah = hill), but it was currently also occupied by a Philistine garrison. Since 13:3 speaks of a Philistine garrison at Geba, many have identified the two as the same location, the modern village of Jaba about six miles north of Jerusalem. No excavations have been conducted there, but surface surveys have found Iron Age remains on the site. It overlooks the strategic pass across the deep canyon of the Wadi Swenit from Micmash that leads from the north into the region of Jerusalem. For discussion of Gibeah see comment on 10:26.

10:5. high place. There is a difference between outdoor cultic places and the "high place" *(bamah)* mentioned in many places as religious centers in the local towns and cities (1 Kings 11:7; Jer 7:31; Ezek 16:16; 2 Chron 21:11; Mesha's Moabite Stele). The high place could be outdoors but often was an indoor facility, built to house sacred furniture, an altar and precincts large enough to accommodate a priesthood.

10:5. musical instruments. These are all typical musical instruments of the time and are attested in ancient Near Eastern texts, reliefs and paintings as early as the third millennium. There is still some disagreement among authorities as to which of the Hebrew words in this passage ought to be translated "harp" and which as "lyre." The one the NIV translates "lyre" is a ten-stringed instrument, while the one translated "harp" is thought to have had fewer strings. Both are hand-held with frames made of wood. The tambourine has been identified in archaeological reliefs as the tambour, a small drum (leather stretched over a hoop) that would not have the tinny rattle sound of modern tambourines. The instrument translated as flute is likely a double pipe made of either bronze or reed.

10:6. connection between music and prophecy. One could be trained for the profession of prophet (or seer), and there was a prophetic guild in this early period of Israel's history usually identified as the "sons of the prophets." Typically these prophets would use various procedures in order to prepare themselves for receiving prophetic oracles. Music played an important role in inducing a trancelike state (ecstasy) that was seen as making one receptive to a divine message. In the Mari texts there is an entire class of temple personnel who were ecstatics and who often provided prophetic messages.

10:6. role of the Spirit of the Lord. When the Spirit of the Lord was attached to any activity in the Judges period, it was usually to the calling up of an army. In a tribal society with no centralized government it was difficult to get other tribes to stand with one or two that might be facing problems. The measure of a leader in such situations was his ability to compel others to follow though he had no office of command over them. In Israel this was a mark of the power of Yahweh, for it was he alone who had the authority to call out the armies of the tribes. Yahweh was the only central authority. It was therefore a clear indication of the Lord's authority at work in someone when they exercised authority that was only Yahweh's by calling out the armies (see Judg 11:29; 1 Sam 11:6-8). This was one of the distinguishing features of the judges of Israel. Saul's central authority is going to be permanent and more extensive than that possessed by the judges, but it still receives its endorsement by the empowerment of the Spirit of the Lord. In 11:6 the empowerment of the Spirit is going to result in Saul's raising an army, as the judges had done. Here it is associated with prophetic activity, specifically to his receptivity to divine guidance.

10:8. Gilgal. As noted in the comment on 7:16, there are several sites with the name of Gilgal. It is impossible to be certain which one is intended here.

10:8. purpose of sacrifices. Burnt offerings and fellowship offerings are two of the most general types of sacrifices. The former often accompanied petition, while the latter served as an opportunity for festive celebration and a communal meal before the Lord. It is likely, then, that these sacrifices would have been directed to either the initiation of kingship or perhaps toward military activity against the Philistines. Between the sacrifice offered in Samuel's town, the sacrifice of those going to Bethel, and these in Gilgal, it becomes evident that sacrifice in this period was not restricted to a central location.

10:10. Saul as a prophet. Kings in the ancient Near East were often considered to have prophetic gifts. This was especially true in Egypt, where the pharaoh was the representative of the gods and spoke for them. Civil leadership in Israel up to this time has also often combined authority for ruling with prophetic activity (Moses, Deborah, Samuel). Samuel accumulated priestly, prophetic and governing roles, but the governing role was the result of the other two. With Saul the issues concern

to what extent someone chosen as king will also accumulate priestly or prophetic roles. Kingship in the ancient Near East was at times configured with those roles included. It is then very logical to ask, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

10:17. Mizpah. Though several cities shared this name (it means something like "outpost" or "garrison"), this one in Benjaminite territory is the most well-known. It is often associated with the eight-acre site called Tell en-Nasbeh about eight miles north of Jerusalem. Mizpah at this time was an oval enclosure surrounded by a wall about three feet thick. It guarded the main north-south road between the hills of Judah and the hills of Ephraim.

10:20-21. process of choosing a king. Evidence from Mesopotamia suggests that divination was used to confirm a designated king but not to propose one. Divination was not considered acceptable in Israel. The process used here is more like an oracular process and is very similar to that used in Joshua 7 (see comment on Josh 7:14-18).

10:25. regulations of the kingship. This appears to be a document that frames a constitution or charter of some sort. One possibility is that it details the people's subordination to the king and the king's subordination to the Lord. In Egypt the coronation ceremony involved a proclamation by the god Thoth that gave the official approval of the gods for the king's accession. There is nothing in this chapter that actually depicts Saul as being crowned; he is merely acclaimed as the one that has been selected (see comment on 11:15).

10:26. Gibeah. Saul's hometown of Gibeah was long been identified with Tell el-Ful about three miles north of Jerusalem, though many have not been convinced despite a small fortress uncovered at the site that archaeologists dubbed "Saul's fortress." The archaeological, textual and topographical evidence are now all thought to favor the theory that Gibeah and Geba are one and the same and are to be identified with Jaba on the southern rim of the Wadi Swenit about six miles north of Jerusalem.

11:1-11
Saul Defeats the Ammonites

11:1. Jabesh Gilead. Jabesh Gilead was a city in the Transjordan, probably along the Wadi el-Yabis, a tributary of the Jordan River that cut through the north Gileadite hill country. A number of sites in the area have been proposed as the ruins of Jabesh Gilead, none of which have proved convincing. The most likely candidate is Tell Maqlub, lying on the northern edge of a bend on the Yabis River. There is detailed evidence for Iron I Age (c. 1200-1000 B.C.) material remains in this area. The city is described as having a treaty relationship with Israel from the period of the judges (chap. 21; cf. 2 Sam 2:4-7). Jabesh Gilead was not incorporated into Israel until after the death of Saul. Cf. 1 Samuel 11:9-10.

11:1-2. Nahash. Ammon and Israel had continually fought over the area east of the Jordan River (see Judg 11:33). Based upon fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls, a restoration of 1 Samuel 10:27b gives evidence that Nahash had also threatened the Israelite tribes of Gad and Reuben, a fact confirmed by the Jewish historian Josephus (A.D. 37-100). Nothing is known of Nahash from extrabiblical literature, no Ammonite historical documents from this period having survived.

11:1-2. Ammonites. Apart from the Bible, the Ammonites are only known from written sources from the Late Assyrian annals (c. 733-665 B.C.) and from local fragmentary epigraphic sources (to c. 590 B.C.). The Bible describes them as a Transjordanian people related to the Israelites through Abraham's nephew, Lot. From the period of the exodus and following, the Ammonites were perennial enemies of Israel until their conquest by Saul's successor, David (2 Sam 10—12).

11:2. gouging out the right eye. The practice of blinding one's enemies is found with the Philistines (against Samson; Judg 16:21) and Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (against Zedekiah of Judah; 2 Kings 25:7). It was also a common Assyrian practice performed upon vassal kings who had broken treaties. The Jewish historian Josephus (A.D. 37-100) states that the right eye was gouged out in this case, which made the soldier unable to fight, since the shield was held over the left eye. However, in the context of 1 Samuel 11 the purpose of the gouging out of the eyes appears to have been reproach. Incapacitating mutilation of subjected individuals is also seen in the treatment of kings whose thumbs and big toes were cut off (see comment on Judg 1:6).

11:4. Gibeah. See comment on 10:26.

11:6. role of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God rested upon Saul as it previously did upon the judges Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah and especially Samson (Judg 14:6, 19; 15:14). When the Spirit of the Lord was attached to any activity in Judges, it was usually to the calling up of an army. In a tribal society with no centralized government it was difficult to get other tribes to support one of their num-

ber that might be facing problems. The measure of a leader in such situations was his ability to compel others to follow though he had no office of command over them. In Israel this was a mark of the power of Yahweh, for it was he alone who had the authority to call out the armies of the tribes. Yahweh was the only central authority. It was therefore a clear indication of the Lord's authority at work in someone when they exercised authority that was only Yahweh's by calling out the armies. This had been one of the distinguishing features of the judges of Israel. In 1 Samuel 10, the Spirit had caused Saul to behave like one of the prophets, while here in 1 Samuel 11, Saul exercised the authority of calling out the armies of Israel. His Spirit possession was reflected immediately in his righteous indignation, similar to the situation where Samson in his fury killed thirty at Ashkelon (Judges 14:19), and it was confirmed by the response of the troops.

11:7. oxen pieces as messages. A biblical parallel to dismemberment as a message comes from Judges 19:29-30, where the unnamed Levite cut his concubine into twelve pieces, evidently an invitation to participate in the intertribal war against the tribe of Benjamin. The idea was that whoever did not come for the battle would be punished in like manner. A letter from the city of Mari has a certain Bahdilim asking the king of Mari if he can cut off the head of a prisoner and send it around as a warning to troops who are not being cooperative in assembling for battle.

11:8. Bezek. Bezek has been located at Khirbit Ibzik, a site west of the Jordan River, twelve miles northeast of Shechem and about fourteen miles west of Jabesh Gilead. It is placed on the southwestern slope of the Ras es-Salmeh, a steep mountain range overlooking the Manasseh hill country. It was thus a convenient place from which to cross the Jordan River to arrive at Jabesh Gilead.

11:8. size of army. The number of soldiers mentioned varies greatly in ancient versions of the Old Testament. The later texts, however, give expanded numbers for both Israel and Judah. Many archaeologists would estimate the entire population of Canaan at this time as being barely this many. The Hebrew term for thousand has often been viewed as a term denoting a unit of soldiers and not to be taken as referring to an actual number (see comments on Josh 8:3; Judg 20:2).

11:9. distance from Bezek to Jabesh Gilead. If both Bezek and Jabesh Gilead have been identified correctly by modern archaeologists, then the two cities were about thirteen or fourteen miles apart. This could easily be covered in a march that began in the evening and concluded in the Ammonite camp in the early hours of the morning.

11:12-15
Saul Affirmed as King

11:14-15. reaffirmation of kingship at Gilgal. Gilgal, a cultic center on Samuel's circuit, remains unlocated, but most think it was near Jericho (see comment on 1 Sam 7:16). As the sacred site closest to the battle scene, it is chosen for the coronation. Even though Saul has been designated by two different processes as the one who will be king, it is only now, after he has proven himself in military affairs (remember, the people wanted a king who would lead their armies into battle), that he will actually be crowned. The text says nothing of reaffirmation but states that they made him king. In Mesopotamia there were ceremonies to celebrate enthronement each year connected to New Year's celebrations. Coronation in the ancient Near East would generally involve investing the king with the royal insignia and regalia and anointing him. There was commonly an aspect of the ceremony in which the king's legitimacy was affirmed by the chief deity. The anointing and the affirmation of legitimacy had already taken place in this case.

11:15. fellowship offerings. One portion of the fellowship offering was offered to God, and another portion was consumed by the worshipers. Typical use of this offering was for ratification of treaties or covenant agreements. For more information see comments on 10:8; Exodus 24:5; and Leviticus 3:1-5.

12:1-25
Samuel's Speech

12:15. Samuel clearing himself of claims. Politics has not changed much in three millennia. It is common for a ruler to blame the country's problems on a previous administration. It was also not uncommon in the ancient world for charges to be trumped up against anyone who might be seen as a threat to the power of the ruler currently in power. It was therefore understandable that Samuel would want to take steps to procure an affirmation of his innocence in matters of government. It was the ruling party's duty to maintain justice, and Samuel wanted verification that he had not been accused of any injustice. The legal process described here consisted of three parts: (1) the witnesses are listed (Yahweh, his

anointed [i.e., the king] and the people, v. 3), (2) Samuel appealed to these witnesses, and (3) the witnesses responded. This pattern is also attested in Ruth (4:4, 11) and Joshua (24:22).

12:6-12. time span of recounted history. Exodus 12:40 says that the Israelites were in Egypt for 430 years. First Kings 6:1 says that it was 480 years from the exodus to the dedication of the temple. The coronation of Saul may be as much as eighty years prior to the dedication of the temple, meaning that Samuel is covering somewhere between 800 and 850 years of history in five short verses. That would be like a contemporary speaker addressing the failures of Christianity from the Crusades to the present in one hundred words or less.

12:12. divine kingship. Ever since the book of Exodus the text has been developing the idea of Yahweh fighting for the Israelites, resulting in the Lord being praised as warrior and king. The book of Joshua indicates repeatedly that the Israelites' victories are the Lord's victories. Yahweh was established as their king and champion and led them forth victoriously in battle. References to Yahweh as king of Israel abound in Scripture (e.g., Ex 15:18; Num 23:21; Judg 8:7; and 1 Sam 8:7; 10:19). The concept of deity as king was not unique to Israel, however. Both Marduk (Babylonian) and Baal (Canaanite) demonstrate their kingship by subduing the sea, which is personified in their divine foe (Tiamat and Yam respectively). The issues of bringing secure order out of conflict, being proclaimed king and establishing a dwelling are intertwining themes in the ancient Near Eastern literatures concerning cosmic battle. More specifically, the Assyrians, for example, claimed that the god Assur was the monarch and that the reigning king was in essence his earthly representative. The difference in Israel, until now, was that Yahweh did not have an earthly counterpart, as did the other nations. The fact that God was seen as raising up military leaders and that God was the one who brought the victories demonstrates that God was the one who was the king leading out the armies in battle (see comment on 8:7). Now Saul's kingship was to be an earthly reflection of Yahweh's rule in heaven.

12:17-18. rain during the wheat harvest. Rain during May and June in Palestine, the months of the wheat harvest, was almost unknown and thus was interpreted as a supernatural occurrence. Furthermore, it could endanger the crop (see Prov 26:1). Thus God was standing as divine witness against them.

12:19. Samuel's revised role. Like Moses and Deborah before him, Samuel, until this point, had exercised political leadership by virtue of his prophetic office. With the initiation of kingship, the role of the prophet would now become an advisory one. Rather than leading the people as the recipient of divine messages, the prophet would offer guidance to the king, who would retain the freedom to accept or reject it. This passage also emphasizes the intercessory role of the prophet (for more information see comments on Deut 18:14-22).

12:25. king and people identified. In the ancient Near East the king was often considered the personification of the state. As a result the king could be held accountable for the peoples' behavior, and the people could be punished or blessed based on the conduct of the king.

13:1-22

Saul Offers the Sacrifice

13:1. chronological note. The age of Saul at his accession is not precisely known since this verse has not survived intact in most ancient manuscripts. The Greek version of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint) added the number thirty here, but that is probably a secondary calculation, possibly based on David's age at his accession (2 Sam 5:4). Saul had an adult son, Jonathan, and at least one grandson before his death (2 Sam 4:4). Saul's length of reign is listed as two years, though most interpreters believe that part of the number has dropped out of the text (i.e., x-two years). However, the Jewish historian Josephus (A.D. 37-100) and Luke (Acts 13:21) both know a tradition that Saul reigned for forty years. Because of the unique spelling of the number in the earliest manuscripts, it is now believed by many that the original number for the length of his reign has been lost.

13:2. size and nature of standing army. Saul's selection of three thousand men probably represented a choice of men to serve as retainers or an imperial guard, rather than the total of the volunteers for the war, which would have been more. Standing armies in the ancient Near East were made up of professionally trained soldiers and mercenaries. They served garrisons and border posts as well as providing for a palace guard. The number of three thousand might simply represent three companies (one stationed with Jonathan and two with Saul). Geba is not a large site, and it is unlikely that it would have housed more than a few hundred men under normal circumstances, but the Israelites would soon have to face the combined military forces of the Philistines (see comment on verse 5).

13:2. Micmash. Rising about two thousand feet above sea level, the site of Micmash (modern Mukhmas) is about four and a half miles southwest of Bethel. Sparse Iron Age finds at the site have led some experts to prefer identification with Khirbet el-Hara el-Fawqa just over half a mile to the north, where more evidence of occupation at this time was found. The mountainous terrain in the area is an obstacle to chariot warfare.

13:3. Philistine garrison at Geba. Geba has been identified as the modern village of Jaba about six miles north of Jerusalem. No excavations have been conducted there, but surface surveys have found Iron Age remains on the site. It overlooks the strategic pass across the deep canyon of the Wadi Swenit from Micmash that leads from the north into the region of Jerusalem.

13:4. distance from Gilgal to Micmash. Again there are numerous sites named Gilgal, and their precise locations are unknown (see comment on 7:16). The Gilgal in 10:8 appears to be near Geba. If Saul's encampment is the Gilgal from Joshua's time, it was much further east, near the Jordan River, about twenty miles from Micmash. In this case he would have been far removed from the theater of operations.

13:5. Philistine army. The Philistines had overwhelming military superiority in this situation, with thirty thousand (often amended to three thousand) chariots and six thousand horsemen (charioteers). If the amended number is correct, there were two soldiers per chariot, known from contemporary Egypt, Anatolia and Assyria. For comparison, Shalmaneser III of Assyria (ninth century B.C.) claims to have crossed the Euphrates River with an army of 120,000. Provincial Assyrian governors were required to raise troops for the Assyrian army, often amounting to as much as 1,500 cavalry and 20,000 troops. Since there were over twenty provinces, the entire amount of Assyrian troops was very large.

13:6. hiding places. Pits and cisterns were dug for the collection of water and would have served as convenient hiding places if they were dry. These would typically have been in the area of towns. There were forested areas on either side of the Wadi Swenit in ancient times so thickets would have been available. Wadi Swenit and Wadi Kelt also feature many caves in the walls of the cliffs. Caves in Palestine often offered protection for people in danger. Sometimes caves were used for family tombs. These would have been well-known by the inhabitants of the area and protected from easy access. There is extrabiblical inscriptional evidence for cave-dwelling refugees in a cave near the Judean fortress city of Lachish. On the walls is written, "Spare me, O merciful God, spare me, O Yahweh," and, "Save, O Yahweh."

13:7. Gad and Gilead. Both the terms Gad and Gilead were employed as general designations for Israelite lands east of the Jordan River. Gilead was inhabited by the tribes of Reuben and Gad. The Israelites fled to these areas since they were somewhat removed from the base of Philistine operations.

13:8. Saul's conundrum. Offering a sacrifice to enlist a deity's favor before an impending battle was common in the ancient Near East. This favor would hopefully ensure the god's willingness to participate in the conflict. The *Iliad* provides many examples of this in contemporary Greek literature, and Hittite and Assyrian accounts (e.g., Esarhaddon of Assyria, seventh century B.C.) amply attest the use of sacrifices and omens to determine the will of the gods before going to battle as an essential part of military strategy. In Saul's case the need for the ritual was interfering with the strategic element of timing. His choice attempted to acquire the ritual benefit (by offering the sacrifice himself) and still try to take advantage of striking before the strategic military moment passed.

13:8-13. Saul's offense. In general it was not unusual for a king to serve some priestly functions (see comment on 2 Sam 8:18). In consideration of the dominant role Samuel has had, however, it is to be expected that the charter of Saul's kingship (10:25) drew distinct lines of delineation between their respective roles. It should be noted that Saul is not accused in verse 13 of violating priestly protocol or committing desecration, but of breaking the command of God.

13:9-10. function of the sacrifices. Burnt offerings and fellowship offerings are two of the most general types of sacrifices. The former often accompanied petition, while the latter served as an opportunity for festive celebration and a communal meal before the Lord. Additionally the peace offerings are sometimes thought to represent an acknowledgment of the deity's kingship—an important element prior to battle. For general information on the sacrifices, see the comments on Leviticus 1:3-4; 3:1-5.

13:14. man after his own heart. This statement means that God was now going to select someone of his own choosing (according to his own will or purpose rather than according to the will and purpose of the Israelites). This wording does not concern the piety of David

but demonstrates God's exercise of will in rejecting Saul (a man fulfilling Israel's desire, 9:20) and replacing him with someone who was measured by a different criterion. Akkadian uses the same terminology when it speaks of the deity Enlil installing a king of his own choice. Even Nebuchadnezzar puts a king of his own choice in Jerusalem.

13:15. Gilgal to Gibeah. The distance for the army to travel from Joshua's Gilgal to Gibeah was about fifteen miles or a day's journey (for difficulties in identification see comment on 13:4).

13:16. Geba and Micmash. These two sites face one another across the deep canyon of the Wadi Swenit, along the strategic pass that crosses the wadi from the north into the region of Jerusalem. Micmash is a little over a mile northeast of Geba.

13:17-18. routes of raiding parties. The Philistine raiding parties turned in three different directions. The Ophrah road was due north and led to the town of Ophrah five miles north of Micmash. The Beth Horon road led west to the town of the same name, about twelve miles from Micmash. It went through Gibeon and would have been one of the major supply lines from the Philistine plains into the Jerusalem hills. Last, the border road overlooking the Valley of Hyenas (Zeboim) was southeast of Micmash, probably where the Wadi Swenit met the Wadi Kelt about halfway between Micmash and Jericho. This is the major pass into the Jordan Valley.

13:19-20. iron monopoly. For the ancients there were many technical difficulties in smelting iron, including maintaining a consistently high temperature, adequate draft, combining a proper amount of carbon and iron (called "carburization," which transforms the wrought iron into steel), and heavy tools to remove slag from the iron itself. Weapons made of uncarburized iron are inferior to bronze weapons. Consistent carburization is not evident in Palestine until the tenth century. It is not certain where iron smelting began, but it was widespread throughout the Near East (especially Anatolia and northern Iraq) by the end of the second millennium B.C. The widespread use of iron in place of bronze is now thought to be the result not only of the availability of the technology for smelting iron but also of the increasing difficulty of procuring the tin needed to make bronze. What must be noted, however, is that the text does not indicate an inferiority in iron technology but the absence of blacksmiths. Bronze weapons would have still been very useful to the Israelites. It is likely that these verses indicate that blacksmithing had been outlawed so as to prevent the manufacture of metal weapons of any sort.

13:21. charges for smithing. The smithing charges here can be seen to be exorbitant when measured against the fact that the average monthly income was approximately one shekel. The implements that were sharpened (plows, mattocks, pickaxes, goads) were for agricultural enterprises. They may have been made of iron or bronze, but the Israelites were prohibited from operating the smithies needed for sharpening them. Iron plows have been uncovered throughout Palestine for this period. Iron mattocks (apparently a type of hoe) have been found at Tell Jemmeh in southwest Palestine. Goads were pointed implements used to encourage the oxen to continue plowing.

13:22. weapon shortage. This verse confirms that neither iron nor bronze manufacture was permitted to the Israelites. We must assume that the Philistine rule in the area had resulted in the confiscation of weapons and that the law against blacksmithing of any sort had made only the most primitive weaponry available to them.

13:23—14:48
Victory at Micmash Pass

13:23. Micmash pass. The Micmash pass is the strategic pass that leads from the north into the region of Jerusalem across the deep canyon of the Wadi Swenit. For more information on Micmash see comment on verse 2. A contingent had advanced from the Philistine camp to the slope of the ravine (or pass) which separated Micmash from Gibeah/Geba and the Israelite camp. The site was surrounded by the hills which formed the north side of the wadi. Micmash was inaccessible except for the pass which linked it to Gibeah/Geba.

14:1, 6, 17. armor-bearer. Jonathan's armor-bearer was more than a porter of military equipment. He fought together with him and probably served the function of a squire or apprentice. The closest parallel from ancient Near Eastern literature is the member of the chariot crew that holds the shield.

14:2. "pomegranate tree" at Migron. Though some commentators have identified Migron as a threshing floor, others have suggested that it is the ancient name for the Wadi es-Swenit. There is a rock of Rimmon (Hebrew for pomegranate) located one mile east of Gibeah/Geba (see comment on Judg 20:45) with a large cave that may have been serving as Saul's headquarters. On the other hand, if

"threshing floor" is correct, there is an ancient threshing floor between Geba and Wadi Swenit, and Ugaritic texts attest to the threshing floor as a place where a king (Danil) met with the people. The open area of a threshing floor, however, would seem less likely in this context.

14:3. linen ephod. An ephod was part of the priestly wardrobe (see comment on Ex 28:6-14) and in both Egypt and Mesopotamia was reserved for clothing images of deity and for high-ranking priests. The ephod is elsewhere closely associated with oracles (it contains the Urim and Thummim, see comment on Ex 28:30, and was used for oracular consultation in Judg 8:27).

14:4-5. terrain: Bozez and Seneh. Khirbet el-Miqtara is a small settlement not far from the pass on the south side of the Wadi Swenit where the cliffs begin to get steeper. This area features some large outcroppings where someone could scale the cliffs without being seen.

14:6. divine warrior ideology. In the divine warrior motif the deity is fighting the battles and defeating the deities of the enemy. In Assyria Nergal is the king of battle, and Ishtar is viewed as a war goddess. The Canaanite Baal and the Babylonian Marduk are divine warriors. In this worldview human warfare is viewed simply as a representation of warfare among the gods. The stronger god would be victorious regardless of the strengths or weaknesses of the human combatants. Therefore, if Yahweh fights on their behalf, Jonathan is convinced that they will be victorious.

14:10. explanation of oracular mechanism. Oracular mechanisms of this period generally operated on a binary mechanism whereby designated occurrences could offer either a yes or a no answer from deity. The designated occurrences were typically options between an ordinary versus an extraordinary occurrence (see comments on Judg 6:36-40 and 1 Sam 6:7-9). In this case, however, either of the Philistine challenges could be seen as typical and appropriate. It would seem, instead, that Jonathan is looking for Yahweh's direction through an (inadvertent) invitation from the Philistines to come into the camp.

14:14. area of battle. The Hebrew text is very difficult, and translations vary greatly (NIV: "in an area of about half an acre"). The reference to half a furrow in the Hebrew text suggests that Jonathan cut a swath half a furrow wide (estimated at ten to fifteen yards) through a field of about one acre.

14:15. earthquake. In the ancient Near East the thundering in the sky and the trembling of the earth are commonly paired together as an indication of the divine involvement in battle (see comment on 2:9). Additionally, the dread of a deity as a divine warrior was often believed to precede a powerful, successful army into battle. Egyptian texts attribute this terror to Amun-Re in the inscriptions of Thutmose III, and Hittite, Assyrian and Babylonian texts all have their divine warriors who strike terror into the hearts of the enemy. It is a common motif that one of the ways a deity achieves victory is by throwing the enemy into confusion. An example in Egyptian literature occurs in the myth of Horus at Edfu: Horus confuses the enemy so that they begin to fight one another until none remain.

14:19-20. oracular use of the ephod. The Urim and Thummim were kept in a pouch in the priest's ephod (see above, verse 3). Information from the Urim and Thummim presumably would be gained by posing a yes-no question and then shaking out one of the stones. It is thought that the same stone would have to be shaken out three times in succession to confirm the answer. When Saul instructs Ahijah to withdraw his hand, he has made the decision to discontinue the oracular process and proceed without divine guidance.

14:23. aspects of divine intervention. Evidence for crediting the Lord with the victory would be seen in four elements that typically indicated divine intervention: direction through an oracle (v. 10); success by the outnumbered army (v. 14); earthquake (v. 15); and confusion and panic among the Philistines (v. 20). These are all connected to the work of Jonathan, while Saul was experiencing no such divine help or guidance even though he anxiously sought it.

14:23. Beth Aven. The town of Beth Aven has not been identified with any certainty. The way it is introduced in the texts suggests it was more prominent than Ai. Tell Maryam is often considered the prime candidate. It has not been excavated, but surveys have turned up Iron Age remains. Hosea is thought to use Beth Aven as a pejorative name (lit. "house of wickedness"; cf. Hos 4:15; 5:8; 10:5) for Bethel (house of God), north of Micmash. As still another alternative, some manuscripts of the Old Testament read Beth Horon, which was due east of Micmash. Any of these towns would have been on a route of pursuit to Aijalon.

14:24. fasting for battle. Fasting is little attested in the ancient Near East outside of the Bible. It generally occurs in the context of mourning. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with mak-

ing a request before God. The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and humbling oneself before God (Ps 69:10). This would be a normal procedure to use in rituals preparing for battle but is incomprehensible as a requirement during the battle. The emphasis Saul places on the fast is for the sake of his own vengeance rather than for the sake of consecration to the Lord.

14:31. Micmash to Aijalon. Aijalon (modern Yalo) was a few miles southwest of Beth Horon and about twenty miles west of Micmash. The town was on the edge of the hill country.

14:32-35. eating without draining blood. Sacred literature from Ugarit and Mesopotamia, as well as Israel, identified blood as the life force of any animal. As such in Israelite tradition it belonged to the life-giver, the creator God Yahweh. Therefore the Israelites were prohibited from consuming meat which still contained blood. This sacred fluid had to be drained from the meat and "poured on the ground like water" so that it returned to the earth. In sacrificial contexts the blood was to be poured on the altar (see Lev 17:11-12). The prohibition against eating meat with the "blood still in it" in Leviticus 19:26 is tied to the injunction against participating in any form of divination or sorcery. Thus, rather than a dietary law, this decree involves the practice of draining blood from a sacrificial animal into the ground or a sacred pit, which was designed to attract the spirits of the dead (see 1 Sam 28:7-19) or chthonic deities, and to consult them about the future. Such practices are found in several Hittite ritual texts and in Odysseus's visit to the underworld (*Odyssey* XI, 23-29, 34-43). These practices were condemned (Deut 18:10-11) because they infringed on the idea of Yahweh as an all-powerful God, who was not controlled by fate.

14:33-35. rock as an altar. Having a stone function as an altar was not unprecedented. A stone served as an altar for the sacrifice at Beth Shemesh (6:14). Secular slaughter of animals was permitted as long as the animal's blood was poured out on the ground (Deut 12:15-24).

14:37. no reply by the oracle. It is generally assumed that the Urim and Thummim were being used for oracular inquiries (see next entry) and that for an answer to be affirmed it would have to be repeated a specified number of times.

14:40-43. binary process for determining guilt. Saul arranged a lot-casting ceremony similar to that used to elect him king (10:19-21) and to condemn Achan (Josh 7:16-18). According to a section of text provided by some reliable manuscripts, the decision was made through the use of the Urim and Thummim (see Ex 28:30; Lev 8:8; Deut 33:8), items kept in the priest's ephod. No description of these objects is found in Scripture, although traditions from the Hellenistic and later periods suggest they were markers, whose appearance and presentation when cast like lots would determine God's will (see Num 27:21; 1 Sam 14:37-41; 28:6). The practice of posing yes-no questions to the gods (asking oracles) is known throughout the ancient Near East. Particularly of interest are the Babylonian *tamitu* texts, which preserve the answers to many oracular questions. Positive and negative stones (thought to be bright stones and dark stones) were also used widely in Mesopotamia in a procedure called psephomancy. In one Assyrian text alabaster and hematite are specifically mentioned. The yes-no question would be posed and then a stone shaken out. The same color stone would have to be shaken out three times consecutively for the answer to be confirmed. *Urim* is the Hebrew word for "lights" and therefore would logically be associated with bright or white stones. One recent study has pointed out that hematite, because of its use for weights and seals, was termed the "truth stone" in Sumerian. The Hebrew word *thummim* could have a similar meaning. Hittite KIN-oracles feature a detailed description of the question, concluding with the request that the answer be favorable. Then there is a series of three castings of the lot to determine the answer. In this context a series of yes or no questions were posed, and after this binary inquisition the lot indicated Jonathan as the offender.

14:47-48. Saul's conquests. The narrator's selection has focused on the spiritual failures of Saul, but here he makes it clear that there were many victories. There is no suggestion in the text or evidence from extrabiblical materials to suggest that these victories represented an expansion of Israelite control or territory. Moab, Ammon and Edom are the neighbors to the east and south. Philistines and Amalekites border on the southwest and are the Israelites' archenemies during this period. Zobah is an Aramean state located in the Beqa Valley region of modern Lebanon. It is possible that these battles of Saul's were defensive rather than offensive.

15:1-35

Saul's Amalekite Failure

15:2-8. Amalekites. The Amalekites were a nomadic tribe inhabiting the desert south of Judah in the Negev and Sinai. The biblical writers saw them, like the Edomites, as descended from Esau. They were the traditional enemies of the Israelites, beginning in Exodus 17:8-13, where they attempted to block the Israelites from crossing into West Asia from Egypt. The passage here is the first recorded instance of the Israelites invading Amalekite territory. The Amalekites are not mentioned in any extrabiblical source.

15:3. the ban. The "ban" is sometimes chosen as the English word to represent the concept of total destruction that is commanded here. Just as there were some types of sacrifices that belonged entirely to the Lord while others were shared by priest and offerer, so some plunder was set aside as belonging solely to the Lord. Just as the whole burnt offering was entirely consumed on the altar, so the ban mandated total destruction. Since the warfare was commanded by Yahweh and represented his judgment on Israel's enemies, the Israelites were on a divine mission with Yahweh as their commander. Since it was his war, not theirs, and he was the victor, the spoil belonged to him. Although the divine warrior motif occurs throughout the ancient Near East, the *ḥerem* concept is more limited—the only other occurrence of the term is in the Moabite Mesha inscription, but the idea of total destruction is also in the Hittite material. The best analogy for us to understand *ḥerem* is to think in terms of radiation. A nuclear explosion would destroy many things and irradiate much more. The abhorrence and caution with which we would respond to that which has been irradiated is similar to what is expected of the Israelites regarding things under the ban. If radiation were personified, one could understand that once something was given over to it, it was irredeemable. It was this condition that Saul exposed himself to by not following the instructions for the ban. Although peoples outside the land were exempt from this, God had singled out the Amalekites for destruction because of their acts against God's people (15:2).

15:4. Telaim. Telaim (Telem in Josh 15:24) was a city of uncertain location in the Negev, but not far from Ziph (modern Khirbit ez-Zeifeh), about thirty miles south of Hebron. The city belonged to the tribe of Judah.

15:4. size of army. Saul had only used three thousand men in 1 Samuel 13, and David fought against the Amalekites with only four hundred men. The word translated "thousand" in these passages should be rendered by its alternate meaning, "companies" or "divisions." Rather than a specified number, it has been suggested that each clan supplied a division, with the number varying dependent on the size of the clan. Later in history these companies were standardized as having a thousand, but here there may be as few as ten in a division. Thus two hundred military divisions came from Israel and ten from Judah. The precise numbers of soldiers would not be known.

15:6. Kenites. The Kenites are mentioned in Scripture as having a nonaggressive relationship with Israel. It has been argued that the term *Kenite* is a reference to metalworking and that the Kenites were itinerant smiths. They were usually found on the southeast border of Judah near Edom. Many of the Kenites were linked to Moses (Judg 1:16, 4:11). Some have suggested that they enjoyed a status as ritual specialists.

15:7. Havilah to Shur. The location of Havilah is uncertain but was probably on the western edge of the Arabian Peninsula near modern Medina (see comment on Gen 25:18). Though it is not impossible that Saul chased them all the way to Egypt, other possibilities are allowed in the wording of the text. One is that Saul chased them along that road. A second is that the text is identifying a certain group of Amalekites, those working the trade route from Havilah to Shur.

15:12. king's monument. Ancient Near Eastern kings often commemorated a victory with a commemorative stele. These would typically offer the details of the successful military campaigns and proclaim the suzerainty of the king over the area. One of the most famous is a stele of the Egyptian king Merenptah (c. 1224-1214) commemorating a victory over the Libyans. They tended to glorify (and enhance) the king but additionally were usually intended to elaborate on how the deity had brought victory to his favored one. Saul's monument was at the Judean town of Carmel. Absalom set up a similar monument in the King's Valley (2 Sam 18:18).

15:22. obedience better than sacrifice. In the ancient Near East oracular instructions from the deity typically concerned ritual procedures for the king to perform. If there were instructions to carry out some military activity, it could easily be assumed that the deity would give such a command in order that his or her temple could benefit from the booty that would be taken. As a result, it would be

difficult to separate the ideas of obedience and sacrifice. Obedience to most oracular instructions would inevitably result in sacrifices being offered to the deity. It is easy to understand how Saul would see obedience in terms of sacrifice rather than as an alternative possibility.

15:23. comparison of offenses in ancient Near East context. The Hebrew word that the NIV translates "rebellion" has to do with pressing one's case. It is used to describe the Israelites' contentiousness in the wilderness. Here it represents Saul's attempts to justify and excuse his actions. Samuel compares this to divination. Divination assumed that there was knowledge to be gained about the activities and motives of the gods through the use of various indicators (such as the entrails of sacrificed animals). It professed to be able to identify what would please the deity without specific input from the deity. In the same way Saul was contending that he knew what would be pleasing to deity (despite Yahweh's specific commands). His contentions claimed the same kind of information divination would offer—that he had an inside track on what would please God. The Hebrew word NIV translates "arrogance" is used when someone is trying to force a particular course of action. Samuel appropriately compares this to idolatry (specifically he refers to teraphim; see comment on Gen 31:19) in that the idols were typically used to manipulate and coerce the gods into particular courses of action (see comment on Deut 4:15-18). Food and gifts were presented to the gods so that the gods would be obliged to grant requests or bestow blessings. Samuel is suggesting that that is exactly the activity Saul intends to engage in as he plans to present all of these cattle to the Lord. Saul was attempting to manipulate with gifts in the same way that idol worshipers did.

15:27. Samuel's hem. As the high priest's garments had an elaborately decorated hem (Ex 28:33-34), Samuel's robe would also have had a distinctive fringe or design marking him as a prophet. It may have been specially dyed or contained a special stitching, and it symbolized his power and authority. Its importance for identification is indicated by the fact that a hem impressed on a clay tablet is used to identify a prophet in the Mari texts. A husband divorced his wife by symbolically cutting off the hem of her robe. Grasping the hem of the garment was a common phrase found in Ugaritic, Aramaic and Akkadian (languages related to biblical Hebrew). In Akkadian the phrase was "to seize the hem." Grasping the hem of someone's garment was a gesture of supplication and submission, both in Israel and Mesopotamia. Saul's grasping of Samuel's skirt was a final plea for mercy. This is also the case in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, where Anat seizes the hem of Mot's garment to plead for her brother Baal. Old Babylonian texts evidence the seizing of the hem as a means of forcing a person into a legal confrontation. When the hem ripped, the prophet recognized this as a symbolic act. The tearing of the garment represented the tearing of the kingdom from Saul's hands.

15:33. put Agag to death. The word used here is unique in the Old Testament and is sometimes translated "hacked to pieces." Dismemberment was a common procedure for the execution of high-ranking enemies and is depicted on a relief of the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III.

16:1-12
David's Anointing

16:1-13. succession narrative and Hittite apology. The description of David's rise to the throne of Israel has some similarities with annalistic documents from Hittite Anatolia of the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. The Proclamation of Telepinu is a decree or an edict with a long prologue justifying the king's cause. Telepinu, a usurper, attempted to justify his accession to the throne by recalling events that actually happened generations before the reign of the king he overthrew. Although, like David, he did not claim any hereditary legitimacy, he showed that he belonged to a line of legitimate and successful predecessors whose principles were betrayed by the king whom he removed. A second example, the Apology of Hattusilis, was a document whose purpose was to justify the revolt that brought Hattusilis to the throne. Like Telepinu, he claimed to have taken the throne because of an unworthy predecessor. David's replacement of the unworthy Saul has superficial similarities with these two Hittite kings. The biblical text, however, is anxious to demonstrate that David did not usurp the throne and in fact did nothing to undermine the reign of Saul. He was not involved in any plot but was simply a pawn in the divine plan.

16:1. anointing with olive oil. Anointing a king was common practice in some parts of the ancient Near East. Among the Egyptians and Hittites, anointing was believed to protect a person from the power of netherworld deities. Much of the evidence comes from Hittite sources describing enthronement ceremonies.

There is no evidence of kings being anointed in Mesopotamia. In Egypt the pharaoh was not anointed, but he anointed his officials and his vassals. This anointing established their subordinate relationship to him and indicated his protection of them. In the Amarna texts there is reference to a king of Nuhasse (in modern Syria) being anointed by the pharaoh. This model would fit the idea of David being anointed as a vassal to God. In 2 Samuel 2:4 it is the people who anoint David. This anointing suggests some sort of contractual agreement between David and the people he will govern. In Nuzi, individuals entering a business agreement anoint one another with oil, and in Egypt, oil anointment is used in wedding ceremonies. For information on royal coronations see comment on 11:15. The spices used for anointing purposes were myrrh, cinnamon, cane and cassia (see recipe in Ex 30:23-25). Oil symbolized the gifts of God to the people and the responsibilities now laid on their leaders through this ceremony. In Israelite practice, anointing was a sign of election and often closely related to endowment by the Spirit. Additionally, throughout the ancient world anointing symbolized an advance of a person's legal status. Both concepts of protection and change of status may correlate to the king's anointing, for it would offer him protection on the throne and identify him with the divine realm.

16:4. Bethlehem. The village of Bethlehem was about six miles south of Jerusalem, lying on the border of the fertile region of Beit-Jalah and the dry region of Boaz near the Judean Desert. Bethlehem may be mentioned in a fourteenth-century letter of Abdi-Hepa, king of Jerusalem. He refers to a town called Bet-Ninurta, which some have suggested could be read as Bit-Lahama. There are meager Iron Age (c. 1200-586 B.C.) remains found at Bethlehem, primarily on the lower city.

16:5. sacrifices at local shrines. Before the construction of the temple in Jerusalem, it was acceptable for the Israelites to perform sacrifices at local sanctuaries, which were quite numerous. Though the term is not used here, this may be one of the high places (Hebrew *bamoth),* man-made installations in which cultic acts were performed. Such installations often included cultic furniture, such as a platform or an altar. In later periods the high places were condemned by the prophets.

16:7. deity searching the heart. It was a common understanding that the gods were not limited to what could be observed on the outside but were capable of deeper insight. In an intriguing Sumerian lament the moon god is portrayed as one who searches the bowels and the hearts of an anointed one who stands before him in supplication. In a Neo-Babylonian text, Shamash (the god of justice) is said to see into the heart of man.

16:10-11. eighth son. The motif of the youngest, eighth son as a hero is seen as early as the Sumerian epic called Lugalbanda in Khurrumkhurra (mid-third millennium), where Lugalbanda is the eighth son who joins his seven older brothers on an escapade to conquer the city of Aratta. Through a series of adventures he emerges the hero.

16:13-23
David at the Palace

16:13-14. role of the Spirit of the Lord. In the Judges period the Spirit of the Lord endowed an individual with central authority that only the Lord possessed (see comment on Judg 6:34-35). The Spirit of the Lord came on Saul in very similar circumstances (see comment on 11:6) and also associated him with prophetic activity (see 10:6). The role of the king represented a more permanent central authority and likewise relied on empowerment by the Lord. The king was an agent of deity and a heavenly functionary just as judges and prophets were. The Spirit did not empower two individuals for the same task at the same time. When David received the authorization for the role as representative, it was taken away from Saul. Just as the Spirit was able to give the positive attributes of courage, charisma, insight, wisdom and confidence, negative results could also be produced by spiritual influence. These would include fear, paranoia, indecisiveness, suspicion and shortsightedness. The term used to describe this spiritual influence in verse 14 does not necessarily suggest something morally evil but has a wide range of negative manifestations (see for instance Judg 9:23; Is 4:4; 37:7; 61:3). Just as God can punish with physical illness, he can discipline by means of psychological affliction. In Mesopotamia the king was seen as being endowed with the *melammu* of the gods (the visible representation of the glory of deity). It designated him as the divine representative and indicated that his legitimacy was approved by the gods. In Assyrian inscriptions it is pictured hovering over the king. The *melammu* could be revoked if the king proved unworthy or incompetent. So in the epilogue to Hammurabi's Laws the king utters a curse on anyone who does not heed the words of the law. If it is a future king, Hammurabi says, "May Anu revoke his *melammu,* break his

scepter and curse his destiny."

16:16-18. court musicians. Court musicians, both male and female, are attested at many royal courts throughout the ancient Near East. They are attested in texts (including, for instance, Uruk and Mari) in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, Hittite Anatolia and Egypt. Additionally, musicians are frequently portrayed in Egyptian tomb paintings. Musicians were usually retained for the ruler's entertainment or for cultic ceremonies. They were included among permanent palace personnel, as ration lists demonstrate.

16:16. harp. The musical instrument here is more precisely a lyre, a stringed instrument. It usually had two arms rising up from the sound box. The strings were attached to the crossbar at the top of the instrument. Examples of lyres have been found at Canaanite Megiddo.

16:20. gifts sent with David. One can assume that David's father Jesse was honored by the drafting of his son into royal service and thus sent gifts. Bread and wine are occasionally mentioned as gifts in the Old Testament. The precise purpose for gifts in this passage is unknown. However, without any formal taxation, David's family may have made a donation to the royal kitchen, since David himself was part of the king's house. There are many examples of subordinates in the Neo-Assyrian period bringing gifts of food to the Assyrian monarch.

17:1-58
David and Goliath

17:1. Philistines. The group of Philistines that are known through the narratives of 1 and 2 Samuel came into the Palestine area with the migration from the Aegean region of the Sea Peoples about 1200 B.C. It is the Sea Peoples that are generally thought to have been responsible for the fall of the Hittite Empire and the destruction of many cities along the coast of Syria and Palestine, such as Ugarit, Tyre, Sidon, Megiddo and Ashkelon, though the evidence for their involvement in those areas is circumstantial. Their battles with the Egyptian pharaoh Rameses III are depicted on the famous wall paintings at Medinet Habu. This international upheaval is also reflected in the Homeric epic of the siege of Troy. Coming from Crete, Greece and Anatolia, the Sea Peoples may have used Cyprus as a base from which to launch their attacks. Following the repulsion of the Sea Peoples from Egypt, the tribe that came to be known as the Philistines settled on the southern coast of Palestine, where they established their five capital cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron (Tell Miqne), Gath (Tell es-Safi) and Gaza. They had overrun Israelite territory in the battle in which the ark was taken (1 Sam 4) and again will do so in the battle in which Saul and his sons are killed (chap. 31). During the reign of Saul there is continual conflict as Saul tries to rid the land of their presence and prevent further incursions.

17:1. location of Philistine camp. Socoh (modern Khirbet Abbad) was a town in the Shephelah Valley about fourteen miles west of Bethlehem near Philistine territory. The site has been surveyed and has produced ceramic remains dated to this time period. Azekah (modern Tell ez-Zakariyeh) was a fortress three miles northwest of Socoh, which controlled the main road across the Elah Valley. The site was excavated earlier this century, uncovering a rectangular fortress with four towers that was dated to this period. This area was of strategic importance to both sides as the main pass between the Philistine plain and the Judean hills. The main road through the Shephelah region heads north from Lachish to Azekah, but about a mile south of Azekah a road goes east following the Wadi es-Sant that opens into the Elah Valley. Ephes-Dammim has not been positively identified but would logically be looked for in this area.

17:2. Israelite camp. The Valley of Elah ("Terebinth") was the broad north-south plain that had an opening where the Wadi es-Sant started its rise into the hill country of Judah, about two miles east of Socoh.

17:4. Gath. Gath has been tentatively identified as Tell es-Safi, five miles south of Tell Miqne/Ekron. Of the five major cities of the Philistines it was the closest to Judah. There has been little excavation at the site, though it has been confirmed that there are Iron Age remains. The city was located about five miles west of Azekah by the Wadi es-Sant that opens up into the Elah Valley.

17:4. Goliath's size. Goliath's height is given in the text as about nine and a half feet. It is suspected that he is of the same stock as the Anakim, the giant inhabitants of the land that the Israelite armies were able to defeat in the conquest. The descendants of Anak are generally considered "giants," though the description "gigantic" may be a more appropriate line of thinking. Champions of this size are not simply a figment of Israelite imagination or the result of embellished legends. The Egyptian letter on Papyrus Anastasi I (thirteenth century B.C.) describes fierce warriors in Canaan who are seven to nine feet tall.

17:5-7. Goliath's armor. Goliath's helmet was likely the typical Philistine feathered headdress known from Palestinian and Egyptian art. His body armor ("plaited cuirass") was probably of a well-known Egyptian style of bronze scale armor that covered the entire body, weighing over 125 pounds. One of the best descriptions of scale armor comes from the Nuzi texts, where a mail coat was comprised of anywhere from seven hundred to over one thousand scales of varying sizes. These scales were sewn onto a jerkin of leather or cloth. The front and back were sewn together at the shoulders (with a space for the head) and probably reached to the knees. His greaves were probably made of molded bronze around the entire calf, padded inside with leather, a type known from Mycenaean Greece. His scimitar (NIV: bronze javelin) was probably a heavy, curved, flat sword with a cutting edge on the outer side of the blade (see comment on Josh 8:18). His spear was something like a javelin, with an iron spear point that weighed over fifteen pounds. It may have been equipped with a ring for slinging, a type known both in contemporary Greece and Egypt. Although most of the weapons were made of bronze, the spear point was made of iron. Goliath's shield was most likely a standing shield, which would have been larger that a round shield.

17:8-10. champion warfare. At times individual combat was used, with the individuals viewed as representatives of their respective armies, so that the divine will could be expressed. Examples of individual combat are known in Egypt on the Beni Hasan wall painting (early second millennium) and in the Egyptian Tale of Sinuhe. It is likewise depicted on a Canaanite vase from the first half of the second millennium. Nearer in time, parallels can be found in the *Iliad* (Hector against Ajax, Paris against Menelaus) and the Hittite Apology of Hattusilis III. A relief from the tenth century found at Tell Halaf depicts two combatants grabbing at one another's heads and thrusting with short swords.

17:11. role of king. The text undoubtedly wants to display Saul's incompetence. The people had sought a king to lead their armies into battle. It was not odd, however, for a king to send out a champion rather than going himself. Even in the event that the king was a great warrior, others would be given the opportunity to prove their skills first. In some senses it would resemble all of the preliminary bouts that precede the "main event" in boxing. As early as the Sumerian epic Gilgamesh and Aka, the practice is seen of the real champion holding back while he sends a capable fighter under his command to engage the enemy. This is also evident in the *Iliad*, where Patroclus dons the armor of Achilles in order to go out and challenge Hector. Nevertheless, given the amount of time that had gone by, Saul should by now have been willing to take up the challenge himself.

17:12. Ephrathite. The Ephrathites were probably a tribal subdivision of the Calebites from the Bethlehem region. Bethlehem was a village within the larger Ephrathah clan, and later the clan became synonymous with the village itself.

17:12. Bethlehem. See comment on 16:4.

17:17-18. food supplies. David came to the camp with about half a bushel of roasted grain (either wheat or barley), loaves of bread and cuts of cheese, all of which were favorites for common people. The grain would typically be fashioned into loaves for consumption, and some would likely be made into beer. In Egyptian texts ten loaves of bread, a half a pound of barley and a jug of beer represented a standard daily wage. The Assyrian annals describe soldiers traveling with grain and straw for their horses. Local governors in Assyria were required to open granaries for armies that were traveling through the region. Since the army is in the vicinity of the Judean hills, it is likely that the people from the area were expected to provide supplies.

17:18. what David is getting from them. David was told to ask how his brothers were doing and to "pick up their assurance." This was likely some sort of token returned with David to confirm that the goods had been provided. This would be proof that Jesse had met his obligations to supply the army and would be the brothers' way of collecting their rations. An Akkadian (a language from Mesopotamia related to Hebrew) pledge was often a cased clay tablet sent with a messenger.

17:19. distance between Bethlehem and Elah. Bethlehem was about fifteen miles from the Valley of Elah, which took most of the day for David to walk.

17:25. reward for killing Goliath. Ancient kings were often interested in procuring the allegiance of those who had demonstrated military prowess. Marriage agreements in the ancient Near East would often function as political or social alliances between families and thus benefit both parties. Thus the champion's family would receive important recognition from being connected to the crown, while the

king would be allied to the renowned hero who had killed Goliath. The Hebrew says nothing about taxes, only that his father's house will be free in Israel. Some have compared the Hebrew word to its Akkadian cognate, which sometimes designates a social class. This then would probably describe a family that had become clients of the crown, supported by allocations of plots of land and supplies, which is implied in 1 Samuel 22:7. This type of client class is well known from Mari texts, the Code of Hammurabi and the Laws of Eshnunna. In these texts, individuals received land grants from the crown, likely based upon service rendered to the king. Perhaps more likely is the comparison to another term in Ugaritic texts that refers to a reward for an act of bravery. It exempts the recipient from mandatory service to palace.

17:36. lions and bears around Bethlehem. Recent excavations in Palestine have uncovered both the lion and the bear in Iron Age levels (early first millennium B.C.). Bears were typically found in the hilly wooded areas of the central hill country, where caves and forests provided their habitat. Similarly the lion would have made its home in the central hills, which were more heavily forested during this period. Although evidence for the lion is lacking in the modern era, the bear survived in the region until early this century. In this region in antiquity the lion was found in Greece, Turkey (Anatolia), the Near East, Iran and India, while there was a Syrian form of the widespread brown bear.

17:37. expectation of divine intervention. The idea that God fought as a partner in battle was a common theme in the ancient Near East. Victories were attributed to deities in both Egypt and Mesopotamia. In fact the encounter was initiated by the deity itself, who then fought alongside the monarch (see comment on 4:3-7). In Egypt regiments were named after the god under whose standard they fought. In Canaan the divine warrior was identified as one who devastated nature. However, it was recognized by these societies that the gods also participated through the use of individual agents who had been commissioned to do the god's bidding in battle. This aspect is seen clearly in contemporary Greek literature as the various gods aid and protect their favorites in the *Iliad*.

17:38-39. Saul's armor. The use of protective armor (shields, helmets, coats and greaves) is attested in Egypt and Mesopotamia by the early third millennium B.C. Though rarely found in archaeological contexts, even early portrayal of soldiers depict them wearing heavy armor (for example on reliefs from the Sumerian city of Lagash and from murals from Hierakonopolis in Pre-Dynastic Egypt). The palace of the Assyrian king Sennacherib (seventh century B.C.) exhibits numerous wall reliefs portraying Assyrian military dress and tactics. The king's tunic and armor would have been very distinctive. If David went out dressed in them, many would have thought that the king himself was going out. Perhaps such a misidentification would have seemed attractive to Saul, who had been sought out by the Israelites to lead them forth in battle. In the *Iliad* a similar switch occurred when Patroclus went out in the armor of Achilles, hoping to intimidate the Trojans. David's refusal would have reflected his recognition that without being trained on how to use the armor and weapons to his advantage, they would become a detriment.

17:40. sling. Although described simply as a shepherd's weapon here, the sling was also used in organized warfare, and Goliath would have been well aware of its deadly potential. Assyrian slingers are depicted on the walls of Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh. In the Babylonian Wisdom composition entitled *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi* the sufferer reports his deliverance by a variety of metaphors, one of which claims that Marduk took away his enemy's sling and turned aside his sling stone. Assyrian sling balls were found at Lachish, an Iron Age Judean fortress town. These were the size of a human fist (two to three inches in diameter) and had been used for the successful Assyrian siege of Lachish in 701 B.C. (possibly also by the Babylonians in their siege of Lachish in 587 B.C.). The Benjaminites were known to be deadly accurate with their slings (Judg 20:16), and it is estimated that a skilled slinger could hurl the rocks at more than one hundred miles per hour. The effective range would probably not exceed one hundred yards. The stone was held in a leather pouch with cords attached at opposite ends. The sling was whirled over the head until the person let go of one of the ends.

17:43-47. prebattle insults. Goliath's insults and curses against David and his God reflect a common rhetoric in these types of confrontations that is found throughout the Near East and eastern Mediterranean. Insulting bravado was intended to demoralize and intimidate the opponent. The curses that were included were not merely empty words but were presumably backed by the person's deity. Sennacherib's representatives at the gates of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. extolled the greatness of the gods of Assyria and ridiculed the God of

Judah as incapable of defending his city (2 Kings 18:17-36). In the Gilgamesh Epic the guardian of the cedar forest, Huwawa, tells Gilgamesh that he should have given his flesh to be eaten by birds of prey and scavengers.

17:43. names of Goliath's gods. Although Goliath's gods are not named, one of the primary deities of the Philistines mentioned in the Bible is Dagon, the patron deity of many West Semitic peoples from the Middle Euphrates region to the Mediterranean coast. Temples to Dagon have been found at the Philistine sites of Gaza and Ashdod. They also worshiped Baal-Zebub, whose temple has been found at Ekron, and the goddess Ashtoreth, who had a temple at Beth Shan (1 Sam 31:8-13). Archaeology, however, has also shown that the Philistines had cultic and architectural connections with the Aegean. Schematic representations of female deities similar to those found in the Aegean have been found at Ashdod, Ekron and Tell Qasile. Cultic vessels showing Aegean influence have also been found.

17:45-47. foundation of David's boast. David's claim would have been acknowledged within the broad theological framework of the ancient world. There are two concepts in tension here. The first is that the stronger, better-equipped warrior is a more effective agent for the gods who are battling. This would be the basis for Goliath's presumed superiority. David is simply following the logic to its inevitable end to arrive at the second concept. If the gods are, in actuality, doing battle with one another through the human agents, then the strength and weapons of the human combatants are irrelevant. Thus Yahweh is described as Yahweh of Hosts, paraphrased with a military description, "the God of the battle ranks of Israel" (author's translation), and David's boast is based on Yahweh's abilities, not his own. This claim would perhaps be psychologically sufficient to undermine Goliath's confidence. Similarly in the *Iliad* Hector acknowledges the superiority of Achilles but suggests that the gods may be on his side and allow him to kill Achilles. In another example, when Hector and Telamonian Aias have fought to a draw, Hector suggests they desist until another day, when the gods will have decided which should win.

17:49. David's shot. The text offers no information concerning the range between David and Goliath when David took his shot. A stone from a slingshot is capable of delivering a killing blow but only when striking a few strategic areas of the head (which was protected). David's shot targeted one of the few vulnerable areas that could render his opponent unconscious. This allowed him to approach and secure Goliath's sword, which he then used to kill his unconscious victim (despite the NIV's implication that the shot killed Goliath).

17:51. cutting off the enemy's head. Killing the enemy with his own weapon was not an unprecedented feat. Similarly, Benaiah took the Egyptian's spear out of his hand and killed him (2 Sam 23:30). In Egyptian literature, Sinuhe killed a soldier from Retenu with his own battle-axe. It can be assumed that Goliath's head was a trophy that was to be put on display. Assyrian king Ashurbanibal was reported to have dined with his queen in the garden with the head of the king of Elam on display in a nearby tree.

17:52. Gath, Ekron and Shaarim. Ekron, like Gath, was one of the five major Philistine cities. It was about five miles north of Gath. Shaarim was a city (and also the name of a highway) near Socoh and Azekah (see Josh 15:36). It is probably the modern site of Khirbit esh-Sharia, which is about one mile northeast of Azekah. Thus Shaarim was about six miles east of Gath and seven miles southeast of Ekron. The road from Shaarim went west and could be taken to either Gath or Ekron.

17:58. extrabiblical information on David. David as an individual is not mentioned by any ancient Israelite inscription, by any source outside of Israel or by evidence of any contemporary material remains at Jerusalem. However, a recent fragment of a ninth-century B.C. Aramaic inscription from Tel Dan has the phrase "House of David," denoting the royal house of the kingdom of Judah, the successor state to the united kingdom of Israel. Thus there is extrabiblical evidence from an enemy state that the Judahites understood their dynastic house to have been derived from a certain David, who most certainly was the famous David of the Bible.

18:1-30
David in Saul's Family and Court

18:4. Jonathan's gift to David. The word for the robe that Jonathan gave to David often denotes a royal robe. Ugaritic texts refer to a special robe worn by the crown prince. If Israel had the same custom, Jonathan would be renouncing his claim to the throne by giving David that robe. He also gave to him his daily warrior's garment and bow. The Israelite sword was carried in a sheath that hung from a belt. The bow was probably made of animal horn and sinews bonded with strips of wood. Jonathan's gifts to David may very well repre-

sent his willingness to give up and transfer his particular position as heir apparent to the throne of Israel. He thus was expressing loyalty and possibly submission to David.

18:5. David's office. The group of armed men over which David is given control here is the standing army made up of the professional military men. It is possible that this is not a field post but more of an administrative position ("secretary of the army"). The position is to be contrasted with the post given to David in 1 Samuel 18:13, which suggests a field command with active duty.

18:6-7. comparison between Saul and David. The comparison of Saul slaying "his thousands" and David "his tens of thousands" is a standard way of expressing a very large number in parallel lines of poetry. The same parallelism can be found in Psalm 91:7, where God protects an individual from a plague, and even in poetry from Ugarit, where the craftsman god, Kothar-wa-Hasis, is described as crafting silver by the thousands and gold by the ten thousands. The intention of these words is to convey large numbers, not to offer a comparison of one being greater than the other. In some cases the greater honor was placed in the last position, but Saul could have been angered simply because David was mentioned in the same breath as himself, thus placing him in the same rank as the king.

18:10. harp. See comments on 10:5 and 16:16.

18:10. spear. Saul's spear appears to have been a sign of his kingship, somewhat like a scepter (also see 22:6; 26:7). Saul stood with spear in hand with his troops in 22:6, in much the same way as the Egyptian monarch is artistically depicted with a scepter. The Assyrian kings were often depicted with weapons in their hands, which were occasionally spears. The spear was not designed to be thrown like the shorter javelins but was usually a thrusting weapon used by the infantry. Nonetheless the *Iliad* portrays mighty warriors hurling heavy spears effectively at their opponents.

18:13. David's office. David is said to be given rule over "one thousand," but the term probably refers to the military division supplied by a clan, with the number varying dependent on the size of the clan. Later in history these companies were standardized as having a thousand, but early on there may have been as few as ten in a division. Apparently Israel's army was divided into these "clans" (Num 31:5; Josh 22:21, 30; Judg 5:8). The army was further divided into "hundreds" (1 Sam 22:7) and even fifties (see comment on 1 Sam 8:12). David is now being put on active duty with a field command.

18:17. marrying the daughter of a king. Marrying the eldest daughter of the king would give David the title of "king's son-in-law," raising his status immensely. In some societies this would have been a potential stepping-stone to the throne, but no such practice is evidenced in Israel. David recognized that his family did not have the same social status as Saul. Saul would have been anxious to procure the loyalty and support of such a noteworthy warrior (see comment on 17:25). Thus David's lower social status was not considered a barrier to his marrying into Saul's family.

18:25. bride price. The bride price was a sum of money paid by the fiancé to the girl's parents (see comments on Gen 29:21-24; Ex 22:16-17; Deut 22:23, 25; 22:29) and typically provided for the wife ahead of time in case the husband deserted her or died. Such provision would not have been necessary for someone in the royal household, but the amount of the bride price would have reflected the status of the bride. David would not have had the means to enter into a royal marriage. However, the price appears to have been set by the father (see Gen 34:12), and thus Saul attached the bride price to the military prowess of the husband-to-be rather than to financial resources. It was not unusual in the ancient Near East for casualty counts to be kept by cutting off some body part: usually hands (see comment on Judg 8:6) or heads (2 Kings 10:6-8 and the practice of making piles of heads by Assyrian king Sargon II). The request for foreskins would have proven that the victims were Philistines, because many of the other neighbors of Israel would have practiced circumcision.

19:1-24
Saul's Pursuit of David

19:13. teraphim. The term *teraphim* refers to a household idol or idols that appear to have had a role in divination (Ezek 21:21; Zech 10:2) and were associated with luck and prosperity of the family. They were explicitly condemned by the biblical authors (Ex 15:23; 2 Kings 23:24). The narrator in Genesis 31 referred to Laban's gods as teraphim. The fact that Rachel was able to hide them under a saddle (Gen 31:19) suggests that some were quite small, though from this passage, it appears that David and Michal's teraphim were of human size and shape. Many of these small figurines have been found in Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine. They were a part of the "popular" or local religion, not associated with temples or national cults for the major deities. One recent study has suggested they were figurines of the

ancestors, but others see them more generally related to the family's patron deity.

19:18. Ramah. In his desire for safety, David moved only two miles east of Gibeah/Geba to Ramah, which was Samuel's hometown.

19:18-24. Naioth. The term Naioth is associated with Ramah and is used only here in this context. It is probably not a proper noun but a generic word for camps. In the Mari texts the Akkadian word related to this Hebrew term is used to describe the encampments of mobile shepherding communities on the outskirts of town. It is possible that Israelite prophetic groups may have occupied shepherd's residences or simply formed a similar type of camp outside Ramah.

19:20. entranced prophesying. One could be trained for the profession of prophet (or seer), and there was a prophetic guild in this early period of Israel's history, usually identified as the "sons of the prophets." Typically these prophets would use various procedures in order to prepare themselves for receiving prophetic oracles. Music played an important role in inducing a trancelike state (ecstasy) that was seen as making one receptive to a divine message. In the Mari texts there is an entire class of temple personnel who were ecstatics and who often provided prophetic messages. This ecstatic prophecy, or prophecy that appears to proceed from someone in a "possessed" or trancelike state, was conducted in Mesopotamia through a functionary labeled a *muhhu.* In Israel the phenomenon often resulted in the prophets being thought of as madmen (see for example 19:19-24; Jer 29:26). Here it is not resulting in prophetic messages from the Lord but serves as a sign of the power of God on the messengers. In that sense it could be compared to the tongues of fire in the upper room in Acts 2.

19:22. well at Secu. Secu denotes a bare height and is not to be taken as a proper noun, because it has a definite article (not usual for proper nouns). There are more than half a dozen wells or springs along the two-mile road from Gibeah to Ramah.

19:24. Saul's "nakedness." Even Saul was "infected" by God's Spirit and became possessed (had an ecstatic experience) resulting in stripping off his garments. This is yet another case of Saul being overcome by the Spirit in various ways (cf. 10:10; 11:6; 16:14). The term "nakedness" can denote the removal of the outer garment, not entire nakedness, and that is probably what is involved here. He not only shamed himself in front of Samuel but also laid aside his kingly regalia, confirming his rejection as king.

20:1-42
Jonathan Helps David

20:5. New Moon festival. Keyed to its use of a lunar calendar, ancient Israel marked the first day of the month, with its "new moon" phase, as a festival day (every twenty-nine or thirty days). As on the Sabbath all work was to cease (see Amos 8:5), and there were sacrifices to be made (Num 28:11-15). In the monarchy period the king became a prominent figure in these celebrations (see Ezek 45:17), and this may explain the political importance of Saul's feast. The festival continued to be observed in the postexilic period as well (Ezra 3:5; Neh 10:33). New Moon festivals were also prominent in Mesopotamia from late in the third millennium down to the Neo-Babylonian period in the middle of the first millennium B.C.

20:6. annual family sacrifice. The tradition of an annual family sacrifice had also been reflected in the family of Hannah and Elkanah (see comment on 1:3). This was separate from the agricultural festivals and pilgrimages (2 Chron 8:13). In David's time this meant an ingathering of the family at the clan site, Bethlehem. Since it represented a higher level of obligation and familial loyalty, the annual sacrifice could easily serve as a valid excuse for David to absent himself from Saul's monthly celebration of the new moon.

20:26. ceremonial uncleanness. Saul considers David's absence to be likely due to ritual impurity. No one could participate in cultic activity, like the New Moon festival, when in a state of uncleanness. This could occur in a variety of ways: contact with bodily discharges such as semen or blood; contact with the dead or the diseased; and contact with an object that has come in contact with something that is unclean (see the laws of impurity and the methods for ritual cleansing in Lev 11—15). Bathing, a waiting period, sacrifices and examination by a priest were the principal means of purification.

21:1-9
David's Flight Through Nob

21:1. Nob. Although its exact location is unknown, Nob is generally believed to lie just north of the city of Jerusalem. Possible locations include Ras el-Mesharif on the slope of Mount Scopus and Qu'meh (see Is 10:32). In David's time it served as the sanctuary site and was served by Aaron's descendants. Presumably it had been moved from Shiloh after the death of Eli and his sons (see 1 Sam 4:10-22).

21:4-6. bread from the table. Twelve loaves of freshly baked bread were placed on the table of the Presence to symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel (see Ex 25:23-30). They were replaced by new loaves each Sabbath, and the old loaves were to be consumed by the priests (see Lev 24:5-9). In this case, due to the need for supplies and David's assurance that his men were ritually clean, Ahimelech had the jurisdiction to allow for a variance.

21:5. purity of men. Since the "consecrated bread" was reserved for priestly consumption, David had to swear that his men were ritually pure before the priests would give him the loaves. Sexual intercourse or contact with women who were menstruating were among the ways that a man could become "unclean" (Lev 15:32-33).

21:7. chief shepherd. Doeg the Edomite is probably a mercenary in the employ of Saul. Many translations allow a slight emendation, rendering "runner" for this word. This would fit well with his function as a royal messenger or spy, whose job was to carry instructions throughout the kingdom and report unusual happenings like David's visit to Nob. A similar use for royal messengers is found in the Mari texts. Nevertheless, chief of shepherds is a common administrative designation, used, for instance, in the titles of the scribe who copied the Ugaritic Myth of Baal and Mot.

21:7. reason for Doeg's presence. Doeg is said to be detained "before the LORD" at Nob. It is possible that he is awaiting a reply to a question sent by the king or a personal oracle. If he is a messenger, the former seems most likely. If he is a herdsman, then he may have delivered a consignment of animals for sacrifice or be giving an account to the officials at Nob of his activities.

21:9. behind the ephod. The ephod, as described in Exodus 28:6-14, was a garment worn by the high priest. In the ancient Near East the ephod was one of the garments used to clothe the image of the deity. Since no image is mentioned here, another alternative is that it hung on a stand of some sort (also a possible explanation of Gideon's ephod in Judg 8:24-27). With the ark still out of the picture, the ephod may have become the holiest relic of the sanctuary. Captured articles of power such as Goliath's sword would therefore be kept there (just as the ark had been put in the temple of Dagon, see comment on 5:2).

21:10-15
David and Achish

21:10. Achish. This King Achish is not referred to in any extrabiblical sources, but the name Achish is attested as a Philistine royal name at a later date. Assyrian records of the seventh century list Ikausu, son of Padi, as the king of Ekron. Ikausu is the same as Achish, son of Padi, named on an inscription from the same period found at Ekron (Tell Miqne).

21:10. why would David go to Gath? Though over twenty miles from Nob, Gath was the closest of the major Philistine cities to Judah. It was most likely David's intention to offer his services as a mercenary to the Philistines. It could be anticipated that they would welcome a proven military man of David's reputation and the opportunity to have this renowned warrior fighting with them instead of against them. Additionally, David's allegiance might eventually give them the chance to launch a strike against Saul and depose him, putting David on the throne of Israel as their puppet. All of this would have argued for the Philistines welcoming David with open arms, but factors were at work for which he had not calculated.

21:11. song. David's notoriety as a mighty warrior and enemy of the Philistines is recalled by Achish's advisers. They quote the chant first mentioned in 1 Samuel 18:7 to warn their lord not to trust him. Its lauding of David has taken on the status of national anthem and neutralizes any positive potential David might have hoped for the Philistines to imagine.

21:13-15. feigned insanity. David was sharp enough to recognize that his negative status as an enemy warrior was obscuring his potential status as a mercenary, ally and potential puppet ruler. Thus he shrewdly reclassified himself by changing his behavior and acting insane. Though David's reputation was well-known, very few Philistines would have ever got a close enough look at David to identify him by appearance. The only evidence they have that he is the famous David is his own self-identification. By acting insane, he discredits that identification. Now he is just a madman claiming to be a famous person. In the ancient Near East, insanity was often identified with possession by a god. A sign of this is that the Hebrew word used here for David's actions, *shaga'*, appears in 2 Kings 9:11, Hosea 9:7 and Jeremiah 29:26 for ecstatic (i.e., "mad") behavior by prophets. These people, while accepted as signs of the presence and sometimes as the messengers of the gods, were not sought after. They must be allowed to live, which is what David was counting on here, but they were also excluded, when possible, from polite society.

22:1-5
David Gathers a Band

22:1. cave of Adullam. This site in the Shephelah (possibly Tell esh-Sheikh Madhkur, five miles south of Beth Shemesh and ten miles southeast of Gath) served as a rallying point and stronghold for David and his men during his period as an outlaw (see 2 Sam 23:13 for its association with David's exploits involving his thirty "mighty men"). It seems to lie in a sort of "no man's land" between Philistine and Israelite territory.

22:1-2. David's band. Like other political and social dissidents before him (see Jephthah's band of adventurers in Judg 11:3), David assembled a group of four hundred men during his outlaw period. This included some family members (since otherwise Saul would probably have imprisoned or killed them because of their association with David), but the majority of his band was probably made up of social outcasts (known in ancient Near Eastern literature as *habiru),* mercenaries and men who saw an opportunity to overthrow Saul. Their bitterness and discontent made them rally to David as their champion.

22:3. Mizpah in Moab. The exact location of this Mizpah ("watchtower") is unknown. Presumably it was a royal Moabite city or at least a fortress. Among the suggested sites are Kerak and Rujm el-Meshrefeh in Jordan.

22:3-4. why protection in Moab. Perhaps because of his Moabite ancestry through Ruth, David felt he could claim kin ties and safely place his parents in the protective custody of the king of Moab (see Ruth 4:17-22). It is also possible that David was counting on Moab's enmity toward Saul (see 1 Sam 14:47). An example of revolutionary fugitives seeking refuge in a mother's country can be seen in Idrimi, king of Alalakh (during the Judges perid), who fled to his mother's family at Emar. Idrimi in exile became the leader of a Habiru band that eventually helped him regain his throne.

22:4. the stronghold. This most likely refers to David's base of operations near the cave of Adullam (see 1 Sam 22:1). Some have suggested that it is a reference to Masada.

22:5. Gad. This is the first appearance of this Israelite prophet or seer. His advice to David to return to Judah and thus face up to Saul provided the type of divine backing David needed to begin his pursuit of the throne. See his involvement with David's census in 2 Samuel 24:11-25.

22:5. forest of Hereth. The exact location of this forested area is unknown, although it must have been in Judah. Suggestions include the site of Khirbet Khoreisa (approximately six miles southeast of Hebron) and Kharas, near Keilah (Khirbet Qila, about six miles northwest of Hebron).

22:6-23
Execution of the Priests

22:6. tamarisk tree at Gibeah. Once again a ruler is depicted as holding court under a tree (see Saul previously in 14:2 and the Ugaritic king Danil in the Aqhat epic). A tamarisk is a tree adapted to desert environments, with many slender branches and scaly leaves. It would be a rare site in the hill country near Gibeah. In this case it may also have marked a cultic site (see the sacred palm under which Deborah served as judge in Judg 4:5).

22:7. prerogatives of officers. One of the ways in which a king, chief or warlord maintained the loyalty and support of his military commanders was through the granting of land (a fief) and the right to its harvests and other resources (see 8:12-15). For instance, Hammurabi's laws and the Mari texts both describe the rights of fief holders and the obligations to the state. Thus Saul is reminding his officers here that their claims to these lands are based on his favor toward them. If they hoped to keep them, they should not consider giving their allegiance to David. Nor should they trust in David's ability to keep any promises of land grants and military commissions to his followers.

22:10. inquiring of God. Among the tasks assigned to the high priests in the ancient Near East was to seek an oracle from deity when requested. Babylonian and Assyrian religious texts mention the examination of animal entrails, the consulting of omen texts or the use of an object associated with the god to divine the future. This might have been done at Nob using the Urim and Thummim (see Ex 28:30) or the ephod (see Abiathar's use of the ephod in 1 Sam 23:5, 9). The giving of an oracle is not mentioned in 21:1-9, but Ahimelech admits that he "inquired of God" for David in 22:15.

22:14. David's office. Since kings seldom paid state visits to each other's capitals, messengers, functioning as royal envoys, served as royal surrogates. This role required them to function as diplomatic couriers, negotiators and occasionally as emissaries to the gods. Embodying as they did the authority and power of their state, kings' messengers were generally treated well by local officials. Their persons were protected, as well as their personal property. Ahimelech recites David's

marks of distinction as his defense for aiding him, including his status as a member of the royal family and commander of the king's bodyguard. Only the most trustworthy and loyal men could be expected to rise to these offices (see 18:27; 2 Sam 23:22-23). Thus as a sign of courtesy, extended to couriers, David was provided with food. Texts from Mari and other Mesopotamian cities list food, garments and other necessities given to royal emissaries to meet their needs on the road and to please their master.

22:16-19. destruction of priesthood by angry king. Saul's order to kill Ahimelech and the entire priestly community at Nob was so outrageous a sacrilege that his own officers refused. Only the Edomite mercenary Doeg was willing to carry out the order and in so doing also massacred the entire population of Nob. Saul's order gave a further sign of his instability and, as he was to discover (28:6), effectively cut him off from any contact with Yahweh. Charges of offenses against deity were often made against kings by their political enemies. Thus the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta charged Kashtiliash with "crimes against Shamash," and the Persian king Cyrus claimed to have been chosen by Marduk to punish Nabonidus for failing to honor the god or his priesthood. Akhenaten, the rogue Egyptian pharaoh of the fourteenth century, had disenfranchised the powerful priests of the god Amun-Re and had scratched out the name Amun in all inscriptions. Thus Saul's action would be seen as just as significant an act of desecration.

22:20-23. Abiathar. Only a single priest escaped the massacre at Nob. Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, fled to David's camp, bringing with him the sacred ephod (23:6). Once Abiathar had told him what Saul had done, David accepted responsibility and added the priest to his company. This event is the crux of the episode, since it placed in David's camp a divine representative, while Saul was left with no further contact point with God. Subsequently Abiathar was to consult the ephod for David (1 Sam 23:9-12) and serve as the visible symbol of God's presence with the outlaw band. Additionally this episode shows the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning Eli's family (1 Sam 2—3) in that this priestly clan was the family of Eli.

23:1-29
David Pursued and Rescued

23:1. Keilah. Located in the eastern portion of the Shephelah, near the border of Philistine territory, Keilah (Khirbet Qila, six miles northwest of Hebron) must have been a frequent target of raiders. It was also mentioned in the El Amarna tablets as a city contested between the rulers of Jerusalem and Hebron.

23:1-5. Philistines. For the Philistines as a part of the population of Canaan and as enemies of Israel, see comment on 4:1.

23:9-12. oracular use of ephod. For a discussion of the use of the ephod for purposes of divination, see comment on Judges 8:24-27. Abiathar's ability to make oracular inquiries for David stands in stark contrast to Saul's lack of divine guidance.

23:7. walled city. Keilah is identified as a walled city with gates that could be barred. As an important link on the roads north-south through the Shephelah and east into Judah, the city would have to be fortified against attack. Note that it was the unprotected threshing floors, which would have been outside the city walls, that the Philistines attacked in 23:1. Saul saw David as trapped within these walls, assuming he would be easier to capture here than in the open countryside. The site has not been excavated, so archaeology has little light to shed on the text.

23:14. strongholds in the wilderness of Ziph. The site of Tell Ziph is located thirteen miles southeast of Keilah and five miles southeast of Hebron. Although in the tribal territory of Judah, it is within a steppe area that would have been sparsely inhabited and a place in which fugitives could easily hide. The strongholds were small outposts that served as signaling stations and contact points for herdsmen and villagers in the area.

23:15-18. Horesh. The term literally means "wood" or "wooded height," and it simply adds a further qualifier to help locate the region where David and his men were hiding in the Judean wilderness and a setting for his meeting with Jonathan. It is generally identified with Khirbet Khoreisa, about two miles south of Tell Ziph.

23:19. Hakilah/Jeshimon. The barren strip of land running parallel to the Dead Sea on the eastern edge of the Judean Wilderness was known as Jeshimon. Despite its arid nature, the ruggedness of the area provided many hiding places, such as the hill of Hakilah, for fugitives like David (see similar description in 26:1, 3).

23:24. wilderness of Maon in Arabah. David moves further south into the Judean Wilderness along the Dead Sea. The Arabah is simply a term for the entire Jordan Rift Valley and here is probably synonymous with the Judean Wilderness. Maon is probably to be identified

with Khirbet Ma'in, eight miles south of Hebron and four and a half miles south of Tell Ziph.

23:29. En Gedi. The oasis of En Gedi lies midway down the Dead Sea and approximately thirty-five miles southeast of Jerusalem. Fed by a continuous spring, it is a splash of life and color in the midst of an otherwise barren landscape. It has served as a cultic site, military outpost and commercial center during its long history. David's choice of this area was probably based on the large number of nearby caves and the water supply. There are a number of fortresses from the period of the divided monarchy (eighth and seventh centuries) that have been discovered in this area. One is at the spring, while another is at the top of the cliff that offers a view of travelers for miles around.

24:1-22
Saul Spared by David

24:2. Crags of the Wild Goats. The name En Gedi means "spring of the young goat," and thus these crags probably take their name from the spring. Ibexes also live in these hills, adding one more possibility for the place name. However, it is a precarious region to take three thousand men on a search mission.

24:3. Saul's business in the cave. While the sheepfolds outside the cave suggested the presence of possible informants to question about the location of David, Saul's entering alone implies he simply planned to use its privacy to relieve his bowels.

24:4-5. significance of Saul's hem. Like the elaborately decorated hem on the high priest's garments (Ex 28:33-34), Saul's robe would also have had a distinctive fringe or design marking him as the king. It may have been specially dyed or contained a special stitching reserved only for the king's use, and it symbolized his power and authority. A hem impressed on a clay tablet is used to identify a prophet in the Mari texts. In Akkadian literature it was a sign of divorce for a husband to cut off the hem of his wife's robe. In diplomatic contexts it symbolized the breaking of an alliance.

24:6. the Lord's anointed. David's refusal to kill Saul when he had the opportunity (see also 26:8-11) is based on the king's status as the "Lord's anointed." He had been given his position by God and only God could take it from him. Political assassination is a very bad precedent for a claimant to a throne to employ (see the way in which it escalates in 1 Kings 15:25—16:27). Divine right to the throne could serve as an extraordinary insurance policy for the king as long as the mystique of being the "Lord's anointed" was maintained. Thus David's refusal to act demonstrates his loyalty to God's original designation of Saul as king and also provides an argument against future attempts on his own life when he became king. The person of the king was typically seen as being under the protection of deity in the ancient Near East. This is reflected, for instance, in a Hittite blessing on the king that affirms that the storm god will destroy anyone threatening the person of the king.

24:14. dead dog. In Akkadian literature humility was often expressed by using terms of self-deprecation. Comparing oneself to a dead dog or a stray dog was one of the common options. Similar dog metaphors are used in the Amarna letters and the Lachish letters.

24:21. oath not to decimate descendants. It was the common practice in the ancient Near East that a king who did not come to the throne by inheritance would summarily execute the prior king's descendants in order to eliminate any potential competition or sedition. This political expediency, however, by wiping out the family line, was popularly thought to jeopardize the afterlife of those family members who had already died (for further information see comments on Num 3:12-13 and Josh 8:29).

24:22. stronghold. See comment on 22:4.

25:1-44
David Encounters Nabal and Abigail

25:1. wilderness of Maon. See the comment on 23:24.

25:2. Carmel. This town lies within the Judean Wilderness, about eight miles southeast of Hebron and a mile north of Maon. It was taken from the Amalekites by Saul in 15:12, and it is therefore not surprising that the people are inclined to be loyal to Saul (as suggested by Nabal's response to David in vv. 10-11).

25:3. Nabal. This personal name means "the fool." That is an unlikely name for a mother to give her son at birth and is more likely to be a name applied to the man by the biblical writers to indicate his role in the story. His foolishness is in stark contrast to the wisdom displayed by his wife Abigail.

25:7. protection of sheep. David implies in his message to Nabal that his group had voluntarily protected the owner's sheep from attacks by wild animals or raiders (see vv. 15-16). Now, at sheep shearing, a festival time when a count would be taken of the sheep and

rewards would be given to the shepherds, David also asks for support for his men. Contracts between herdsmen and sheep owners during the early part of the second millennium have been found in Mesopotamia at the town of Larsa. Herdsmen would typically receive a fee or commission on the sheep and goats that were delivered safely at the shearing. David's men are claiming a portion of that compensation. It would usually include wool, dairy products or grain. Nabal spurned this request and insulted David instead.

25:18. provisions in Abigail's gift. Nabal had listed bread, water and meat as rewards for his servants (25:11), and now Abigail includes two hundred loaves, two skins of wine and five butchered sheep as part of her gift. This acknowledges the service David and his men had done in protecting Nabal's herds. In addition, as a sign of hospitality during a festival period, she also brings a bushel (five seahs) of roasted grain, one omer (two quarts) of raisins (following the preferred Septuagint reading), and two hundred pressed fig cakes. These latter items were stored food items and would serve David's company well.

25:23-31. persuasive oration in the ancient Near East. As is the case with Abigail's speech, persuasive oration generally appears in wisdom contexts. She suggests David disregard the words of fools (see Prov 26:2) in much the same way that Ptah-Hotep (2450 B.C.) and Amenemope (seventh century B.C.) do in Egyptian "instructions," and the seventh-century B.C. Assyrian sage Ahiqar does. They, like Abigail, also extol the virtues of loyalty and the obligations of rulers to their subjects. This latter trait is an integral part of one of the most famous pieces of persuasive oration in the ancient Near East, the Protests of the Eloquent Peasant from Middle Kingdom Egypt.

25:39-44. king's marriages as alliances. Diplomatic texts from throughout the ancient Near East contain marriage contracts that function as political alliances between countries. Zimri-Lim, the king of Mari during the eighteenth century B.C., successfully placed his daughters in the harems of nearby kingdoms and married several foreign wives himself to increase his power and the stability of his realm. In David's case, prior to becoming king of Israel, he made a series of marriages that strengthened his political and economic position. Thus the marriage to Saul's daughter Michal gave him connection to the royal family. His marriage to Abigail provided him with ties to the area around Hebron, and his marriage to Ahinoam of Jezreel established connections with households in the vicinity of Megiddo and Beth Shan. This kinship network insured that David would have friendly voices in the council of elders from all over the country.

26:1-25
David's Second Chance to Kill Saul

26:1. locations. See the comments on 23:14 and 23:19.

26:8-11. the Lord's anointed. See the comment on 24:6.

26:11. spear and water jug. The spear was generally used by the infantrymen in the front ranks. This is hardly where one would expected to find a king. The fact that Saul always seems to have the spear near to hand (see for instance 18:10; 19:9; 2 Sam 1:6) suggests it may have been an insignia of his office. As a result, this may have been a ceremonial spear. It may also be significant that this is the same weapon he tried to kill David with in their early encounters. The jug or cruse may well have been one of the small disk-shaped vessels known from this period that featured two handles flanking the mouth so that they could be attached to a strap. Depriving a man of his water and weapon in this region would have constituted a threat to his life. David therefore demonstrated how Saul's life was in his hands.

26:19. forced to worship foreign gods. When exiled from their own country, fugitives were denied the opportunity to worship their god at familiar sacred sites. The only option for worship open to them was to serve the gods of other lands, adopting the ways of the people with which they were forced to dwell. Similar sentiments are expressed in the story of the Middle Kingdom Egyptian exile Sinuhe.

26:20. partridge of the mountains. Hunting partridges involved beating the bushes and chasing the birds until they were exhausted. This is an apt description of the manner in which Saul has been pursuing David. There is also a pun here based on the literal meaning of the Hebrew word for partridge, which is the "one who calls upon the mountain" (see Jer 17:11). David is doing this as he reproaches King Saul.

27:1-12
David as a Philistine Vassal

27:2-12. role as a Philistine mercenary. The use of mercenary troops was quite common in the ancient world (see Jer 46:20-21). Very often these men were political fugitives, like David,

and their loyalty to their employer was based on their hatred of the ruler who had exiled them (many of the fifth-century B.C. Greek tyrants joined the Persian army after being expelled from their positions and fought against the Greeks at the Battle of Marathon). Thus Achish of Gath's misplaced trust of David is based on the known enmity between David and Saul, but it is reinforced by the amount of booty which David brings him from his raiding expeditions. David is using this opportunity to (1) escape Saul, (2) obtain wealth through raiding which he can use to ingratiate himself with the elders of Judah (30:26), (3) learn the military tactics and the iron technology of the Philistines and (4) eliminate some of Israel's enemies in his raids. By leaving no survivors, David eliminates any witnesses and thus maintains Achish's trust until the time when he will return to rule in Judah.

27:2-3. Gath. Although its exact location has not been firmly established, the current view places Gath at Tell es-Safi, five miles south of Tel Miqne-Ekron in the northern Shephelah. Its pre-Philistine existence is attested in the El Amarna letters and was traditionally tied to the Canaanite Anakim (see Josh 11:22). As one of the five principal Philistine city-states, Gath was the home of the giant warrior Goliath and one of the leaders in the campaign against Israel (see Judg 3:3).

27:2. Achish. This King Achish is not referred to in any extrabiblical sources, but the name Achish is attested as a Philistine royal name at a later date. Assyrian records of the seventh century list Ikausu, son of Padi, as the king of Ekron. Ikausu is the same as Achish, son of Padi, named on an inscription from the same time period found at Ekron (Tell Miqne).

27:6. Ziklag. The exact location of Ziklag is still in dispute. A number of sites have been suggested, but the two most likely are Tell esh-Shari'a (in the northwestern section of the Negev, about fifteen miles southeast of Gaza) and Tell es-Seba' (most often identified as the site of ancient Beersheba and four miles from the modern city; see comment on Gen 22:19). The dispute arises over possible breaks in occupation during the Iron Age (early monarchy) period at Tell esh-Shari'a and the likelihood that the original site of Beersheba was further west of Tell es-Seba'. While the occupation history of Tell es-Seba' generally matches the information we have on Ziklag, this identification would put Ziklag over thirty miles south of Gath. Both sites place David's stronghold in the Negev, where he could easily stage raids south in the Sinai or east into Edom and Midian. They would also be far enough from Philistine territory to allow him to operate without close scrutiny.

27:7. chronological note. This is the final period before David comes to the throne. His accession is usually dated about 1010 B.C.

27:8. Geshurites. These people lived in a region to the southeast of Philistia in the northern Sinai (see Josh 13:2). They are not to be confused with the inhabitants of Geshur in the southern Golan area of Bashan (Josh 13:11). That area would have been inaccessible to David's raiders. Presumably these southern Geshurites were allied with the Philistines and thus would have made appropriate targets for David's expeditions in the Negev.

27:8. Girzites. The Girzites only appear in this passage and are not mentioned in any other ancient source outside the Bible. Some variant readings identify the people referred to here as the Gezerites. The town of Gezer is ten to twelve miles northeast of Gath. This would seem to be an unlikely raiding area for David if Ziklag is twenty-five to thirty miles south of Gath.

27:8. Amalekites. See the comments on Deuteronomy 25:17-19.

27:8. Shur. The wilderness of Shur lay in the northern Sinai between Canaan and the northeastern border of Egypt (see comment on Ex 15:22). Pastoral nomadic tribes, such as the Geshurites and Amalekites, traditionally inhabited this region and used its arid environment as a defense.

27:10. Jerahmeelites. David's ambiguous response to Achish regarding his raids suggested he was looting villages in Judah. The Jerahmeelites were a Judahite clan associated with the area just to the south of Beersheba (see 30:29).

27:10. Kenites. See the comments on Numbers 24:21-22.

28:1-25

Saul and the Medium from Endor

28:2. David as personal bodyguard. As he was in Saul's service (22:14), David now is appointed as the head of the personal bodyguard of King Achish. This puts him in a difficult situation, since it almost assures that he will have to participate in the battle against Saul.

28:3. mediums and spiritists. For more information on divination as a whole, see the comments on Deuteronomy 18. The practitioners of spiritism and sorcery are condemned because of their association with Canaanite religion and because their "art" attempted to circumvent Yahweh by seeking knowledge

and power from spirits. They represented a form of "popular religion." In this case the banned individuals participated in a form of divination employing ritual pits from which ancestral spirits could be raised to speak to the living about the future.

28:3. banning them. Saul's decision to ban mediums and spiritists from his realm would ordinarily be praised because of their close association with Canaanite worship practices. They functioned as conjurers of ancestral spirits who could speak of the future. Superstitions and the aura of the occult power made these individuals feared and often undesirable. Almost a millennium earlier King Gudea of Lagash had also banned mediums from his realm, so it is not an act connected solely to monotheism. In this instance Saul's ban is paralleled with the death of Samuel to demonstrate that he had no means at his disposal, whether legitimate or illegitimate, to divine God's will.

28:4. location of Philistine and Israelite camps. The eastern end of the Valley of Jezreel is about ten miles wide from north to south. The north end is blocked off by Mount Tabor, while the south end is blocked off by Mount Gilboa. The ten-mile stretch between the two is broken into two passes by the smaller Hill of Moreh. The town of Shunem where the Philistines make camp is on the southwest side of the Hill of Moreh just across the Harod Valley (the southern pass from the Valley of Jezreel to the city of Beth Shan) from Saul's camp at Mount Gilboa. The two camps are about five miles apart. Endor is located in the middle of the northern pass (between the Hill of Moreh and Mount Tabor), about six or seven miles north of the Israelite camp (about a two-hour trek). Saul would have proceeded around the eastern side of the Hill of Moreh and thus have avoided the Philistine camp. Note that Endor (Khirbet Safsafeh) is technically in the tribal territory of Manasseh, outside of the territory controlled by Saul (Josh 17:11). The fact that the battle takes place so far north of Philistia suggests that they were trying to cut the Galilee region off from Saul's kingdom. Saul's position takes advantage of the mountainous terrain and would favor his lightly armed forces.

28:6. means Saul used to seek information. Saul is rightly concerned about the upcoming battle with the massed forces of the five Philistine city-states. He first employs the usual divination methods to consult God and see if the Divine Warrior would give him a victory. These methods included incubation rituals in which the inquirer sleeps within a sanctuary or near a sacred object in order to receive a dream from a god (see comment on 3:3), the use of Urim to cast lots (see comment on Ex 28:30) and the visions of prophets (see Saul's previous association with prophets in 1 Sam 10:10-11). None of these inquiries was answered, and it is made clear that Saul is abandoned by God.

28:7. specialist Saul wanted to use. Since he had no other recourse to seek God's will about the coming battle, Saul broke his own law banning mediums and made a secret visit to the medium of Endor. She has established a reputation as one who could successfully consult ghosts and ancestral spirits. This specialist from Endor used a ritual pit to conjure up the spirits of the dead. Although the process is listed in Deuteronomy 18:10-11 as one of the "detestable acts" associated with Canaanite religion, the actual use of a pit is not mentioned in the Old Testament outside of the Endor episode. As in Hittite magic, the practitioner here is an "old woman." The pits were believed to be magical portals through which spirits could pass between the realms of the living and the dead. The practitioner was one who had special knowledge of the location of such a pit and who was familiar with the procedures necessary to summon the dead. There is no indication in these rituals that the practitioner was possessed by the spirit or that the spirit spoke through her, and so she was not a medium in the modern sense.

28:8-11. procedures for calling up spirits. Examples from Greek (Homer's *Odyssey),* Mesopotamian and, especially, Hittite literature provide the details: (1) done at night, (2) after the spot is divined a pit is dug with a special tool, (3) a food offering (bread, oil, honey) or the blood of a sacrificial animal is placed in the pit to attract spirits, (4) an invocation ritual, including the spirit's name, is chanted, and (5) the pit is covered to prevent spirits from escaping after the ritual is concluded. Both practitioner and client had roles to play in the procedure. The spirits who emerged were in human form and generally were able to communicate directly with the client. In Mesopotamian necromancy incantations, only the practitioner could see the spirit. This was accomplished through ritual ointments smeared on the face.

28:14. prophetic mantle. Since clothing is often a status marker in the ancient world (see Joseph's various changes of clothing in Genesis 37, 39—41), it may be expected that prophets were distinguished by a particular garment. The spirit of Samuel is recognized by his robe (see Elijah's mantle in 1 Kings

19:19 and 2 Kings 2:8, 13-14).

28:8-20. beliefs about afterlife. The spirits of the dead were believed to descend to the underworld known as Sheol. This was a nebulous region of continued existence, but it is not distinguished as a place of reward or punishment.

28:8-11. consulting dead in ancient Near East. Because of a well-developed ancestor cult that pervaded much of the ancient Near East (perhaps reflected in the emphasis on the role of the male heir to care for the father's shrine in Ugaritic documents), the dead were considered to have some power to affect the living. It was believed that if libations were poured out on behalf of dead ancestors, their spirits would offer protection and help to those still living. In Babylon the disembodied spirit *(utukki)* or the ghost *(etemmu)* could become very dangerous if not cared for and often were the objects of incantations. Proper care for the dead would begin with proper burial and would continue with ongoing gifts and honor of the memory and name of the deceased. The firstborn was responsible for maintaining this ancestor worship and therefore inherited the family gods (often images of deceased ancestors). Such care would have been based on a belief, as seen in Saul's consultation of the medium of Endor, that the spirits of the dead could communicate and had information on the future that could be of use to the living. These spirits were consulted through the efforts of priests, mediums and necromancers. This could be a dangerous practice since some spirits were considered demons and could cause great harm. While it is difficult to totally reconstruct Israelite beliefs about deceased ancestors and the afterlife, it seems possible that prior to the exile there existed a cult of the dead or ancestral worship. This is suggested by archaeological remains: (1) utensils, bowls and implements for eating and drinking found in Iron Age tombs in Israel, (2) references to deposits of food and drink offerings for the dead (see Deut 26:14; Ps 106:28) and (3) the importance placed on family tombs (see the ancestral tomb for Abraham and his descendants at Hebron) and mourning rituals performed at these tombs (see Is 57:7-8; Jer 16:5-7). The local and family ancestral cults were condemned by the prophets and the law.

28:24. meal prepared for Saul. There are elements of hospitality customs in the offering of a meal to Saul by the woman of Endor. Like Abraham, she provides a costly meal by slaughtering a calf and making bread (see Gen 18:6-7). It is unlikely that the woman owned more than this one animal, and so she is truly doing Saul great honor. Saul's reluctance to accept her invitation may be tied to her profession or her association with other gods. It may also be a sign of his depression over Samuel's words of doom. His eventual acceptance follows the pattern of indecisiveness and contradictory behavior so often found in his career. There is also a sense of resignation in eating a "last meal."

29:1-11

David's Help Rejected by Philistines

29:1. Aphek/spring in Jezreel. There are a number of different sites named Aphek in various parts of Canaan. This one is qualified by its identification with a spring in the Jezreel Valley. Most likely this Aphek is in the southern Sharon plain and specifically the site of Ras el-'Ain at the source of the Yarkon River. This then suggests that the Philistines first mustered their troops at Aphek (as they did prior to the Battle of Ebenezer in 4:1) and then moved up thirty-five or forty miles into the Jezreel to confront Saul. References in Josephus connect this Aphek with Antipatris (see Acts 23:31), twenty-six miles south of Caesarea Maritima.

29:3. Hebrews. The Israelites are referred to repeatedly by the Philistines as Hebrews (see comment on Gen 14:13). This may have been a generic term, as is the case with Habiru and Apiru in Akkadian and Egyptian texts, or a pejorative label applied to a people without leadership or a defined political state. David's role as a mercenary fits well with the term Habiru in the El Amarna texts.

29:5. David his tens of thousands. This is the third time this chant has been quoted in the text (see 1 Sam 18:7; 21:12). Originally it served as a mark of distinction for David and a source of Saul's jealousy and hatred toward him. In the episodes involving the Philistines, the chant is used as a reminder and a warning that David cannot be trusted to serve Achish loyally. In this instance it provides David with a plausible excuse not to participate in the final battle against the "Lord's anointed."

30:1-31

Disaster at Ziklag and Revenge on the Amalekites

30:1. distance from Aphek to Ziklag. The distance from the Sharon Plain to the southern Shephelah where Ziklag was located is approximately fifty miles. It would not be un-

usual for an armed group and their auxiliaries to take three days to travel this distance.

30:1. Amalekites. One of the curiosities of the Amalekites is that they always seem to be present to cause trouble no matter how many times the Israelites defeat them (see Ex 17:8-16; 1 Sam 15:1-9). In this case the Amalekites respond to David's raiding of their villages (1 Sam 27:8), taking advantage of David's presence at Aphek. The raid is immediately followed up by David's devastating defeat of the Amalekites and the rescue of his family and property. In this way the narrative demonstrates that David was nowhere nearby when Saul was killed. He is acting the role of hero, defeating Israel's enemies and saving his people from harm, while Saul is being defeated by the Philistines at Gilboa.

30:7-8. oracular use of Ephod. David's question is typical of oracular events in which a yes or no response is requested. For other examples of using the ephod for this purpose, see the comments on Judges 8:24-27 and 1 Samuel 23:9-12.

30:9. Besor Ravine. This was a deep wadi bed (three to four hundred feet wide) whose steep sides would have required a great deal of agility and energy to traverse. It is located in the western Negev and served, along with the Wadi Gerar, as the southern border of Canaan.

30:11-13. Egyptian slave. In their effort to escape, the Amalekite raiders had abandoned a sick Egyptian slave. David's hospitality to this man, giving him food, water and raisin cakes, is reminiscent of Abigail's offering to David in 1 Samuel 25:18. It once again displays David's adherence to traditional values and also provides him with the military intelligence his small force of four hundred men will need to defeat the much larger force of Amalekites.

30:14. Kerethites. These people were associated with the Philistines and the Pelethites, and their name suggests a Cretan origin. Their territory in the Negev probably adjoined that of Ziklag and Judah.

30:14. land of Caleb. The allotment given to Caleb and his family was in the area around Hebron and Debir (see Josh 14:6-15; 15:13-19) in southern Canaan. In later periods this was in fact within the territory of Judah (Josh 15:1-12).

30:17. fleeing on camels. For the Amalekites living in the steppe areas of the Negev and northern Sinai, the camel would have been a perfect beast of burden and swift form of transportation for raiding. In this case, they also served to provide a quick getaway for the remnant of the Amalekite band. For more information see the comment on Judges 6:5.

30:18-25. division of spoil. See the comment on Deuteronomy 20:10-15 for a discussion of the protocol associated with the division of spoils following a battle. David adhered to the sacred code that auxiliary troops, left to guard a fortress or the baggage train, should also share equally in the spoil. The two hundred men who were too exhausted after traveling from Aphek to continue in pursuit of the Amalekites still served as a rear guard in case David was forced to flee and thus deserved their share.

30:26. elders of Judah. David's generosity in sending a portion of the loot he had taken from the Amalekites has real political implications. Being able to distribute wealth is a sign of power in the Near East. It marks these local elders as David's clients, and it will be expected that they will support him in his bid for the kingship (see 2 Sam 2:4).

30:27-31. towns. The towns in addition to Hebron where David sent portions of his spoils include Bethel (Khirbet el-Qaryatein), just north of Arad (Josh 19:4); Beth Zur (Khirbet et-Tubeiqah), four miles north of Hebron and associated with Caleb (Josh 15:58); Ramoth Negev (possibly Bir Rakhmeh; named Baalath Beer in Josh 19:8), nineteen miles southeast of Beersheba; Jattir (Khirbet 'Attir), a Levitical city twelve miles southwest of Hebron (Josh 21:14); Aroer (modern 'Ar'arah), twelve miles southeast of Beersheba (Josh 15:22); Siphmoth, an unknown site; Eshtemoa (es-Semu), ten miles southwest of Hebron (Josh 15:50); Carmel (Tell el-Kirmil), seven miles south of Hebron (1 Sam 15:12); Hormah, possibly Khirbet el-Meshash, seven miles east of Beersheba (Josh 15:30); Bor Ashan (Khirbet 'Asan), just northwest of Beersheba and a Levitical city of Judah (Josh 19:7); and Ether (NIV: Athach; Khirbet el-'Ater) in the Shephelah, about fifteen miles northwest of Hebron. Most of these sites are in the area known as the hill country of Judah, though a few are further south in the Negev.

31:1-13

The Death of Saul

31:1. Mount Gilboa. See comment on 1 Samuel 28:4 for the position of the Philistine and Israelite forces within the Valley of Jezreel (see also 1 Chron 10:1-12). The fact that so many of Saul's men and three of his sons are slain on the slopes of Mount Gilboa demonstrates that his army was quickly forced to flee before superior Philistine tactics. They may have been seeking to restore order by regaining the high ground in the battle, but without the leader-

ship of Saul's sons they were quickly cut down and Saul was faced with capture.

31:3-5. Saul's prospects if captured alive. In this period it was common for captured kings to be mutilated and subjected to a life of humiliation. Putting out the eyes or cutting off the thumbs and big toes were just a few of the procedures used. As a sign of their ignominy, they were doomed to spend miserable years begging and fighting for scraps under the triumphant king's table (see comments on Judg 1:6-7), or displayed in public places for whatever abuse passersby might invent. Torturous practices were continued by the Babylonians, Assyrians and Persians, and the literature is full of the gruesome acts performed on captured enemies. Other examples of a king requesting his armor-bearer to kill him exist in Assyrian records. The Elamite king and his armor-bearer stab each other simultaneously.

31:9. cutting off the head. A king's head was a treasured prize used as a means of boasting of one's conquests. Assyrian king Ashurbanipal was reported to have dined with his queen in the garden with the head of the king of Elam on display in a nearby tree. He describes the cutting off of the head as "making him more dead than before."

31:10. armor placed in temple. In addition to stripping the bodies of the slain for loot, Saul's armor (symbol of his position as king and well known to the enemy—see 1 Sam 17:38) was taken as a trophy in much the same way that Goliath's sword (1 Sam 17:54) and the ark of the covenant (1 Sam 5:2) were taken and displayed in a temple. In this way the gods of the Philistines were honored, and Saul and his God were graphically demonstrated to be defeated. See the comment on Judges 2:13 for the name Ashtoreths.

31:10. exposing the corpse. To dismember the body of Saul and leave it unburied was the height of disgrace and shame for the victim and the family/nation. Improper burial was popularly thought to jeopardize an individual's afterlife (for further information see comment on 1 Kings 16:4). The practice of impaling the bodies of their defeated enemies was commonly used by armies in the ancient Near East. For instance, the Assyrians considered it a psychological ploy and a terror tactic (as depicted on the walls of their royal palaces).

31:10-12. Beth Shan. In this period Beth Shan (Tell el-Husn) was either controlled by the Philistines or allied with them. Since it lies in a commanding position in the Jezreel Valley and is a very tall mound, it would be a perfect place to display Saul's dismembered body. The ten-acre mound stands at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley and guards that important trade route's entrance into the Jordan Valley. It continues as an independent Canaanite enclave into the monarchy period (1 Sam 31:10-12) but was incorporated into Solomon's administrative districts (1 Kings 4:12). This is a double site, with a Roman-Byzantine city (Scythopolis) built at the base of the tell. Archaeological investigations have shown almost continuous occupation of the site since Chalcolithic times (4500-3300 B.C.). The water supply (Wadi Jalud), arable land and strategic location have insured that its population prospered, generally under Egyptian rule (starting with Thutmose III in the sixteenth century) and later under the Sea Peoples and Israelites. From this period archaeologists found remains of twin temples that some identify as the temples of Astarte mentioned here and the temple of Dagon (see 1 Chron 10:10).

31:11-12. Jabesh Gilead. See the comment on 11:1 for the discussion of Saul's original connection with this Transjordanian city. Their rescue of Saul's body from Beth Shan reflects the obligation they felt because of his efforts to save their city from the besieging Ammonites (1 Samuel 11).

31:12. journey from Jabesh Gilead to Beth Shan. Although the exact location of Jabesh Gilead is unknown, it must have been along the Wadi el-Yabis in the northern Gileadite hill country. Tell Maqlub, thirteen miles from Beth Shan, is a likely candidate.

31:12. cremation. Cremation is not sanctioned as a burial rite elsewhere in the Bible (see Lev 20:14; Josh 7:25 for the use of burning as capital punishment). It is possible that the advanced state of deterioration and decay required extreme measure to purify the body. No embalming techniques would have been effective. The burning of the bodies of heroes in the *Iliad* might suggest a similar ritual honoring Saul. The only other peoples in the ancient Near East known to practice cremation were the Hurrians of Mitanni and the Hittites (both mid-second millennium).

31:13. tamarisk tree at Jabesh. A final ironic note in the Saul narrative has him buried beneath a tamarisk tree. He is portrayed as assembling his troops and exercising his power as king under or near a tamarisk tree in 1 Samuel 22:6. His grave is marked by this simple desert growth rather than a palace, capital city or kingdom. The tamarisk grows in sandy soil. It is deciduous and may reach over twenty feet in height, with small leaves that excrete salt. Its bark is used for tanning and its wood for building and making charcoal. Bedouin commonly

plant this hearty tree for its shade and the branches which provide grazing for animals. In Mesopotamian incantations, the tamarisk was a holy tree with purifying qualities. Images were made from its wood and it was at times connected with cosmic stability.

2 SAMUEL

1:1-16

News of Saul's Death

1:1. chronology. The year is approximately 1010 B.C. This date can be arrived at by calculating back from more certain points in time later in the monarchy period.

1:1. Ziklag. Ziklag has not been identified with any certainty. For discussion of the possibilities see comment on 1 Samuel 27:6.

1:2. dust on head. The practice of putting dirt, dust or ashes on one's head was a typical sign of mourning throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament period. It is a practice also known from Mesopotamia and Canaan. Many mourning rites function as a means for the living to identify with the dead. It is easy to see how dust on the head would be a symbolic representation of burial.

1:2. reverential prostration. The standard method of demonstrating obeisance in the ancient Near East was to bow to the ground. Egyptian tomb art is filled with examples of servants and royal officials prostrating themselves before the pharaoh. In the El Amarna tablets (fourteenth century B.C.) the format of each letter contains a greeting, followed by a set formula of honoring the pharaoh by bowing seven times forward and backwards.

1:2. news dissemination. The normal official means of spreading news was through the use of couriers. Nevertheless couriers would have only been dispatched to certain key locations. Since the administration had been nearly wiped out and the rest were in flight or in hiding, there were likely few if any official couriers to bring word of the results of the battle at Gilboa, especially as far away as Ziklag, some seventy-five or eighty miles south of the scene of battle. Other news carriers would be soldiers returning from battle or merchants traveling from city to city. In this case, however, it is evident that the Amalekite sought David out, expecting to gain favor.

1:6. leaning on his spear. The spear has been an important symbol of Saul, from use as a weapon against David (1 Sam 18:10-11) to an identifying emblem (1 Sam 26:11) to a crutch as he faces death.

1:8. Amalekite. See comment on Deuteronomy 25:17-19. Since it was the Amalekites who had just recently been responsible for the raid on David's town, Ziklag (see comment on 1 Sam 30:1), this man is already in jeopardy, and his message is not likely to be given any credibility.

1:9. Saul's request. Death is imminent and preferable to the alternative (see comment on 1 Sam 31:3-5). Saul's request reflects a desire to end his life with as little pain as possible.

1:10. crown and armband. The headwear mentioned here would more accurately be rendered "diadem," referring to an object hung at the forehead or on the front of a headpiece. It often is a symbol of authority. As early as the Sumerian period the diadem is one of the insignias of royal power bestowed on the king by the god Anu. Perhaps the best-known example of this in the ancient world is the serpent (uraeus) on the front of a pharaoh's crown, which was believed to be a protective device. In the descriptions of Israel's high priest's garments the diadem is generally associated with a "golden plate" (NIV; see comment on Lev 8:9). The armband is not referred to in any other Old Testament passages. Armbands were a frequent adornment in the first millennium. The earliest examples found by archaeologists in Israel date to the eleventh century. Armbands and a diadem are mentioned in a list of jewelry that the Assyrian king Sennacherib gave to his son (and successor) Esarhaddon.

1:11. tearing clothes as sign of mourning. Along with placing ashes in the hair, the tearing of clothing was a common form of mourning in the ancient Near East. One example outside the Bible is found in the Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat (c. 1600 B.C.), in which the sister of the hero tears her father's garment as she foretells a coming drought. Such an act often implied grief over the death of a relative, friend or prominent individual.

1:12. mourning rituals. Many mourning rituals find their origin in (1) identifying with the dead, (2) providing something for the dead or

(3) protecting the living from the dead. Yet it is not always possible to trace back and discover how these values may have been reflected in any particular ritual. Weeping, wailing and lamenting were important in the funeral rites of most peoples of the ancient Near East. Fasting, tearing clothes and setting aside regular clothes were all ways of expressing grief.

1:15. David's order. The execution of the Amalekite has many complex elements linked to it. As already mentioned, the fact that he was an Amalekite put him in grave jeopardy. Second, David had on two other occasions refused to take Saul's life because of his respect for Saul's status as being the anointed by God, and he would expect no less from others. Third, if he received the actions of the Amalekite as having been done in his service, he would be subject to the accusation that he had commissioned an agent to execute Saul. It was important for him to distance himself from the actual killing of Saul, even if it could be justified as a mercy killing.

1:17-27
David's Elegy for Saul and Jonathan

1:17. elegies. Examples of funeral laments have been found in the ancient Near Eastern literatures. Perhaps best known is Gilgamesh's lament for his deceased friend Enkidu in tablet eight of the Gilgamesh Epic. This calls on others to share in the mourning and eulogizes the good qualities and heroic deeds of the deceased.

1:18. Book of Jashar. It is inferred that the Book of Jashar contained ancient poetic accounts of heroic deeds (the only other reference to it is in Josh 10:13). It has not been preserved. The title *Jashar* could be the adjective "upright" or a form of the Hebrew verb "sing."

1:20. Gath, Ashkelon. Gath and Ashkelon were two of the five principal cities of the Philistines. For more information about them see comments on 1 Samuel 5:8 and Judges 14:19 respectively.

1:20. uncircumcised. Circumcision was practiced by many different peoples in the ancient Near East (see comment on Gen 17:9-14) but not by the Philistines. The comment here has little to do with physical attributes or sociological practices, but is an ethnic designation that for the Israelites is a sign of the covenant.

1:21. curse on Gilboa. The curse focuses on the fertility of the area. It is similar to curses such as that found in the Atrahasis Epic that are intended to result in famine. By becoming a place of death (dry, unproductive fields), it would serve as a memorial to the deaths that had occurred there.

1:21. shield rubbed with oil. Israelite shields of this period were made of wood with leather stretched over the surface. They were either round or rectangular with rounded top. Oil was used to wipe the blood off after a battle and to treat the leather so it remained pliable.

1:24. fine clothing. The clothing provided for the women of Israel simply reflects an improvement in the standard of living during the reign of Saul. Successful policing of the trade routes could increase merchant activity, which in turn made imports more accessible and provided outlets for exporting local goods.

2:1-7
David Made King

2:1. oracular inquiry. From chapter 23 through the end of 1 Samuel, David is making oracular inquiries of the Lord by means of the ephod under the guidance of Abiathar the priest. It is likely that is also what is happening here. In an oracular inquiry a yes-no question was posed to the deity, and a binary mechanism was used to determine what the answer was. The normative means laid out for this process in Exodus was the Urim and Thummim (which were kept in a pouch in the ephod).

2:1. Hebron. Hebron was centrally located in the hill country of Judah and was one of the most important towns in the region. It is located about twenty miles south of Jerusalem. This twelve-acre site, occupied about 1200 B.C., was very attractive because there are more than two dozen springs in the area. About the time of David the fortifications of the city were improved and expanded. It served as David's capital for seven years and enjoyed its greatest prominence during this period.

2:4. tribal king. In a previous attempt at kingship the process was initiated on the tribal level (see Judg 9). Since the Philistines had most likely overrun the central part of the land as a result of the battle at Gilboa (1 Sam 31), only a few of the tribes may have had the freedom to participate in designating a new king. It must also be remembered that tribal autonomy had a long history among the Israelites, and a city-state form of government had characterized the previous Canaanite residents of the region. Finally, with three of Saul's sons having been killed along with him, there was no clear information concerning succession to the

throne, even if the tribal leaders were content with Saul's line and the Philistines would have allowed it. All of this makes the procedure of a tribe designating a king very logical.

2:5-7. procuring support. The town of Jabesh Gilead in Transjordan would have still been free of Philistine control. It represented one of the strategic constituencies of Saul because of the deliverance that he had provided them (1 Sam 11). If the leaders of this pro-Saul enclave could be persuaded to acknowledge David, they would serve as bellwether for many of the other Transjordan cities and perhaps others from the northern regions. David suggests to them that they have repaid Saul in providing him proper burial—he is gone and there is no loyalty still due him or his family. David is just as willing to provide for their defense as Saul had been.

2:8—3:5
Conflict Between the Houses of David and Saul

2:8. Mahanaim. Besides serving as an administrative center for the government of Saul's son, this is where David sets up headquarters when he has to flee from Absalom (17:27). The town is also mentioned as one destroyed by Pharaoh Shishak's invasion during the time of Solomon's son. While it is clear that Mahanaim is in the Transjordan region, the precise location is unknown. The most common identification today is with Tell edh-Dhahab el-Gharbi on the northern bank of the Jabbok. There have been no excavations at the site, but surface surveys confirm that it was occupied during this period.

2:9. political control of Saul's house. Abner had been Saul's commander in chief and was his cousin. Rather than take the throne for himself, he procured it for one of Saul's surviving sons, Ish-Bosheth. He appears to have retained the support of a number of the northern tribes. Though Ish-Bosheth was king, the text gives the impression that Abner was in control. It was not that unusual for a military strongman to sponsor a weak heir to the throne. In earlier Egyptian history at the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, Ay, a military commander (and perhaps father-in-law) of Akhenaten is the principal sponsor and advisor of young Tutankhamun son-in-law of Akhenaten.

2:12. Gibeon. The city of Gibeon is usually identified with the modern el-Jib, located six miles northwest of Jerusalem and seven miles southwest of Ai. The excavations there have discovered a double water system constructed as early as the Judges period. The earlier of the two systems involved cutting straight down through the limestone some thirty-five feet (descended by a stairway spiraling down the wall) to a tunnel, allowing the inhabitants of the city to have access to spring waters at the base if the mound was besieged. A second, later system provided a stepped tunnel leading to another (more reliable) spring. This water system is strong evidence that the site is Gibeon because of the well-known "pool of Gibeon" mentioned here. The identification is further confirmed by jar handles found at the site with the city's name inscribed on them (although it should be noted that jar handles with other cities' names stamped on them were found as well, explained by the city's major industry: wine export).

2:12-13. reason for the battle. Gibeon was a principal city in the region that had been overrun by the Philistines and presumably was still under Philistine control. It is therefore difficult to imagine that either army would be free to initiate military action against the other in Philistine territory. More likely is the possibility that Abner is on his way down to make preliminary arrangements to transfer his support to David. Natural caution would lead David to dispatch a military escort since Abner was not foolish enough to come without his own military entourage. Joab intercepts Abner at Gibeon, and they decide to be entertained by a gladiatorial contest between some of the trainees or mercenaries. Though bloodshed was probably expected in these "games," tempers flare and a full-blown skirmish explodes.

2:13. pool of Gibeon. The pool of Gibeon was a well-known water system—a model of modern engineering. The builders tunneled down through the limestone about thirty-five feet, making the hole almost forty feet wide. Steps were carved into the side spiraling down to the bottom of this pool where a straight set of stone steps descended another forty-five feet through a tunnel to reach the water table (seventy-nine steps in all). This had been built to provide the inhabitants of the city with a secure water supply inside the walls during time of siege. It has been estimated that about three thousand tons of rock would have been removed to accomplish this engineering feat. Only later was a tunnel cut to the spring outside the city.

2:14-16. individual bouts. At times individual combat was used, viewing the individuals as representatives of their respective armies so that the divine will could be expressed (as in the fight between David and Goliath). It is un-

likely that this is the case here because there are twelve pairs (not just one) and because the intent is cited as entertainment. It must be noted, however, that battle is at times portrayed as a festival (as early as Sargon and, closer to this time, in the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic). The NIV translation "fight hand to hand" obscures the fact that this is merely an exhibition. Examples of individual combat are known in Egypt on the Beni Hasan wall painting (early second millennium) and in the Story of Sinuhe. It is likewise depicted on a Canaanite vase from the first half of the second millennium. Nearer in time, examples are known from Mycenaean Greece and from Hittite literature. A relief from the tenth century found at Tell Halaf depicts two combatants grabbing at one another's heads and thrusting with short swords.

2:16. daggers. The weapons used by the combatants are described by the Hebrew word that is typically translated "sword." It can be used for shorter two-edged swords (usually less than sixteen inches) or longer one-edged swords. The context here would demand the former since the combatants are in close quarters and are stabbing one another.

2:21. stripping of weapons. The plunder from personal combat was the possessions of the slain. The rank or status of a warrior would be reflected in clothing, armor or the quality of the weapons. These would become trophies and status symbols for the victor. Asahel is unwilling to settle for any soldier's gear—he wants the commander's.

2:23. butt of the spear. Spears often were made with a metal casing on the butt end that was not honed to a point but was tapered down to a sharp edge. This could be used as a goad or to stick the spear in the ground. Many of these metal ends have been found in excavations and are portrayed on wall paintings.

2:24. geography. The place names mentioned in verse 24 cannot be identified with any confidence. It is likely that the "way to the wasteland of Gibeon" runs northeast toward the Jordan valley. Ammah and Giah are unknown. There is a hill rising out of the fertile valley around Gibeon on the way toward Geba that may be identified as Ammah.

2:29. Abner's itinerary. The Arabah refers to the Jordan rift valley. Abner would have descended into it through the Micmash pass (see comment on 1 Sam 10:5) toward the ford at Adam (see comment on Josh 2:7). Bithron may not even be a place name, and if it is, it remains unidentified.

2:31. buried in father's tomb. Iron Age burial practices featured multiple burials in cave tombs. The body was laid out on its back with personal objects arranged around it.

3:6-39
Abner's Defection and Execution

3:7. sleeping with concubine. Concubines are women without dowry who include among their duties providing children to the family. In the royal household they may represent minor political alliances. Since a concubine has been a sexual partner, a son who used his father's concubine was not only viewed as incestuous but was seen as attempting to usurp the authority of the family patriarch. In a similar way a successor to the throne at times sought to expropriate the authority of his predecessor by taking over his concubines. Israel was a tribal society in transition to a monarchy. The network of support for a king would have been found in the powerful clans and families. Acquiring concubines and wives would therefore be the mechanism for building up the backing of each local area. Support might also be found in wealthy merchants, military leaders or even in priestly families.

3:8. dog's head. This expression is not used anywhere else in the Old Testament. See comment on 1 Samuel 24:14 for information concerning self-deprecation using dog metaphors.

3:9. curse formula. This formula is common in curses in Samuel and Kings and is usually found in the mouth of royal figures. An exception is Ruth's use of this same formula in Ruth 1:17. The formula is also known from Alalakh and Mari. Abner has not specified what it is that God will do. Since this oath is sometimes associated with rituals in which animals are mutilated, it is assumed that the speaker calls down similar mutilation on himself.

3:10. transfer of kingdom by Abner. As mentioned in the comment on 2:9, Abner most likely held the reins of power in the provisional government for which Ish-Bosheth was the figurehead. If the military was loyal to Abner, his defection would leave Ish-Bosheth virtually unprotected. Abner would probably likewise succeed in bringing with him the allegiance of most of the northern tribes that had remained faithful to Saul's family.

3:13-14. Michal's status. As indicated in the comment on 3:7 above, royal harems were the accepted means of establishing a support base both nationally and internationally. Michal, the daughter of Saul, would have represented a certain amount of legitimation for David as he was attempting to lay hold of Saul's kingdom. Ancient law (evidenced in Hammurabi,

Eshnunna and the Middle Assyrian Laws) provides that a man who has been driven from his home by force may lay claim to his wife when he returns. He would retain this right even if she has remarried (often necessary for support) and had children.

3:14. one hundred foreskins. This was the bride price paid by David for Michal (see comment on 1 Sam 18:25). The accomplishment of killing one hundred Philistines would have identified David as a significant military ally meriting marriage into the royal family.

3:17-19. Abner's diplomacy. Abner is now functioning as an agent for David's kingdom. He is not only planning his own defection but intends to bring the northern tribes with him. Tribal decisions were made by the elders who are called together. It is strategic for him to speak to the Benjaminites personally and individually, both because he is a prominent leader in the tribe of Benjamin, and, even more importantly, because Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, so they would be the most loyal to Saul's descendants.

3:20-21. agreement between Abner and David. It was typical of important transactions that they be sealed with a feast shared between the parties to celebrate the legal arrangements that have been concluded. The twenty men with Abner may be important representatives of the powerful factions in Israel as well as a small military entourage of high ranking officers.

3:22. raid with plunder. Most armies, whether made up of mercenaries, conscripts or professional members of a standing army, considered plunder to be part of the pay of being a soldier (much like a waitress would consider tips). Some raids were carried out with military objectives in mind (expansion, control of trade routes, etc.), but others would be intended to pester an enemy and, at the same time, provide extra pay for the soldiers. Since David had little means to finance an administration or military, plunder was probably the sole source of compensation for the army.

3:26. well of Sirah. This oasis is generally and traditionally located about two miles north of Hebron.

3:29. curse on Joab's house. The curse pronounced by David is wide-ranging. The first category refers to the most serious and humiliating forms of physical disease (for more details on these see comments on Lev 13). The second is the most obscure. The word the NIV translates "crutch" has been now identified from Ugaritic and Akkadian as the word for "spindle" or "distaff." The phrase used here was the common description of a woman involved in menial tasks. A Hittite oath of a soldier, if broken, would result in the loss of manhood. The oath describes this penalty in terms of the violator holding the spindle and mirror. This second curse then threatens Joab's house with decreased virility. The third curse speaks of violent death and the fourth of suffering want or famine.

3:31. mourning rites. See comment on 1:12.

4:1-12
Assassination of Ish-Bosheth

4:3. Beeroth and Gittaim. Beeroth is generally looked for north of Kephireh toward the Bethel/Ai area, perhaps at el-Bireh or Nebi Samwil. It was one of the Hivite cities of Gibeon that deceived Joshua (see Josh 9). This verse tells us that the Hivite population fled to Gittaim (specific location unknown), apparently leaving Benjaminites as the sole population in Beeroth.

4:4. Mephibosheth's injury. Although the biblical text does not clarify the details, it is generally believed that the battle at Mount Gilboa in which Saul was killed led to Philistine control of the entire central region. If that is true, it is likely that the Philistines would have sacked Saul's capital at Gibeah. Such circumstances would explain the frantic flight of Saul's household and the subsequent injury of Mephibosheth. A neck or spine injury could have made Mephibosheth a paraplegic, but it need not have been so extensive as that. Broken legs or ankles improperly set or poorly treated could likewise lame him. Splinting to set bones was a practice known in the ancient world, but compound fractures were often considered hopeless.

4:5. noonday rest. In the semiarid climate of the Near East it is common for the hottest hours of the day (after lunch) to be set aside for rest or napping.

4:6. wheat in the king's house. Though it would not be difficult to document the presence of storehouses in proximity to royal quarters, there is a persuasive textual variant at this point in the text that makes reference to a guard (female) who has fallen asleep because she had tired herself out gathering wheat.

4:12. mutilation and exposure. To dismember the bodies of the assassins and leave them unburied is the height of disgrace and shame for the victim and the family. Improper burial was popularly thought to jeopardize an individual's afterlife (for further information see comments on Num 3:12-13 and Josh 8:29). Public display of enemies' corpses can be seen

in the practice of impaling the bodies on a pike, which the Assyrians used as a psychological ploy and a terror tactic (as depicted on the walls of their royal palaces). The cutting off of the hands and feet was probably understood to extend their pain and suffering into the afterlife, but there is not enough attestation of the practice or the thought behind it to recover the reason with confidence.

5:1-25
David's Victories

5:1. flesh and blood. The actual Hebrew idiom is "bone and flesh," but it expressed the same concept as our "flesh and blood" does. Affirmation of their kinship is offered as a basis for political alliance. Compare the similar context in Judges 9:2.

5:3. role of the elders. The elders here are the clan leaders of Israel. In the absence of a king or other dominant leader, the tribes relied on the collective assembly of the tribal elders. They administered justice in the village culture and served as representatives for the people at major gatherings. The people would look for the endorsement of David by the elders before they would accept his leadership.

5:3. compact with elders. As in 2:4 where an agreement was reached with the leaders of Judah, here all the tribes subscribe to a formal declaration of David's kingship. This would likely have included a written ratification document such as that drawn up with Saul in 1 Samuel 10:25.

5:3. anointed. David had been anointed by the leaders of Judah in 2:4. Anointing designated a change in status and was symbolic of their affirmation of his kingship. For more information on the practice of anointing see comment on 1 Samuel 16:1.

5:4-5. chronology. David's reign is generally believed to take up the first third of the tenth century B.C. (about 1010-970). Forty can often be a round number, but the breakdown in verse five suggests that it should be taken as a precise reckoning.

5:6. Jerusalem. The city is strategically located along an east-west road that runs from the fords of the Jordan near Jericho to the coastal highway. It is also by the most significant north-south road that runs through the hill country from Beersheba to Beth Shan. Its location is also strategic because of its position by the border between Judah and Benjamin. The deep valleys on the east and west of the ridge and the reliable water supply found at the Gihon spring combined to make the location defensible and desirable. The earliest reference to Jerusalem is in the Egyptian execration texts from early in the second millennium B.C., where its kings are named Yaqirammu and Shayzanu. The next reference is found in six letters in the Amarna texts from Abdi-Heba, king of Jerusalem, to the pharaoh requesting military support. Jerusalem was one of the key cities in the region and in the Amarna period was competing with Shechem for control of the hill country. Jerusalem was defeated by the Israelite armies at the time of the conquest, but the inhabitants had not been driven out and it had not been occupied by the Israelites (Judg 1:21). The city of Jerusalem in this period occupied only the north-south ridge covering about ten acres that runs south of the modern city walls. The top of the ridge is only about four hundred feet wide and about fifteen hundred feet long. The population would not have exceeded one thousand. The Canaanite city was built on an artificial platform that was supported by a series of terraces. Archaeologists have uncovered a stepped stone structure over fifty feet tall at the northeast corner of this ridge. This was most likely the platform for the Jebusite citadel referred to in verse 7, and was enhanced by David for use as the foundation of his palace built in verse 11. The city was surrounded by a ten-foot-thick wall that had first been built over eight hundred years earlier. There is little else that archaeologists have found in the city that is attributable to the time of David.

5:6. Jebusites. First mentioned as descendants of Canaan (Gen 10:16), the Jebusites were probably non-Semitic peoples, related to the Hittites or Hurrians, who moved into this region during the early second millennium. They inhabited the hill country along the southern border with Benjamin (Josh 15:8) and the city of Jebus (Josh 15:63; 2 Sam 5:6). After David captured Jerusalem, the Jebusites apparently were either assimilated or were enslaved and eventually lost their ethnic identity (2 Sam 5:6-9).

5:6. lame and blind. There has been some suggestion that this was a magical tactic involving a hex. By positioning lame and blind people on the walls the threat was posed that any who entered the city would become lame and blind. Most, however, have preferred the understanding that this is simply a taunting hyperbole: "Even the lame and blind could hold off your armies!"

5:7. Zion. The etymology of Zion cannot at present be traced, but here (its first occurrence) it appears to refer to the acropolis of the Jebusite city. It later came to represent David's city and was used to refer to the entire city of

Jerusalem through much of the poetic and prophetic literature of the Old Testament.

5:8. water shaft. For over a century many interpreters have identified David's means of entry into the city with Warren's Shaft, a rock-cut tunnel that gave the residents access to the water of the Gihon Spring. More recent archaeological work in the tunnel system by Reich and Shukron, however, has determined that the Warren Shaft was never used as a water tunnel and was not connected to the underground system in the time of David. The following comments explore the various elements involved in this interpretation.

The Gihon spring lies in the Kidron valley on the southeast side of the city. Three or four times a day it gushes water for about forty minutes. It can provide up to forty-five thousand cubic feet per day (enough to fill a pool that is seventy-five feet square and eight feet deep).

The strategic importance of water systems. In time of siege it was imperative for the inhabitants of the city to have access to a secure water supply, but the city walls were on the crest of the hill, while the spring was in the valley. For this reason much engineering creativity was directed toward the use of tunnels and shafts cut through the bedrock that could provide water for the city. Other water tunnels are known from Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer and Gibeon (see comment on 2:13). The earliest rock-cut water systems known from the ancient Near East are from thirteenth-century Mycenaea.

Jerusalem's water system. From inside the city one would enter a passageway that descended gradually by slopes and steps. A sharp right turn would enter a horizontal tunnel that ended in a steep stairway into a natural cave. The distance from the entrance to the cave is about 130 feet. A sharp turn from the cave led one into a fortified tower, where the water from the Gihon Spring collected in a large pool.

David's penetration of the city. The only entryway into the water system from the outside would have been through a channel that forked off from the tunnel that took water from the spring to the pool in the tower. This channel ran the length of the city. It was not a tunnel, but it was covered over by huge rocks. At this stage it is not possible to offer any clear idea of how Joab made his way into the city.

5:9. king's personal ownership of the capital. The title "City of David" may reflect the ancient practice that the capital city became not only the royal residence but the personal estate of the reigning king and his successors. From Tukulti-Ninurta of the thirteenth century to Sargon II of the eighth century, Assyrian kings were known to name capital cities after themselves. Sargon purchased the site of Dur-Sharrukin and built his capital there (Khorsabad) in much the same way that Omri bought the site for his new capital, Samaria (1 Kings 16:24). Such royal estate cities typically housed the administration (composed largely of relatives of the king) and enjoyed certain privileges, including exemption from taxation, corvee labor, military duty and imprisonment, as well as being beneficiaries of the most beautiful and elaborate building projects. Such privileges *(kidinnutu)* were enjoyed, for instance, by Babylonian cities such as Nippur, Sippar and Borsippa, based on their status as religious centers rather than as political capitals. Political capitals such as Nineveh and Babylon also were endowed with similar status.

5:9. supporting terraces (millo). It is now accepted by most that this important defensive structure should be identified with what archaeologists have called the "stepped stone structure" (see comment on 5:6). This structure is made of rock and earth, and allowed for the building area to be expanded by about two thousand square feet.

5:11. Tyre. Tyre was one of the major Phoenician seaports of the ancient world. It was located on a small island (about 150 acres) in the Mediterranean just off the coast about one hundred miles directly north of Jerusalem. The city and its mainland fortress are well represented in ancient sources from as early as Ebla and including Egyptian execration texts, Amarna letters, the Epic of Keret (Ugaritic), the Tale of Wenamon (Egypt) and down into Greek and Roman sources. Besides its significant role in the sea trade of the day, the textile and dye industry (see comment on Num 4:6) and the export of cedar were among the pillars of its economy.

5:11. Hiram. The dates of Hiram I of Tyre (Phoenician Ahiram; Assyrian Hirummu) are commonly cited as 969-936 B.C., based on the chronological reckoning of the Jewish historian, Josephus (first century A.D.). He claims to have extensive records of the history of Tyre and offers much information about Hiram's reign. This dating gives little if any overlap between David and Hiram and is suspect due to the methods of calculation available to Josephus. Contemporary Near Eastern sources offer no information about this Hiram but mention prominently his later namesake, Hiram II. The name is also well known from the sarcophagus of Ahiram, king of nearby

Byblos, around this same time period.

5:11. cedar wood. Cedar trees are slow growing and can live up to three thousand years and attain heights of 120 feet. Beautiful grain, sweet-smelling aroma and durability combined to make cedar the wood of choice for most temples and palaces of the ancient world. High resin content inhibited the growth of fungus. The forests of Lebanon on the west slope of the Lebanon range (at elevation levels of about five thousand feet) were one of the few places where it grew. Both Mesopotamia and Egypt were importing it beginning as early as the fourth millennium B.C. By the year 1000, there was little that remained of the legendary forests, making the rare wood all the more valuable.

5:11. David's palace. Though no remains of David's palace have been discovered by archaeologists, the assistance of Hiram of Tyre suggests that it would have been of Phoenician architectural design. Contemporary Phoenician examples excavated in Syria are identified by the Akkadian description *bit-hilani,* which refers to the characteristic porch with columns that are prominently featured. A palace of *bit-hilani* style has been excavated in Israel at Megiddo and has been identified as Solomon's palace. This most likely offers the closest example of what David's palace in Jerusalem would have looked like. The palace at Megiddo is about seventy feet square. Inside, a number of large halls, an audience chamber, an interior courtyard and about a dozen smaller rooms for residential or administrative use filled out the first floor. It was at least two stories tall and featured a guard tower.

5:13. royal marriages as political strategy. Marriage was a tool of diplomacy throughout the ancient Near East. Towns, city-states, tribes or nations who wished to ally themselves with a ruler or come under his protection sealed the treaty with a marriage of a daughter of their chief family to the suzerain or his son. This was an act of loyalty on the part of the vassal, who would then have a personal stake in preserving the dynasty. For instance, Zimri-Lim, the king of Mari during the eighteenth century B.C., successfully placed his daughters in the harems of nearby kingdoms and married several foreign wives himself to increase his power and the stability of his realm. Similarly Pharaoh Thutmose IV (1425-1412 B.C.) arranged a marriage with a daughter of the Mitannian king to demonstrate good relations and end a series of wars with that middle Euphrates kingdom. In David's case, prior to becoming king of Israel he made a series of marriages that strengthened his political and economic position (see comment on 1 Sam 25:39-44). The marriages in this verse likely assured the support of some of the leading families of Jerusalem.

5:17. stronghold. The stronghold referred to here is not the same as that referred to in 1 Samuel 22:4 and 24:22, but is likely the Jebusite citadel in Jerusalem. The platform for this citadel and a few remnants of the wall have been found by archaeologists at the northern end of the Jebusite city in the area south of the modern walls of the Old City.

5:18. Valley of Rephaim. As the Sorek Valley moves eastward out of the Shephelah near Beth Shemesh, it breaks into several passes into the hills around Jerusalem. The Sorek Valley at one point turns northeast toward Gibeon, while the Valley of Rephaim turns east-southeast toward the area between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. It joins the north-south road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and then heads northeast into Jerusalem. This would be a strategic location for the Philistines to cut David off from potential reinforcements from Judah.

5:19. oracular inquiry. From chapter 23 through the end of 1 Samuel, David is making oracular inquiries of the Lord by means of the ephod under the guidance of Abiathar the priest. It is likely that is also what is happening here. In an oracular inquiry a yes-no question was posed to the deity, and a binary mechanism was used to determine what the answer was. The normative means laid out for this process in Exodus was the Urim and Thummim (which were kept in a pouch in the ephod).

5:20. Baal Perazim. The "baal" element in this name (as a title for deity) is thought to identify the site as a sacred site and may have derived its name from Perez the son of Judah and progenitor of the line of David. Some identify the site as the ridge between Giloh and Beit Jala about two miles northwest of Bethlehem.

5:21. abandoned idols. Nearly every army in the ancient Near East included priests and diviners (as seen in the Mari texts), prophets (2 Kings 3) and portable sacred objects (Assyrian Annals of Shalmaneser III [858-824 B.C.]). In this way, the god(s) could be consulted on the battlefield or invoked to lead the soldiers to victory. In the divine warrior motif, the deity is fighting the battles and defeating the deities of the enemy. In most situations prayers would be made and omens asked to assure the god's presence. The idols would only be abandoned under the most critical circumstances. There are several cases in the ancient world of statues of a god being carried off as

trophies of war. For examples see comment on 1 Samuel 5:2.

5:24. marching in the balsam trees. If balsam trees are mentioned here, they would be identified as bushlike shrubs called mastic terebinths, common in the hill country. While there are many reasons to be suspicious of that translation, no other suggestion has been persuasive either. There is agreement, however, that some sort of tree is referred to. It has been suggested that David is using a tree oracle in which observations of the trees are taken as divine guidance, but it is difficult to confirm this as a regular oracular procedure.

5:24. divine vanguard. In the divine warrior motif the deity goes out as the vanguard to vanquish the enemy. This is common throughout the ancient Near East. In Hittite accounts, Hattusilis III claims that Ishtar went out before him. In Egypt, Amun-Re is said to have gone out before the armies of Thutmose III. The deity terrifies and confuses the enemy, and at times sends thunder (see comment on 1 Sam 7:10) or earthquakes (see comment on 1 Sam 14:15).

5:25. Gibeon to Gezer. The Valley of Rephaim (where the Philistines were camped in verse 22) is southwest of Jerusalem. The Gibeon-Gezer corridor follows the Aijalon Valley, which is northwest of Jerusalem. Verse 23 suggests that David positioned his army to the west of the Philistines to block their retreat. This would have driven the Philistines toward Jerusalem (about two miles), which they would have passed to the west. Just north of the city they would have veered northwest to make for Gibeon (six miles). There may have been additional Philistine garrisons in this area, or they may simply be heading for the next corridor to the plain. Since the text mentions Gezer, they must have headed northwest out of Gibeon to the Beth Horon pass (about three miles; see comment on Josh 10:10) and down into the Valley of Aijalon (five miles). It is about seven more miles to Gezer, which means that David drove the Philistines completely out of the hill country.

6:1-23
The Installation of the Ark in Jerusalem

6:1. thirty thousand chosen men. David's standing army is now thirty divisions (see comment on Josh 8:3). The importance of the ark as well as its military significance is indicated by the size of the escort. Processions to showcase military might were common in the ancient world and continue in popularity today. The Assyrian army likewise accompanied the statue of Marduk as it was restored to Babylon from Asshur in the seventh century.

6:2. Baalah. In 1 Chronicles 13:6 Baalah is identified as another name for Kiriath Jearim. The ark has been housed in Kiriath Jearim ever since its return from Philistia. The site is commonly (but tentatively) identified with Tell el-Azhar, nine miles west northwest of Jerusalem.

6:2. enthroned between the cherubim. The ark was a wooden box, open at the top, approximately three to four feet in length and two and a quarter feet in both width and height, based on eighteen inches a cubit. It was overlaid inside and out with sheets of the finest gold and had four rings (also gold covered) attached to the sides for the insertion of two gold-encrusted poles, which were used to carry the ark and to protect it from the touch of all but the high priest. A golden cover, decorated with two winged cherubim, sealed the ark. Its primary function was to store the tablets and to serve as a "footstool" for God's throne, thereby providing an earthly link between God and the Israelites. In Egyptian festivals the images of the gods were often carried in procession on portable barques. Paintings portray these as boxes about the size of the ark carried on poles and decorated with or flanked by guardian creatures. Biblical descriptions as well as archaeological discoveries (including some fine ivory pieces from Nimrud in Mesopotamia, Arslan Tash in Syria and Samaria in Israel) suggest the cherubim are composite creatures (having features of a number of different creatures, like the Egyptian sphinx), often four-legged animal bodies with wings. The cherubim appear in ancient art with some regularity, flanking the thrones of kings and deities. The combination of cherubim as throne guardians, chests as footstools and statements in the Old Testament concerning Yahweh being enthroned on the cherubim supports the concept of the ark as representing the invisible throne of Yahweh. The use of empty thrones was widespread in the ancient world. They were provided for use by deities or royal personages when they were present.

6:3. new cart. The use of a new cart would assure that there was no ritual impurity connected to the cart from previous usage (for instance, if it had been used to transport dung or dead animals). However, instructions for the transport of the ark always involved priests using poles to carry it rather than using a cart. The cart precedent was set by the Philistines (1 Sam 6:7).

6:5. worship music. These are all typical musi-

cal instruments of the time and are attested in ancient Near Eastern texts, reliefs and paintings as early as the third millennium B.C. There is still some disagreement among authorities as to which of the Hebrew words in this passage ought to be translated "harp" and which one as "lyre." The one the NIV translates "lyre" is a ten-stringed instrument, while the one translated "harp" is thought to have had fewer strings. Both are hand-held with frames made of wood. The tambourine has been identified in archaeological reliefs as the tambour, a small drum (leather stretched over a hoop) that would not have the tinny rattle sound of modern tambourines. The fourth instrument (NIV "sistrum") is the most difficult because it only occurs here. It is most commonly considered a shaker or rattle of some sort. The last, cymbals, are made of bronze and are in the percussion group, so the only remaining question concerns their size.

6:6. threshing floor of Nacon. The location of this threshing floor is unknown. The text puts it in the vicinity of Obed-Edom's house, which in turn is not far from Jerusalem, but it is impossible to be more precise.

6:7. Uzzah's irreverence. The ark is viewed as an object requiring respect and caution. Its very nature made it dangerous (compare electricity). The word translated "irreverence" occurs only here in the Old Testament, but the same root in related languages means "disdain" (Akkadian) or "negligence" (Aramaic).

6:10. house of Obed-Edom. The name Obed-Edom means "servant of Edom" (perhaps a deity's name; compare Obadiah = Obed-Yah[weh]). Additionally he is identified as a Gittite, that is, from Gath. A company of soldiers (mercenaries?) from Gath made up David's personal bodyguard (see 15:18), and it is possible that this individual is one of them. The house is generally considered to be in close proximity to Jerusalem, but evidence is lacking.

6:13. sacrifice every six steps. When the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal was restoring the image of Marduk to Babylon (seventh century), fatted bulls were offered every two miles along the way (Assur to Babylon is about 250 miles). David would have made about the same number of sacrifices as Ashurbanipal in about a half mile. The text does not specify what was used for an altar or how long the procession took. The word translated "bull" is a general term for cattle that can be male or female. The category of fatted calf is not used in the ritual instructions in the Pentateuch. It is presumed to be an animal that has been specially fed and pampered so the meat will be tender. The text does not specify what type of sacrifice this is intended to be.

6:14. linen ephod. Though the ephod is a priestly garment, David is not necessarily portrayed as actually officiating in the role of the priest. Alternatively he may be taking the role of supplicant before the Lord and thus "offers" the sacrifices, not as priest but as any worshiper would (see comment below on verse 17).

6:14. dancing in the ancient world. Much of the dancing that is attested in the ancient world takes place in cultic contexts, though both Mesopotamian and Egyptian sources frequently depict dancers involved in entertainment. The dancing connected to festivals would probably resemble folk dancing of today, featuring the coordinated movements of a group of dancers. At other times the dances could more resemble ballet, where a scene or a drama is acted out. Single dancers usually performed either whirling, squatting, leaping, hopping-type dances or acrobatics approximating a modern gymnast's routine. Dancers sometimes performed either scantily clad or in the nude. In cultic contexts the participating officials (i.e., priests and administration) at times danced, not just the professionals. In one Hittite ritual this specifically included the queen. There are no known examples of dancing kings.

6:14-21. David's activity. The verb translated "danced" in verses 14 and 16 is used only in this passage. The use of the word in the related language of Ugaritic shows it to be something one does with fingers, thus suggesting snapping or waving fingers. The verb translated "leaping" in verse 16 is used only here and in a slightly different form in Genesis 49:24, where it is a description of the agility of the arms. In the parallel passage, 1 Chronicles 15:29, the verb translated "dancing" is only used of human activity twice (once parallel to singing and rejoicing, Job 21:11; and once opposite to mourning, Ecc 3:4). It generally conveys swaying, trembling or vibrating movements. It is possible, then, that David is not involved in dance at all but is swaying his arms and snapping or waving his fingers.

6:15. trumpets. The trumpet referred to here is the ram's horn (shofar). The shofar is capable of a variety of tones but cannot play a tune so is used primarily for signals either in worship or in warfare. The ram's horn was softened in hot water, then bent and flattened to produce its distinctive shape.

6:17. tent pitched for the ark. The text does not refer to this tent as the tent of meeting or the tabernacle, the two technical descriptions

that typically identify the sanctuary that had been ordained at Sinai. Canaanite religious texts also speak of pavilions used for the dwelling of the gods. Archaeologists have found the remains of a Midianite tent shrine at Timnah that dates to the twelfth century B.C. It too was made of curtains draped over poles. Portable structures of similar design (curtains hung over gold-gilded beams or poles) are found in Egypt as early as the mid-third millennium both in sacred and secular use.

6:17. burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Burnt offerings were totally consumed on the altar and usually were connected to petitions (see comment on Lev 1:3-4). Fellowship offerings provided a basis for a communal meal, and typical use of this offering was for ratification of treaties or covenant agreements. For more information see comments on 1 Samuel 10:8; Exodus 24:5; and Leviticus 3:1-5. The fellowship offerings are seen in contexts of coronation (1 Sam 11) and temple dedication (1 Kings 8). It is possible that the installation of the ark was combined with an enthronement celebration; see next comment.

6:17. enthronement celebration. Assyrian enthronement festivals from the time of Tukulti-Ninurta I (twelfth century) describe the king taking off his royal robes and praying humbly before the deity. Then the king is re-crowned and blessed. There follows a procession to the throne, concluding in gifts of allegiance being offered by high officials. The similarities in David's festivities can easily be seen. Here it is Yahweh whose enthronement is being celebrated. David sets aside his royal garments and leads the procession as a simple supplicant to the throne room (the tent). Then the sacrifices of petition and allegiance are offered. From verse 21 it might be inferred that on this occasion there was also a reaffirmation of David's election and kingship. Assyrian records also preserve several accounts of the founding of a new royal city (Ashurnasirpal, Sargon, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon). These feature the god being brought into the city accompanied by sacrifices and a banquet (including music), with food and drink being distributed liberally to the people.

6:18. blessings for the people. In the ancient world, blessings (as well as curses) were believed to have a power all their own that would result in their fulfillment. They were often given by the priests to someone leaving the sanctuary after participating in some ritual. In ancient Near Eastern practice a phrase invoking the gods to grant watch care and well-being is used regularly in Ugaritic and Akkadian salutations. Finally, the phrase "the Lord bless you and keep you" is also found in the words (Hebrew) painted on a large storage jar from the ninth century B.C. found at Kuntillet Ajrud in the northern Sinai.

6:19. gifts for the people. The loaf of bread here is a braided ring bread that is perforated in the baking process. "Date cake" is a traditional translation—the word occurs only in this account, and the meaning is uncertain. The treat rendered "raisin cake" could be made out of any dried fruit. Hosea 3:1 specifies that raisins are used to make this morsel, but the context here does not give that information. This would be a block or ball of compressed dried fruit.

6:20. Michal's complaint. In verse 16 the text says that when Michal saw David performing whatever he was doing (see comment on 6:14-21) that she despised him. It is not until this verse that detail is given concerning what offended her. Michal's complaint did not focus on undignified behavior but on David's attire. There are two reasons already mentioned why David may have set aside his royal robes in favor of a simple linen ephod. If he is dancing as part of the procession (see 6:14 above), he may have adopted the attire of those who dance, which was often very little. If this resembles an enthronement festival (see 6:17 above), it was customary for the king to adopt the role of supplicant. Since Michal compares him to a "vulgar fellow," it is likely that the former represents her understanding.

7:1-29

A Covenant and a Dynasty for David

7:1, 11. rest. Here it is indicated that God has given David rest from his enemies, and throughout the Old Testament the Lord speaks of giving rest to his people. This is especially significant in this context where David wants to build a temple, because in the ancient Near East the temple of the deity was supposed to offer rest to the deity. Some of the temple names even suggest that as a primary function of the temple. This divine rest then often results in rest for the people in their land. In contrast the Bible says little about divine rest, and it is never the prerequisite for human rest except for the sabbath.

7:2-3. prophet as advisor. Prior to the time of Samuel, prophets had exercised political leadership by virtue of their prophetic office. With the initiation of kingship the role of the prophet had become an advisory role. Rather than leading the people as the recipient of divine messages, the prophet offered guidance to the

king, who would retain the freedom to accept or reject it. For more information see comments on Deuteronomy 18:14-22.

7:2. cedar dwelling versus tent dwelling. It was a common occurrence in the ancient Near East for a victorious king to show his gratitude to the patron deity by building a temple. Examples go back into the mid-third millennium among the Sumerians and continue down into Assyrian, Babylonian and even Persian times. The temple (home of the god) was expected to bring the protection of the deity to the king and his land. A permanent and luxurious dwelling (cedar) would be intended to insure the Lord's presence and favor. In Ugaritic literature the father god, El, was believed to inhabit a tent shrine (as were many of the Canaanite deities). Baal, in contrast, built for himself a beautiful palace.

7:5. divine permission to build. In the ancient world it was important to procure divine permission to build a temple. If the king proceeded on his own without direction as to the location, orientation, size and materials, he could expect only failure. In the Neo-Babylonian period Nabonidus tells of a king who undertook such a project without the consent of the gods, with the result that the temple collapsed. In the Sumerian *Curse of Akkad,* Naram-Sin seeks an omen that will permit him to build a temple. Though he does not receive one, he proceeds anyway. His action is consequently blamed for the fall of the dynasty of Akkad.

7:8-11. deity as king's sponsor. It is common rhetoric in the ancient Near East for a king to claim the sponsorship of the national deity. Hittite and Mesopotamian documents are especially clear. The deity is acknowledged as having brought the king to the throne, given him the land and established his kingship. The god is relied upon to protect the king, give him victory over his enemies and establish his dynastic line, thereby determining the destiny of the king.

7:13. son to build temple. An inscription survives in which Adad-Guppi, the famous queen mother of the Neo-Babylonian empire (sixth century), reports a dream given by the god Sin. The god told her that it was her son who would construct the temple for him in the city of Harran. This was different to David's situation in that it was a work of restoring a sanctuary that had fallen into ruins.

7:14. father/son relationship between God and king. Egyptian kingship is particularly strong on this point, since the kingship of the pharaoh was seen as derived from the divine realm. More particularly he was conceived as the son of Re, the sun god. In Ugaritic literature, Keret, king of Khubur, is identified as the son of El, the chief god of the Canaanites. Among the Aramean kings the designation was even included in their throne names (Ben-Hadad means son of Hadad). In Mesopotamia, from Gilgamesh in the mid-third millennium through kings such as Gudea, Hammurabi, Tukulti-Ninurta and Ashurbanipal, just to name a few, it was part of the royal prerogative to claim divine heritage.

7:14-15. security despite discipline. In one Hittite treaty of the second millennium the Hittite king, Hattusilis III, guarantees his vassal, Ulmi-Teshup of Tarhuntassa, that his son and grandson will inherit the land after him. The text goes on to say that if Ulmi-Teshup's descendants commit offenses, they will be punished (even with death), but that the land will not be taken away from Ulmi-Teshup's family as long as there is a male heir.

7:15. covenant love. Hittite, Akkadian, Ugaritic and Aramaic examples all show that the positive action of the suzerain toward the vassal is expressed as love, kindness and graciousness, and in return the vassal is expected to respond with obedience and loyalty. In the Amarna letters (from vassal kings of Canaan to their Egyptian overlord) "love" is used as a characterization of friendly and loyal international relationships. It expresses the vassal's intentions to be loyal and to honor the terms of the treaty agreement between the parties. The biblical text shows a clear example of this usage in 1 Kings 5:1. There are rare instances in Mesopotamian literature where an individual is admonished to love a deity, but in general the gods of the ancient Near East did not seek love from their worshipers, nor did gods enter into covenant relationships with them.

7:18-29. observations about David's prayer. In a prayer of Ashurnasirpal I (an Assyrian king a generation earlier than David) to Ishtar he thanks Ishtar for her sponsorship. The benevolent acts he recognizes include raising him up from obscurity, appointing him as a shepherd to the people, making him a name and allowing him to establish justice for his people. These are also some of the same divine services that Nathan has identified to David (verses 8-11).

7:22. monotheism. The statement here that there is no God except Yahweh goes beyond previous statements. Though there were several attempts in the ancient world to magnify one god to the near exclusion of others, these do not come close to the ideal of monotheism represented in ancient Israel (see comments on Ex 20:3 and Deut 6:4).

8:1-18

David's Kingdom

8:1. Metheg Ammah. Many doubt that this is a place name, and a number of creative alternatives have been proposed. If it *is* a place name, the location has not been identified.

8:2-3. selective, proportional execution. The described means of choosing those who would be executed is unparalleled in both the Bible and the ancient Near Eastern records available to us.

8:2. tribute. When one state or other political entity conquered another or extended hegemony over its affairs, the result was the exaction of tribute payments from the subject people. This could take the form of precious metals (by weight or as jewelry or implements), farm produce (a significant portion of the harvest) or labor service. Not surprisingly, this draining of the economy was unpopular and was generally the reason for revolt or warfare. Extrabiblical documentation for this practice is widespread. For instance, the annals of the Assyrian kings often include lists of items received as tribute: the Black Obelisk inscription of Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.) contains Jehu's tribute to Assyria of silver, gold, lead and hard woods; Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 B.C.) received elephant hide, ivory, linen garments and other luxury items from his vassals in Damascus, Samaria, Tyre and elsewhere.

8:3. Hadadezer. Hadadezer is identified as the son of Rehob, which may indicate his association with the important town of Beth Rehob (see 10:6). The Assyrian king who was contemporary to David, Ashurrabi II, reports significant trouble from an Aramean king who is seeking to expand into Assyrian territory. There is no mention of this king's name, but Hadadezer is the most likely candidate. The name itself is familiar since it is also the name of the Aramean king who opposed the Assyrians in the ninth century (Adad-Idri is the Assyrian form).

8:3. Zobah. This important Aramean kingdom was situated in the vicinity of the Anti-Lebanon range and the northern section of the Beqa Valley (southern section of the Orontes) and extended east to the plain of Homs. It is mentioned in Neo-Assyrian records of the eighth and seventh centuries.

8:3. Euphrates River. The bend of the Euphrates at Emar is most likely the area intended here. According to 1 Chronicles 18 this battle took place at Hamath on the Orontes river. NIV's "control" is the Hebrew word for "hand," which elsewhere refers to a stele or monument with a royal inscription (1 Sam 15:12; 2 Sam 18:18) being set up here by David. Verse 13 speaks of a "name" David makes (NIV "became famous"), which is another way that Hebrew speaks of a monument. Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III (fifteenth century) boasted of the steles they erected on the banks of the Euphrates.

8:4. chariots. The chariots of Syria during this period are similar to the Assyrian models depicted in reliefs of the ninth century. They featured two yoked horses with one or two others harnessed beside. Two spoked wooden wheels on a rear axle supported a small platform occupied by a driver and rider equipped with bow and spear. The sides only went up to mid-thigh on the standing occupants.

8:4. hamstringing. Horses could not be mercifully shot as they are today, and the Israelites had no use for them and no means to care for them; they certainly did not want their enemies to have continued use of them. Hamstringing involves cutting through the rear tarsal tendon in the hock joint (equivalent of human Achilles tendon), leaving the horses unable to walk.

8:5. Arameans of Damascus. The movement of Arameans into the Levant took place in the eleventh century. Based on other examples from cuneiform literature, the name Aram may in fact have originally been that of a region (cf., Sippar-Amnantum of the Old Babylonian period) that was later applied to people living there. Current evidence suggests that the Arameans inhabited the upper Euphrates throughout the second millennium, first as villagers and pastoralists, then as a political, national coalition. In this text there is no mention of a king of Damascus, suggesting that Damascus has not yet emerged as a major power in the region.

8:5. Damascus. Damascus is located in an oasis watered by the Barada River in the shadow of the Anti-Lebanon range to the west and with the Syrian desert stretching out to its east. It is first mentioned in the lists of Thutmose III in the fifteenth century and is named, though not in a major role, in the Amarna texts. Its major prominence comes in the conflicts with Assyria in the ninth and eighth centuries. The continuing occupation of the site has offered few opportunities for excavation, resulting in no information to illuminate the biblical period.

8:7. gold "shields." The Hebrew term here was long obscure but is now recognized as a technical term borrowed from Aramaic referring to a bow case. Ceremonial bow cases are pictured in later Persian reliefs.

8:8. Tebah and Berothai. Tubikhu is men-

tioned in the Amarna texts as a city south of Homs and may be the Tebah mentioned here. It is also known from Egyptian itineraries. Berothai is Bereitan in the Beqa Valley south of Baalbek. 1 Chronicles 18:8 adds Cun (Kunu) to the list, which was the ancient name of Baalbek (almost fifty miles north of Damascus).

8:9. Tou of Hamath. Tou of Hamath controlled the region north of Zobah and was apparently pleased to see the influence of the kingdom of Zobah checked by the Israelites. While Hamath (modern Hama, about 130 miles north of Damascus) is the name of a city on the Orontes, it also identifies a nation in Neo-Assyrian records. Tou is unknown outside the Bible, but the name is common in the Hurrian language. This suggests that Hamath was not at this time an Aramean state.

8:10-11. dedicating precious metals to the Lord. Dedication of the precious metals to the Lord means that they were donated to the sanctuary's treasury and became part of the assets administered by the priests rather than going into the royal treasuries. Specially selected objects such as ceremonial weapons or important cultic objects would have been kept, while many of the smaller items would be melted down.

8:12. extent of David's control. David's kingdom included Transjordan at least as far south as the Arnon. Territory of Edom focused on the region southwest of the Dead Sea. David's conquests targeted the two major trade routes through the region.

8:13. Valley of Salt. Wadi el-Milh is one possibility, halfway between Beersheba and the Dead Sea, though only the name supports the identification.

8:14. building garrisons. Placing garrisons in annexed territories or in vassal countries allowed a country to extend its supply line and to monitor activities and maintain control. Food supplies and arms could be stored there, and the military personnel could be ready to deal with any deviation from treaty stipulations or to put down any uprisings. Likewise tribute could be collected and merchant activity controlled.

8:16-18. administrative officers and organization. Joab is listed first, reflecting the reality that the military commander was second in command in the administration. This was normal in the Levant. The recorder would have charge of the records and documents of state and could be viewed as a herald or even as the equivalent to the modern press secretary. He also had control of who was admitted to see the king and would have been the protocol officer. The secretary would have been in charge of diplomatic correspondence and would have been comparable in some ways to the Secretary of State. There has been some suggestion that these offices are tailored to Egyptian models of administration, but Canaanite models are equally defensible.

8:17. two high priests. Abiathar descends from the line of Eli (see comment on 1 Sam 1:3), which held the high priestly office at the beginning of this period. Zadok is later identified as representing the line of Aaron through his firstborn, Eleazar (1 Chron 6:8). There is no information concerning how the transfer of power had occurred during the Judges period. It is not impossible that the Zadok line had retained priestly prerogatives in Judah, but one can only speculate. Competing priesthoods are not unusual in the ancient Near East, but typically would represent priesthoods for different gods.

8:18. Kerethites and Pelethites. These were groups of mercenaries who served David as vassals rather than as members of the standing army. The Kerethites are identified as immigrants from Crete and are closely associated with the Philistines, who were believed to come from the same area of the Aegean. The Pelethites are known only from passages such as this, where they are associated with the Kerethites.

8:18. sons as "advisers." The Hebrew text uses the word "priests," but this is not the problem it has been portrayed as. Although the tribe of Levi had been exclusively assigned all of the duties related to the sanctuary (see comments on Lev 10:10 and Num 18:1-7), there is no text that prohibits non-Levites from performing other priestly tasks (see comments on Ex 28:1). It is just that as time went on, priestly tasks not related to the sanctuary were gradually eliminated (see 2 Kings 23:8). The existence of priestly duties carried out within the family context are indicated in post-Sinai contexts (Judg 6:24-26; 13:19; 1 Sam 20:29), and in the general culture of the ancient Near East the oldest son frequently had priestly duties in the veneration of ancestors (see comment on Num 3:1). Saul had been reprimanded for his involvement in a priestly function, but that may have been because it violated the charter (1 Sam 10:25) that delineated his role with respect to Samuel's (see comment on 1 Sam 13:8-13). David's priestly prerogatives may have been attached to the traditional roles in Jerusalem. The existence of such a royal priestly tradition is recognized in places like Psalm 110:4 and perhaps in David's participation in the ceremony of installing the ark (above, 6:14).

9:1-13

David's Care for Mephibosheth

9:3. lame in both feet. See the comment on Mephibosheth and his disability in 2 Samuel 4:4.

9:4. Lo Debar. This was an area north of the Yarmuk River in Transjordan that was allied with Saul and later transformed into a vassal state by David. The site of Tell Dober, which has evidence of occupation in the Iron I and II periods, may well be the city that controlled this region. It lies at the southwestern tip of the Golan and is north of the Yarmuk.

9:7. David's action contrasted to normal. Mephibosheth had good cause to be afraid of David. There is wide precedent in Mesopotamian texts for the elimination of all rival claimants to the throne when a king comes to power (compare Baasha's murder of Jeroboam's family in 1 Kings 15:29). Such purges also occurred years later as a form of revenge for political opposition or rebellion attempted against previous rulers. For example, Ashurbanipal mutilated, executed and fed the bodies of his grandfather's rivals to dogs as part of his first official acts as king of Assyria. David, however, treats Mephibosheth, the only surviving male member of the royal family, as the rightful heir to Saul's estates. His generosity is coupled with the command to eat at David's table. In this way Mephibosheth is treated with honor, though some have noted it also keeps him under observation should he be inclined to subversion.

9:7. eating at the king's table. Political prisoners were seldom kept in prison cells. It was more advantageous for the king to hold them in confinement within his palace or royal city, treating them to the pleasures of the "king's table" but always keeping a close eye on their activities. Reports in ration lists from the Babylonian and Assyrian periods provide evidence of food, clothing and oil provided to "guests" of the king. Persian courts contained political detainees as well as "allies" who were kept in the king's presence to insure a continual flow of taxes and soldiers for the army. Thus Mephibosheth, like Jehoiachin many years later (2 Kings 25:27-30), enjoyed the largesse of the king's court but was not truly free.

10:1-19

War with the Ammonites

10:2. David's intended treatment of Hanun. During David's outlaw period he not only spent time as a Philistine mercenary but also sought out help from Saul's enemy Nahash of Ammon. This would have involved a pact of mutual nonaggression and support, and would have been of benefit to both David and Nahash. Most treaties found in ancient Near Eastern documents are suzerain treaties in which a stronger state imposes tribute and other obligations on vassal states (see the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon). Some, like the treaty ending the war between Egypt and Hittites in the thirteenth century B.C., recognize "brotherhood" or parity between the two sovereigns (Rameses II and Hattusilis III). Since treaties were considered to be "eternal," it is not unusual that David would have sent a delegation to Hanun to renew the elements of this agreement. The hostile reaction the diplomats received suggests Ammon's fear that David wished to transform the treaty from a parity agreement to a suzerain treaty.

10:3. Hanun's treatment of David's men. David's messengers have half their beards shaved (symbolically emasculating them and by extension David) and "their garments [were cut] in the middle at their hips," leaving them naked like slaves or captives (see Is 20:4). These men were ambassadors and as such were entitled to both respect and diplomatic immunity. What may seem like a "prank" was in fact a direct challenge to David's power and authority, and precipitated a war between the two nations. David could not allow such an obvious "rape" or symbolic castration of his representatives to go unavenged. A review of Assyrian royal annals (Sargon II, Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal) contains justifications for a declaration of war based on a violation of a sworn agreement or the physical challenging of Assyrian authority. Although the annals are not as graphic as this example, they also serve as a "dropping of the gauntlet" in political terms.

10:5. till beards grow back. Beards were a symbol of virility (compare the Assyrian king Shamshi Adad's taunting of his son Yasmah-Addu, saying "Are you not a man—have you no beard?" in the Mari letters). The physical message conveyed by Hanun's act is that Israel would be deprived of its strength and thrown into mourning, with garments torn and heads and beards shaved (see Is 15:2). As representatives of the king, these ambassadors were personally embarrassed by their treatment. However, by extension, David was also shamed, and thus he kept them from public view until the "damage" was no longer visible.

10:6. coalition. Very often small states or kingdoms would ally together against a common enemy. In this case, Ammon, feeling the need to strengthen its position against David, en-

listed the help of the Arameans. Twenty divisions of troops came from Beth Rehob on the border between Syria and Israel (in the vicinity of the Huleh Valley near Tel Dan—see Judg 18:28), and from Zobah in the northern Beqa Valley. The former city is also mentioned in Egyptian records from the time of Thutmose III. See the comment on 2 Samuel 8:3 for other conflicts between Israel and the Aramean king Hadadezer. Maacah also lies southeast of Beth Rehob, south of Mount Hermon and east of the Jordan. The last group of soldiers (twelve divisions) come from Tob (et-Tayibeh, twelve miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee in Gilead). The list of allies thus names the regions from north to south, covering the territory from the Orontes to the territory of Ammon.

10:7-12. battle situation. The presence of two separate forces (Ammonites defending the gates of their city [probably Rabbah] and Arameans deployed in the adjoining area) required Joab to divide his own army and make contingency plans with his co-commander, Abishai, in case of a collapse by either Israelite group (compare the account in 1 Chron 19:9-13). This strategy suggests he was surprised by the enemy position and did not have sufficient forces to effectively fight a sustained two-front battle. Although he was in a dangerously untenable position, with enemy troops on two sides, his strategy appears to have worked, at least to the extent of a draw. This may explain why he was not able to follow up his efforts but withdrew to Jerusalem.

10:16. Helam. Although its exact location is uncertain, the city or district of Helam was probably in northern Transjordan, perhaps between Damascus and Hamath (supported by a variant reading in Ezek 47:16)—a site that could serve as a staging area for Hadadezer's Aramean troops from across the Euphrates and an area close enough to be a threat to David's control of the region. The site is mentioned almost a millennium earlier in an Egyptian execration text, but that does not help locate it.

10:17. battle lines. Military formations were designed to take advantage of terrain and the weaponry employed by the army. The text indicates that Shobach, the Aramean commander, had both chariots and infantry. The ranks of infantry, deployed in mass formations led by "commanders of fifty," included spearmen with shields in the front rank and bowmen and slingers placed immediately behind them. When the armies came together, hand-to-hand combat would have employed flat-bladed axes and daggers. The chariots were often placed on the flanks for easier maneuverability.

10:19. subjects of Israel. It was not uncommon in the ancient Near East for the fortunes of war to lead to political shifts of allegiance. With the defeat of the Aramean army, many of the villages and towns that had formerly sworn allegiance to Hadadezer now offered their support and tribute to David. Parallels to this practice can be found in the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon as well as in the campaign lists of most of the Assyrian monarchs. It should not be assumed, however, that David was able to take total, structural command of this region of northern Transjordan. Coerced support, won one day in battle, may disappear at the first sign of weakness.

11:1-27

David and Bathsheba

11:1. the time when kings go off to war. Military campaigns, while seldom officially declared, came predictably in the ancient Near East with the end of the winter rains. A period of several months was then available during the spring season, prior to the harvest, when every able-bodied man was needed to work in the fields. Many of the Assyrian and Babylonian royal annals include the notation that a military campaign began in either the first month (Nisannu) or the second month (Aiaru) of the year (the period from March-May).

11:1. king remained behind. Kings, because of the duties of state or physical reasons, could not always accompany the army in every campaign. For instance, the Assyrian king Sennacherib employs an official known as the Rabshekah to besiege Jerusalem in 2 Kings 18:17-35. David's decision to remain behind may reflect his confidence in Joab's military skill, a pressing diplomatic matter or his concern with domestic affairs.

11:1. Rabbah. Rabbah was the capital city of the ancient Ammonites. It was located at the same site as modern Amman in Jordan on the north bank of the Zerqa at the sources of the Jabbok River, about forty miles east of Jerusalem. Because of continued occupation of the area, archaeological excavations have been limited. The ancient acropolis, however, has been investigated but has yielded little about the city at the time of David (perhaps a wall constructed by him).

11:2. roof of the palace. Because of the cool breeze that refreshes Jerusalem in the early evening, many people come out to socialize or to enjoy the air from the privacy of their roof tops. The palace's architecture was most likely

similar to that of more common dwellings, with a large living or sleeping area on the roof (1 Sam 9:25).

11:2. bathing. Bathsheba's bathing is probably an act of purification following her menstrual cycle (see 2 Sam 11:4). This would be based on the laws of ritual purity as described in Leviticus 15:19-24. It is uncertain whether her intent in bathing on the roof was simply to use the air to help dry herself or whether she used the opportunity to bring herself to the attention of the king.

11:3. family of Bathsheba. The father of Bathsheba is Eliam, a member of David's special cadre of "mighty men" (2 Sam 23:34) and therefore the head of an influential household. This Eliam is the son of Ahithophel, one of David's most respected advisors (2 Sam 15:12; 16:23). This information, along with the fact that her husband, Uriah the Hittite, is also one of the "mighty men" (2 Sam 23:39), suggests that David knew exactly whose house he was looking at and was well acquainted with Bathsheba (an alternative translation suggests that it was David who said "Is this not Bathsheba?").

11:4. purification from uncleanness. The reference to Bathsheba's bathing refers to a ritual of cleansing after the completion of the seven days of impurity following her menstrual cycle (see Lev 15:19-24). It also establishes that she was within the most likely time for conception when she had sexual intercourse with David (10-14 days after commencement of menstruation). This also meant that it was impossible for Uriah to be the father of her child.

11:6-7. Hittite in army. As one of the seven major peoples of Canaan (Deut 7:1), the Hittites could easily have been hired as mercenaries, served on labor gangs or intermarried with Israelites during the period of the judges and the monarchy. They may represent descendants of immigrants from the Anatolian empire or the more recent, northern Syrian Neo-Hittite states.

11:9-11. Uriah's behavior. The presence of the ark of the covenant (v. 11) with the army suggests that they were engaged in a form of "holy war" and therefore special restrictions may have been imposed on the military (see the mass circumcision of the men prior to the beginning of the conquest in Josh 5:4-8 and the purity rites required of encamped soldiers in Deut 23:9-11 and 1 Sam 21:5). If Uriah had taken advantage of the opportunity David gave him to have intercourse with Bathsheba, it would have been possible to claim he was responsible for her pregnancy. However, Uriah's insistence on maintaining his ritual purity by sleeping in the guard barracks forced David to take more drastic measures.

11:14-15. letter of doom. Since Uriah was originally sent to David to bring a first-hand report of the military situation, it is not unusual that David would have sent him back to Joab with official dispatches and orders. As a story element, having a victim deliver his own death warrant is found in folklore from many cultures (see the *Iliad*, where the story is reported of Bellerophon, who, falsely accused, carried his own death warrant to the king of Lycia), but this is the only occurrence in the Bible.

11:15-16. deployment of Uriah. As one of David's "mighty men," Uriah would have regularly been placed at the head of a contingent of soldiers and may have been expected to hold a strategic position in the battle plan (see the description of these "mighty men" in 2 Sam 23:8-39). In this case, however, he was intentionally placed opposite an elite force of Ammonite troops and badly outmatched. Uriah's portrayal as the immaculate soldier suggests that he would accept this assignment without question, but he must have wondered at the tactics.

11:16-24. battle tactics. The tactics on each side seem to involve feints and traps. With the city under siege, it would have been unnecessary to launch offensives. It may be that Uriah's troops were sent on a mission to attempt a breach of the walls. Israelite casualties occurred when Uriah's division was met by a foray coming out to engage the would-be breachers and because they were drawn too close to the walls, where they were within range of missiles thrown or fired from above. Joab's anticipation of David's recitation of the well-known incident of Abimelech's death (Judg 9:50-53) shows that this may have either been a calculated risk or a tactical mistake, if the Israelites were simply fooled into a murderous crossfire. However, it also provided a plausible explanation for Uriah's death and probably did not cost the lives of too many other Israelite soldiers.

11:26-27. time of mourning. The standard period of mourning was seven days (Gen 50:10). Only exceptional persons merited a longer time (thirty days for Moses and Aaron in Deut 34:8 and Num 20:29). In the case of a grieving widow, this would allow her the usual amount of time associated with other forms of impurity before she could consider remarriage (see Lev 12:2; 15:19).

12:1-13
Nathan's Rebuke

12:2-4. purpose of the parable. Nathan's para-

ble of the ewe lamb provides a juridical setting for the indictment of David for his adultery with Bathsheba. As chief advocate for the rights of his people (see 2 Sam 15:4; 1 Kings 3:4-28), the king was expected to render judgment and to demonstrate his wisdom. While David does judge the actions of the "rich man," he is not wise enough to discern that he is judging himself.

12:2-12. nature of the indictment. The case presented by Nathan for David's decision may appear to the reader to have nothing to do with David's crimes, since it deals with neither adultery nor murder. What this case demonstrates is that adultery and murder were only the end results of a more serious crime: abuse of power. David is formally indicted by the divine tribunal (God speaking through the prophet) not only for taking another man's wife but for believing that he could take whatever he wanted and being dissatisfied with what God had given him. It is thus made clear that the king is not above the law and will be called to judgment by God, if not by the civil authorities.

12:5-6. deserves death/quadruple compensation. In his outrage, David would like to be able to sentence the offender to death because of his pitiless attitude, but the law was clear enough. The fourfold compensation is consistent with the law in Exodus 22:1 for the theft of a sheep (Hammurabi's Code requires a fine ten times the value of the stolen livestock).

12:8. master's house and wives. Since royal marriages were a reflection of the power of a monarch and represented political and economic alliances made in the name of the state, it would have been necessary, at the succession, for the harem of the former king to become the responsibility of the new monarch. In this way there was continuity of treaty obligations. After the death of Ishbosheth (2 Sam 4:5-7) and David's rise to kingship, it would have been expected that he would extend his protection to Saul's family, including his harem. Thus it is possible that the brief reference to David's marriage to Ahinoam in 1 Samuel 25:43 is a reference to his taking Saul's wife Ahinoam (1 Sam 14:50).

12:11. curse. This punishment follows the crime by suggesting that David's power will be usurped and his wives will be taken from him (see Absalom's taking of David's wives in 2 Sam 16:21-22). This even hints at the possibility that the throne would be taken from him. His violence and sexual misconduct will be matched by the violence and sexual misconduct of his household.

12:15-25
The Death of David and Bathsheba's Child

12:16. David's plea. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with making a request before God. The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and humbling oneself before God (Ps 69:10). Babylonian prayers include similar expressions of supplication and a sense of dependence on the power of the gods to remove evil and restore health.

12:20-23. David's conduct. David's servants did not know the judgment that had been uttered against the child by God. As a result, David's actions were misinterpreted by them. Fasting can be a response to mourning (as David's servants assumed in this case). But David strove to change God's mind, and his fasting was part of the procedure to enhance David's petition. Once he sees that the petition has been denied, he ceases his fast.

12:23. I will go to him, he will not return to me. This is simply David's acknowledgment that his efforts to save his son have failed. He does not expect any petition to bring his son back to life but recognizes that they will only be together in death. It is therefore a poignant expression of the ultimate fate of all humanity, similar to Jacob's mournful reply in Genesis 37:35. Gilgamesh's mourning for his dead companion Enkidu includes the statement that he "has now gone to the fate of mankind," and the hero is reminded by Siduri in the same epic that "when the gods created mankind, they ordained death for him." For more information on afterlife, see the comment on Job 3:13-19.

12:26-31
The Fall of Rabbah

12:26. royal citadel. This verse refers to a citadel, while the next refers to the water supply. It is generally assumed that the water supply for ancient Rabbah was the powerful spring by the city. Whether there were separate fortifications to guard the acropolis and the water supply or whether they were both guarded by a single fortification is unknown. One way to capture a walled city is to cut off its access to water. It may be that the citadel was captured because the Israelite army gained control of the water supply. This was the tactic used by

Antiochus III in Hellenistic times when he captured the same city.

12:27. water supply. Due to the often meager rainfall and the fact that it only comes during the winter months, cities and towns were dependent on wells, springs and cisterns during much of the year. The kings of Mesopotamia often boasted in their annals about their efforts to build canals, aqueducts and water-lifting devices (see also 2 Kings 20:20). Thus the capture of a city's water supply generally meant a quick end to a siege. Nothing is known of the means by which the water supply of Rabbah was protected.

12:28. king accomplishing last phase. The royal annals of ancient kings and pharaohs seldom mention their generals by name and always ascribe victories that the gods have granted to the crown. Kings did not always go on campaigns with the army. Assyrian records speak of the king remaining at home while a high-ranking general or the crown prince was entrusted with accompanying the army. This often happened when there were matters at home that were too pressing for the king to be absent. David's absence from the battlefield might therefore lead his subjects (or detractors) to infer that he is incapacitated, threatened or in some way unable to conduct the duties of king. Even when the king led the campaign, he would often not be the one leading the charge in battle but would be back at camp headquarters planning strategy. It would still be normal procedure, however, when possible, for the king to lead the march into the conquered city. David had himself seen the divided loyalties that resulted when his own victories won him a popular following among the people. These eventually contributed to bringing him to the throne. Joab's pointed statement regarding whose name would be invoked as Rabbah's conqueror might therefore be expected to get David's attention and send him quickly into the field.

12:30. king's crown. The word used here usually refers to a ceremonial headdress. Conical caps or turbans were common among the kings and deities of the ancient world. Those worn by kings were often made of embroidered cloth brocaded with gold and gems. At times an additional gold diadem was worn encircling the turban. The weight of this particular crown suggests that it was made entirely of gold and not worn by the Ammonite king but perhaps sat upon the brow of a statue of the god Milcom (an attractive variant reading in the text). Many of the statues of Canaanite gods feature a conical headdress, so it would not be unlikely for the Ammonite god to be so adorned. It is grammatically possible that it was the jewel in the crown that was taken as plunder and worn by David, rather than the seventy-five-pound crown, which would have been difficult to wear for even a short ceremony.

12:31. labor of captives. One of the sources of heavy labor in Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine was war captives. While royal annals and inscriptions (such as the Mesha stele from Moab) describe large numbers of captives, these may be exaggerations. More reliable, however, are administrative documents listing rations, clothing and the deaths of slaves. It is likely that these persons were put to immediate use restoring the damage caused by wars but eventually settled and became citizens, tilling farms or serving in the military.

13:1-22
Amnon and Tamar

13:8-9. bread making. The use of a special pan (mentioned in later Jewish literature) in which the kneaded dough is boiled to make a sort of dumpling suggests more than just bread making. Amnon's feigned illness, coupled with the suggestion that he needs someone he can trust to prepare nourishing food, calls for an easily digestible item and evident precautions against suspected poisoning.

13:12-13. Tamar's plea. There are four elements to Tamar's plea. The first is that such behavior is not the custom among the Israelites. Obviously taking brides by force is not unknown (see Shechem's rape of Dinah in Gen 34:2 and the abduction of the female dancers of Shiloh in Judg 21:19-23), but apparently it was considered an unacceptable "non-Israelite" custom. When Tamar describes this act of rape, she uses a "shock" word that is designed to bring someone to their senses. The second and third elements of her plea concern personal honor, hers and Amnon's respectively. She realizes that without witnesses there can be no case made against him, and therefore her only hope is to play upon his better judgment and his character as a prince of Israel. She tells him that he will be counted among the fools, a term that applies to men without principle or personal honor who come to a bad end. In Tamar's final attempt (v. 13) she suggests her willingness to join Amnon's household as his wife.

13:18-19. Tamar's garment. The costly, embroidered robe (the term only appears elsewhere in the Joseph narrative [Gen 37:3]) worn by

Tamar marked her as one of the virgins of the household of David. It implied that she was pure and not yet spoken for, and therefore still under the care and protection of the royal house. Now, by tearing her robe, Tamar demonstrates her grief and the fact that her honor has been compromised. Her right to wear this special garment has ended, and her future prospects have been dramatically changed.

13:19. ashes on head. Like tearing one's garment and wearing sackcloth, placing ashes on the head is a sign of mourning (Esther 4:3; Jer 6:26). The gesture of placing her hand on her head has perhaps been illustrated by the mourning female figures on the Phoenician sarcophagus of Ahiram, thirteenth-century king of Byblos, but there the mourning women are putting both hands on their head. The Egyptian *Tale of Two Brothers* also describes this gesture as an indication of mourning.

13:20. Tamar's fate. Because she was no longer a virgin, her worth to her household was diminished, and it is quite possible that no marriage was contracted for her. This is suggested by the comment that she came under the care of Absalom's household rather than David's. She would have lived an unfulfilled existence. The El Amarna texts equate a woman without a husband with an unplowed field.

13:23-39

Absalom's Execution of Amnon and His Exile

13:23. Baal Hazor. This site is usually identified with Jebel el-'Asur, five miles northeast of Bethel, in a rugged part of the Central Hill Country.

13:23. sheepshearing. The wool industry was extremely important in the ancient Near East. For instance, a large percentage of the administrative tablets from the Sumerian city of Nippur deal with the wool industry and the wool trade. Sheep were sheared in the early summer, generally near sites associated with dyeing and weaving (for instance, a large quantity of loom weights was discovered at Timnah). Since this labor required large numbers of laborers, like the grain harvest, the burden was lightened by associating it with a holiday time as well (see 1 Sam 25:7-8).

13:34. geography. The flight of David's sons from Baal Hazor cannot be reconstructed with any confidence. Undoubtedly it was circuitous, but the text of this verse is too uncertain to provide details. It is possible that the location Horonaim included from the Septuagint in NIV may represent Upper and Lower Beth Horon, where there was a major pass from the Northwest. These sites are identified with Beit 'Ur el-Foqa' and Beit 'Ur et-Tahta, both about ten miles northwest of Jerusalem. Neither city can be seen from Jerusalem, but it can be expected that sentries would have been stationed westward to guard this important approach. The text merely indicates this approach as the road that the travelers were using.

13:37-38. Absalom's flight. After Amnon's murder, Absalom fled back to his grandfather's kingdom in Geshur, in the southern portion of the Golan Heights in Bashan. This independent kingdom and its cities just east of the Sea of Galilee are known from the El Amarna and Egyptian execration texts. David's marriage to Talmai's daughter is just one of several diplomatic alliances created by such unions (2 Sam 3:3).

14:1-20

The Wise Woman of Tekoa

14:2. wise woman. The context of the story and of the political situation requires a person skilled in speaking (see also the wise woman of Abel in 2 Sam 20:16-19). However, for a woman to have an authoritative voice, as each of these women do, a special status is also required. Educated women as well as women in positions of authority (priest, scribe and prophet) occasionally occur in the ancient Near Eastern material, but the category of "wise woman" has not yet been isolated.

14:2. Tekoa. Located about ten miles south of Jerusalem, Khirbet Tequ'a lies in the hill country of Judah and borders on the wilderness. The small size and relative remoteness of this village allowed the wise woman to present a case which might not be known to persons in Jerusalem.

14:2. strategy of the wise woman. The strategy used by the wise woman follows a well-known motif of disguise and legal fiction. For instance, in an Egyptian myth (twelfth-century text) the gods Horus and Seth are each trying to seize the throne left empty by Osiris. Horus's mother, Isis, disguises herself as a herdsman's widow and brings a fabricated case before Seth in which strangers are trying to confiscate her son's property and evict him. Seth becomes indignant on her behalf and by his verdict condemns himself.

14:4-11. king as court of last resort. One of the prime responsibilities of the kings of the ancient Near East was to establish justice and righteousness for the people (prologue to Hammurabi's Code; 2 Sam 8:15; 1 Kings 10:9). To deal with the load of cases that arose, kings

delegated authority to elders and judges who heard most disputes (2 Sam 15:4). Still there are a number of texts (Mari letters and the Code of Ur-Nammu), many of them dealing with the plight of widows and orphans, which identify the king as the court of last resort.

14:7. clan responsible for capital punishment. According to Exodus 21:12 murder is a capital crime (also evidenced in the Ur-Nammu code). It would ordinarily be within the rights and jurisdiction of the clan to carry out this sentence (as in the Middle Assyrian Laws). However, it is possible that the "avenger of blood" (2 Sam 14:11) is not a member of the clan and has been hired to carry out the sentence. This case is further complicated by the lack of witnesses (Num 35:30). Even more serious is the elimination of the heir. This would leave the widow without a caregiver, and the family's land would revert to the clan and nearest male kin.

14:7. advantage to clan of extinguishing line. If a man's last descendant was executed or died, his property would remain within the clan and would be redeemed by the nearest male kin (see Jer 32:6-16). There are economic advantages to be gained from this, since it would strengthen the holdings of a prominent member of the clan (compare Ahab's acquisition of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21 and 2 Kings 9:25-26) and would ensure the land would remain under cultivation.

14:11. avenger of blood. The legal role of the avenger of blood is described in Numbers 35:16-28 and Deuteronomy 19:6-12. There is some disagreement about whether this person is hired by the clan to carry out sentence or is a member of the clan involved. Blood feuds, even internal ones, were so disruptive that the cities of refuge were established to provide a "cooling down" period and a reexamination of the circumstances of the case (see comments on Num 35).

14:13-17. analogy to Absalom's case. The wise woman skillfully ties her hypothetical case to Absalom's situation. In the analogy the woman stands for the nation (or the people), and David himself has become the avenger of blood who is portrayed as threatening the future of the kingdom and of the inheritance of the covenant by his actions against Absalom. There is also a veiled reference to plotters who stand to gain from Absalom's exile or death as eventual inheritors of David's authority and power. Now, using a wisdom plea, the woman calls on David to be a "just king" who provides a righteous solution to her "case."

14:20. king knows everything. Egyptians also considered their kings to be endowed with all knowledge and capable of discerning what anyone's thoughts were. This was believed to be the basis on which the king was able to rule justly and pronounce righteous judgments.

14:19-20. Joab as Absalom's sponsor. Throughout David's career Joab served as commander of the army and chief political advisor to the king. At times, when it was apparent that David was incapable of making a decision (as with Absalom) or was in danger of harming the authority of the monarchy (see 2 Sam 19:1-8), he used independent judgment. Such autonomy both benefited David and made him wary of Joab's power. In this instance, Joab may have perceived the growing popular support Absalom had with the people and felt it would be better to have him where he could be watched, at court, than working to undermine David's authority in exile. As a "company man," Joab is also interested in securing a smooth and legitimate succession to the throne when the time comes. Thus it is not wise to leave this loose end unattended.

14:21-33
Absalom Restored to Favor

14:24. Absalom's partial restoration. It was not uncommon for persons to be exiled for political reasons. For instance, the Middle Kingdom Egyptian courtier Sinuhe spent over twenty years in forced exile, and Ahiqar, the advisor to the Assyrian king Sennacherib, lived for a time in exile in Egypt. On their return, however, they expected honorable treatment and a restoration of former status. But even though David agreed to Joab's request to return Absalom to the royal court, he was not yet prepared to restore his status (as crown prince?). This suggests that though the death sentence had been lifted, David had no intention of offering a full pardon and was simply keeping Absalom where he could be carefully monitored.

14:26. Absalom's hair. Absalom's virile handsomeness is epitomized by his long hair. Its thickness and weight (between two and four pounds) were considered remarkable. There is a Phoenician inscription from the ninth century reporting the dedication of shaven hair in fulfillment of a vow made to the goddess Astarte. In ancient thinking, hair (along with blood) was one of the main representatives of a person's life essence. As such it was often an ingredient in sympathetic magic. This is evident, for instance, in the practice of sending along a lock of the presumed prophet's hair when prophecies were sent to the king of

Mari. The hair would be used in divination to determine whether the prophet's message would be accepted as valid. Absalom's hair is not connected to any such functions in this text. Instead the reference to the hair simply serves as a foreshadowing of his unusual death (2 Sam 18:9-15), a concept that may be strengthened by an omen text that says that if a man has beautiful hair, the end of his days is near.

14:26. shekels by the royal standard. The standardization of measures in Judah is most likely based on shekel weights first established in Ugarit, Babylonia or Egypt (approximately 3.5 ounces to 1 shekel). There is some variation in these standards, with as much as 4.5 ounces to a shekel occurring.

14:33. Absalom's full restoration. Full parental acceptance is seen in Absalom's long-delayed audience with the king and David's kiss (see Gen 33:4 and Ex 18:7 for the kiss as an affectionate greeting and sign of kinship). A public display such as this demonstrated full reconciliation, but it did not promise Absalom the position of heir to the throne.

15:1—19:43
Absalom's Revolt

15:1. chariot and horses. It is possible that having a chariot and horses and an entourage of fifty runners could be construed as official language for status as either a king or the heir to the throne. The chariots featured two yoked horses with one or two others harnessed beside. Two spoked, wooden wheels on a rear axle supported a small platform occupied by a driver and rider equipped with bow and spear. The sides only went up to midthigh on the standing occupants. The word used here suggests an ornamental chariot of the sort used both in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The luxury transportation of the day, these were typically gilded with all variety of gold, lapis lazuli and precious stones.

15:1. fifty runners. Those who run before chariots proclaim the presence of the king or prince and protect his person. In Hittite texts the gods are said to run before the king's chariot leading to victory. The men who run before the king's chariot function as heralds. Fifty was a regular unit within the military. Having such an entourage gave Absalom a bodyguard as well as the rank of captain. Wherever he went, his fifty runners would have raised attention and given credence to his claim to his status as heir apparent.

15:2-6. Absalom's currying favor with the people. When a prince wishes to displace his father the king, it is inevitable that he will attempt to undermine the king's authority with public statements about corruption or governmental malpractice. For example, the Ugaritic king Keret is denounced by his son for not hearing the cases of widows, the poor or the oppressed. Absalom employs this same strategy, taking advantage of a lack of leadership on David's part (failure to appoint judges) and of growing discontent among the northern tribes. In addition to offering them a model of efficient administration of justice, Absalom also plays the "common man," not allowing supplicants to bow to him but kissing them as an equal or friend.

15:7-10. Hebron. It is shrewd political maneuver on Absalom's part to be crowned in Hebron (nineteen miles southeast of Jerusalem). In addition to being the site of the ancestral burial cave at Machpelah, it was also David's capital city when he was king of Judah. Absalom thereby associates himself with the covenant and the roots of David's original power center. He also puts enough space between himself and Jerusalem to prevent interference and set the stage for his march on the capital.

15:8-9. fulfilling vow. Information concerning vows can be found in most of the cultures of the ancient Near East, including the Hittite, Ugaritic, Mesopotamian and, less often, Egyptian. Vows are voluntary agreements made with deity. Vows would typically be conditional and accompany a petition made to deity. Since this is a religious act, drawing the deity into compact with the worshiper, it may not be broken under penalty of God's displeasure. This may explain why David would accept Absalom's request, even though six years had passed since the vow was spoken.

15:10. sound of the trumpets. The blowing of trumpets or the ram's horn (shofar) was used as a signaling device in battle, for celebration and as preparatory to a major announcement, as in the coronation of a king. The shofar is capable of a variety of tones but cannot play a tune so is used primarily for signals. The ram's horn was softened in hot water and then bent and flattened to produce its distinctive shape. Trumpet signals are attested in Egypt in the Late Bronze Age (this time period) in both military and religious contexts. A preset code would include some combination of long and short blasts.

15:10. king in Hebron. David had been king in Hebron for seven years before moving his capital to Jerusalem. Drawing on this dynastic tradition, Absalom has himself declared king in Hebron. This gives his rebellion greater legitimacy and provides ample indication that

he was drawing support from Judah as well as the northern tribes. Hebron was centrally located in the hill country of Judah and was one of the most important towns in the region. It is located about twenty miles south of Jerusalem. For more information see comment on 2:1.

15:12. offering sacrifices. As in 1 Samuel 10:8 it is likely that the sacrifices were burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, two of the most general types of sacrifices. The former often accompanied a petition, while the latter served as an opportunity for festive celebration and a communal meal before the Lord. These sacrifices would have been directed to the initiation of kingship and perhaps toward military activity against David. The sacrifices were being offered to make petition for God's blessing and in preparation for a feast that would create an alliance between Absalom and those in attendance.

15:12. Ahithophel. This is the first introduction to Ahithophel, one of David's chief advisors. As suggested in the comment on 11:3, he is likely the grandfather of Bathsheba. In nations where kingship is either inherited or won on the battlefield, advisors were essential for providing educated, wise and diplomatic strategies and counsel. Often adorned with titles such as vizier, prime minister or royal steward, these individuals were entrusted with many of the responsibilities for operating the kingdom. During this period the Israelite kings did not designate such an office, and Ahithophel is never listed among the officials of the administration, but his status as royal counselor suggests that he may have enjoyed some of that function.

15:12. Giloh. Although sometimes identified with Khirbet Jala, five miles northwest of Hebron, this hometown of Ahithophel is more likely to be found further south and west, near Debir. It was assigned to the tribal territory of Judah (Josh 15:51).

15:16. concubines caring for palace. Since royal marriages were a reflection of the power of a monarch and represented political and economic alliances made in the name of the state, it would have been necessary, at the succession, for the harem of the former king to become the responsibility of the new monarch. In this way, there was continuity of treaty obligations. It is possible that the concubines left behind were those that David had taken into his harem from the leading Jebusite families of Jerusalem (see 5:13) or from some of the families that were supporting Absalom in Hebron.

15:18. Kerethites, Pelethites, Gittites. These were groups of mercenaries who served David as vassals rather than as members of the standing army. The Kerethites are identified as immigrants from Crete and are closely associated with the Philistines who were believed to come from the same area of the Aegean. The Pelethites are known only from passages such as this where they are associated with the Kerethites. The Gittites may be a brigade of troops formed during David's service with Achish of Gath (1 Sam 27:1-12) or simply a group formed as his personal bodyguard after becoming king. All of these troops seem to be of Philistine or Cretan origin. It is unclear from the text whether these special units of mercenary troops (see 2 Sam 8:18) represented the sum total of the army which David was able to command in his retreat from Jerusalem or simply additional contingents.

15:19-22. mercenaries' loyalty. It became common practice in the ancient Near East to employ mercenary troops to augment native forces (for instance, Egyptian use of Nubians starting with the New Kingdom). However, as David suggests, the loyalty of mercenary troops is generally based on regular payment and, when possible, choosing to fight on the winning side. The remarkable statement by Ittai the Gittite expressing personal loyalty to David implies a long-standing relationship and a fealty that transcends monetary gain.

15:23. geography. David leaves Jerusalem traveling east across the Kidron Valley toward the Mount of Olives, the hill across the valley from Jerusalem. He then continues northeast to Bahurim following the Jerusalem to Jericho road to the Jordan Valley across the region the text refers to as the wilderness. He eventually would have crossed the Jordan at the fords of Jericho and then proceeded north to Mahanaim.

15:24-25. role of the ark. It would be logical to bring the ark along because the ark represents the presence of Yahweh and as such is a powerful talisman (for the significance of the ark in battle see comment on 1 Sam 4:3-7). However, David is discerning enough to recognize that if he is out of favor with God, the ark will do him no good and may even pose a threat. There is also a potential advantage to be gained by leaving the ark in Jerusalem, as he shrewdly uses its continued presence as a cover for the spying efforts of Zadok, Abiathar and the priesthood (2 Sam 15:35-36; 17:15-16).

15:25-26. testing the Lord's favor. Israelites believed that God's favor or disfavor was evidenced in the good or evil that came into a person's life. David's expulsion from Jerusa-

lem is therefore described almost as a trial by ordeal. The king's speech suggests that he is resigned to leave the course of events in God's hands. Remembering the pronouncement of judgment by Nathan, recorded in 12:10-12, David cannot be certain that these tragic events are not punishment for his crimes. David is relying on Zadok's ability as a seer to obtain a word from Yahweh on the king's ultimate fate (compare Saul's use of the witch of Endor in 1 Sam 28:3-8). One Mari prophetic text provides a warning of a revolt and the need to surround the king with trustworthy officials; this might be the type of message David was hoping to receive.

15:28. fords in the desert. The "fords in the desert" is a reference to the fords near Jericho, about a day's journey from Jerusalem. Rather than taking the symbolic step of leaving his kingdom entirely, David plans to encamp on the west bank of the Jordan River, about four miles from the mouth of the river as it empties into the Dead Sea. He would rest here and await news of the developments in Jerusalem (see 2 Sam 17:16).

15:30. Mount of Olives. When dealing with ancient geographic names, it is always possible that the reference is to a landmark or trail that is no longer in existence. In this case, the place name may refer to the Mount of Olives (see Zech 14:4) or perhaps to a specific path up the middle slope of one of the three ridges of the Mount of Olives leading to the northeast. This is less than a mile from the city walls.

15:32. summit where people used to worship. This place of worship is not previously mentioned in the text but probably represents a traditional open-air altar or an abandoned shrine. Some suggest this is to be identified with Nob (1 Sam 21:1, 19), but that is uncertain, and Nob is generally thought to be further north.

16:1-2. food supplies. Any army in the field needed provisions and a supply line. Local governors in Assyria were required to open granaries for armies that were traveling through the region. It is common that the people from the area were expected to provide supplies. In this case, the food also functions as tribute to a sovereign and recognition of David's right to rule. Ziba's gift is less generous than Abigail's in 1 Samuel 25 but is not of inappropriate size.

16:3-4. Mephibosheth's absence. While David's immediate concern is the rebellion within his own household, this chapter reminds us that there is a deposed dynastic house (Saul's) lurking in the background and willing to capitalize on David's weakness to its own advantage. Ziba categorizes Mephibosheth with the disgruntled in a ostensibly successful attempt to curry favor with David. Ziba's accusation is sufficiently believable that David confiscated Mephibosheth's lands. The Sumerian code calls for an adopted son to forfeit land in cases where he has repudiated his legal obligations to the family that adopted him. David had always had the option to confiscate the lands belonging to his predecessor. Here he exercises that option but does not take them for the crown, instead giving them as a grant to a loyal servant.

16:5. Bahurim. Located north of the Mount of Olives, Bahurim was a Benjaminite village (probably Ras et-Tmim or Khirbet Ibqe'dan). Saul had been from the tribe of Benjamin, so it would be expected that here among his kin one would find an enclave of loyalists. This is still practically on the doorstep of Jerusalem, which itself is in the territory of Benjamin.

16:11. the Lord has told him. David is not claiming to have been privy to a discussion between the Lord and Shimei, nor is he suggesting that Shimei has been the recipient of a prophetic oracle of some sort. The way that the Lord had "told" Shimei to curse David was through the events that had transpired. With David's own son driving him from the throne, it would be very easy to infer that David was suffering judgment at God's hands. All that is left to deduce is what the offense might have been that led to the punishment. David is simply acknowledging that Shimei is absolutely justified in thinking that God had cursed him and therefore cannot be blamed for wanting to jump on the bandwagon. Only a future vindication would free David to consider Shimei's acts to be in the category of treason rather than simply a voice recognizing the circumstances through which God is carrying out retribution.

16:21. Absalom and David's concubines. It can be shown in a number of instances that the royal harem is considered the exclusive property of the reigning king. Any attempts to obtain women from the harem are seen as a sign of rebellion or usurpation of power (see Ishbaal's reaction to Abner in 2 Sam 3:6-11 and Adonijah's request for Abishag in 1 Kings 2:20-21). The loss of the harem to another monarch, as described in the Assyrian annals of Sennacherib, was a sign of submission or being deposed. For more information see the comment on 3:7.

17:1. twelve thousand men. This number may actually refer to a levy from all twelve tribes rather than an exact figure. Some scholars suggest that the word translated as "thou-

sand" was simply a military unit. For more information see comment on Joshua 8:3.

17:1-3. Ahithophel's strategy. By eliminating David, Ahithophel believed that any opposition to Absalom's rule would collapse. A quick attack on the disorganized, exhausted "army" of David might well be successful in killing the king and routing his already demoralized forces in a place of their choosing. This was not to be a pitched battle but a surgical strike with a fixed purpose.

17:5-13. Hushai's strategy. Carrying out the role of double agent assigned him by David (2 Sam 15:32-36), Hushai argues against Ahithophel's immediate strike against David. He suggests a militarily sound strategy of consolidating Absalom's control over the capital and the nation before moving in great force against the deposed king. He also raises the specter of a possible defeat early in Absalom's rule that could raise questions about his fitness and restore David's chances of return. He skillfully manipulates Absalom's pride as he paints the grand picture of the new king riding at the head of an endless sea of soldiers ready to overwhelm any meager opposition. Procrastination and additional time for strategic planning are accepted as wisdom here despite the advantages inherent to Ahithophel's strategy (see Amasa's fate when he failed to respond to Sheba's revolt with dispatch in 2 Sam 20:4-13).

17:13. drag the city down with ropes. One of the strategies employed in siege warfare was the use of scaling ladders. It is possible that grappling hooks, attached to ropes, may also have been used for this purpose. These could be climbed as attackers swarmed over the walls or used to dislodge stones from the walls and make them more vulnerable to battering rams. Depictions of sieges in Assyrian palaces include the demolition of walls using picks, but hooks and ropes may also have been used by attackers.

17:17. En Rogel. A spring half a mile south of the Gihon Spring, near the junction of the Hinnom and Kidron Valleys, En Rogel most likely shared the same water source as Gihon (associated with Bir Ayyub, "Job's Well"). It served the needs of the people immediately outside the walls of Jerusalem. Since it was frequented by many people, it would be a place to hear the gossip and it would not be suspicious for Jonathan and Ahimaaz to be stationed here, waiting for word from the city.

17:18. Bahurim. Located north of the Mount of Olives, Bahurim was a Benjaminite village (probably Ras et-Tmim or Khirbet Ibqe'dan). It is a bit ironic that David's spies would be aided and hidden in a well by an inhabitant of Bahurim, since it was also the home of Shimei ben Gera, who had cursed the king (2 Sam 16:5).

17:23. Ahithophel's actions. Suicide is not condemned in the Hebrew Bible. The six examples (Abimelech, Samson, Saul, his armorbearer, Ahithophel and Zimri) that appear in the text even suggest a measure of honor and courage is attached to the act, in much the same way as it is described in Seneca *(70th Epistle).* The Roman philosopher says, "The wise man will live as long as he ought, not as long as he can." Thus Ahithophel's departure is a reasoned journey. He clears up his affairs at home, presumably writing a will and insuring orderly transference of property to his heirs, and then hangs himself. He also cheats the executioner, since his support of Absalom would be interpreted as treason against the Lord's anointed.

17:24. geography. It may be presumed that Absalom did not cross the Jordan until some time after David had left the fords and traveled to Mahanaim, about thirty-five miles from the fords at Jericho. Mahanaim is identified with Telul ed-Dhabab el-Garbi on the north bank of the Jabbok. Its importance as an administrative center is attested to by its use by Ishbaal (2 Sam 2:9) as his capital and its mention in the records of Pharaoh Shishak. There have been no excavations at the site, but surface surveys confirm that it was occupied during this period.

17:28-29. provisions. Once again David receives provisions for himself and his men (see Abigail's supplies in 1 Sam 25:18 and Ziba's proffered provisions in 2 Sam 16:2). In each of these cases, these foodstuffs could be construed as tribute or as the duty expected of a vassal. The Ammonites had been subdued by Saul (1 Sam 11) and later by David (2 Sam 10). Thus the king is acknowledged by his allies with hospitality and respect despite his forced departure from Jerusalem.

18:1-2. military organization. This division of the military into three fighting units made up of sections of one hundred and one thousand is typical of Israelite military structure (see Num 31:48; Judg 9:43; 1 Sam 11:11). Mesopotamian sources, such as the Mari texts, speak of a variety of military groups commanded by officers of differing rank and status. In addition to these regular contingents of troops, special lightly armed forces used in ambushes and reconnoitering, and troops assigned to protect commanders or the king are also mentioned.

18:6. forest of Ephraim. The most likely area

for this battle site is in Transjordan near Mahanaim (see 2 Sam 17:27). This would fit the scene of Absalom bringing the conflict to David rather than David invading Israel by crossing the Jordan. The density of this "forest" is somewhat in dispute, since deforestation and erosion have drastically changed the area south of the Jabbok. The word used here could refer to rugged country with isolated groves as well as a true forest. It is unusual to see the forest attributed to Ephraim, since Ephraim's assigned territory was all west of the Jordan. But the tribe may have made some claims to that territory or had settlers there (see Judg 12).

18:8. forest claimed more lives than the sword. When the Old Testament speaks of land devouring people (as the forest does here), it is indicating a hostile, inhospitable environment that threatens survival. Since this was a battlefield chosen by David and not Absalom, it may be expected that the king's forces utilized the rough terrain and forested areas to their advantage. Ambushes, feints drawing troops into ravines or wadis, and other guerilla tactics may have been employed. Divisions can get disoriented, lost or isolated and become easy targets.

18:9. Absalom's predicament. The text says that it was Absalom's head that got caught, not his hair as commonly assumed. The situation is pregnant with symbolism as the royal mule (the designated mount of kings) deserts the would-be king and leaves him hanging in a tree, a condition for one cursed of God (Deut 21:23).

18:11. ten shekels and a warrior's belt. A bonus of one year's worth of pay and a distinctive article of clothing constituted a significant reward and indicates how strategic Absalom's death was to Joab. Gilgamesh's military attire included both a belt for his dirk and a sash or girdle of some sort, but the word used here (feminine form) is never used elsewhere as a piece of military gear (despite the NIV's addition of "warrior"), usually conveyed by the masculine form. It is used for a woman's sash in Isaiah 3:24 and may refer to a fancy sash or belt worn on special occasions (see comment on 1 Kings 2:5).

18:14. javelins. The "javelin" used by Joab everywhere else refers to a blunt rod used to beat someone. The verb is one that usually means to strike (exception, Judg 3:21). The heart is not always internal, but can refer to the chest or the midsection. If Joab's intention was to stab Absalom, a sword or spear would have been the more likely choice. It seems instead that Joab intends to dislodge Absalom from the tree by whacking him in the midsection. A single rod might have broken under such rigorous use (see Is 14:29), so he uses three. Once the (probably unconscious) victim was brought to the ground, Joab's ten assistants collectively finished the job.

18:14. armor-bearers. Commanders and officers within the army were accompanied by armor-bearers (see examples in the *Iliad).* These trusted individuals formed a bodyguard during battle (see 1 Sam 31:4-6), provided substitute weapons should the commander break or lose one, and apparently even functioned as "friends" and advisers (see David as Saul's armor-bearer in 1 Sam 16:21 and Jonathan's armor-bearer in 1 Sam 14:12-17).

18:16. sounded the trumpet. As part of the preparations for battle, ancient armies throughout the Near East broadcast to their troops a set of designated signals that would call for advance or retreat. The use of trumpets (shofar) and runners might be the only means to control troop movements. They were also used as a rallying sound to assemble troops for battle or, like the fire signals of the Mari texts, as a signal of approaching danger.

18:17. burial practice. Assyrian texts indicate that punishment of rebels regularly included impalement, leaving the bodies unburied. Israelite leaders also engaged in these forms of "display" (see the execution of the five enemy kings in Josh 10:27), but the bodies were not to be left hanging indefinitely (Deut 21:23). Thus even accursed individuals would be buried under a pile of stone (see comment on Josh 8:29)—not to be confused with the honorable funerary mounds of Mesopotamian kings.

18:18. pillar as monument. The Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat (c. 1600 B.C.) mentions that one of the duties that a son owes to his father is to erect a stele or pillar in honor of the ancestor gods. Since Absalom has no [living?] son to do this for him, he does the job himself. This is rather ironic considering that he was not buried in the family tomb. His personal monument becomes a sad marker of a failed life. The tomb in the village of Silwan (across the Kidron valley from Jerusalem) today called Absalom's tomb is from a much later period (Herodian).

18:18. King's Valley. The exact location of this site is unknown. It is often identified with the Kidron Valley, east of Jerusalem, or the confluence of the Hinnom, Tyropoeon and Kidron Valleys. It is also referred to as the Valley of Shaveh in Genesis 14:17.

18:19-23. messengers bringing news. Runners were used by armies and government officials in the ancient Near East. The Mari texts describe battlefield movements being partially

directed by messengers as well as diplomatic dispatches and news of the approach of delegations and caravans. It seems apparent from these texts as well as the biblical narrative that messengers had different ranks. Some, like the *suḫarum* of Mari, were young men employed for their stamina and speed. However, there were also messengers in the lower levels of the diplomatic corps (perhaps comparable to the priestly status of Ahimaaz) who were trusted with more important missions.

18:24. between inner and outer gate. Starting with the Middle Bronze period, city fortifications included both massive wall systems and elaborate, multichambered city gates. The patterns in the Iron Age varied from site to site (both casemate and solid wall construction), but generally a stepped approach and narrow entrance restricted the types of vehicles and the amount of traffic through the gateway. Additionally there was often a right-angle turn inside the outer gate before entrance was gained to an inner gate. Within this area between the gates were guardhouses and meeting places used by legal and business officials. Excavations at the city of Dan have revealed an elevated platform between the two gates where it is thought that the ruler of the city sat when public court was in session.

18:24. roof of the gateway. Whether rectangular or circular in construction, gates were guarded by multistoried towers that could be used as lookout posts. Evidence from Megiddo, Timnah, Hazor and Lachish demonstrates the use of tower fortifications for defense and as platforms for sentries.

18:33. room over the gateway. Since the gates and their attendant towers were multistoried, there would be ample room within their walls for guardhouses and chambers used for quartering troops and as meeting places. David's retreat after the news of Absalom's death into one of these rooms places him in a position to see the disposition of his army while still having privacy. The fact that he did not go back into the city suggests his awareness of the delicate political situation, while at the same time indicates he is not ready to resume his regular schedule.

19:8. king's seat in the gateway. Recent excavations at Tel Dan have revealed what appears to be a stone platform set inside the gate area, which once was canopied and may have held a throne. It could have been used for ceremonial or diplomatic occasions or legal proceedings (see 1 Kings 22:10). The Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat describes King Danil sitting in the gate area judging the cases of widows and orphans. Thus a king enthroned is a king carrying out the duties of the position—an image David now wanted to portray.

19:11-15. process for reinstallation of David. Because Absalom had been anointed king, and because the tribal elders of both Judah and Israel were divided on whether to take David back as king, certain compromises and assurances had to be made. For instance, Absalom's chief general, Amasa, is now given charge of David's army (although not the elite and mercenary troops, which remained under Joab's command). David also has to cajole his own tribe, reminding them of blood ties and previous oaths of loyalty. David's exile and eventual return to kingship could be compared to the similar experiences of Idrimi, the fifteenth-century B.C. king of Alalakh, who was forced from his throne for seven years before regaining the loyalty of his vassals.

19:15. Gilgal. During much of the early monarchy, Gilgal apparently served as a cultic center. Perhaps because of its previous association with the installation of Saul as king and its proximity to the Jordan River (possibly identified with sites near Khirbet Mefjir, about a mile northeast of Jericho), this was an appropriate place for the tribal elders to welcome David back as king. See comments on 1 Samuel 7:16; 11:14-15.

19:24. caring for feet and mustache. The NIV translation suggests a neglect of personal appearance that frequently accompanied mourning. This would also serve as evidence that Mephibosheth had entertained no thought of promoting himself for the throne, for otherwise he would have taken special care to appear kingly. Alternatively, Ezekiel 24:17 identifies bared feet and covered mustache as signs of mourning. The actions attributed to Mephibosheth allow this possibility, because the text simply says he had not "done" his feet or mustache.

19:22, 29. pardon granted on special occasions. The king serves as "head of household" to his nobles and royal court. As such he may operate as a *paterfamilias*, granting life or sentencing them to death for political crimes or disloyalty (see 1 Kings 2:19-46). Shimei and Mephibosheth have both committed crimes against David that could justify the death penalty. However, David chooses on the day of his accession to pardon them as a sign of his magnanimity and willingness to forgive his political enemies (see Saul's similar statements in 1 Sam 11:12-13). It was typical in Mesopotamia for the king to declare *anduraru*—a release of prisoners and debt slaves—connected to his accession to the throne. Similar release could also extend to those guilty of

political crimes as seen in the reform document of the Sumerian king Uruinimgina (twenty-fourth century B.C.), in which even thieves and murderers are freed. In Egypt the coronation of a new pharaoh was often accompanied by proclamations of amnesty.

19:42. eating the king's provisions. Those who eat from the king's table or storehouse are his dependents and must therefore demonstrate their loyalty based on this payment (evidenced in the listing of provisions provided to nobles and members of the bureaucracy in Mari and Babylonian administrative texts). This is the basis of Mephibosheth's crime, since he is one who had accepted David's provisioning (2 Sam 9:6-7). The leaders of Judah disclaim any such ties, insisting that their welcome of David is based on his ability to rule, not bribes or favors granted to them.

19:41-43. basis of intertribal argument. The presence of favoritism and discrimination is bound to end up being reflected in policies and privileges. At the heart of this dispute is whether the monarchy is built around the person and family of David (a position the elders of Judah take, referring to their kin ties) or whether the kingship is an institution deserving loyalty no matter who reigns (Israel's position). This argument foreshadows Sheba's revolt and the eventual secession of the northern tribes under Jeroboam's leadership. The dispute also is reminiscent of the arguments between tribes so common in the Judges period. Both examples indicate that the idea of centralized government under a monarchy has not yet taken firm root among the Israelites. It is easy to think of Israel as having a natural unity reflected in the united monarchy, while the divided monarchy is considered an aberration. In fact, however, until the postexilic period it was tribal loyalties more than unified national loyalties that tended to govern political decisions.

20:1-25
Sheba's Revolt

20:1. Sheba's declaration. The troops of all the tribes but Israel, feeling like outcasts in the reinstallation process, do not initiate military action against Judah or David but simply abandon David under the leadership of Sheba (he sends them "to their tents" rather than mustering them for battle). Sheba's declaration effectively announces withdrawal of support of David's kingship, but it does not indicate support for another king. Since Sheba is a Benjaminite, it is possible that there is still some linkage to the house of Saul and that a Saulide would be sought, but the text does not reveal that element.

20:3. treatment of the ten concubines. Because Absalom had taken sexual possession of these women, they could no longer serve as sexual partners of the king. If they had been in the harem to represent political allies who had supported Absalom, their status as persona non grata would be doubly justified. David maintained his obligation to them, but they would never have children by him. Hammurabi's code requires that widows receive "food, oil and clothing" as their due, and Exodus 21:10 addresses similar rights of concubines.

20:4-5. mustering the army. The short period of time allotted for Amasa to assemble an army from the clans of Judah may be a test of his and their loyalty. Amasa had served Absalom, and the elders of Judah had only recently renewed their oath of loyalty to David. Runners may have been used to gather the troops (see the seven-day mustering of 1 Sam 11:3-5), but the Mari texts indicate the use of inscribed lists that were to be taken to villages and encampments to enlist soldiers. This procedure would have required much more than three days to gather a large force.

20:6. master's men. Joab is the one identified here as Abishai's master. Since Joab is out of favor and perhaps demoted, Abishai is given command of the standing army. The army was divided into three groups. First were the mercenaries, who served as the king's personal army and bodyguard; these were the Cherethites and Pelethites, of which there were probably several hundred. Second was the standing army, which probably included both Israelites and mercenaries; these were the trained professional soldiers who had been under Joab's command and were now being led by Abishai. At this point perhaps only those of Judah had remained loyal, so this may also be only a few hundred, though the standing army would generally have consisted of a few thousand. The third group was all those who were eligible for being enlisted in times of crisis. This was the group that Amasa was trying to organize.

20:8. great rock in Gibeon. Many times the biblical text makes reference to landmarks known in that time but no longer familiar to us (see Deborah's palm in Judg 4:5). Thus the writer here may be referring to an altar or high place such as Nebi Samwil (about a mile south of el-Jib; see 1 Sam 14:33; 1 Kings 3:4) or simply a particularly unusual rock formation near Gibeon (el-Jib, four miles northwest of Jerusalem).

20:8. Joab's gear. It is difficult to reconstruct Joab's ruse. He is wearing his soldier's tunic with the normal warriors' belt and sheath for his sword. The most common understanding is that Joab contrived somehow to tip his sword out of its sheath in a way that appeared accidental. He retrieved it with his left hand and was holding it nonthreateningly when he came up to Amasa.

20:9. taking by the beard. Greeting a nonrelative with a kiss is not often attested except in situations of obeisance (i.e., kissing the feet; found in many ancient texts, including the Epic of Gilgamesh). There are instances in which the kiss is a form of reconciliation (see Joseph and his brothers in Gen 45:15), and this may be the case with Joab and Amasa. It also could be an expression of concern or commiseration with a common problem, as in 2 Samuel 15:5. When men kissed, it would not have been unusual for one to grasp his fellow's beard. This act makes each man vulnerable and is more often associated with aggressive action in battle. Here it is a sign of trust to allow the kiss. In this case, Amasa's trust was misplaced, and Joab used the opportunity to eliminate his rival.

20:14. Abel Beth Maacah. Typically identified with Tell Abel el-Qamh, three miles northwest of Dan in the northernmost part of Israel, Abel Beth Maacah also appears in the list of Thutmose III's conquests. Its strategic importance is attested to by the recording of its capture by Tiglath-Pileser III in 1 Kings 15:29 and the Assyrian annals.

20:15. siege ramp. One of the common methods in siege warfare was the construction of a ramp that could be used as an assault platform for siege towers as well as a means of gaining approach for battering rams (2 Kings 19:32; Jer 6:6; Ezek 4:1-8). The ramps were made necessary because of the common construction of a slopping glacis and high walls that made it difficult to attempt a frontal assault. Archaeological investigations have found evidence of the construction of these ramps (such as at Masada), and depictions of the use of the siege ramp are found in Assyrian bas-reliefs and are described in the annals of Sennacherib and other Assyrian kings. The earliest archaeological remains of a siege ramp were found in connection with the Assyrian siege of Lachish in 701. Though evidence of ramps has not been found for this period, the battering ram had already been in use for nearly a thousand years, so ramps must also have been in use.

20:16. wise woman. See the comment on 2 Samuel 14:2.

20:19. city that is a mother in Israel. Phoenician, Ugaritic and Old Babylonian word parallels to *'em,* "mother," are kin terms related to clan groups. It is therefore likely that the wise woman's argument is related to the extermination of one of Israel's clans, not a "founding city." This is coupled with a long tradition of common sense by the inhabitants of Abel. Joab is therefore encouraged to be "wise" like them and spare his fellow covenantal partners.

20:23-25. administrative offices. This list of officials within David's inner circle is an indication of the growing complexity of David's growing bureaucracy (compare Solomon's administrative lists in 1 Kings 4:1-19). It and the list in 2 Samuel 8:15-18 are typical of similar rosters found in Neo-Babylonian administrative documents. While these offices are unrelated to the story of Sheba's revolt, it would be appropriate for the editor to insert the list here as an indication of the restoration of political order. The inclusion of a new office, that of chief of forced labor, also suggests new policy objectives to strengthen fortresses and improve communication and travel within the kingdom.

21:1-14
Revenge of the Gibeonites

21:1. previous administration offenses as cause for present distress. In the ancient Near East it is common for the king to be understood as the embodiment of the state and the representative of the people. During the reign of the Hittite king Mursilis, a twenty-year plague was determined to have been the result of offenses committed by his predecessor, and attempts were made to appease and make restitution. Likewise the Babylonian king Nabonidus discerned by oracle that some of his difficulties were the result of the neglect of the moon god, Sin, and he sought to rectify that situation. Perhaps most notable among ancient documents for the condemnation of previous kings' conduct is the Weidner chronicle. In this document thirteen kings are criticized for their failure to give due honor to the Esagil sanctuary of Babylon. This becomes the basis for the advice to the current administration to be more faithful.

21:1. famine leading to oracular inquiry. Famine or plague was often looked upon as a sign of divine disapproval or wrath. The Hittite king Mursilis composed a body of Plague Prayers in order to avoid the wrath of the gods. Seeking the "face of the Lord" is a common expression also found in Babylonian and

Hittite sources. Seeking the face of a superior normally meant to have an audience with that personage for the express purpose of seeking his counsel or direction. It is not certain in this instance whether David sought God's presence by means of an oracle, or whether he entered a holy place to speak to God.

21:2-4. Gibeonites. The city of Gibeon (modern el-Jib) is six miles northwest of Jerusalem in the tribal territory of Benjamin. For more information see comment on Joshua 9:3. The Gibeonites were protected by treaty as a result of the incident recorded in Joshua 9. It can be understood that they could easily become the target of nationalistic zeal, but there is no information from the biblical records of Saul's reign detailing his actions against them.

21:5-9. seven of Saul's line executed and exposed. The execution and exposure of criminals and covenant breakers was common in the ancient Near East. Some exposed corpses have been found at Terqa (Tell Ashara) in Syria from about this time period, when seminomadic Arameans traveled to the site to give tribute to the Assyrians. Moreover, many Kassite period boundary stones from Babylonia (late second millennium B.C.) contain curses which include exposure of the corpse in the event of someone transgressing the stipulations of the boundary agreement in question.

21:6, 9. on a hill before the Lord. The hill before the Lord was presumably the Gibeonite high place mentioned in 1 Kings 3. It is normally identified with Nebi Samwil, which is about one mile south of Gibeon. The fact that it was performed before the Lord may indicate a sort of ritual act. The aforementioned Kassite treaty curses were also performed in the audience of a deity.

21:9. harvest time. The beginning of the barley harvest is in April, corresponding to the Hebrew month Ziv. The month name was borrowed from the Canaanites and corresponds to the Babylonian month Iyyar, the second month of the agricultural year. An ancient description of harvest time in Palestine can be found in the Gezer calendar (tenth century B.C.). The calendar mentions a month of harvesting barley followed by a month of harvesting wheat. The crops were either pulled out by hand or cut with a sickle.

21:12-14. treatment of bones and bodies. It can be assumed that only the ashes of Saul and Jonathan were buried here, since their bodies had been burned (1 Sam 31:11-13), which was an unusual custom in ancient Israel. Israelites considered that a person's body ("flesh") and spirit were in principle inseparable. Thus, the individual was both spirit and flesh. Because of this the dead corpse was very carefully treated, as it was still considered part of the person's existence. If the dead person's body was somehow destroyed (e.g., by exposure), that person's existence was severely threatened (for more information see comment on 1 Kings 16:4). This idea is implied in literature and in the material remains from the Mesopotamian city of Ur in the early second millennium B.C. The bodies of dead relatives were buried underneath the shrine room of private residences. They were still considered in some sense part of the family and required eating utensils and other daily life implements. Thus it was important to treat the bones of the corpse with great care. In a similar fashion, David was concerned to take care of the remains of Saul and Jonathan.

21:15-22
Exploits Against the Philistines

21:16. weapons. Either the Philistine's spear or spearhead (the shaft of the spear was not normally made of bronze) weighed three hundred shekels, roughly equivalent to seven and one half pounds, half the weight of Goliath's (1 Sam 17:7). He was girded with a "new sword," an ambiguous term which may have been a special distinction.

21:17. lamp of Israel. The temple was to have a perpetually burning lamp (Ex 27:20). The lit lamps symbolized the presence of God in their midst and the resulting life and hope that they enjoyed because of it. The phrase "lamp of God" is also used to refer to hope (1 Kings 11:36; 2 Kings 8:19), and that would also make sense in this context as the Davidic dynasty represented God's provision of kingship. Similar uses of the word in Ugaritic and Akkadian are tied to perpetuation of rule or divine presence. Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III is referred to as the light of all mankind. An Old Babylonian idiom expresses a family having no descendants by the image of its brazier going out.

21:19. spear shaft like a weaver's rod. The spear in question must have been equipped with a thong and a ring for slinging which resembled the wooden rod and rings, tools used to lift the heddle in weaving. This type of spear was a weapon used in the Aegean and in Egypt in the early Iron Age (c. 1200-900 B.C.). There are artistic depictions in both Egypt and Greece of women weaving with the aforementioned tools.

21:20-22. twelve fingers and twelve toes. Deformities were the object of intense curiosity and speculation in the ancient world. There is

an entire series of Mesopotamian omen texts that describe birth anomalies, including those with extra digits on hands and feet.

22:1-51
David's Hymn of Victory

22:1-51. singing a victory song. One way to celebrate victories and commemorate them for years to come is to compose and sing songs. Songs of all sorts are known throughout the ancient Near East from the first half of the third millennium. One Assyrian list of songs about a century before David includes titles of about 360 songs in dozens of different categories. The singing of a song in response to divine help resulting in victory is a common theme in the Bible. Though they may not be the same genre as the Hebrew Psalms, kings from both Mesopotamia and Egypt composed dedicatory hymns to gods, thanking them for victory over their enemies. For example, Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria (c. 1244-1208 B.C.) composed a long epic hymn to Ashur thanking him for victory over Babylon, while justifying his conquest of Babylon because of the unworthiness of their ruler.

22:2-3. rock metaphor. The rock in the Old Testament often symbolized security and the defense of an impregnable refuge. God was the rock (or mountain) who gave security and safety to his people. Some of the most important Anatolian and Palestinian deities of the late second millennium B.C. (such as El, the divine creator) were described as deified mountains.

22:5. waves of death metaphor. Here, as in the book of Jonah (2:6-7), the writer equates his circumstances with a watery covering at the entrance to death, which is a synonym to Sheol, the abode of the dead. Swirling waters represented the chaotic, destructive waters that jeopardize not only life, but creation.

22:6. cords of the grave. Noose snares were commonly used by hunters in the ancient Near East. In this metaphor, death or Sheol is the hunter. For many cultures in the ancient Near East, Sheol, the abode of the grave (i.e. underworld) was a very real place where individuals led an amorphous existence, eating clay and dust, hoping that their descendants would take care of their needs. There were gates and gatekeepers to keep the dead inside; thus it was called "the land of no return." This description can be found in the second-millennium Akkadian epic The Descent of Ishtar. Apparently the Hebrew view of the grave was not unlike this, although there is no elaborate description of it in the Old Testament.

22:14-16. Yahweh as a warrior. In the divine warrior motif the deity is fighting the battles and defeating the deities of the enemy. In Assyria, Nergal is the king of battle, and Ishtar is also viewed as a war goddess. The Canaanite Baal and the Babylonian Marduk are divine warriors. Thunder and lightning were considered to regularly accompany the presence of a deity in the ancient Near East, often in a battle setting. From the Sumerian Exaltation of Inanna, to the Hittite myths about the Storm God, to the Akkadian and Ugaritic mythologies, the gods are viewed as thundering in judgment against their enemies. Baal is depicted as grasping a handful of thunderbolts. Thundering terminology is picked up in royal rhetoric as Hittite or Assyrian kings portray themselves as the instruments of the gods, thundering against those who have violated treaties or stood in the way of empire expansion.

22:34. feet of a deer. There were fairly large populations of Iranian deer in Palestine during the period of the Israelite monarchy (although they became extinct sometime last century). They were never domesticated and represented only a small percentage of the meat supply at the Bronze and Iron Age sites in the region. Some deer were kept in captivity, as described by a fifteenth-century ration list from coastal Alalakh (see comment on Ps 18:33).

23:1-7
Last Words of David

23:1. oracle of David. The introductory term translated "oracle" is most commonly used to introduce speeches of the Lord, but it is also sometimes used to introduce wise sayings (Agur's oracle, Prov 30:1) or prophetic speeches (Balaam's oracle, Num 24:3, 15), as verses two and three suggest this is. This is the only insinuation in the Old Testament that David could be classified among the prophets.

23:1. singer of songs. It is unclear whether this phrase represents a description of David or a description of the "God of Jacob." Both can be justified from usage of this terminology in the Ugaritic texts. The former would describe David's singing talents, and the latter would describe God as the treasured object of the songs or perhaps the cherished defender of Israel.

23:5-7. metaphors of kingship. The metaphor begun at verse five has a solar flavor. The rule of a just king is like the warmth of the sun for crops but is devastating to the unjust. Representing the king's justice as the sun (Yahweh

is the king in this case) is found among the Hittites and especially for the kings of Egypt. A Middle Kingdom hymn to the god Amun-Re describes the king as the lord of rays, who gives life-giving rays to those whom he loves but is a consuming fire to his enemies. In Mesopotamia it is Shamash, the sun god, who is the god of justice. Thorns symbolize rebels, who are simply poked into the fire (the result of the sun's heat).

23:8-39
Accounts and List of David's Mighty Men

23:8. David's mighty men. It is generally thought that the thirty were a special group of retainers—champions who had attached themselves to David (see comment on 1 Sam 17:25) and served as his "special forces" group—an elite group of operatives that did not necessarily function within an organized military structure.

23:11-12. Pas Dammim. Pas Dammin, or Ephes Dammin (1 Sam 17:1), was described in Scripture as being between Socoh and Azekah near the Valley of Elah. Thus it was west of Bethlehem towards the Philistine coast. Damun, four miles northeast of Socoh, is one candidate for the modern site of Pas Dammin, but it is difficult to see how that could be described as between Socoh and Azekah.

23:13. geography. Adullam was about sixteen miles southwest of Jerusalem. It is identified with modern Tell esh-Sheikh Madhkur. It is not certain whether the "cave" of Adullam is to be identified with the city itself or with a nearby site. The location of the Valley of Rephaim is uncertain but may be the modern el-Baq'a, an area southwest of Jerusalem (see comment on 5:18). Thus the cave of Adullam was somewhere north and east of the Valley of Rephaim.

23:14. stronghold. The stronghold mentioned here is likely near the site of Adullam (see 1 Sam 22:4). Some have suggested that it is a reference to Masada. The context for this section seems to be when David was in flight and thus was not yet king. During David's rule the "stronghold" was Zion (2 Sam 5:17).

23:15-17. gate of Bethlehem. Neither a well nor a gate has been located in the sparse Iron Age remains at Bethlehem. The remaining Iron Age remains have been located on the slope of modern Bethlehem near the Church of the Nativity. The upper part of the mound does not seem to have been occupied during the Iron Age. Thus David's gate and well were probably on the lower part of the town.

23:20. lion pit on snowy day. Lions, though probably not plentiful, were still roaming the countryside in the Iron Age and became extinct only in modern times. Hunting lions was a favorite sport of kings and heroes. Both Egyptian and Assyrian kings chose lion-hunting scenes to depict their manliness. One of the techniques used to hunt lions was the use of a pit. The lion would be pursued into the pit, where often a net would be used to entangle it. The hunter would then go into the pit with a spear and finish the kill. The likely reason for mentioning the snow would be that it made the footing more difficult. Snow was not an altogether extraordinary occurrence in the highlands of southern Palestine.

23:23. king's bodyguard. The position that Benaiah held here, captain of the king's bodyguard, was the same that David held in Saul's administration (see 1 Sam 22:14). This was probably the mercenary force described as "the Cherethites and the Pelethites" (see comment on 15:18). Captains of the king's bodyguard are well-known from Assyrian records and from Greek sources (e.g., Herodotus) describing the Persian army of Darius I and Xerxes I (521-465 B.C.).

24:1-17
David's Census

24:2. census. Taking a census was a practical measure utilized by governments in the ancient Near East, perhaps as early as the Ebla tablets, c. 2500 B.C. (though the evidence here is scant), and clearly by the middle of the second millennium. However, the benefits derived from this practice were not necessarily appreciated by the people since they led to increased tax levies as well as military or forced labor service. Viewed in this light, it is not surprising that popular notions existed that the census was a source of bad luck or the basis of divine displeasure. Mari texts (eighteenth century B.C.) from Mesopotamia describe men fleeing to the mountains to avoid being counted.

24:5-8. itinerary. The census takers begin by heading east into the Transjordan region to the southeast extremity of the land at Aroer along the Arnon and then proceed north to the northeast extremity at Dan. Tahtim Hodshi is obscure, but the logic of the itinerary would suggest something in the region of Mount Hermon, often considered a northeast boundary. From there they head northwest to the Phoenician coast at Sidon and then begin to move south through the main sections of the country.

It is interesting to note that after the mention of Tyre (outside of Israel proper), the Hivites and Canaanites are mentioned, and then the list skips to Beersheba at the southern extremity of the land. In so doing it fails to mention by name any districts, towns or territories on the west side of the Jordan.

24:9. census results. The total of 1.3 million fighting men has seemed high to the archaeologists who study population density. Estimates of the population of the land at the time of David run between three and nine hundred thousand. While granting that the methods by which such estimates are arrived at can be contested, it must also be remembered that the word translated "thousands" in the text may also mean divisions made up of much fewer than a thousand.

24:10. conscience-stricken about census taking. It was because of God's anger (for undisclosed offenses, v. 1) that David decided to take a census. If he is now conscience-stricken concerning that decision, it suggests that his motive for taking the census may have been to appease God's anger. One way to appease the anger of deity in the traditional Near Eastern way of thinking was to pay him off, that is, offer generous gifts to the sanctuary. Since a census generally levied a head tax to be paid to the temple (see comment on the census temple tax in Ex 30:11-16), it is possible that the census was an attempt to appease God by pouring money into the temple coffers. This was not how Yahweh desired to be treated, and rather than appeasing his anger, it increased it. The punishment was the result of both his original anger and David's attempted appeasement.

24:11. seer. The seer and the prophet were engaged in basically the same activity, but the structuring of the role in society was different (much like the difference between the offices of judge and king). The seers appear to be able to pass on their office either to students or to sons, whereas the prophet is spontaneously called by God.

24:12-15. king and people identified together. In the ancient Near East it was common for the king to be the embodiment of the state and the representative of the people. In Hittite literature, for instance, an offense committed by the king could bring punishment on all the people. Royal prayers were often directed toward the deities to seek forgiveness for past or present royal offenses that were viewed as being the cause of present distress.

24:16. angel afflicting the people. This is the same terminology used for the destroying angel in the Passover account in Exodus 12. In the Mesopotamian epic called Erra and Ishum the plague god (Erra or Nergal) embarks on a massive campaign of destruction and is finally calmed by a subordinate, Ishum, preventing total decimation of the land. An obvious difference (among many) is that here in Samuel the destroying angel is under the absolute control of the Lord, while in the Erra epic, Marduk, the chief god of Babylon, is distant and ambivalent.

24:18-25
Altar and Threshing Floor

24:18. Arauna the Jebusite. When David conquered Jerusalem he did not drive out the Jebusite inhabitants. Arauna, having retained a significant tract of land north of the city, is sometimes identified as the Jebusite governor. In fact the Hurrian word (the Jebusites are usually considered of Hurrian extraction) for a feudal overlord is *ewrine,* leading some to believe that Arauna (variant: Awarna) is a title rather than a name.

24:18. threshing floor. Since the threshing floor was a large, flat, open area, it was a natural gathering spot for the townspeople. Since it was so intimately connected with the harvest, it was a natural site for religious ceremonies and festivals. These combine to make it likely that Arauna's threshing floor already had some sacred traditions attached to it from earlier periods.

24:22. threshing sledges and ox yokes. The threshing sledge was a platform made of boards with pieces of iron stuck through holes. This would be hitched behind the threshing animals and loaded up with rocks. When dragged over the wheat it would aid in the threshing process. For this text they, along with the yokes, become a convenient source of wood for the sacrifice.

24:24. fifty shekels of silver. This is not a great amount of money compared to the four hundred shekels that Abraham paid for the cave of Machpelah (Gen 23). Additionally, 1 Chronicles 21:25 reports that six hundred gold shekels were paid for the entire site.

1 KINGS

1:1-53

Solomon Gains Throne over Adonijah

1:3-4. Abishag's status. The fact that David is said to have had no relations with Abishag indicates that she was never officially taken into the royal harem. Though neither wife nor concubine, her role as final companion to the king provided enough ambiguity to later place her in the middle of a power struggle (see comment on 2:13-21).

1:3. Shunammite. Located in the territory of Issachar (Josh 19:18), Shunem (modern Solem) was seven miles southeast of Nazareth. It is mentioned in Thutmose III's conquest list of the fifteenth century B.C. and in the fourteenth-century B.C. El Amarna letters.

1:5-6. primogeniture in Israel. In the ancient Near East primogeniture is not always the rule. In many texts it is clear that the children divide the inheritance evenly. With regard to succession to rule, in some cultures brothers had priority over sons. In others it was up to the king to designate his successor, and in some cases the subjects had to consent. In Israelite culture the firstborn was generally assumed to have certain advantages, but neither inheritance nor succession inevitably fell to him. See the comment on Deuteronomy 21:15-17 for the ancient Near Eastern context of inheritance rights of the firstborn.

1:5. fifty runners. It was common practice for persons of high political status to display their authority by riding in a chariot, accompanied by an entourage of runners (see comment on 2 Sam 15:1). In battle formation this provided a set fighting unit, as noted in the annals of Sargon II and other Assyrian kings.

1:7-8. support of army and priesthood. In the Ugaritic Epic of Keret, Prince Yassib, Keret's son, makes the argument that the invalid king is no longer capable of carrying out his duties and that he should therefore yield the throne to his successor. Similarly, David's sons positioned themselves to take the throne from their declining father. They went about this by soliciting the support of power groups within the state—specifically, the leaders of the military and the priestly community. Opposition from either of these groups could make for a short reign (see respectively 1 Kings 16:15-18 and 2 Kings 11). Since the dynastic line was staying in power, there was no need to reenlist support among the tribes and clans. With their pressing for the establishment of a coregency (a common practice in Egyptian and Mesopotamian monarchies), rather than seeking to forcibly depose David, Nathan and Bathsheba win the throne for Solomon.

1:9, 19. sacrifices. It is likely that the sacrifices were burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, two of the most general types of sacrifices. The former often accompanied a petition, while the latter served as an opportunity for festive celebration and a communal meal before the Lord. These sacrifices would have been directed to the initiation of kingship (coronation). The sacrifices were being offered to make petition for God's blessing and in preparation for a feast that would create an alliance between Adonijah and those in attendance, following the pattern used by Absalom. Such covenantal meals are a part of treaty and alliance agreements, as exemplified in texts from Mari and the Amarna letters.

1:9. En Rogel. This spring is only about 650 yards south of the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley (see comment on 1:33) and only about a half mile from David's palace. The choice of this location for the ceremony is probably due to the fact that the spring lies at the junction of the territory of Benjamin and Judah (presumably suggesting both would have access to its water supply). Adonijah's support base can therefore be inferred as comprising the tribal alliances that brought David to power. His support by Joab and Abiathar would also represent this traditional element. The stone of Zoheleth is sometimes translated Serpent Rock and likely refers to a distinctive rock that had some ritual traditions associated with it.

1:21. treatment of claimants to the throne. There is wide precedent in Mesopotamian texts for the elimination of all rival claimants to the throne when a king comes to power. Such purges also occurred years later as a form of revenge for political opposition or rebellion attempted against previous rulers. One way to better understand Bathsheba's fears for herself and her son Solomon is to look at the murder of the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 681 B.C. by his sons. Although the king had designated his son Esarhaddon as his successor, civil war broke out with portions of the military taking sides. Esarhaddon finally secured the throne and had those guilty of the murder of their father executed. Such intrigue surrounding the succession to the throne was not unusual in the ancient

Near East. There had been bloody strife between David's sons in the past (see 2 Sam 13—15), and a general purge of other claimants might well occur after David's death. Esarhaddon solved the problem for his successor by having his treaty partners sign an agreement to support the disposition of his two sons as king of Assyria and of Babylonia respectively.

1:33. the king's mule. During the early monarchy the proper animal for the king to ride was the mule (see 2 Sam 18:9). Precedent for this practice is found in a Mari letter containing a suggestion to King Zimri-Lim that it would be more in keeping with the dignity of the monarch if he rode in a cart pulled by mules rather than by horses. It is also possible that horses were not in general use by the Israelites until later periods. During this period mules were two or three times more expensive than horses. They were imported and, of course, could not reproduce.

1:33. Gihon. This is a spring now known as 'En Sitti Maryam in the Kidron Valley just below the east slope of David's Jerusalem (see comment on 2 Sam 5:8). In contrast to Adonijah's support base in the traditional tribal groups, Solomon's base appears to be in the royal city, Jerusalem, itself. The Gihon spring, as Jerusalem's water supply, is therefore a fit setting for this ceremony.

1:34. anointing by priest and prophet. The pattern to this point had been for a prophet to anoint the prospective king (see the comment on 1 Sam 16:1). This provided divine sanction for him to rule. In the ancient Near East, priests often played significant political roles, but no prophets from the ancient Near East are known to have played the role of kingmaker. Now, with the first example of hereditary succession, it was appropriate that both the high priest and a prophet participate in this ceremony. In this way, both God (through the prophet) and the religious community that served the people and Yahweh (especially the Jerusalem sanctuary) recognized the king's right to rule.

1:38. Kerethites and Pelethites. See the comment on 2 Samuel 15:18 for discussion of these mercenary troops (probably Cretans and other Sea People descendants). They served as a praetorian guard, whose duties and loyalties were strictly to the king. Use of highly trained, mercenary soldiers is also found in Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Roman sources.

1:41. noise in the city. Though En Rogel is only 250 yards from the southern wall of the city, it is much lower in elevation (near the southwestern end of the foot of the modern village of Silwan). Neither the activity in the city nor that at Gihon can be observed from that vantage point. Nonetheless, the commotion would easily carry across the valley.

1:49. Adonijah's guests disperse. Adonijah's supporters apparently were willing to try to force the succession issue but had no stomach for civil war. Nor did they desire to be personally aligned with one who would undoubtedly now be labeled a rebel. It was clear that Solomon had gained the support of both the king and the political establishment of Jerusalem, and Adonijah's cause was a lost one.

1:50. taking the horns of the altar. Adonijah claims the right of sanctuary when he grabs the horns of the altar (see Ex 21:13-14). Archaeological evidence of horned altars has been found at sites such as Beersheba (see comment on 2:28). Asylum, however, was supposed to be granted for unintentional homicide, and Adonijah's "crime" was presuming his right to rule as king. It seems likely that the altar, because of its tie to sacred space and association with the deity (see the comment on Ex 27:1-8), could be used to take oaths of innocence in the face of possible punishment (as seen in Hammurabi's code).

2:1-11
David's Instructions to Solomon

2:1-11. dying king's instructions. A number of pieces of Egyptian wisdom literature, notably the Instruction of Merikare (from about 2100 B.C.), take the form of instructions to a newly crowned king from his predecessor. As here, the instructions given to Merikare by his father offer advice concerning how certain situations should be dealt with in order to secure a just and unthreatened rule. The new king's responsibility is to deal wisely with those who have shown rebellious tendencies. Even the categories of rebels mentioned show some similarity to the individuals David advises Solomon to act against.

2:5. Joab's crimes. Abner (see the comment on 2 Sam 3:29) and Amasa (see comment on 2 Sam 20:9) had both been military and political rivals eliminated by Joab in defiance of David's intentions. In both instances, David was politically embarrassed and had to publicly denounce Joab's actions. Given Joab's past treatment of opponents, the stability of the kingdom required that he be punished as a criminal.

2:5. blood-stained belt and sandals. The words used for belt and sandals in this verse are never clearly used for military dress (see comment on 2 Sam 18:11). The idea here may be that the clothing stained with blood indi-

cated that the killings were not in battle contexts.

2:7. eating at the king's table. Those who eat from the king's table or storehouse are his dependents and those he chooses to sponsor. It is expected that they will demonstrate their loyalty based on this payment (evidenced in the listing of provisions provided to nobles and members of the bureaucracy in Mari and Babylonian administrative texts). Those sponsored in this way would generally be members of the administration and champions of military repute. Many of these would either be already part of the king's family or would marry into the family (see comment on 1 Sam 17:25).

2:8. Mahanaim. Besides serving as an administrative center for the government of Saul's son (2 Sam 2), this is where David set up headquarters when he had to flee from Absalom (see the comment on 2 Sam 17:24). The town is also mentioned as one destroyed by Pharaoh Shishak's invasion during the time of Solomon's son. While it is clear that Mahanaim is in the Transjordan region, the precise location is unknown. The most common identification today is with Tell edh-Dhahab el-Gharbi on the northern bank of the Jabbok. There have been no excavations at the site, but surface surveys confirm that it was occupied during this period.

2:8. Shimei's crime. See the comment on 2 Samuel 16:11.

2:10. royal tombs. By right of capture, the citadel area of Jerusalem was David's private domain and thus a proper burial site for himself and his successors. Ugaritic shaft tombs within their palace precinct indicate this was a familiar royal practice. Early Iron Age (1200-1000 B.C.) and Iron Age II (1000-600 B.C.) tombs, based on archaeological investigation along the coastal plain in the area of Judah, seem to have been primarily either cave tombs or rectangular chamber tombs, some with forecourts and raised benches for the internment of the corpse. The quality and quantity of grave goods can only be speculated on since there is no trace of the royal tombs from the monarchy period. However, it may be presumed, based on the royal tombs of Mycenae, Egypt and Ugarit, that they would have contained treasures representative of the status of the dead. The place often identified to tourists as David's tomb on present day Mount Zion is a late tradition. The only monumental tombs from the First Temple period are in the modern village of Silwan across the Kidron Valley from David's Jerusalem. These do not date back as early as David (who was buried *in* the City of David) and are not royal tombs.

2:11. chronology. Typical of ancient Near Eastern annals, the narrative describing each of Israel and Judah's kings ends with a summary statement that takes note of the number of years the king reigned and sometimes a mention of contemporary monarchs. Though the number forty is often a round number, here it is broken into very precise divisions, suggesting an actual forty-year reign. David's reign would have extended from about 1010 to 970.

2:12-46
Solomon's Accession to the Throne

2:19. queen mother's throne. There were three different types of queens in the ancient world. The most familiar to our way of thinking is one who is the primary wife of the king (e.g., Queen Esther). While sometimes these royal consorts were little more than ornamentation, in other contexts (such as among the Hittites of the second millennium) they served as royal deputies with extensive power (compare the role of Jezebel in Ahab's court). A second type is the wife (or mother) of the king who accedes to the throne after his death and rules in his place (e.g., Athaliah of Judah, Hatshepsut of Egypt). The third is the queen mother whose royal husband has died but who continues to exert significant political influence over the new king, her son (e.g., Sammuramat of Assyria, Maacah of Judah, see 1 Kings 15:13). That is the role depicted for Bathsheba here. The extent to which the queen mother exercised a significant or powerful role in judicial, economic or social matters would have depended on the personality of the individual. The fact that the mother is named for nearly every king of Judah (though not for kings of Israel) suggests that the role of queen mother was an important one throughout the Davidic monarchy.

2:13-21. Adonijah's request. The network of support for a king would have been found in the powerful clans and families. Acquiring concubines and wives would therefore be the mechanism for building up the backing of each local area. Support might also be found in wealthy merchants, military leaders or even in priestly families. Royal marriages were a reflection of the power of a monarch and represented political and economic alliances made in the name of the state. It would therefore have been necessary, at the succession, for the harem of the former king to become the responsibility of the new monarch. In this way there was continuity of treaty obligations. Consequently a potential successor to the throne at times sought to expropriate the authority of his predecessor by taking over his

harem. As a result any attempts to obtain women from the harem are seen as a sign of rebellion or usurpation of power. The loss of the harem to another monarch, as described in the Assyrian annals of Sennacherib, was a sign of submission or being deposed. Abishag's status would have been ambiguous if she had never officially become part of the harem, in which case Adonijah's request would not have constituted an overt attempt to procure the throne. It is possible, however, that Adonijah wished to position himself for an attempt to take over the kingship by acquiring David's last companion. Certainly Solomon chose to interpret the request as having that intent.

2:26. Abiathar's banishment to Anathoth. The Iron I village of Anathoth was located at Ras-Kharrubeh, about three miles northeast of Jerusalem. In the Persian period the site was moved slightly north to the village of Anata. Apparently Abiathar and his family continued to hold estates in this area (note Jeremiah's ties to Anathoth and the field of Hanamel in Jer 1:1 and 32:7-9). As part of Solomon's purge of Adonijah's supporters, Abiathar was banished to the "country life" and forced to resign his duties as high priest. Solomon's reluctance to execute Abiathar or his priestly family is understandable in light of Abiathar's faithful service as priest and diviner for David (see 1 Sam 23:9-12).

2:28. horns of the altar. See the comment on 1 Kings 1:50. Horned altars have also been found in excavations of Canaanite sites and in Cyprus. The horns may have been used to tie down a sacrifice or support a bowl of incense. Joab's attempt to claim asylum by grasping the horns was rejected, because of his treason against Solomon and his unauthorized murders of Abner and Amasa. The charge and curse for "shedding of innocent blood" in verses 31-33 is an oath of clearance for David's family and a condemnation of Joab's. Egyptian legal documents from the time of Rameses IV, twelfth century B.C., charge officials to be careful not to inflict punishment on a person without proper authorization. The text states that "all that they have done [should] come down upon their own heads."

2:34. buried on his land in the desert. It is likely that Joab was buried in a family tomb near Bethlehem (his brother Asahel was buried there in 2 Sam 2:32). The description is of open pasture land rather than desert, and that would fit the area of the Judean hill country.

2:36-37. Shimei's house arrest. Based on Shimei's earlier cursing of David (2 Sam 16:11) and David's final instructions (1 Kings 2:8-9), Solomon places him under close house arrest—a condition in which the prisoner is responsible for maintaining his own defined boundaries. Apparently there was some concern that Shimei might rally support against Solomon among the Benjaminite tribesmen if he was allowed to travel north of Jerusalem. This compares to the restrictions placed on the movement of slaves in the Ur-Nammu and Hammurabi codes and suggests that Shimei had lost rights as a full citizen. In the Instruction of Merikare (see comment on 2:1-11) those vassals who had a history of rebelling but were not currently involved in rebellion were to be exiled.

2:37. Kidron Valley. Mention of the Kidron as Shimei's northern boundary is a clear indication that he is not to have contact with other members of the Benjaminite tribe—a group that had been a part of Sheba's revolt in 2 Samuel 20. The Kidron wadi is located just east of the Ophel, separating Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.

2:39. geography. Although a conclusive identification of the Philistine city of Gath has not yet been established, the general consensus is that it is at Tell es-Safi, ten miles southeast of Tel Miqne-Ekron. David's association with Achish and his inclusion of mercenaries from Gath (2 Sam 15:18-23) suggest it was part of Israel's political sphere—at least by treaty agreement. Shimei's journey there to recover his two slaves would have taken him west of Jerusalem as far as the Shephelah and easily outside the confines of his house arrest.

3:1-3

Summary of Solomon

3:1. identity of Pharaoh. The biblical narrator chose not to mention the pharaoh by name, but most likely this would have been Siamun, the next to last ruler of the relatively weak Twenty-First Dynasty. Since this pharaoh was faced with difficulties with the Theban priesthood at home, he was unable to conquer either Philistia or Israel. He therefore chose to ally himself by marriage with Solomon, perhaps as a way of weakening the Philistines along the southern coast of Palestine (c. 960 B.C.).

3:1. marriage alliances. The policy of using royal marriages as a diplomatic tool, tying local leaders as well as foreign monarchs together in treaty and familial alliance, has a long history in the ancient Near East (see the comments on 11:1). The fact that Solomon received a daughter of the pharaoh demonstrates he is in a stronger position than the monarch of Egypt at that time. Her dowry included yield-

ing Gezer to Solomon, thereby giving the king of Israel a strategic site overlooking the northern Shephelah and guarding one of the principal roads between the coast and the hill country around Jerusalem.

3:2-3. sacrificing at high places. The picture portrayed in the biblical narrative is that prior to the construction of the temple in Jerusalem, sacrifice and religious ritual commonly took place at local shrines or *bamoth.* They were constructed for this purpose and in most cases appear to be an installation that could be entered and within which cultic activity took place (see the comment on 1 Sam 9:12-13). Many of them may have had an urban setting, although this does not preclude their existence outside city walls on nearby hills (2 Kings 17:9-11). Their actual appearance and the furnishings associated with the high places are unknown, but the large number of references to them as sacrificial sites suggest some may have been quite elaborate. Eventually the monarchy and the Jerusalem priesthood attempted to suppress the use of the high places because of their desire to emphasize Solomon's temple as "the place which Yahweh will choose."

3:4-15
Solomon's Dream

For information on this section see the comments on 2 Chronicles 1.

3:16-28
Example of Solomon's Wisdom

3:16. prostitution. Despite being prohibited by law (Lev 19:29; Deut 23:18), prostitution was apparently tolerated among the Israelites. In fact, several narratives exist in which a prostitute is a heroine (Rahab in Josh 2 and Tamar in Gen 38). Certainly their social status would have been extremely low, but that may well be an integral part of the Rahab episode, where several unexpected events occur. Solomon's willingness to hear the case of the two prostitutes in here fits in well with his image as a "just king" (making up for the judicial failures of David—2 Sam 15:2-4). It is also in keeping with the legal protections afforded prostitutes in the Mesopotamian law codes (Lipit-Ishtar and Middle Assyrian Code).

3:16-28. royal wisdom in judging. Solomon's wisdom is demonstrated in his ability to discern true justice, a quality which marks him as a "just king." This attribute is claimed by nearly every ancient Near Eastern king as he ascends the throne and establishes his rule as one concerned for the welfare of the state and even the weakest of its citizens (see the prologue to Hammurabi's Code in which he is charged by the gods "to cause justice to prevail in the land"). Other examples of the expectation of royal wisdom are found in the Egyptian Protests of the Eloquent Peasant (twentieth to eighteenth centuries B.C.) and in the appeal of the eleventh-century B.C. Egyptian priest Wenamon, who asked the prince of Byblos for a resolution of his case.

4:1-28
Solomon's Administration

4:7. district system. In an attempt to centralize his authority as king and begin the process of weakening local, tribal loyalties, Solomon reorganized his kingdom. The tribal districts that had been created after the conquest and during the settlement period could be dangerous to the Davidic dynasty. The northern tribes under Sheba had already attempted to secede from the united kingdom (2 Sam 20:1-2). If new political boundaries could be redrawn so that tribal populations and the new Canaanite cities added to the nation were mixed together, then the king might forestall future political problems. This restructuring also aided in financing national works projects (see 1 Kings 9:15-19), the national defense and the initiation of international commercial ventures (1 Kings 9:26-28). Since each district was responsible for maintaining the king's household one month each year, a regular system of taxation (other than the religious tithe) could be initiated, further weakening local autonomy in favor of a centralized national perspective on administration.

4:7. provisions for royal household. The king's household consisted of his immediate family as well as his major government officials and their extended bureaucracy (see the list in 1 Kings 4:1-6). In this way each of the twelve officials given charge of Israel's administrative districts (see the list in 1 Kings 4:8-19) helped finance Solomon's government. Their responsibilities would have included marshaling the natural and human resources of their districts to insure a more efficient and profitable use of their local resources in the national interest. Such provisioning also served as a form of taxation, directing the local districts to give service to the national government. Administrative documents from Ugarit, Mari and Babylon give some indication of royal expectations from local governors. A quota of raw and manufactured goods and materials

are listed, sometimes side by side with previous years' offerings.

4:8-19. geography. Ugarit and Alalakh both yielded administrative texts with a literary form similar to that found here. The geographical designations for the various provinces of Solomon's kingdom are not sufficiently delineated so that exact boundaries can be established for each of them. Each governor apparently had a seat or seats of administration: for example, Ben-Abinadab at Dor and Baana at Taanach and Megiddo. Some of the districts apparently encompassed previous tribal area: Dan's original area in the central highlands, Naphtali in eastern Galilee and Asher on the western slopes of the Galilee. However, what is distinctive is the inclusion of Canaanite and Philistine territory: Dor, a port city of the Sea Peoples mentioned in the Egyptian tale of Wenamon (eleventh century B.C.) and Canaanite Hepher (Tell Ibsar) in the Sharon Plain (Josh 12:17). The placement of Judah at the end of the list (v. 20) suggests that its administration and fiscal responsibilities may have differed from the rest of the districts because of its association with the Davidic house.

4:21. boundaries of Solomon's kingdom. The description of Solomon's kingdom stretching from the Euphrates River in the east (refers to the area where the river turns north in the region of Emar) to the Wadi al-Arish on the border of Egypt is intended to demonstrate the magnitude of Solomon's rule and correlate it to the boundaries of the covenantal promised land of Deuteronomy 1 and Joshua 1. Mesopotamian annals from the time of Sargon of Akkad (third millennium) to the later Assyrian rulers included statements of the extent of their kingdoms. In general they reflect either military campaigns that have taken the king into areas beyond his actual boundaries or an extension of economic hegemony in which the ruler is able to extract tribute or tolls from neighboring kingdoms or foreign merchants. The reality is that there are various levels of what constituted "control" or "boundaries." The text here does not offer the details of the level of control Solomon exercised over each area, but nevertheless several different relationships may be identified. In addition to the traditional territory from Dan to Beersheba, Solomon had provinces (conquered states such as Moab, Edom and Ammon), vassals (tribute-paying, but having native rulers such as Hamath, Zobah and Philistia), and allies (treaty partners such as Egypt and Tyre).

4:22. daily provisions. Such a notation of the quantities of grain and animals made available daily to feed Solomon and his court fits in well with the picture of a monarch on a par with the Egyptian pharaoh. The use of some Egyptian loan words (cor = homer = 6.3 bushels) suggests that the form of this statement may have been modeled after the official records of Egypt or the Canaanite or Philistine kingdoms. Note that all of the items listed could be stored or kept in pasture or corral until they were needed. Perishable foods were also a part of their diet, but these (other than oil) seldom appear as weighed or measured items on administrative lists such as the ration lists found in the Mari texts that keep track of the exact amounts given to slaves, officials and traveling dignitaries.

4:25. own vine and fig. This is a stock phrase that appears in the historical annals and many of the prophets as a sign of peace and prosperity for Israel. When God is angry, then the reverse occurs, and the vine and fig tree are destroyed along with the peace. The idiom refers to the security and moderate prosperity that allow one to enjoy life's little pleasures. The vine and fig provided some shade as well as fruit and enjoying them indicated some long-term prospects—each took several years to become productive.

4:26. horses and chariots. Typically a chariot team included three horses with only two being used at any one time and the third kept as a reserve. The three would be stabled together, so twelve thousand horses for four thousand pens is the correct proportion indicating the potential for four thousand chariot teams (though some may have been used for cavalry). Nevertheless, 1 Kings 10:26 reports that Solomon had fourteen hundred chariots. This is a large contingent of chariots but is not as large as the two thousand that Ahab contributed to the western alliance that met the Assyrians at the Battle of Qarqar in 853 (see comment on 22:1). In the thirteenth century the Hittites and their allies had amassed twenty-five hundred chariots to confront Rameses II at the Battle of Qadesh.

4:30. wisdom of the men of the east. There was a longstanding tradition of wisdom in the ancient Near East. Proverbial statements, such as those by the Egyptian sages Ptah-Hotep (2450 B.C.) and Amenemope (c. 1100) and the Assyrian courtier Ahiqar (c. 700), closely parallel portions of the book of Proverbs. In addition, the longer wisdom pieces, such as Job and Ecclesiastes, are very similar in form and content to the Egyptian Dispute over Suicide (c. 2100) and the Babylonian Dialogue about Human Misery (c. 1000). Even more classical epic poetry, such as the Gilgamesh cycle and

the tale of Ishtar's descent to the underworld, contains elements of wisdom literature that explore issues like human mortality and concern for personal achievement. With such a rich body of literature and tradition, it is a remarkable statement to say that Solomon surpassed all of these ancient sages.

4:31. Ethan, Heman, Calcol, Darda. These renowned wisdom figures are also tied to the genealogy of Judah and Tamar through their son Zerah (Gen 38:30). Mahol (Hebrew *maḥol* = dancers) may actually refer to their role as musicians, a profession which is associated both with worship as well as wisdom performance. Ethan and Heman appear in Psalm titles (Ps 88 and 89) and thus have been incorporated into the formal aspects of temple worship, even though they are not listed here among the Levites.

4:32. three thousand proverbs. The *mashal* or proverb fits into a genre of writing in the ancient Near East which is marked by short, pithy statements expressing common sense or well-known values. Three thousand is a round number and is described as the number that he spoke, not the number he composed. As today, wisdom can often be the result of research and gathering of information rather than reflective of some creative enterprise.

4:32. 1005 songs. It was not uncommon in the ancient world to express "more than" with an x plus one progression or the use of a round number plus one or plus a digit (see Prov 6:16; Amos 1:3). But if the five in this number is functioning the same way, it is unusual. This oriental mode of expression is also observable in something as familiar as 1,001 Arabian Nights. Around 2000 B.C. Shulgi, king of Ur, also had a literary reputation. In hymns to himself he boasts of his education and literary skills, and bears the title of first royal musician.

4:33. plant life. Botanical wisdom in the ancient world did not concern the issues that modern day biologists would study. One area of interest was herb lore, which included medicinal functions as well as use in industry (dyes) and food production. In other cultures it would also include magical properties of various herbs. Another area of botanical wisdom would be agricultural in nature—the wisdom of a farmer concerning seeds and the whole planting, nurturing, fertilizing and harvesting process. Since the statement concerning Solomon's wisdom targets trees, however, and occurs in the context of proverbs and songs, it is more likely that Solomon's wisdom was expressed by using trees in parables or fables with wisdom teachings. Such parables are known in the Old Testament (Judg 9:8-15) as well as in the ancient Near East (e.g., the Sumerian Fable of the Tamarisk and the Palm) and required insight into the nature of the trees and bushes.

4:33. animal life. Though the NIV uses verbs like "described" and "taught," the Hebrew simply says Solomon "spoke about" plant and animal life. As in the previous entry, this suggests that he used his insight to tell stories—parables and fables about animals for the purpose of teaching wisdom. Aesop was not the first to use this medium, and more than a millennium before Solomon the Sumerians were producing animal debates and fables. The most prominent Akkadian fable known to us is The Snake and the Eagle. Additionally, wisdom speech in ancient Egypt (e.g., the Instruction of Amenemope) and Mesopotamia (as in the first-millennium Aramaic Words of Ahiqar) was filled with analogies and parables involving animals and plants.

5:1—6:38
Building the Temple

For more information on chapter 5 see comments on 2 Chronicles 2:1-18.

5:1. relationship between Israel and Tyre. The Phoenicians of Tyre, located twenty miles south of Sidon on an island half a mile off the Phoenician coast, prospered from their control of the naval mercantile trade throughout the Mediterranean. Their independence is attested in the Egyptian Wenamon's report (c. 1080 B.C.), and their influence is found in archaeological levels on Cyprus and later at Carthage on the North African coast. However, their preoccupation with trade and their lack of sufficient farmlands made it necessary for them to establish relations with neighboring nations who were interested in the goods brought by Phoenician ships and could pay for them with grain and other natural resources. Solomon's consolidation of the region of Palestine made him a good trading partner for Hiram and a constant source of income for Phoenician builders and contractors.

5:1. Hiram. The dates of Hiram I of Tyre (Phoenician Ahiram; Assyrian Hirummu) are commonly cited as 969-936 B.C., based on the chronological reckoning of the Jewish historian Josephus (first century A.D.). He claims to have extensive records of the history of Tyre and offers much information about Hiram's reign. This dating gives little if any overlap between David and Hiram and is suspect due to the methods of calculation available to Josephus. Contemporary Near Eastern sources of-

fer no information about this Hiram but mention prominently his later namesake, Hiram II. The name is also well known from the sarcophagus of Ahiram, king of nearby Byblos, around this same time period.

5:3. under his feet. The Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (thirteenth century) "puts his foot on the neck of" individual conquered kings as well as (symbolically) on that of conquered lands, clarifying that they have thus become his footstool. This is graphically depicted in a tomb painting from the fifteenth century B.C. showing Thutmose IV seated on the lap of his mother (?) with his feet resting on a box that is filled with enemies laid out in a pile. For further information see comment on Psalm 108:13.

5:17. quarrying stone. Limestone from the hill country was quarried for the temple in Jerusalem. This involved simply extracting the stone from the cliffs, not the finishing process of dressing and shaping the stones that would have been done by master craftsmen from Phoenicia (see 1 Kings 7:10).

6:1. chronology. This chronological note attached to Solomon's construction of the Jerusalem temple is at the heart of the discussion of the date of the exodus and conquest periods (see sidebar on the date of the exodus). Most historians would place the dedication of Solomon's temple in 966 B.C. By adding 480 years to this, you get 1446 B.C. as the date for the departure from Egypt. Archaeological difficulties and the strength of the Egyptian hold on Syro-Palestine during the fifteenth century B.C. have brought this date into question. As a result many now see 480 as a stylized number, symbolic of forty years (a typical round number) for each of twelve judges or indicating twelve generations (40 x 12 = 480). Based on the dates for Hiram I and the founding date for the Phoenician colony at Carthage, the temple's construction most likely took place between 967-957 B.C. The note uses typical Phoenician phrasing.

6:1. Ziv. This is the second month of the Canaanite and Israelite calendar. It corresponds to portions of April and May in our own calendar. The fact that the passage identifies this as the second month may indicate that Ziv was not the usual Israelite month name used but represented an official designation known to a larger, non-Israelite audience.

6:4. clerestory window. Because the architectural terms found in the Hebrew are technical terms, their exact meaning is uncertain. Some suggest that the windows were constructed with a narrow opening on the outside and a wider opening on the inside (see Ezek 40:16). It is also possible that latticed windows are meant here. The lack of windows in Mesopotamian temples, however, argues against natural light entering Solomon's temple (see 1 Kings 8:12). The 'Ain Dara temple had false windows carved into the stone with a lattice-work design.

6:5. six side-rooms. This portion of the temple's structure is clouded by the uncertainty over the Hebrew terminology generally rendered "side buildings" or "wings." These may be part of the earliest construction of the building, serving first as storage areas and later expanded upward as the temple grew. Whether they were intended as permanent structures or even buttresses is unclear, as is the materials from which they were built. The architecture of the contemporary temple at 'Ain Dara features tall corridors flanking the hall. It is possible that this verse describes such corridors.

6:6. offset ledges. The side chambers along the outer walls of the temple were offset or recessed as they followed the wall upward. V. Hurowitz provides two interpretations of this architectural feature: (1) a means of enclosing the temple within a "cedarwood crate" (with cedar boards laid horizontally on the recesses) or (2) a sort of "reverse pagoda" shape, creating the visual effect that the outer wall of the temple widened from bottom to top.

6:7. tools used. Earlier taboos against using iron tools in the construction of sacred altars or buildings (see Deut 27:5; Josh 8:31) are somewhat tempered by their apparent use at the quarry but not near the temple site. An early Sumerian account of Gudea's building a temple for his god insisted that there be no noise around the area of the temple during the building project. Masons used large picks (weighing thirty or thirty-five pounds) for quarrying and smaller picks (weighing twelve or fifteen pounds) for the shaping of the stone. Those found in excavations have iron heads of various shapes with wooden handles. Iron-headed sledge hammers and long double-handled saws were also portrayed on Assyrian reliefs.

6:14-35. See comments on 2 Chronicles 3.

6:36. three courses of dressed stone. Perhaps as an architectural buffer against earthquake damage, the walls of the inner court were constructed with a row of cedar planks (in known examples these are about four inches thick) interspersed after every three horizontal courses of stone. This would help compensate for slight irregularities in the stone size and smoothness. This style is also attested at Ugarit, throughout Anatolia, in the palace at

Knossos on Crete and at other Mycenaean sites. See its mention in Ezra 6:4 with regard to the postexilic Second Temple.

6:38. month of Bul. The Canaanite calendar names are used here as well as the older name for month (*yeraḥ,* meaning "moon"). Bul is also found as a month name in Phoenician inscriptions. It means "moisture" and is tied to the rainy season of autumn in the Mediterranean climate. As the eighth month it corresponds to October-November.

7:1-12
Building the Palace

7:1-12. dimensions and architecture of palace. Like other palace complexes in the ancient Near East (such as those at Mari, Nineveh, Babylon and Susa), Solomon's royal precinct would have covered several acres, and the palace itself was larger than the temple. It served as an administrative complex as well as a hall of justice and an armory. Of the structures mentioned here, the "Palace of the Forest of Lebanon" is most fully described (150 feet long, 75 feet wide, 45 feet high), with its three rows of forty-five cedar pillars making it very much like a "forest." The overall style of construction is much like that of the *Bit-Hilani* of Syria and Mesopotamia (see comment on 2 Sam 5:11), with chambers on three sides surrounding a central meeting hall (75 feet long and 45 feet wide). The side rooms would have contained three stories, while the hall would have been open to the flat ceiling. Doors are found at the sides and at either end, and windows in the upper stories allowed light to cascade down into the audience chamber and assembly hall. The other two palaces (v. 8) are not described in any detail, but since they served as living quarters, their monumental character would not have been as important to the prestige of the monarchy as public buildings.

7:9. dressing of stone. The stone for the palaces was to be cut to specific size and shape so that they could be fitted into a "headers and stretchers" pattern, with cedar logs providing additional stability. It was necessary to first saw the soft limestone from the Judean cliffs (it would harden after exposure to air). This would provide a dressed block (ashlar masonry), finer than could be created with hammer and chisel, that would fit together as closely as possible.

7:10. size of stones. The massive foundation blocks were between twelve feet and fifteen feet in length, weighing many tons. The even larger blocks found in the foundation of Herod's temple platform in Jerusalem (one block was over forty feet long and weighed about one hundred tons) suggest this was not an unusual size for monumental construction.

7:15-22. free-standing pillars. These two hollow, bronze pillars are thirty-four feet high (counting the capitals) and nearly five feet in diameter. The description of the free-standing pillars of a temple in the Assyrian city of Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta also contains the details of length, circumference and the design of the capitals with which they were crowned. Of particular interest is the additional fact that they were engraved with inscriptions. This feature would be typical for entryways, and it is likely that these pillars were considered gateposts. One possibility is that Jachin and Boaz may have been the first word of the respective inscriptions and therefore came to be considered their names. Pomegranates and lotus flowers (NIV: "lilies") are often used in architectural decorations.

7:23-51. See comments on 2 Chronicles 4.

8:1-66
Dedication of the Temple

8:2. month of Ethanim. This autumn month (corresponding to September-October) was a part of the rainy season and is tied into the Feast of Tabernacles (see the comments on Ex 23:16b and Deut 16:13-17). The dedication of the temple during the seventh month (its completion is noted in 1 Kings 6:38 in the eighth month) may reflect a year-long celebration after the completion of work or a delay of nearly a year in order to officially tie it into the harvest festival.

8:14-66. See comments on 2 Chronicles 6.

9:1-9
Response of Yahweh

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 7.

9:10-28
Deeds of Solomon

9:11. twenty towns in Galilee. Since the Galilee is defined various ways (see Josh 20:7; Is 9:1), it is possible that the territory given to Hiram included portions of the western foothills as far as Megiddo. Most likely it would have involved the buffer area between Phoenicia and Israel. Note the return of these lands and cities to Solomon in the Chronicler's account (2 Chron 8:2). Precedent for exchange of territory and cities is to be found in Mesopota-

mian and Egyptian royal records, treaties and annals. For instance, in the Assyrian annals of Sennacherib, the king describes capturing towns in Hezekiah's territory and transferring them to Philistine kings in Ashdod, Ekron and Gaza.

9:14. 120 talents of gold. In the system of weights and measures used in the ancient Near East the talent was the highest unit of weight (equivalent to sixty minas or three thousand shekels). One hundred twenty talents is therefore about four tons of gold. For statistics concerning gold see comments on 1 Chronicles 22:14.

9:15-19. building projects. Both as a part of his consolidation of control over all of Israel and as a check against any armed incursion by the Egyptian pharaoh Shishak, Solomon initiated a program of public works using a corvee or forced labor system. The list found here, which stretches geographically north-south, is similar in style to that found in the Mesha inscription from Moab and in Assyrian royal annals. This program transformed Jerusalem, expanding its living area and defense. It also strengthened the defensive posture of the nation in strategic commercial and military centers such as Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer as well as in the southern border towns of Baalath and Tamar ('Ain Husb). The consistency of building style (casemate walls and six-chambered city gates) at many of these sites helps archaeologists establish architectural links to this period despite the lack of documentary evidence outside the Bible. The infusion of capital necessary to make such vast improvements in the infrastructure would have been a boost for the local economy and kept potentially hostile, Canaanite populations employed more constructively.

9:15. supporting terraces (Millo). The city of Jerusalem in the period of David had occupied only the north-south ridge covering about ten acres that runs south of the modern city walls. The top of the ridge is only about four hundred feet wide and about fifteen hundred feet long. The previous Canaanite city had been built on an artificial platform that was supported by a series of terraces. Archaeologists have uncovered a stepped stone structure over fifty feet tall at the northeast corner of this ridge. This was most likely the platform for the Jebusite citadel referred to here in 2 Samuel 5:7 and was extended by David for use as the foundation of his palace and again by Solomon as the city expanded north to include his palace and the temple complex. It is now accepted by most that the "Millo" (NIV footnote) should be identified with the retaining walls (including the "stepped stone structure") that provided the foundation for these monumental buildings. There is little else that archaeologists have found in the city that is attributable to the time of David and Solomon.

9:20-28. See comments on 2 Chronicles 8.

10:1-13
The Visit of the Queen of Sheba

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 9:1-12.

10:14-29
The Wealth and Splendor of Solomon

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 9:13-28.

11:1-13
Solomon Led Astray by Wives

11:1-3. marriage alliances. Marriage was a tool of diplomacy throughout the ancient Near East. For instance, Zimri-Lim, the king of Mari (eighteenth century B.C.), used his daughters to cement alliances and establish treaties with his neighboring kingdoms. Similarly, Pharaoh Thutmose IV (1425-1412 B.C.) arranged a marriage with a daughter of the Mitannian king to demonstrate good relations and end a series of wars with that middle Euphrates kingdom. The wives of an ancient ruler therefore usually represented political alliances. Towns, city-states, tribes or nations who wished to ally themselves with a ruler or come under his protection sealed the treaty with a marriage of a daughter of their chief family to the suzerain or his son. This was an act of loyalty on the part of the vassal, who would then have a personal stake in preserving the dynasty. In David's case, prior to becoming king of Israel, he made a series of marriages that strengthened his political and economic position. Thus the marriage to Saul's daughter Michal gave him a connection to the royal family, his marriage to Abigail provided him with ties to the area around Hebron, and his marriage to Ahinoam of Jezreel established connections with households in the vicinity of Megiddo and Beth Shan. This kinship network insured that David would have friendly voices in the council of elders from all over the country. The huge number of wives and concubines are designed as a reflection of the wealth and power of Solomon in relation to his nobility and neighbors. The au-

thor does not condemn Solomon for polygamy—it was a necessary part of his political activities. Condemnation is for the way Solomon allowed his wives to turn him away from the Lord.

11:2. prohibition against intermarriage. A chief concern of the biblical writers was syncretism. If Israel was to remain true to Yahweh, then it must be free of foreign influence. According to this viewpoint, intermarriage and the training of children by mothers who were not Israelites could only weaken the covenantal bond (see the comment on Deut 7:3).

11:3. wives of royal birth. Distinction is drawn between those wives who were of higher status or rank than concubines. The Ugaritic texts provide a similar example of division within the harem. In Arhalba's court, wives whose children were in the line of succession (such as Kubaba), were considered truly royal women and distinguished from those who had lesser status.

11:3. three hundred concubines. The harem served both political as well as sexual functions. Wives were part of the alliance system between nations, and they were the means of obtaining an heir to the throne. Many wives were a reflection of power and a hedge against female infertility. Not all wives in a harem, however, were of similar social rank, and those from lesser families would have been designated as concubines, whose children would not have been in the royal succession.

11:5. Ashtoreth. See the comment on Judges 2:13 for this Canaanite fertility goddess, the consort of the storm god Baal. In Ugaritic texts (the Keret epic and the Baal and Anath cycle) she is known as Athtar or Astarte, and in Mesopotamia religious documents she is called Ishtar. Ashtoreth/Astarte was worshiped as the chief goddess of both Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia, and they took her worship throughout the Mediterranean, where she was identified with the Greek goddess Aphrodite.

11:5, 7. Molech. The Ammonite god Milcom (= Canaanite Baal) is actually named in verse 5 (as well as in v. 33) though referred to as Molech in verse 7. (See the comment on Lev 18:21 for the association of Molech, a Canaanite and Phoenician deity, with child sacrifice.) The name Milcom has been attested in Ammonite inscriptions and personal names, and makes more sense than Molech in this context, since this is a listing of national gods. It is difficult to tell whether Molech in verse 7 is a misspelling or a variant form of the name.

11:7. Chemosh. Described in terms very much like Yahweh in the Moabite inscription of King Mesha (c. 830 B.C.), Chemosh is a national deity who punished his people by allowing them to be controlled by Israel during Omri's reign (see 2 Kings 3), called for a holy war of liberation (much like the use of *ḥerem* in Josh 6:17-21), and fought, like Yahweh, as a divine warrior for the Moabites (Josh 10:42). Outside of Moab, Chemosh may have been worshiped as Kamish at Ebla and, based on an Assyrian text equating him with the underworld god Nergal, appears to have been part of the pantheon of gods in Mesopotamia.

11:14-43
Solomon's Political Adversaries

11:14. Hadad the Edomite. Edom had been conquered by David during his wars to subdue his neighbors (see 2 Sam 8:13-14). David's garrisons had probably been meant to secure control of the trade routes and access to the port on the Gulf of Aqaba. Now, perhaps with half-hearted support from the Egyptians (see comment on v. 22), a new Edomite leader was jeopardizing Israelite control. There is little information to suggest that Edom was a national entity at this time. Hadad more likely represented one of the more powerful tribes in the region. His opposition may have taken the shape of raids on caravans rather than wars of independence. There are no references to him in contemporary extrabiblical sources.

11:15-16. Joab's action against Edom. Such wholesale extermination is known from Assyrian records and the evidence of the mass grave uncovered at Lachish that dates to Sennacherib's 701 B.C. campaign against Judah. Many of the fifteen hundred bodies in that grave were civilians, indicating both the loss of life during the siege and the manner in which much of the garrison was exterminated.

11:17-18. Hadad's journey. Like Jeroboam in verse 40, Hadad sought asylum in Egypt. His flight took him south and east of Edom to Midian in the northern Arabian peninsula and then on to Paran in the northwestern Sinai (possibly the oasis Feran; see Num 13:3). The rough terrain and circuitous route would have protected the refugees from pursuit.

11:18. identity of pharaoh. Unlike verse 40, where Shishak is named as pharaoh of Egypt, the monarch is anonymous here. He is most likely a member of the Twenty-First Dynasty, but there is no indication of his identity. Since Hadad was in Egypt from his childhood to his manhood, he would have had association with several pharaohs, including at least Osorkon (984-978) and Siamun (978-959). All of

the pharaohs of this period would have welcomed political refugees from Palestine and Transjordan in their attempt to balance and counterbalance the growing power of Solomon and Hiram in the region.

11:18. Hadad's exile. It is an interesting fact of political life in the ancient Near East that political dissidents and royal refugees were often taken in by kings (Egypt, Babylon, Persia and even petty chiefs of Palestine, according to the Tale of Sinuhe). These persons were part of a larger game played by rival monarchs, and what was at stake was the economic and political control of the entire region. The refugees were housed, tied to their patron by marriage and then let loose with some financial or military support to cause as much trouble as they could on a rival king's borders. In this way one power could drain the resources of its rival and eventually set it up for conquest.

11:19. Tahpenes. This word is based on the Egyptian term *t.hmt.nsw,* and it is likely not a personal name but a title. It would be comparable to the Hebrew *gebira* ("queen mother"), which follows it as an explanation in the Hebrew text. Her status is therefore indicated as the "wife of the king" and mother of the heir to the throne.

11:22. Pharaoh's attempt to retain Hadad. If this pharaoh is Siamun, as seems likely, he is the same one who had made a treaty with Israel (see 3:1) sealed by the marriage of his daughter to Solomon. This represented a change in policy from the days of David, when he had been undermining Israelite expansion by harboring enemies such as Hadad. Hadad's resolve to go back and organize opposition against Solomon puts Siamun in a very awkward position.

11:23. Rezon. This name, which is etymologically similar to *rozen* ("ruler"), may be a royal title. Though some have suggested that his actual personal name is Hezion (see 15:18), there is little to support that, and he is more likely a father or even grandfather of Hezion. Apparently this former vassal of the Aramean ruler Hadadezer escaped David's slaughter (2 Sam 8:3-8) and spent some time as a brigand chief. Then during Solomon's early reign he was able to establish himself as ruler of Damascus and create a kingdom (Aram) that would rival Israel throughout the tenth and ninth centuries.

11:24. Hadadezer of Zobah. See the comments on 2 Samuel 8:3-8 and 10:6 for the rivalry between David and the Aramean states in northern Transjordan and western Galilee. Zobah was located north of Damascus (see comment on 2 Sam 8:3). It was one of several Aramean kingdoms that controlled portions of Syria and northern Mesopotamia until the expansion of Israel's control under David and Solomon.

11:24-25. Aram of Damascus. This is the name of the small state centered around the Syrian city of Damascus (see 2 Sam 8:5-6). The growth of its power in the period after the division of Israel into two states made it the most influential state in the area of Syro-Palestine. Assyrian sources from the reign of Shalmaneser III mention it as a significant rival and the head of a coalition of states (Battle of Qarqar in 853, see comment on 22:1).

11:26. Zeredah. The birthplace of Jeroboam may be identified with 'Ain Seridah, about fifteen miles southwest of Shechem in the tribal territory of Ephraim.

11:27. supporting terraces (Millo). See the comment on 9:15 for the structural purpose of the Millo.

11:28. Jeroboam's office. As a member of Solomon's bureaucracy, Jeroboam was a local leader of the regional corvee, a corps of men drafted into temporary service (porterage, construction), within the district of "the House of Joseph" (Ephraim/Manasseh). Since the term for "forced labor" is not used, it may be presumed that Jeroboam's work was with Israelites, not slaves. His position might be compared to the *rabi Amurrim* (head of the Amorites) in the Mari texts, whose tasks included both military commands as well as being a local labor organizer, supervising construction projects on dams and the renovation of temples.

11:29. Ahijah. Though Shiloh (see comment on 1 Sam 1:3) had been destroyed at the time of Eli and much of its cultic standing had been lost, it retained its religious heritage because of its ancient tradition. There may be no significance to the fact that Ahijah hails from the northern territory, but he is playing the role of kingmaker that was familiar in this early period of the prophetic office. Both Saul and David had been anointed by the prophet Samuel, who also was trained in Shiloh. This precedent continued throughout the next century as each of the major dynasties of the northern kingdom (Jeroboam, Baasha, Omri, Jehu) rose and fell in accordance with prophetic pronouncement. Sometimes the designated king was content to wait for the proper time (as Jeroboam does), while for other individuals (such as Jehu), the prophetic proclamation initiated a coup. In the ancient Near East priests often play significant political roles, but no prophets from the ancient Near East are known to have played the same role as these Israelite king-

makers. Nonetheless, throughout the ancient world it was believed that prophets not only proclaimed the message of deity but in the process unleashed the divine action. In Assyrian king Esarhaddon's instructions to his vassals, he requires that they report any improper or negative statements that may be made by anyone, but he specifically names prophets, ecstatics and dream interpreters. It is no wonder, then, that this action by Ahijah immediately put Jeroboam in jeopardy (v. 40).

11:30. division of the prophet's cloak. The cloak Ahijah tears is a normal garment (see Deut 22:26) rather than a garment of office. This is a startling action considering the cost of clothing and the likelihood that most people had only one additional set of clothing. Symbolic gestures become one of the common methods used by the prophets to convey a message. Some gestures are common, normal activities, though usually they take a more eccentric turn (see comments on Ezek 4:1). By accompanying the prophetic pronouncement with a gesture, there was a stronger suggestion that the prophecy was being effectuated and brought into reality. There is some similarity to the way the rest of the ancient world viewed the magical realm. In magical practice ritual actions often needed to accompany the incantations that were intended to bring about the desired result. For more information concerning the relationship between the prophets and magical procedures, see comments on 2 Kings 4:34; 5:11.

11:33. Ashtoreth, Molech, Chemosh. See the comments on 1 Kings 11:5 and 7 for these Canaanite gods.

11:36. lamp in Jerusalem. As an eternal flame is a symbol of endurance and remembrance, the reign of a descendant of David in Jerusalem provides a link to God's promise to David's dynasty (2 Sam 7:8-16). Similar uses of the word in Ugaritic and Akkadian are tied to perpetuation of rule or divine presence. Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III is referred to as the light of all mankind. An Old Babylonian idiom expresses the concept of a family having no descendants by the image of its brazier going out.

11:40. Shishak. Shishak (Sheshonq I) was the chief of a prominent Libyan family that had been settled in the Egyptian delta region (Bubastis) as a result of conquests several centuries earlier (twelfth century). He married into the family of the Twenty-First Dynasty pharaohs, and when their line died out, he was positioned to accede to the throne as the founder of the Twenty-Second Dynasty (c. 945). He established himself on the throne through the placement of family members in key posts and through further marriage alliances. Once enthroned, he made a determined effort to restore Egyptian power by inaugurating a monumental building program in several areas: the Delta region (including both the area of Tanis and Memphis) and Herakleoplis. The biblical account as well as his statue at Byblos indicate a strong interest in extending Egyptian hegemony into Syro-Palestine. His inscription at Karnak describes his invasion of Palestine in 925 (including a list 154 towns destroyed) and is also commemorated on a stele erected at Megiddo. Jerusalem is spared because of Rehoboam's payment of a huge ransom for the city (1 Kings 14:26).

11:40. Egypt as protector. Just as Hadad sought political refuge in Egypt (see comment on 11:18), Jeroboam turns to Shishak for support and protection. It would have fit quite well into the pharaoh's plans for his own incursion into Palestine to aid Solomon's rival. It is even possible that the price extracted from Jeroboam for this assistance was to step aside when Shishak campaigned along the coast as far north as Taanach and Megiddo and inland to Beth Shan.

11:41. annals of Solomon. It is common practice to end an account of a king with a reference to additional works from which the narrative had been drawn—generally the "Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel" (see 1 Kings 14:19; 16:14). The source listed here, however, seems to be a separate compendium dealing specifically with events in Solomon's life and additional accounts of his wisdom. From a historical standpoint it is unfortunate that we no longer have access to these materials. In the ancient world royal annals were often kept not just as an unbiased repetition of events but as a means by which a king established his reputation before the gods and for the benefit of later kings. Whether theological or propagandistic or both, they were usually composed with legacy in mind.

12:1-24
Rebellion Against Rehoboam

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 10—11.

12:25-33
Jeroboam Establishes His Kingdom

12:25. fortification of Shechem. Jeroboam's choice of Shechem (Tell Balatah) as his first capital city was based on its strategic location

(thirty miles north of Jerusalem in a narrow pass between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim), its available water supply and its rich agricultural resources. Its location also allowed it to dominate all commercial and military travel through the Ephraimite region. Archaeological evidence for Jeroboam's refortification of the site is scarce, although there are indications of a casemate wall and towers built in Strata IX following the old Late Bronze fortification line. Destruction layers ending both Strata IX and X may be indications of the incursions of the Egyptian pharaoh Shishak. For the earlier history of Shechem see comment on Judges 9:1.

12:25. Peniel. Peniel/Penuel has been identified with Tell edh-Dhahab, "Mounds of Gold," on the Jabbok, five miles east of the Jordan River. Jeroboam may have relocated here during Shishak's invasion of Palestine, but the appearance of Peniel on Shishak's list of conquests at Karnak suggests it was not a distant enough refuge. Jeroboam may have also used the fortress here to help him control that portion of Transjordan (Gilead) which had previously been ruled by David.

12:26-27. Jerusalem and house of David connection. Since Jerusalem had been conquered by David and the sanctuary there established by David and Solomon, there were strong ideological ties between the house of God and the house of David, both inseparably tied to Jerusalem (for information concerning Jerusalem as personal property of the Davidic dynasty see comment on 2 Sam 5:9). It was the Yahweh who had established the Davidic dynasty who was enshrined at the temple in Jerusalem. Jeroboam therefore had to seek a way to break the political ties with the Jerusalem worship of Yahweh without breaking the traditional ties with Yahweh of the covenant who had brought them out of Egypt and given them the land.

12:28. golden calves. Like the ark of the covenant the golden calves are not idols. Rather both the ark and the calves function as thrones or pedestals upholding the glory of God. Calves were a reflection of syncretism, the religious and cultural borrowing from the Canaanites, so prevalent among the Israelites. Bulls or calves were associated with the god Baal and the fertility cult in Ugaritic texts. El is often referred to as "Bull El," and there is a tale of the mating of Baal and Anat which produced a steer. Quite likely, Jeroboam saw this as an excellent political maneuver, pleasing Israelites who were more comfortable with a mixture of Yahwist and Baalist imagery. Bronze or composite bull or calf figurines have been found in several archaeological excavations (Mount Gilboa, Hazor, the Bull Site and Ashkelon; as well as a ceramic one at Shiloh) but only three to seven inches long.

12:28. calves as thrones. Since Jeroboam's intent was to provide alternative worship centers to Jerusalem, it would have been necessary to furnish those shrines with a religious symbol just as powerful as the ark. The calf symbol was well-known in the Canaanite context of the second millennium and represented fertility and strength. However, so that the calves would not be considered idols, the argument was made that they were instead merely the throne of Yahweh. This is based on the portrayal of Canaanite and Ugaritic gods in sculpture and reliefs standing on the body of a bull. In addition, Mesopotamian moon gods Sin and Nannar are both represented on cylinder seals and in religious texts either with a bull or portrayed as a rampant "ferocious bull." Thus one possibility exists that the golden calves placed in the shrines at Dan and Bethel by Jeroboam were intended to function as thrones or divine pedestals for the invisible Yahweh. Some have noticed that in third-millennium depictions (mostly on cylinder seals) the deity would be depicted standing on the back of a winged composite creature (such as the cherubim were). It was in second-millennium Syria that the bull became the more common "pedestal animal."

12:28. calves' relation to Yahweh. It has been commonly accepted by many scholars that Jeroboam's golden calves were connected to a (syncretistic) worship of Yahweh. This argument is based on the lack of another divine name associated with the calves and the reference to the "gods who brought you out of Egypt." This latter phrase seems to negate the possibility of association with the Egyptian bull-god Apis (despite Jeroboam's Egyptian ties; see 1 Kings 11:40). Ugaritic parallels suggest ties between the calves and either Baal or El. Attempts to tie the calves to Sin, the moon god of Haran and Ur, and to vestiges of the ancestral religion within the Joseph tribes is bolstered by a great deal of textual and archaeological evidence, but they are still open to speculation. Whatever its original intent or background, the calves ultimately became associated with false worship by the Israelite community, whether as a violation of commandment one or two. The latter seems more likely in that even a century later, when Jehu eliminates Baal worship from Israel, he takes no action against the calves (see 2 Kings 10:28-29).

12:29. Dan and Bethel. Jeroboam's choice of

these two sites for his national religious centers was based on their previous association with cultic activity. Bethel was the site of Jacob's theophany (Gen 28:10-22) and an altar (Gen 35:1), while Dan became the shrine for the tribe of Dan in Judges 18:27-31. Geographically, the cities were located at either end of the nation and thus facilitated the peoples' religious pilgrimages and sacrifice.

12:30. Bethel. See the comments on Joshua 8:9 and Judges 1:22-23. Lying only eleven miles north of Jerusalem on the dividing line between the two kingdoms, Bethel (Beitin?) was a natural choice for Jeroboam's shrine. Its sanctuary could attract pilgrims who might otherwise travel south to worship in Solomon's temple. Ultimately, Bethel will eclipse Dan in importance as the "king's sanctuary."

12:30. Dan. See the comment on Judges 18:29. Jeroboam built upon Dan's (Laish) traditions as a cultic site, both from the time when it was a Phoenician colony and later when the tribe of Dan migrated to the area (Judg 18:27-31). Situated in the extreme north and on the border with Phoenicia and Syria, Dan probably served as a site for treaty negotiations as well as a border outpost. Its somewhat isolated position in the foothills of Mount Hermon and the distance to Israel's power center at Samaria, however, may have contributed to a loss of status after Jeroboam's time. Excavations at Dan have uncovered the high place constructed by Jeroboam for the calf. The sanctuary complex was about 195 by 145 feet and featured a large altar in an open-air courtyard. One large horn from the main altar was found as well as a smaller horned altar.

12:31. shrines on high places. Since Jeroboam's strategy has an underlying political agenda, it seems natural that he would have certified the continued use of traditional, local shrines or "high places." This was an acknowledgment of the desire for a greater measure of local autonomy (see the plea made by the tribal leaders in 1 Kings 12:4) and a popular ploy, allowing "popular" forms of religious expression to flourish without undue restriction in places like Mount Carmel, Gilgal, Mizpah and Mount Tabor. While some of these may have been open-air altars, the mention of "houses" suggests a more elaborate cultic installation associated with urban centers (2 Kings 17:9-11; 2 Chron 1:3). The lack of central control over religious practice could of course only facilitate syncretism.

12:31. new priesthood. There is precedent elsewhere in the ancient Near East for deemphasizing one community of priests in favor of another one. For instance, the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten attempted to break the power of the Amon priesthood in order to magnify Aten worship. Similarly, the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus replaced Marduk as the principal deity of worship in his empire with the moon god Sin. In both cases the revenge taken by the slighted priesthood cost the ruling dynasty its position. Jeroboam's treatment of the Levites in his new kingdom is an indication that he does not trust their loyalties to him. He felt that by appointing a non-Levitical priesthood he could insure that his policies (shrines at Bethel and Dan, golden calves, use of high places, new religious calendar) would be carried out without question. Priests and Levites in Israel exercised significant political influence, so Jeroboam felt it mandatory to appoint loyalists who were dependent on him for their position.

12:32-33. new festival. The eighth month (Marchesvan) spans our October-November, a month later than the principle festivals in Jerusalem, when the New Year and the Feast of Tabernacles were celebrated. The Feast of Tabernacles was a harvest festival (see comment on Deut 16:13-17), so some suggest that Jeroboam's adjustment to the calendar reflected a later fruit harvest in Ephraim than in Judah. Alternatively, the festival period in the seventh month may have taken on certain political elements. 1 Kings 8:2, 65 make it clear that the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem took place in connection with this period. In Babylon the New Year was an occasion for celebrating the enthronement of the national god and the king. Since temple dedication involved the enthronement of Yahweh in his temple, there is at least some level of continuity here. If this festival included celebration of kingship, the Jerusalem practice would, of course, have focused on the elect status of the Davidic dynasty.

13:1-34

The Shrine and the Prophet

13:1. man of God. For discussion of various aspects of prophecy and prophets see the comments on Deuteronomy 18:14-22. As in Judges 6:8 this nameless prophet is a defender of the covenant. His message denouncing Jeroboam and his altar at Bethel clearly infers that this shrine is illegitimate. Ancient Near Eastern prophets often had messages that included admonitions regarding who should receive worship and how, and what were and were not legitimate shrines.

13:2. human sacrifice. See the comments on Genesis 22:1-2 and 22:13-19 for the case against human sacrifice among the Israelites (contrast Judg 11:30-40). While human sacrifice, especially of infants, was practiced by some of the peoples of the ancient Near East (archaeological evidence from Carthage, Nuzi and Tepe Gawra; see Lev 18:21; 2 Kings 3:27), the curse of the man of God in this narrative relates to the defiling of the Bethel altar. The term "sacrifice" is clarified by the next phrase that explains that it is dead men's bones, not executed victims, that will be burned. Any sacred installation would have to maintain its ritual purity. Burning the bones taken from crypts would so utterly corrupt it that it would be difficult to ever use it again.

13:3. the sign. The credentialing of a "true" prophet could come if his/her pronouncements came true or, in a more spectacular mode, when Yahweh sent a "sign" as an verification that the prophet was sent from God. In this case, what was needed was an unmistakable sign of divine wrath against the altar at Bethel. It would not be enough simply to call for its eventual disuse. Instead the immediate destruction of the altar was declared, along with the desecration of the sacred ash from the sacrifice. These ashes contained the fatty residue reserved for God (see Lev 1:16; 6:10 for proper disposal of these ashes). In this way both the vehicle of sacrifice (the altar) and the sacrifice of dedication itself are to be invalidated by divine command. Many of the altars found by archaeologists have been made of limestone, a soft stone that is easy to quarry and readily available. Impurities or inadequate time to cure could be among the causes for the stone to crack when exposed to heat.

13:4. shriveled hand. Most interpreters have identified this physical condition as resulting from some sort of hemorrhage or clot, but these conditions do not explain why the arm remained extended. The latter has been described as a condition today termed "cataplexy" (a shock to the nervous system that causes muscle rigidity).

13:7-9. shared meal and gift. Meals and gifts were often used in the treaty or covenant making process (see Gen 24:52-54; 31:43-46; Ex 24:9-10). Meals were also an integral part of the protocol of hospitality, which, for a time, set aside any enmity between the parties involved (see Judg 19:1-9). The man of God's refusal to make peace with Jeroboam is a further sign of Yahweh's denunciation of the king and his policies. Some similarity can be identified in the scene between Samuel and Saul in 1 Samuel 15:24-31, where worshiping the Lord would have likely involved a festive meal settling their differences and renewing their alliance. In this case, however, the Lord's instructions had clearly prohibited any such rapprochement.

13:11-18. behavior of the old prophet. Though the man of God had successfully repudiated Jeroboam's attempt to enlist his allegiance, he was not as successful in avoiding the overtures of the prophetic community at Bethel. The shared meal would have carried the suggestion of alliance between the man of God from Judah and the prophet(s) of Bethel.

13:21-22. oracle of judgment. Prophets were known to receive messages that were uncomfortable for them and that they preferred not to deliver. This particular oracle showed the old prophet from Bethel to have been deceptive, but that does not prevent God from using him to pronounce judgment on the man of God who had disregarded his original instructions from the Lord.

13:26-32. burial of prophet. The unusual manner of death for the man of God (vv. 24-25) and the witnesses who saw a lion simply standing beside the body and not even attacking his donkey, testify to a judgment of God. This "sign," more than the one that destroyed the altar at Bethel, convinces the "old prophet" that he had been responsible for his colleague's death. In fact his statement in verse 32, certifying the validity of the man of God's curse against the altar and the high places in Samaria, serves as a reinforcement by a "northern" prophet of its inevitable enactment. To honor the man he had betrayed, the prophet provides him with a tomb (in essence adopting him into his family), which he in turn will share—forever intertwining their dual curse. While one interpretation of the unusual death of the man of God might have been that his curse of the altar was ill-founded, the story preserved here simultaneously validates the curse and explains the death.

14:1-20
Jeroboam I of Israel

14:3. gift for the prophet. See 1 Samuel 9:6-8; 2 Kings 5:5; and comment on 2 Kings 8:9 for other examples of bringing a token gift to a prophet. It may be that prophets, like Levites, were landless and depended for their food and livelihood on the gifts of those who consulted them. This gift may have been relatively insignificant since the king's wife was in disguise. Whatever the amount, the gift showed a sense of respect for the God the

prophet represented (see Gideon's "present" for the angel in Judg 6:18-21). The large number of votive images found by archaeologists in Canaanite and Israelite contexts suggest both food offerings and fertility symbols were commonly offered when an oracle or god was consulted.

14:2, 4. Shiloh. For information concerning Ahijah and Shiloh see comment on 11:29. Whether Shiloh (Khirbet Seilun, between Bethel and Shechem) contained an open-air shrine or was the site of a more elaborate temple complex in the period of the early monarchy and divided kingdom is uncertain. In any case the presence of a priestly community affiliated with the family of Eli stems from the time of the judges (1 Sam 1:7-9) and continues into the monarchy (see Jer 7:12-15 for mention of its destruction). Such a center would have also attracted prophets, like Ahijah, associating themselves with the presence of God.

14:9. indictment of the king. There is a long tradition in Mesopotamia recognizing the stereotype of the king who makes disastrous choices and brings on himself the wrath of the gods and the doom of his kingdom. The classic example in Mesopotamia is Naram-Sin of the dynasty of Akkad at the end of the third millennium. In a work known as the Curse of Agade, his desecration of the famous Ekur temple of Enlil in the holy city of Nippur is blamed for the fall of the kingdom (which doesn't happen for several more decades).

14:10-11. curse on the house of Jeroboam. For a ruling dynasty the worst possible curse is one that predicts the extinction of the family and the passing of the kingship to another group. This may explain why the Assyrian kings were always careful to list the kings they had violently deposed as a visible threat to any others that might think to revolt or even "did not bow at the king's feet quickly enough" (Sidqia of Joppa in the annals of Sennacherib). The colorful language describing the complete annihilation of Jeroboam, his sons and all of his clients/bondsmen provides images of them all going up in smoke and leaving no more trace than a dung fire. The further humiliation of their bodies being left unburied and devoured as garbage by scavenging dogs dishonored Jeroboam's house, cutting its members off from their ancestors (see Deut 28:26). For similar curses against a royal house in Israel, see comment on 1 Kings 16:4.

14:15. Asherah poles. See the comments on Asherah and the poles which symbolized her presence in Canaanite cultic sites in Deuteronomy 7:5 and Judges 2:13.

14:17. Tirzah. See the comment on Joshua 12:24 for the premonarchic background of this city. It seems likely that Jeroboam ruled from Tirzah, as did his immediate successors—Baasha, Elah, Zimri and Omri. Tirzah has been identified as Tell el-Farah, seven miles northeast of Shechem on the road to Beth Shan. It is favored by good elevation, a consistent water supply (two springs that feed the Wadi Farah) and a strategic location on the trade route. It also has ready access to the fords of the Jordan at Adam. The gate and fortifications were rebuilt from the Middle Bronze remains, and there is evidence of central planning in the building of new residences throughout the city. Its political importance may also be inferred from its mention in Shishak's list of conquests during his invasion of Palestine.

14:19. annals. The standard method of recording the major events and accomplishments, year by year, of the ancient Near Eastern kings was the production of royal annals. Some of the known chronicles of the ancient world (such as those of the Assyrian kings), while useful in reconstructing chronology and geographic locations, very often are a blatant example of official propaganda. Others (such as those from the Neo-Babylonian period) simply offered unembellished information. The reference to the annals of the kings of Israel again demonstrates that the biblical writers drew their account from larger, more detailed sources.

14:21-29
Rehoboam of Judah

For more information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 12.

14:23. high places. Apparently the use of outdoor shrines was common among the Canaanites. This was considered abhorrent to the Deuteronomic writer(s) because these local cult sites promoted a "popular" brand of religion that contained elements of Canaanite worship deviating from the established Yahweh-only doctrine. Thus local altars, sacred poles dedicated to Asherah, sacred groves and any place associated with a Canaanite god (Baal, El, etc.) or the worship of god outside of Jerusalem, "the place the Lord your God will choose" (Deut 12:5), were forbidden. There is a difference between these outdoor cultic places and the "high place" *(bamah)* mentioned in many places as religious centers in the local towns and cities (1 Kings 11:7; Jer 7:31; Ezek 16:16; 2 Chron 21:11; Mesha's Moabite Stele). The "high place" was apparently an indoor fa-

cility, built to house sacred furniture, an altar and precincts large enough to accommodate a priesthood. A clear differentiation is drawn between these two types of religious sites in 2 Kings 17:9-11.

14:23. sacred stones. Standing stones or *maṣṣebot* were apparently a common feature of Canaanite religion and also appear as memorials in a number of Israelite covenantal contexts (see Ex 24:3-8; Josh 24:25-27). Their association with Asherah, Baal and other Canaanite deities is the basis for their being condemned as a rival and threat to Yahweh worship. Archaeologists have discovered sacred stones at Gezer, Hazor and Arad. In the latter two cases, they are clearly within a sacred precinct and part of the cultic practices at these sites. The Hazor stones include incised representations of upraised arms and a sun disk. From basins sometimes found near the foot of such pillars it is inferred that libations (liquid offerings) were poured over them.

14:23. Asherah poles. One common feature of Canaanite worship and syncretized Israelite worship on "high places" and in city shrines is the erection of Asherah poles (Judg 3:7; 1 Kings 14:15; 15:13; 2 Kings 13:6). There is some uncertainty about whether these were simply wooden poles, erected to symbolize trees, or whether they contained a carved image of the fertility goddess or were a part of a sacred grove. The reference in 2 Kings 17:10, which refers to Asherah poles beside "every spreading tree," seems to indicate that these were poles erected for cultic purposes rather than planted trees. As the consort of El, Asherah was clearly a popular goddess (see 2 Kings 18:19), whose worship is mentioned in Ugaritic texts (1600-1200). Her prominent appearance in the biblical narrative indicates that her cult was a major rival to Yahweh worship (see the prohibition in Ex 34:13; Deut 16:21). This explains both the number of examples in which Asherah poles are erected and venerated as well as the strong condemnations of this practice and the depictions of these poles being cut down and burned (Judg 6:25-30; 2 Kings 23:4-7). For more information see the comment on Deuteronomy 7:5.

14:24. male prostitutes. For more information concerning cultic prostitution see the comment on Deuteronomy 23:17-18. The term used here occurs in both feminine and masculine forms and refers, perhaps euphemistically, to ones who have been set apart for particular functions. This same term is used in Akkadian literature to refer to those who have been consecrated as functionaries serving at the shrines or temples. The prostitute was among those functionaries, as was the wet nurse and the midwife. It is unclear what functions the males might have served.

15:1-8
Abijah of Judah

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 13:1-22.

15:9-24
Asa of Judah

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 14—16.

15:18. Tabrimmon, Hezion. These two names are known only from this context. Aramaic sources from this period are nonexistent, and Assyrian records do not involve Aramean kings at this time. The names represent logical and legitimate Aramean forms, but no other historical information is available.

15:25-32
Nadab of Israel

15:25. chronology. The attempt on the part of the biblical writer to correlate the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah is not always easy to synchronize. Most likely, Asa's first year was 914 B.C., but Nadab's first year very likely did not begin until 911 B.C. In addition, Nadab's reign, while it comprised portions of two years, actually only lasted a few months before he was assassinated in the autumn of 910 B.C.

15:27. Gibbethon. Lying about two miles west of Gezer in Philistine territory, Tell el-Melat was likely only a military outpost on the border with Israel (note it is listed in Danite territory in Josh 21:23). Its strategic location is attested by its mention in the campaign list of Pharaoh Thutmose III (1468 B.C.) and of the Assyrian king Sargon II, as part of his suppression of the Ashdod revolt (713 B.C.; Is 20:1).

15:29. wiping out predecessor's family. See the comment on 1 Kings 1:21 for a discussion of political purges at the time of change of administration. By eliminating all future claimants to the throne, Baasha made it more likely that his family would succeed him. The fulfillment of the curse (1 Kings 14:7-16) against Jeroboam's house is similar in form to the Ur III "Curse of Agade" about the Akkadian king Naram-Sin, whose desecration of a shrine in Nippur brought the wrath of the gods down on him and his kingdom.

15:33—16:7
Baasha of Israel

15:33. Tirzah. See the comment on 1 Kings 14:17. Tirzah officially becomes the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel during Baasha's reign. It will remain there until Omri moves it to Samaria (1 Kings 16:24).

15:33. chronology. The reign of Baasha presents one of the most difficult chronological problems in the Bible. If, as this verse states, Baasha came to the throne in Asa's third year and reigned twenty-four years, he would have died in Asa's twenty-sixth year (see 16:8). The problem comes when 2 Chronicles 16:1 has Asa and Baasha at war in Asa's thirty-sixth year. Suggested solutions have been numerous, but none very convincing. Thiele's dates for Baasha are 909-886. He is contemporary with Asa of Judah and Ben-Hadad I of Damascus. This is the beginning of a century-long period when the Arameans of Damascus begin taking a leading role in the region.

16:4. dogs, birds and no burial. The fate assigned to Baasha's family (notice, not to Baasha himself) was the worst that could befall someone in the ancient world. Exposing the corpse represented a final humiliation and a desecration, for most ancient peoples believed that proper, timely burial affected the quality of the afterlife. In the Gilgamesh Epic, Enkidu, returned from the netherworld, reports to Gilgamesh that the one who died unburied has no rest and that the one who had no living relatives to take care of him could only eat what was thrown into the street. A Babylonian curse relates burial to the uniting of the spirit of the dead with loved ones. We know that even Israelites believed that proper burial affected one's afterlife, because they, like their neighbors, buried their loved ones with the provisions that would serve them in the afterlife; most often pottery vessels (filled with food) and jewelry (to ward off evil), with tools and personal items sometimes added. Israelite law required even the body of an impaled criminal to be removed and buried at sunset rather than left to be devoured by birds and other animals. First-millennium Assyrian records demonstrate these concerns as Ashurbanipal punishes his opponents by having their bodies thrown in the streets and dragged around. Being devoured by scavengers made burial impossible and was the most dishonorable punishment possible. From the same period an Assyrian curse declares, "Let dogs tear his unburied body to pieces." On one occasion the corpses were chopped up and fed to dogs. The intention of this atrocity was typically to eliminate any possibility of proper burial and thus to doom the individual's spirit to wander restlessly rather than enjoy a peaceful afterlife. Exposing the corpse was also occasionally practiced by the Egyptians.

16:6. Tirzah. Tirzah was a royal residence of Jeroboam and then the capital city of the northern kingdom, probably beginning in the time of Baasha. It has been identified as Tell el-Farah seven miles northeast of Shechem on the road to Beth Shan. It is favored by good elevation, a consistent water supply (two springs that feed the Wadi Farah) and a strategic location on the trade route. It also has ready access to the fords of the Jordan at Adam. The gate and fortifications were rebuilt from the Middle Bronze remains, and there is evidence of central planning in the building of new residences throughout the city. Its political importance may also be inferred from its mention in Shishak's list of conquests during his invasion of Palestine.

16:8-14
Elah of Israel

16:8. chronology. Elah's reign was brief and apparently uneventful. As with his predecessors, there is as yet no mention of him in extrabiblical records. Thiele places him in 886-885.

16:11. killing predecessor's family. Leaving any living relatives of a king who had been forcibly deposed from the throne by assassination was an invitation to civil war. The relatives would be honor-bound to avenge the death of the previous king, and they would be certain to find those who would support their bid to regain the throne. Such annihilation of ruling families was common practice both in Israel and in the ancient Near East at large.

16:13. worthless idols. The text here speaks only of "worthless things," but that is a common designation of idols in the ninth through the sixth century. It expresses the biblical perspective that the idols are powerless nothings and that the belief in them is conceptually flawed.

16:14. annals. Royal annals were kept throughout the ancient Near East, with most examples coming from mid-second millennium Hittite kings and from ninth- to sixth-century Assyria and Babylon. The annals could be represented by annalistic royal inscriptions that give detailed accounts of military campaigns. In addition there are court chronicles that give information of important events in

each year. There are currently no annals from Israel or Judah that have been discovered by archaeologists.

16:15-20

Zimri of Israel

16:15. chronology. Zimri's seven days are dated by Thiele to 885.

16:15. Gibbethon. Gibbethon was one of the cities listed among those taken by Thutmose III on his campaign into Palestine in the first half of the fifteenth century B.C. Over seven hundred years later it was an important conquest of the Assyrian king Sargon II in his campaign against Ashdod (713-712). If the city is to be identified with Tell Malat, it is strategically located near the intersection of the Philistine plain with the foothills of Judah nearly twenty miles west of Jerusalem and about four miles west of Gezer. Extensive excavations have not been conducted, but there are finds dating to this period on the site, and it is clear that it was a fortified city.

16:16. army naming king. While it was not typically the army's task to designate the king, the support of the military was an important link to securing a contested throne. Military coups were probably more frequent in the Near East than our sources indicate, because most kings desired to present themselves as having come to the throne through legitimate means. Using the might of the military to seize power and enforce one's rule is not a precedent that many would seek to establish. Nevertheless prominent examples of militia-backed takeovers from one's own countrymen can be found in the Assyrian kings Tiglath-Pileser III (745) and Sargon II (722), and the Persian king Darius the Great (522), though each puts a different twist on the story of his succession that suggests a legitimate claim to the throne.

16:18. citadel of the royal palace. Tell el-Farah, ancient Tirzah, shows evidence of destruction and abandonment at this time. There is a fortified citadel that has been found at the northwest corner of the site that is possibly the one that Zimri set aflame. The practice of a king burning down the palace around himself is also seen in 648, when Babylon succumbs to the siege of Ashurbanipal and Shamash-shuma-ukin throws himself into the flames of the burning palace.

16:21-28

Omri of Israel

16:21-22. contesting succession to the throne. When succession to the throne was not a case of a son taking the place of his father, it could be expected that there would be several claimants, each with supporting factions. Nothing is known of the nature of Tibni's claims or who made up his constituency. Likewise the details of the civil war are not given.

16:23. chronology. Thiele's dates for Omri are 885-874. This is a critical juncture in the history of the region because the Assyrians are ready to begin their attempts at western expansion. Ashurnasirpal II came to the throne in 883 and extended his control over the entire course of the Euphrates, thus putting him on the doorstep of the western nations. The Aramean state of Bit-Adini by the western reaches of the Euphrates came under his control, and in 877 he marched to the Mediterranean and then south between the Orontes/Litani rivers and the Mediterranean, collecting tribute from cities as far south as Tyre. Additionally the Arameans of Damascus under Ben-Hadad have become a force to reckon with, and all of this will force Israel to find its niche through international alignment.

16:24. Samaria. It was Omri who built Samaria and established it as the capital of the northern kingdom, Israel. About twelve miles west of the previous capital, Tirzah, the city is located at an important crossroads with easy access to the Jezreel Valley to the north, Shechem to the southeast and the coast to the west. It is near both major north-south routes that run west of the Jordan. The excavations at the site have uncovered what is believed to be Omri's palace on the acropolis as well as parts of the wall separating the acropolis from the lower city. The wall was about five feet thick and built using the finest masonry of the day (ashlar stones set in a trench using headers and stretchers). Ahab improved the fortifications by adding a casemate wall over thirty feet thick.

16:24. two talents of silver. Two talents of silver equals six thousand shekels. This is considerably more than David paid for the eventual temple site in Jerusalem, but it is a substantially larger portion of real estate as well. It is about 150 pounds of silver. Its economic equivalent in buying power today would be between fifteen and twenty million dollars. Even if the entire upper and lower city (which comprised 160 acres in Roman times) was included, this was still expensive real estate.

16:27. Omri in the ancient Near East. Though there are no contemporary sources that record interaction with Omri, sources from the middle of the ninth century refer to Omri in a

number of different ways. The Moabite inscription of King Mesha recounts Omri's past oppression of Moab as the historical background of Mesha's claims of his more recent domination of Omri's successors. Assyrian inscriptions of Shalmaneser III identify Israel as the land of Omri. Since Omri was on favorable terms with pro-Assyrian Tyre and Sidon, it is likely that he also adopted a pro-Assyrian stance. His alliance with the Phoenicians was sealed by the marriage of the crown prince, Ahab, to the Sidonian princess, Jezebel. This strategy aligned him against the Arameans, who stood against the Assyrians and were the most active threat against Israel. Nevertheless it appears that Omri did negotiate a working relationship and maintained an uneasy peace with the Arameans, who were feeling the pressure of the Assyrians and needed friends in the region.

16:29-34

Succession of Ahab of Israel

16:29. chronology. Thiele's dates for Ahab are 874-853. It is certain that he was still on the throne in 853 because he is listed in Shalmaneser III's records as one of the principle members of the western coalition that opposed the Assyrians at the battle of Qarqar in that year.

16:31. Jezebel. The only possible reference to Jezebel in contemporary records is a seal from this time period inscribed with the name *"yzbl."* It is a large seal featuring Egyptian motifs accompanied by the Phoenician inscription of the name. As the king's daughter, it has been suggested that she could have enjoyed a status as the high priestess of the national deity, Baal Melqart.

16:31. Ethbaal of Sidon. Ethbaal was the king of the Sidonians from 887 to 856. He ruled over the entire region of Phoenicia and actually used Tyre as his capital city. Josephus, writing many centuries later, describes him as a priest of the goddess Astarte who had usurped the throne. Josephus is not always reliable on such matters, but he appears to be using some Greek sources that may be translations of Phoenician records. Ethbaal is given much credit in the development of Tyre as an island port and probably built the southern harbor with its accompanying breakwater. No mention of him has yet been found in contemporary records.

16:31. Baal Melqart. Melqart was the chief god of Tyre as early as the ninth century B.C. He is equated with the Mesopotamian god Nergal, lord of the netherworld, and later with the Greek god Heracles. He is at times referred to as the Baal of Tyre and thus his identification with the Baal who enjoys Jezebel and Ahab's loyalty. It should be understood that this is therefore a different god from the Canaanite Hadad, who is usually referred to as Baal in the biblical text. In the ninth-century Aramean inscription of Bir-Hadad, Melqart is a warrior god, but no myths concerning his activities have survived from the Old Testament period. In later texts, Melqart is seen as a dying-rising god (correlating to the cycles of nature), who appears to be brought back to life by fire.

Since the biblical text never uses the title Melqart, there are alternative possibilities. The most common is that Baal is Baal Shamem (lord of the heavens), who is known throughout the first millennium as one of the chief gods of Phoenicia. Most information on him, however, comes after 800, and therefore little can be determined about him from the period of this narrative.

16:32. temple of Baal in Samaria. Excavations in Samaria have not yet located any remains from Ahab's temple of Baal. It has been suggested that the temple contributed to the concept being promoted by Ahab and Jezebel that the city was the sacred precinct of Baal (for the privileges of such status, see comment on 2 Sam 5:9). This would mean it functioned as an independent political unit, just as Zion often did in the south. For the implications of this see the comments in 2 Kings 10:21.

16:33. Asherah pole. Asherah can be either the name of a fertility goddess or the name of a cult object (as here). The goddess was popular in the religious deviations in Israel and was sometimes considered a consort of Yahweh. An indication of this belief is found in the inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom. In Canaanite mythology she was the consort of the chief god, El. She appears in Mesopotamian literature as early as the eighteenth century, where she is consort of the Amorite god Amurru. The cult symbol may or may not have born a representation of the deity on it. The pole may represent an artificial tree since Asherah is often associated with sacred groves. Sometimes the cult object can be made or built, while on other occasions it is planted. We have little information of the function of these poles in ritual practice.

16:34. rebuilding Jericho. Joshua had pronounced a curse on anyone who would rebuild the city of Jericho. Many interpreters have thought that a practice of the day was that the dedication of a house would feature the sacrifice of a child from the family. This was used to explain the skeletal remains of

children found buried under the thresholds of houses (foundation sacrifices). In similar manner the builder of a city would sacrifice a child who would be buried in a significant location in the city. This interpretation has been largely abandoned, and some researchers now see a connection between the curse and the disease schistosomiasis (bilharziasis). This disease is caused by a blood fluke carried by snails of the type found in abundance at Jericho. It infects the urinary tract and affects fertility and child mortality.

17:1—18:15
Elijah and the Drought

17:1. Tishbe in Gilead. Tishbe is mentioned nowhere else in the Old Testament, and its location is unknown. The traditional identification with Istib, eight miles north of the Jabbok River, has little to commend it.

17:1. withholding of rain and Baal. The policies and actions of Ahab and Jezebel are intended to promote Baal as the national deity of Israel in place of Yahweh. The dispute championed by Elijah concerns which deity is king—which is more powerful. In the Canaanite material available from ancient literature (particularly the information provided by the Ugaritic tablets), Baal is a god of lightning and storm, and responsible for the fertility of the land. By withholding rain, Yahweh is demonstrating the power of his kingship in the very area of nature over which Baal is thought to have jurisdiction. Announcing this beforehand to Ahab is the means by which Yahweh's kingship and power are being portrayed. If Baal is the provider of rain and Yahweh announces that he will withhold it, the contest is on.

17:3. ravine of Kerith. This incident demonstrates Yahweh's control in that he shows he can provide for whomever he wishes. The Wadi Kerith has not been identified with confidence. NIV translates the description as "east of the Jordan," but the Hebrew phrase often means "on the way to," suggesting that the wadi is one that drains into the Jordan from the west. Matching this description and known for its desolate terrain is the Wadi Kelt. Wadi Swenit runs past Micmash and halfway to Jericho meets the Wadi Kelt, which is the major pass into the region of the Jordan. This would be about thirty miles southeast of Samaria. An alternative in the region of Samaria would be the Wadi Faria, which meets the Jordan at the fords at Adam.

17:4. fed by ravens. Ravens are known to roost in desolate rocky areas like the wadi. Their habit of storing excess foods in rocky crags worked to Elijah's benefit. He could observe where they put the food and retrieve it. While much of the diet of ravens consists of carrion, they also eat fruit such as dates.

17:9. Zarephath. Zarephath (modern Sarafand) is a town near the coast of the Mediterranean between Tyre and Sidon. It is listed as a harbor city in thirteenth-century B.C. Egyptian texts. It was a flourishing manufacturing and industrial center throughout the first millennium B.C. and down into Roman times. Its importance here is that it shows that Yahweh had also produced a drought in Baal's own home territory.

17:10. gathering sticks at the town gate. The woman is gathering twigs to start a small fire. The verb suggests foraging for discarded stubble. The traffic through the town gate and jostling of loads there would make it a likely place for one to find small pieces that had been dropped by others.

17:10. widow. In a society that is subject to disease and warfare, it is not uncommon to find widows. Since a widow had no inheritance rights, special provisions were typically made for them under the law, allowing them to glean in harvested fields and protecting them from being oppressed. They needed protection under the law because they were powerless to protect themselves and were often dependent on charity for survival. Based on the statements in the prologues of the Ur-Nammu Code and the Code of Hammurabi, it is clear that kings considered it part of their role as "wise rulers" to protect the rights of the poor, the widow and the orphan. Similarly, in the Egyptian Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, the plaintiff begins by identifying his judge as "the father of the orphan, the husband of the widow." If a god is going to demonstrate his role as a king, one clear way of doing so is to show his concern for the vulnerable by caring for the needs of a widow in desperate need.

17:10-11. Elijah's request. Elijah's request would have been very modest within the range of normal hospitality (which was often offered at the gate of the city). In this time of drought and famine, however, it served only to expose the corporate and personal crises that existed.

17:12. LORD your God. Here the woman clearly refers to the Israelite God, Yahweh. There must have been something recognizably Israelite in Elijah's appearance, and the woman follows standard protocol by pronouncing her oath in the name of the deity of the person to whom she is speaking. Though she uses a

common oath formula, she also unwittingly offers affirmation of Yahweh's vitality. Her phrase betrays nothing of any personal belief in Yahweh.

17:12. flour and oil. One of the typical baked products that formed a basic part of the meal was a small flat cake made of wheat flour and cooked in oil.

17:14. provision of flour and oil: fertility. Grain and oil were two of the major exports of the city of Zarephath. The fact that they were in short supply is an indication of how severe the drought was. They are also two of the most basic commodities for survival. As staple products they represent the major arena where fertility can be observed. The contest between Yahweh and Baal continues as Yahweh demonstrates that he is able to provide for "Baal's people" in "Baal's territory" just as easily as he is able to provide for his own people and just as easily as he is able to withhold from whomever he chooses.

17:18. death of son connected to prophet. Prophets were often considered dangerous and having one around posed considerable risk. The gods could be harsh taskmasters as often as they could be generous benefactors, and the prophets represented them. Additionally, if the prophet were to become angered or offended at any little thing, he might, in an uncontrolled moment, pronounce some sort of curse that would inevitably come true. The woman assumes that her child's death is punishment from some presumed (though unknown) offense that has come to the attention of the deity because of the prophet's presence. She had thus far benefited from Elijah's presence, but now she judges that the cost was too high.

17:21. stretched himself on boy three times. Some have taken this as an example of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, since in ancient times death was determined as having taken place when the person stopped breathing. But the full weight of a man on a child would be counterproductive to that procedure. The more complete description of the procedure in 2 Kings 4:34-35 suggests a different explanation. In Mesopotamian incantation literature the touching of part to part is a means by which demons exercise power over their intended victims—it is the idiom of possession. In this belief, vitality or life force can be transferred from one body to the other by contact of each part. By imitating the procedure believed to be used by demons, the prophet is able, through the power of Yahweh (notice the prayer), to drive the demons out and restore the boy's life. This is often considered to be one of the clearest cases of sympathetic magic in the Bible.

17:22. return of life versus Baal. Part of the profile of fertility gods was the dying and rising cycle that was related to vegetation and to the seasons. The deity would "die" during the winter months and descend to the netherworld. He would be brought back out of the netherworld and restored to life in the spring to bring fertility back to the land. His power to enable fertility extended beyond crops to animals and people as well. As a god who regularly returned from death, it was believed that these fertility gods also had the power to occasionally restore life to someone who had died. Therefore, by restoring the boy's life, Yahweh is again showing his power in the realm considered to be Baal's central arena (see comment on 2 Kings 4:16-35).

18:1-46

The Contest on Mount Carmel

18:3. Obadiah in charge of the palace. Obadiah holds one of the highest offices in the administration (see comment on 4:6). Though this post later becomes the equivalent of prime minister, at this stage it most likely designates stewardship of royal lands and possessions. It is claimed as a title of an official named Gedaliah on a seal from sixth-century Lachish.

18:4. killing Yahweh's prophets. The standard religious systems of the ancient Near East were openly tolerant of worship of any deities. To ignore a potentially powerful deity or to persecute his worshipers would make one vulnerable to divine anger and punishment. Religious intolerance or persecution do not arise until much later in history. Policies that may look like religious persecution in the ancient world are usually political in nature. When the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten took action against the priests of Amun-Re, it was because of their substantial political and economic influence. He was seeking to defuse their power. The agenda of Jezebel was to enthrone Baal as the king and national god of Israel instead of Yahweh. This would have been her act of loyalty to Baal. The prophets of Yahweh would have, of course, contested this move on religious, political, personal and traditional grounds. They would be most capable of mobilizing formal and large-scale opposition among the general population. On political grounds, then, they had to be eliminated.

18:19. Mount Carmel. It is likely that Mount Carmel, south of the modern port of Haifa,

had long served as a boundary between Israel and Phoenicia and was, like many mountains, considered a sacred site. As early as the lists of Pharaoh Thutmose III (fifteenth century), Carmel is probably the one identified as a holy mountain in the vicinity of Acco. It is also the location where Assyrian king Shalmaneser III collected tribute from both Tyre and Jehu of Israel in 841. Carmel actually refers to a mountain range that stretches about thirty miles from the outcropping into the Mediterranean southeast toward Megiddo and stands at the northwestern end of the Valley of Jezreel. It is uncertain which summit in the range is the location of the contest. It is possible that the contest took place at the foot of the mountain rather than on its summit. Sacred mountains usually featured the places of worship at their base rather than at the summit, which would have been considered holy ground inaccessible to the populace. Elijah eventually ascends to the summit to offer his prayer for rain (v. 42).

18:19. eating at Jezebel's table. It is interesting that it is Jezebel's table, not Ahab's, that hosts the prophets of Baal and Asherah. This suggests that she has her own dining accommodations and resources and that she is the sponsor and benefactor of these prophets.

18:23-24. nature of the contest. There are three significant concepts involved in centering the contest around the ability of the deity to send fire. (1) *Fire is an indication of the presence of God.* In biblical texts, from the burning bush and the pillar of fire to the throne vision of Ezekiel (1:4), fire is seen as accompanying theophanies (appearances of God). In this way the contest asked the respective deities to show themselves. (2) *Fire is connected to the lightning of the storm god.* As the storm god, Baal is depicted with lightning bolts in his hand and is spoken of in the texts as flashing forth with fire or lightning. In one text fire is even used by Baal as a means of constructing his house. Baal was therefore considered by his worshipers as the lord of fire. In the continuing agenda of the narrative that Yahweh show his superiority in every area of Baal's domain, the ability to bring fire is strategic. (3) *Fire represents the acceptance of the sacrifice.* Burnt offerings of this sort typically accompanied petition. In this case the petition on everyone's mind was for the drought to end. If both parties had been praying for the drought to end, the resulting rain could be attributed by either group to its own god. As a result the contest is set up to demonstrate which deity is responding to the petition of his followers. If fire is sent, the petition has been granted, and the rain that follows can be attributed to the correct deity. It is therefore important to recognize the close connection between the sending of the fire and the sending of the rain.

18:26-29. prophets' appeal to Baal. The NIV speaks of the prophets "dancing around the altar" (v. 26) and "slashing themselves with swords and spears" (v. 28). In the first description the verb is controversial. It is the same verb as that translated "passover" in Exodus 12 (see the comment on Ex 12:11) and may be better understood as protectively standing vigil. Certainly there is plenty of evidence of ritual dances in the ancient world; however, none of them come from the literature connected with the Canaanites. The self-laceration of this verse is part of a mourning ritual. In Ugaritic literature the gods are portrayed as practicing this when they hear of the death of Baal. Additionally an Akkadian wisdom text from Ugarit compares the bloodletting of mourning rites to that practiced by ecstatic prophets.

18:27. Elijah's taunts. The biblical text offers four activities that Elijah suggests for Baal: thinking, busy, traveling and sleeping. These can be compared to some of the activities in which Baal is engaged in the Ugaritic texts. When the goddess Anat comes to look for Baal, she is told he has gone hunting. Ugaritic literature that portrays the death of Baal features the repeated strain that he needs to be awakened. The classical source used by Josephus, Menander of Ephesus, reports that the Tyrian king, Hiram, contemporary of David, instituted the ritual for the awakening of Herakles (=Melqart, see comment on 16:31). The mythology of the ancient world understood the gods to be involved in a variety of activities similar to those that engage human beings. Though Elijah's words are meant to be taunts, they are not unrealistic depictions of Canaanite beliefs. The prophets of Baal would not have viewed his suggestions as ridiculous or unworthy of deity.

18:30. Elijah's repair of the altar. The terms used suggest a previous altar for the worship of Yahweh that was in disrepair due to an act of destruction. It can probably be inferred that the altar had been torn down as a result of Jezebel's promotion of Baal worship. Destruction of competing or unacceptable high places was often a part of religious reform. It was often believed that the precise location and orientation of a sanctuary or altar had been determined by deity and was significant. Therefore, even though Elijah "builds" the altar in verse 32 with twelve stones that probably make up the entire altar, it can be viewed as "repair" in the

sense that it enjoys continuity with the altar previously operating on the site.

18:32. size and purpose of the trench. The trench size is described in terms of something that holds about half a bushel of grain. A trench that held half a bushel would not be very large. Perhaps the text is making reference to a standard container that holds (Hebrew text: "houses") this amount of grain (the way we would speak of a two-liter bottle) and is suggesting that is how deep the trench was dug all around the altar. The purpose of the trench is to collect the runoff, which otherwise would have simply been absorbed into the dry earth.

18:33-34. soaking of the sacrifice. Some have thought that the pouring of water on the altar would have seemed a great waste to those who were languishing through a third year of drought. It must be remembered, however, that there is no suggestion that this was fresh water. The nearby Mediterranean was full of water—it was just undrinkable.

18:38. fire of the Lord. The storm gods of the ancient Near East are typically equipped with lightning bolts that are their means of sending fire. Assyrian kings throughout this period speak of the gods as a burning flame and of sending fire before them. Esarhaddon (seventh-century Assyria) speaks of his march and attack in terms of an unquenchable fire. All of this is the way that the deity was believed to enter into battle. Fire brought about by his thunderbolts was one of his principal weapons. While the events on Carmel do not show Yahweh using fire to destroy his enemies, he is using it as a means to defeat his opponent, Baal. Another occurrence of fire from the Lord consuming a sacrifice is in the ordination of Aaron and his sons (Lev 9:24).

18:40. Kishon Valley. The Kishon River flows northwest from the northern end of the Jezreel Valley to the Mediterranean just east of Haifa. It is fed from the mountains in the Carmel range and from the hills of Galilee around Nazareth.

18:44. cloud. The text has given no indication of the time of year this event takes place. Summers are usually devoid of rain in Palestine, though there can occasionally be clouds in the sky. The winter is the rainy season. Rain usually comes from the west (the sea), as indicated here. When the rainy season begins in the autumn, showers often come on quite quickly from the west. Comparing the size to a man's hand is indicative of how far away the cloud is—when he holds up his outstretched hand, he can obscure it from his sight.

18:45. Jezreel. Jezreel was between fifteen and twenty miles from the Carmel area. This fifteen-acre site was situated at the southeastern entrance to the Jezreel Valley between the Hill of Moreh and Mount Gilboa. It was here that Ahab had built a winter capital. Excavations have unearthed a large royal enclosure from this time period occupying a large portion of the mound (see comment on 21:1).

18:46. tucking cloak into belt. The "girding of one's loins" typically involves belting tight a loose garment or folding up a long one in preparation for some strenuous activity. This particular passage is difficult because the verb that is used is unique to this verse and its meaning is uncertain. So, for instance, if Elijah had "girded his loins" for the slaughter of the prophets, he could just as well be ungirding them here. Despite the NIV translation, no garment is mentioned here.

18:46. Elijah running ahead of Ahab. This verse does not speak of *outrunning* but of *running before* the chariot of Ahab *until he came* to Jezreel. Those running before the chariot of a king or prince constitute his entourage (see comment on the same phrase in 2 Sam 15:1). Elijah, under the power of Yahweh, was playing the role of prophetic herald, apparently proclaiming the changed attitude of Ahab and his loyalty to Yahweh. The power of Yahweh brings blessing, success and victory. In Hittite texts it is the gods who run before the chariot of the king—here Elijah does so as the representative of God. The eighth-century Aramean king, Bir-Rakib, portrays himself as a loyal vassal to the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III by "running at his wheel."

19:1-18
Elijah's Flight

19:3. Beersheba. Beersheba is the southernmost extremity of the land. It is located in the northern Negev at Tell es-Seba' (three miles east of the modern city). Its name derives from its association with the wells dug to provide water for the people and flocks in this area (see Gen 26:23-33). Archaeological evidence has been found of occupation during the monarchy through the Persian periods.

19:4. day's journey into the desert. Elijah is apparently heading southwest toward the Sinai Peninsula. One day's journey would have taken him about a third of the way to Kadesh-barnea.

19:4. broom tree. The white broom tree *(retama raetam)* is common in this region and grows anywhere from five to ten feet in height. It is the only shrub to offer shade in this dry, desolate region.

19:5-7. angel's provisions. There is nothing striking about the description of the food provided by the angel. It is the same as what Elijah had asked the widow to make for him (see 17:13). Perhaps most significant is that the Israelites in the wilderness were reported to have made such cakes out of manna (Num 11:8).

19:8. trip to Horeb. Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai. If Sinai is to be found down in the southern region of the peninsula, as the text seems to necessitate (see comment on Ex 19:1-2), he must travel another two hundred miles and could therefore easily take forty days. It is true that a caravan could often make seventeen to twenty miles a day, but Elijah is not accustomed to this type of travel and is traveling on his own. Five miles per day under such conditions in this climate would not be unusual.

19:11-13. fire, wind and earthquake with theophany. A theophany is an appearance of the divine presence. In the ancient Near East theophany was often connected with battle, and the warrior god was believed to fight on behalf of his people using thunder bolts (lightning, fire), the stormwind and the trembling earth to terrify the enemy. From the Sumerian *Exaltation of Inanna,* to the Hittite myths about the storm god, to the Akkadian and Ugaritic mythologies, the gods are viewed as thundering in judgment against their enemies. Baal is depicted as grasping a handful of thunderbolts. Thundering terminology is picked up in royal rhetoric as Hittite or Assyrian kings portray themselves as the instruments of the gods, thundering against those who have violated treaties or stood in the way of empire expansion. Israel's Yahweh is also viewed as a warrior God, but here Elijah is shown that there is much more (see next comment).

19:12-17. Yahweh's plan. In the ancient Near East the gods were believed to be active in the events of history. Kings claimed that they were put on the throne by their patron deity and that that deity supported them, gave them guidance and brought them victory and success. It is interesting to note, however, that this involvement of the gods always seems to have the tone of political propaganda. The gods of the ancient Near East do not have a plan that they reveal. While they are believed to be active throughout the scope of history, there is no indication that they had a plan for the direction of history. Here it is made plain to Elijah that Yahweh is not simply a hot-blooded warrior defending or dethroning kings on an arbitrary whim like the gods of the ancient Near East. He has an agenda for history. His warfare is not just wrathful blood-letting—there is a long-term plan that is being carefully worked out. Once all the fire and storm and earthquake are past, the plan can be articulated. The "gentle whisper" in verse 12 is not describing how the Lord speaks. It is descriptive of the resonating silence after all the clamor of destruction. It is with silence hanging in the air that Yahweh's voice of direction may be heard.

19:15-16. anointing three replacements. Elijah made the mistake of thinking that he was indispensable, God's last and only hope. By announcing three successors, the Lord is making it clear that he is never without recourse. The Aramean king, Hazael, will be God's instrument of judgment on Israel (for more information see comment on 2 Kings 10:32). Jehu will become king of Israel and in the process bring God's punishment on the house of Ahab (for more information see comments on 2 Kings 10). Elisha will continue the prophetic work of Elijah.

19:15. Desert of Damascus. The Desert of Damascus refers to the great Syrian desert that stretches from Damascus to the Euphrates river basin. It was this desert that the "fertile crescent" went around.

19:16. Abel Meholah. Abel Meholah is located on the west bank of the Jordan somewhere south of Beth Shan. The most likely candidate is Tell Abu Sus, eleven miles south of Beth Shan at the southern end of the Beth Shan Valley, where the Yabis River enters the Jordan from the east.

19:18. mouths not kissing Baal. On the black stele of Shalmaneser III, the Israelite king Jehu is portrayed kissing the ground before the Assyrian king. In *Enuma Elish* the tribunal of gods kisses the feet of Marduk after he has put down the rebellion and established himself as head of the pantheon. This was the common act of submission offered to kings and gods. Likewise the kissing of the idol involved kissing its feet in an act of homage, submission and allegiance. In the Mari letters the governor of Terqa, Kibri-Dagan, advises Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, to come to Terqa to kiss the feet of the statue of the god Dagan.

19:19-21
Elisha Chosen as Apprentice

19:19. plowing with twelve yoke of oxen. Large landowners could accomplish the task of plowing much more quickly using multiple plows, each pulled by a team of oxen driven by a worker. Here Elisha is in charge of twelve such teams.

19:19. prophet's cloak. The cloak referred to here is an outer garment, not the same as the robe discussed in 1 Samuel 15:27. The distinctive prophet's cloak is most likely made of animal skin and is hairy in appearance (see Zech 13:4), though not all cloaks were so made. Very little is said about prophetic garb in the ancient Near East, so comparison is difficult. It may be of interest that Assyrian inscriptions beginning at this period portray a few individuals wearing lion-headed cloaks. Some of these individuals are involved in ritual activities (dance) and accompany deity. It is guessed that they may be exorcists.

19:21. Elisha's response. Kissing is more often used in greeting than in saying goodbye (a word supplied here by the NIV translators, not in the Hebrew text). Kissing between a father (or grandfather) and a son or daughter is found in several contexts as a prelude to receiving a blessing (Gen 27:26; 31:28, 55; 48:10) and may be implied here. The butchering of the oxen supplies the meal for the celebration that also accompanied the blessing. It would appear, then, that Elisha has requested the opportunity to receive his parents' blessing.

20:1-43

Ahab and Ben-Hadad

20:1. Ben-Hadad of Aram. Aramean history at this time is still in need of much clarification, with at least part of the problem caused by several rulers with the name of Ben-Hadad ("son of [the god] Hadad"). The issue is further complicated by the fact that Shalmaneser III's inscriptions name the ruler of this time Hadadezer (see comment on 2 Sam 8:3). The first Ben-Hadad has been referred to earlier in chapter 15 and ruled during the first part of the ninth century, though no precise dating is possible. In 2 Kings 8 the king murdered by Hazael (about 842) is named Ben-Hadad, and Hazael is later succeeded by a king named Ben-Hadad. The name Bir-Hadad occurs in an inscription dedicated to the god Melqart, but again it is unclear which Ben-Hadad this refers to. It has been suggested that the sequence may be Ben-Hadad I (1 Kings 15), Ben-Hadad II (1 Kings 20), Hadadezer (Shalmaneser Inscription, considered by some a variant name of Ben-Hadad), Ben-Hadad III (Melqart inscription), Hazael, Ben-Hadad IV. There is no other material from the ancient Near East to help unravel this at this time.

20:1. thirty-two kings. Coalitions of many small kingdoms were frequent in these times. When Shalmaneser III invaded the west in 853 at the Battle of Qarqar, he was greeted by a coalition of twelve major kings. Shalmaneser's inscription lists the number of cavalry, infantry and chariots provided by the various members of the coalition. There were still many city-states and tribal groups around at this time, who each would have had a "king," so it is not difficult to imagine thirty-two of them banding together.

20:5-6. terms of tribute. Ahab is initially prepared to meet the demands for tribute and peaceful surrender imposed by Ben-Hadad. The resulting vassal relationship would involve members of Ahab's family being taken as hostages to insure that the terms were met. Assyrian practice of this time was to take princes hostage to provide incentive that good behavior would result, and here the Arameans are doing the same. When Ben-Hadad finds Ahab so agreeable, he insists further that the right of seizure be extended to anything of value that is found in the palace.

20:13-14. role of the prophet. In this period of preclassical prophecy the prophets of Israel served in very much the same role as their ancient Near Eastern counterparts (see comments on Deut 18:14-22). One of the most frequent areas addressed concerned, as here, the advisability of military activity. Since it was believed that God's involvement was essential for the success of the military, the entire sequence begins with the divine command to go into battle. This divine command can be seen as typical in the royal inscriptions of the Assyrians. It was also important to consult the deity about timing and strategies. During the time of Saul and David this type of information was usually gained through the priest's manipulation of oracular devices (see comments on 1 Sam 14:10; 22:10; and 23:9-12). Now, instead of asking questions of a priest to receive oracular responses, the questions are being posed to the prophet, who, as a representative of God, offers the prophetic oracles as responses from God.

20:23, 28. god of the hills, god of the valleys. In the polytheistic setting of the ancient Near East, gods were generally considered as having defined territorial jurisdiction, just as political leaders would have. This jurisdiction could be divided up along national lines (each nation having its patron deities) or by topographical areas or boundaries (rivers, mountains, lakes, plains), as here construed. The fact that Israel was a mountainous country and that the capital cities, Samaria and Jerusalem, were both in mountain regions, would fuel the speculation that Yahweh's jurisdiction was in the mountains.

20:24-25. planned strategy. The tactics that will be used for the second campaign are significantly different. In the first round the Aramean coalition attacked Samaria directly. This was intended as siege warfare. In the second phase the emphasis was not on starving the people out or on breaching the walls of a city, but on pitched battle in open terrain where the Arameans intended to take full advantage of their chariotry and cavalry. Whether because of the different battle tactics or because of the failure of the first campaign, the Arameans assigned a new group of field commanders and filled the ranks with new recruits.

20:26. Aphek. Identification of the site of this battle is complicated by the fact that there are several different towns named Aphek in ancient Israel (perhaps as many as five). The one that has most commonly been proposed as the site for this battle is located just east of the Sea of Galilee on the route from Damascus to Israel. The problem with this is that it is hard to imagine the Arameans choosing a site that far from Samaria or the Israelites going that far afield to engage them. Somewhere in the vicinity of the plain of Jezreel is most logical, and the use of Aphek as a muster point for the Philistines at the battle of Gilboa would likewise raise this possibility (compare the comments on 1 Sam 28:4 and 29:1).

20:30. escape to Aphek. Since the site of Aphek has not been identified, it is impossible to comment on the archaeological record of the fortifications. The collapse of walls is not specifically attributed to siege and breach, or to divine intervention. One of the principal tactics for bringing about the collapse of walls was tunneling beneath them. In fact it has been suggested that the very purpose of dry moats (dug to bedrock) and earthen ramparts was to prevent tunneling to undermine the walls. If the foundation of the wall could be weakened, the superstructure would collapse.

20:31. sackcloth and ropes. Sackcloth is a familiar sign of mourning. The sarcophagus of Ahiram depicts mourning women with what is likely sackcloth wrapped around their hips over their skirts. The ropes are probably a symbol that they consider themselves captives. Both Assyrian and Egyptian reliefs depict captives from Syria with a tether bound around the neck.

20:33. taken up into chariot. A vassal would have run by the wheel of the chariot (as in the Aramean Bir-Rakib inscription), whereas an equal is taken up into the chariot. By referring to Ben-Hadad as his brother and taking him up into his chariot, Ahab is expressing his willingness to renegotiate their former relationship. It is likely that previously Ahab was considered a vassal to Ben-Hadad, in which case there would have been a suzerainty treaty between them. This would have required Ahab to pay tribute and be under the general authority of Aram. In this new "brother" relationship there would be a parity treaty between them that would not require tribute. It would put them on equal terms, providing mutual support militarily and opening up trade routes and merchant opportunities on an equal footing. Ahab's leniency is seen in his settling for equal status rather than pushing his advantage to make Ben-Hadad his vassal.

20:34. terms of treaty. The return of conquered territory would have restored the traditional boundaries between the two nations. The other concession by Ben-Hadad concerned trade opportunities. One of the actions taken when a major city came under the control of a new king was to construct a marketplace for his merchants in a square set up in his honor. A colony of merchants would then take up residence in the city to carry on their trade. This practice is illustrated by the courtyard outside the city gate of Dan. There the archaeologists excavated a series of buildings that has been identified as a bazaar area set up to honor the Aramean conqueror, whose stele (now referred to as the "House of David Inscription") was prominently featured there.

20:35-40. actions of the prophet. The initial encounter with the man who refused to wound him made it clear that even an act of mercy that disobeyed God's command brought forfeiture of life. The wound the prophet requests is apparently one to the head, which would then make very realistic the bandage that he wore. While the bandage serves as his disguise, the wound may have gained him access to the king. It is interesting that while the king has a reputation for mercy (v. 31) and shows mercy to Ben-Hadad, his judgment in this wounded man's case is anything but merciful. A talent of silver is exorbitant and would suggest that the prisoner is a very important person. For "sons of the prophets" see comment on 1 Samuel 19:20.

21:1-29
Naboth's Vineyard

21:1. Jezreel palace. For general comments about Jezreel see 18:45. The palace at Jezreel was excavated in the early 1990s. The rectangular enclosure covers about eleven acres and is surrounded by a casemate wall with towers at the corners. It featured a six-chambered

gate, a moat and earthen ramparts. The moat was cut from rock and averaged thirty feet wide and at points was nearly twenty feet deep. The moat used in Palestine was a dry moat (called a fosse) probably intended to prevent tunneling under the walls of the city. Jezreel was about twenty-three miles from Samaria.

21:3. vineyard as part of inheritance. Ahab's offer is more than fair and even generous. Naboth's refusal is not just based on traditional "family homestead" type of feelings but on theological issues. Possession of the land had been a gift of the covenant. Distributed to tribes, clans and families, the patrimonial landholdings constituted each family's part of the covenant promises and benefits (for more information see comment on Lev 25:23). Documents from both Mari and Ugarit attest to a practice of perpetual ownership of land and strict rules about the transfer of property—but these are not given a religious explanation. It is also possible that, as a royal residence, Jezreel enjoyed a privileged status in which all residents enjoyed certain benefits (see comment on 2 Sam 5:9). Among these was protection from royal expropriation of land even in exchange for other property.

21:7. rights of the king. This passage is believed to represent a true distinction between the rights extended to the king in Israel and those current in Phoenicia. Differences involve issues concerning (1) the ultimate ownership of land and (2) the absolute power of the king. In the first category, Israelites believed that all the land was Yahweh's land, while the Phoenicians would have seen land as royal fiefdoms—all land was on grant from the king. In the second category, Israelite kingship was designed to be less despotic than most monarchies—the king was not above the law. Jezebel would not have been accustomed to such niceties.

21:9. declaring a fast. Fasts could be declared by the king and generally were proclaimed in the context of some sort of critical petition (see 1 Sam 7:6). For instance, in the drought that was experienced in these times a day of fasting would have served the purpose of praying for rain and perhaps seeking out the offenses that could potentially have brought the drought. Just as David arranges for the deaths of Saul's family members to rectify the offense in 2 Samuel 21, so here Naboth's death would be an attempt to bring an end to whatever situation was the basis for the fast.

21:9. seating arrangement. The prominent seating of Naboth would reflect his status in the community and sets him up for the contention that his actions were capable of affecting the entire community. The two false witnesses are seated near him so that they can claim to have heard his words.

21:11-13. Naboth's crime. Cursing the king usually entails a forthright renunciation of loyalty to the king (as in Judg 9:27-28 and 2 Sam 16:7-8) by fixing blame for the situation squarely on his shoulders. Cursing God is likewise associated with disloyalty to him and involves maligning or discrediting him, at times by fixing blame. Isaiah 8:21 features the combination of cursing both God and king in the context of fixing blame for hardship or crisis. As the community is being led in this fast to seek the cause of their crisis, these two planted witnesses claim that they heard Naboth fixing blame for the crisis on God and the king. This is judged as treasonous, and he is sentenced to death by the officials, who have been prompted to respond to the case in that way. An Alalakh text indicates that if a man is put to death for treason, ownership of his property reverts to the palace.

21:19. dogs licking blood. Dogs were scavengers who roamed the streets and alleys feeding on garbage. That anyone's (let alone a king's) body should be so exposed meant that there would be no honor in death or even a proper burial. Improper burial was popularly thought to jeopardize an individual's afterlife (for further information see comment on 1 Kings 16:4). Israelites considered that a person's body ("flesh") and spirit were in principle inseparable. Thus the individual was both spirit and flesh. Because of this the dead corpse was very carefully treated, as it was still considered part of the person's existence. First-millennium Assyrian records also demonstrate these concerns, as Ashurbanipal punishes his opponents by having their bodies thrown in the streets and dragged around. From the same period an Assyrian curse declares "let dogs tear his unburied body to pieces."

21:27. Ahab's response. Sackcloth and fasting were considered some of the basic elements of repentance as well as mourning in ancient Israel. Fasting is little attested in the ancient Near East outside the Bible. It generally occurs in the context of mourning. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with making a request before God. The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and

humbling oneself before God (Ps 69:10). Sackcloth was made of goat or camel hair and was coarse and uncomfortable. In many cases the sackcloth was only a loin covering. The sarcophagus of Ahiram depicts mourning women with what is likely sackcloth wrapped around their hips over their skirts.

22:1-40
Battle at Ramoth Gilead

22:1. chronology: Battle of Qarqar. Since the alliance of Ahab and Ben-Hadad at the end of chapter 20, three years have gone by. It is generally assumed that the reason their alliance remained strong was because of the threat of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III who was making his way westward. He finally posed a threat to southern Aram in 853, where he was met by a coalition of twelve western nations at the Battle of Qarqar. Shalmaneser lists Ahab of Israel and Hadadezer of Damascus as two of the most significant parties in the alliance which was led by Iarhuleni of Hamath. Qarqar is on the Orontes River about 150 miles north of Damascus, but only 25 miles north of Hamath. Though Shalmaneser claims victory, study of subsequent history suggests that the western coalition succeeded in their major objective. It was not until ten or twelve years later, after the confederacy had eroded, that Shalmaneser finally shows any indication of control in the region. It is most likely the general success against Shalmaneser that gave Ahab the confidence to take military action against the Arameans and try to regain Ramoth Gilead.

22:12-38. Micaiah and Ahab. See comments on 2 Chronicles 18.

22:38. pool in Samaria. In the excavations of Samaria a large pool (sixteen by thirty-three feet) was discovered inside the northwest corner of the wall by the palace, but it is impossible to say whether this is the pool referred to here. It is uncertain whether the prostitutes are bathing in the pool or the blood or both.

22:39. palace of inlaid ivory. Ivory decor was very popular at this time for inlays in furniture and for wall panels. One of the principal sources of ivory was elephant tusks, which were imported from Aram (where Syrian elephants were not yet extinct). Elephant hides and tusks, as well as live elephants, were at times included in tribute payments. Excavations at Ashurnasirpal's palace at Kalah produced some very fine ivory carvings decorating the walls. Over five hundred ivory fragments have also been found in the excavations at Samaria dating to the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. Many feature Egyptian and Phoenician artistic motifs.

22:41-50
Jehoshaphat of Judah

22:42. chronology. Thiele's dates for Jehoshaphat are 872-848, with other systems generally coming within two years of that. No reference to Jehoshaphat has yet been found in extrabiblical inscriptional material from the ancient Near East.

22:46. male shrine prostitutes. For more information concerning cultic prostitution, see the comment on Deuteronomy 23:17-18. The term used here occurs in both feminine and masculine forms and refers, perhaps euphemistically, to ones who have been set apart for particular functions. This same term is used in Akkadian literature to refer to those who have been consecrated as functionaries serving at the shrines or temples. The prostitute was among those functionaries, as was the wet nurse and the midwife. It is unclear what functions the males might have served.

22:48. fleet of ships. Trade by means of seagoing vessels was already taking place in the first half of the third millennium B.C. By mid-second millennium a fleet of ships from Ugarit numbered 150. Excavations of a sunken merchant ship (off the coast of Uluburun, Turkey) from the period give a good idea of the variety of items being shipped. Trading ships of the first millennium were single-masted with a crow's nest and could feature either one or two banks of oars. Typical length would be about fifty feet, though larger ones are known.

22:48. Ophir. Gold from Ophir is mentioned in an eighth-century inscription from Tell Qasile. The precise location of the site is unknown. The fact that it was shipped in at Ezion Geber suggests an Arabian location, though sites in India and East Africa have been considered.

22:48. Ezion Geber. Ezion Geber was a port city located at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba and may be either Tell el-Kheleifeh (which some identify as Elath) or on the island of Jezirat Far'on (Coral Island), the only site in the region with evidence of an ancient harbor area. The latter has been substantiated by underwater archaeological work that shows massive walls and jetties (though not Iron Age) and a small amount of Iron Age pottery. The technology used for the artificial harbor is similar to that found at Phoenician Tyre.

22:51-53
Ahaziah of Israel

22:51. chronology. Thiele's chronology for Ahaziah places him in 853-852. He is not mentioned in any extrabiblical records.

2 KINGS

1:1-18
Ahaziah, King of Israel

1:2. lattice of the upper room. The excavations in Samaria have demonstrated that the royal palace at this time did have a second story. The style of architecture featured open areas, and the lattice described here would have been a wooden grid offering both shade and air circulation.

1:2. Samaria. Samaria was the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. For more information see the comment on 1 Kings 16:24.

1:2. Baal-Zebub. For many years it has been suggested that this name is an intentional corruption of Baal Zebul (Chief Baal), often identified in Ugaritic literature as lord of the underworld. This would explain the Greek form used in Matthew 10:25; 12:24; and elsewhere, "Beelzebul," and the attachment of the title to Satan in the New Testament. "Zebub" means "flies," and if it is a complimentary title, it may refer to the ability to drive away flies who carry disease and infection. A deity named El-Dhubub is known at Ugarit and may mean something similar. Incantations known from Ugaritic invoke Baal Zebul to exorcise demons of disease. Ahaziah, however, is not requesting an incantation effecting healing but only an oracle providing information concerning whether or not he will recover. This is also what is offered by Elijah in verse 6.

1:2. Ekron. The Philistine town of Ekron (Tel Miqne) is about a sixty-mile trip from Samaria. For more information on the site see comments on Judges 1:18 and 1 Samuel 5:10.

1:8. Elijah's clothing. See comment on 1 Kings 19:19 for a discussion of Elijah's mantle. The text here, however, makes no specific mention of Elijah's mantle but describes him as distinguished by hairiness, which could refer either to his garment or his person. The latter is more likely here, because what the NIV translates "belt" is everywhere else a loincloth, which would not be visible if he wore another garment. Certainly another option would be that he is cloaked in the hairy mantle but can be seen to be wearing only the leather loincloth beneath the cloak.

1:10. fire from heaven. The storm gods of the ancient Near East are typically equipped with lightning bolts which are their means of sending fire. Assyrian kings throughout this period speak of the gods as a burning flame and of sending fire before them. Esarhaddon (seventh-century Assyria) speaks of his march and attack in terms of an unquenchable fire. All of this is the way that the deity was believed to enter into battle. Fire brought about by his thunderbolts was one of his principal weapons.

1:17. chronology. Ahaziah's brother, Joram, succeeded him and reigned, according to Thiele, from 852 to 841. As a result, Judah and Israel had kings with virtually identical names ruling over the same period of time.

2:1-18
Elijah Taken Up

2:1. Gilgal. There are several sites named Gilgal, and it is difficult to be certain which is intended here. The best known is in the region of Jericho (see comment on Joshua 4:19), but it would be unusual for their trip to lead them over to Bethel first and then back to Jericho. Additionally, verse 2 speaks of going *down* to Bethel, which would not make sense with this Gilgal. The other possible Gilgal is the one in the vicinity of Geba and Micmash (see comment on 1 Sam 13:4), which is just a few miles south of Bethel and would require a descent to go toward Bethel.

2:2. Bethel. Bethel was the location of one of the calf shrines and was an important religious center. Its history included the patriarchs (Gen 28), the conquest and settlement (Josh 8; Judg 1), and Samuel (1 Sam 7), and, for at least a short time, it housed the ark (Judg 20:26-28).

2:3. company of the prophets. One could be trained for the profession of prophet, and there was a prophetic guild in this early period of Israel's history, usually identified as the "sons/company of the prophets." Typically

these prophets would use various procedures in order to prepare themselves for receiving prophetic oracles. Music played an important role in inducing a trancelike state (ecstasy) that was seen as making one receptive to a divine message. In the Mari texts there is an entire class of temple personnel who were ecstatics and who often provided prophetic messages. Akkadian texts also use the designation *mar bari* (son of a *baru)* to designate a member of the guild of diviners who sometimes offered prophetic oracles.

2:4. Jericho. The trip from Bethel to Jericho was about twelve miles (mostly downhill) and would have taken about half a day. A settlement had reoccupied the site during the time of Ahab (see comment on 1 Kings 16:34).

2:6. Jordan. The Jordan is about five miles beyond Jericho. This would be about the place where Joshua crossed the Jordan.

2:9. double portion. By asking for a double portion, Elisha is not asking for twice as much as Elijah had, but for twice as much as any other successor would receive. This is the normal inheritance right of the firstborn, who would "carry the torch" for the family. Elisha is requesting that he receive the status as the principal successor to Elijah.

2:11. location of Elijah's ascension. Throughout his career Elijah has been mirroring some of the events in Moses' life. As they have now crossed to the east side of the Jordan, they are going toward Mount Nebo (where Moses died), which is about ten miles from the Jordan. The text does not name Nebo, or even suggest they were on a mountain, but it does place them in roughly the same vicinity.

2:11. chariot and horses of fire; whirlwind. The word translated "whirlwind" is typically connected directly to God's activity (the storm of Jonah 1) and at times to his presence (Job 38:1). The chariot imagery is more difficult to assess, because no role is given to the chariot and horses in the passage. In ancient Near Eastern imagery, major deities are at times accompanied by charioteers. There is a deity known as Rakib-El, who is the charioteer of the Canaanite god El. He is textually associated with Hadad, the storm god, but too little is known to elaborate any further on that interesting connection (chariot with storm, as here). In Akkadian literature, Bunene, the advisor to the sun god Shamash, is designated the charioteer. Connection to a sun god offers possible explanation for a chariot of fire. The charioteer would be responsible for transporting the deity, especially into battle. In Israelite religious belief, Yahweh is sometimes portrayed or manifested in ways familiar to ancient Near Eastern thought. For instance, in Elijah's contest with the Baal prophets, Yahweh is shown to be a God who controls fertility and responds with fire, and figurative language often associates him with the sun (Ps 84:11). Here his portrayal may share elements with Hadad, the storm god who is accompanied by a charioteer. These similarities suggest the possibility that familiar imagery was being used to clarify the involvement of deity in this unprecedented event.

2:12. my father. The title "father" is used to designate the leader of a group in both Hebrew and Akkadian. Likewise a "son" is therefore a member of that group.

2:12. chariots and horsemen of Israel. It is uncertain whether Elisha is exclaiming at what he is seeing or is ascribing this title to Elijah. If it is the latter (as 13:14 suggests), the title may be indicating an identification of Elijah's status as the charioteer, a close associate of the deity (cf. Bunene in the comment on 2:11) and the one that brings him into battle.

2:12. tearing clothes. Along with placing ashes in the hair, the tearing of clothing was a common form of mourning in the ancient Near East. One example outside the Bible is found in the Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat (c. 1600 B.C.) in which the sister of the hero tears her father's garment as she foretells a coming drought. Such an act often implied grief over the death of a relative, friend or prominent individual.

2:13. prophet's mantle. Elijah had cast his cloak over Elisha to select him for the task in 19:19. The cloak referred to here is an outer garment, not the same as the robe discussed in 1 Samuel 15:27. The distinctive prophet's cloak is most likely made of animal skin and is hairy in appearance (see Zech 13:4), though not all cloaks were so made. Very little is said about prophetic garb in the ancient Near East, so comparison is difficult. It may be of interest that Assyrian inscriptions beginning at this period portray a few individuals wearing lion-headed cloaks. Some of these individuals are involved in ritual activities (dance) and accompany deity. It is guessed that they may be exorcists. Elijah's mantle is here indicative of his spirit and power that Elisha is inheriting.

22:19-22

Waters of Jericho

2:19. bad water. The history of the water problem at the Ain es-Sultan spring by Jericho can be reviewed in the comments on Joshua 6:26 and 1 Kings 16:34. An alternative

to the parasite theory suggested in those comments is that the geological shifts that could possibly have been related to the fall of Jericho brought the spring water into contact with radioactivity in the rock layers that polluted the water and caused sterility.

2:20. new bowl and salt. The use of a new container suggests one untainted by impurities, thus indicating that this is a ritual undertaking. "Flask" is preferable to NIV's "bowl," though the word is used only here in the Bible and is of uncertain meaning. Salt is used to combat the curse because curse is connected to rebellion and salt is seen as symbolically counteracting rebellion (see comment on Judg 9:45).

2:23-25. Boys and Bears

2:23. age of mockers. Two different descriptions are used for this group. The first (v. 23) uses a noun and adjective combination that elsewhere refers to children or prepubescent youths. The second (v. 24) typically refers to the younger generation, from babies (e.g., Ruth 4:16) to middle-aged men (e.g., 2 Kings 12:8; Rehoboam was over forty, and these are his peers). This is probably a group of young teens. It was Elisha's curse but God's judgment.

2:23. baldhead. If Elijah was a hairy man (see comment on 1:8), Elisha's baldness would be a stark contrast and perhaps suggest to some that he could never have the same powers as his master. This taunt would therefore be a disavowal of his prophetic office and calling and would be strikingly refuted by the immediate fulfillment of his curse. Therefore in verses 19-22 Elisha removed a curse, while in 23-24 he effectuated a curse.

2:24. bears. Syrian bears were not yet extinct in this period and inhabited the forested regions in Israel. Bears were typically found in the hilly wooded areas of the central hill country, where caves and forests provided their habitat. The forested areas would be closer to Bethel than to Jericho. Ravaging wild beasts were often seen as punishment sent from God (see comment on 17:25).

2:25. Elisha's journey. The trip from Jericho to Bethel is about twelve miles, while Bethel to Mount Carmel is nearly seventy-five miles. From Mount Carmel back to Samaria is nearly forty miles.

3:1-27 War with Moab

3:1. chronology. Joram's succession has been previously mentioned in 1:17, but there it was related to the second year of Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat. Here it is correlated to the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat. This led Thiele to identify a period of coregency between Jehoshaphat and his son. The year, according to Thiele, is 852.

3:2. sacred stone of Baal. Standing stones were often used in shrines and temples in the niche where the idol otherwise would stand. Sometimes these could have reliefs of the deity inscribed on them, but often they would be blank. Such stones have been found in many excavations in Israel, including those at Dan, Gezer and Arad.

3:4. Mesha of Moab. Mesha is known from the inscription (the Moabite Stone) that details the past control of Israel over Moab and celebrates Mesha's breaking free of that control. The four-foot-high inscription was found at the site of Dibon, just north of the Arnon river, in 1868. It commemorates the building of a sanctuary, and it mentions Omri by name and refers to his son (Ahab, or perhaps his grandson, Joram) without naming him. It makes reference to the Moabite national god Chemosh who had used Israel for punishment of his land but now had brought victory. The next verse makes reference to Mesha's successful revolt against Israelite control (during the reign of Ahaziah?), so the events of the Moabite stone precede the events of this chapter.

3:4. tribute. While one hundred thousand lambs is an immense amount of tribute, it pales in comparison to the over eight hundred thousand sheep that Assyrian king Sennacherib claims to have taken from Babylon.

3:6-8. battle strategy. The allies cannot easily come against Moab from the north because Mesha has fortified the Medeba plains north of the Arnon. As a result they march south through Jerusalem, Hebron and Arad, around the south end of the Dead Sea (through the desert of Edom) and come at Moab from an unexpected direction. The march from Samaria to Arad is about eighty-five miles. From there it may be as many as fifty more to Kir Haresheth if a fairly direct route is taken.

3:8. desert of Edom. The desert of Edom is difficult to identify, but the comment in verse 9 that they had a seven-day march suggests that it refers to the area east of Edom. Perhaps they skirted to the south of the Wadi Zered and moved around to attack Moab from the east.

3:9. lack of water. From the time they left Jerusalem, they would have been traveling through arid, inhospitable land with few water sources. Dehydration comes very quickly in this climate and can be deadly.

3:11. presence of a prophet. It was typical procedure in the ancient Near East for an army to be staffed with some religious personnel (priests or prophets) for the purpose of making oracular requests, reading omens, making appropriate sacrifices and representing God's presence with the army.

3:11. pouring water on the hands of Elijah. Elisha is here identified as the personal attendant of Elijah. Though he performed menial tasks, his mere association with the already legendary prophet offered some hope for divine aid.

3:13. prophets of father and mother. Joram's father and mother, Ahab and Jezebel, had favored the prophets of Baal and Asherah. It is interesting that Joram does not disavow those prophets or the gods they serve, but only replies that Yahweh was the one who had instigated the campaign, so he must be dealt with. This may suggest that oracles had been sought from Yahweh by this northern king and that the oracles had answered favorably concerning this military action, though, alternatively, the alliance may have taken shape only because Jehoshaphat consulted Yahweh concerning his involvement (see 2 Chron 18:4-7). This divine direction, however it came, is now interpreted by Joram as Yahweh's intention to bring about their destruction.

3:15. harpist. The translation of "minstrel" would be preferable here since the instrument is not mentioned. It is most likely a lyre of the same type that David played for Saul. Typically, especially in this early period, prophets would use various procedures in order to prepare themselves for receiving prophetic oracles. Music played an important role in inducing a trancelike state (ecstasy) that was seen as making one receptive to a divine message. In the Mari texts there is an entire class of temple personnel who were ecstatics and often provided prophetic messages. The lyre usually had two arms rising up from the sound box. The strings were attached to the crossbar at the top of the instrument. Examples of lyres have been found at Canaanite Megiddo.

3:17. provision of water. It is likely that the army was in the vicinity of the Wadi Zered. Like all wadis, Zered fills up seasonally with the runoff from the higher elevations. As a result, it can suddenly course with water even though no rain has been experienced at the lower elevations. The digging of pits in the wadi would be a means of capturing the runoff for their use lest it all surge right past them. Prophetic knowledge of rain in high elevations that would bring water into the area is also demonstrated by Deborah (see comment on Judg 4:14-16).

3:22. water appearing as blood. It is not hard to imagine the water having the appearance of blood in a sandstone water course under a rising sun on a hot, hazy day—especially if the Moabites had no reason to think there would be any water scattered in the pits throughout the wadi. But if they actually thought it was blood, where were the corpses? If they come charging in expecting plunder, it is more likely that the Moabites see what appears to be a deserted camp. They therefore take the appearance of the water as an omen that internal rivalries have resulted in the desertion of the camp as the armies fought one another. In fact a Mesopotamian omen series of popular beliefs contains the indication that if a river carries blood, internal strife will lead an army to do battle with itself, brother against brother. The imagery of blood flowing like water is used in Assyrian descriptions of battles.

3:25. treatment of Moab. The ecological destruction was intended to cripple the economy for years. The springs and fields could eventually be cleared of stones, but needing to do so would make it a long, slow process to reestablish a productive agriculture. Sometimes springs would find other, less usable outlets and fields would be so damaged as to have greatly reduced fertility. The cutting down of trees would have even more devastating effects on the ecological balance. Not only would shade and wood supply be lost, but topsoil erosion would increase and the loss of forestation's contribution to the environment would accelerate the development of wasteland conditions. Some fruit trees (such as the date palm) take twenty years of growth before they become productive. Agricultural devastation and deforestation were typical tactics of invading armies seeking to punish those they conquered and as an attempt to hasten their surrender. The Assyrian records and reliefs especially detail punitive measures that include felling trees, devastating meadowlands and destroying canal systems used for irrigation.

3:25. Kir Haresheth. This is a designation for the capital city in the southern section of Moab, otherwise known as Kir-Moab, and identified with modern Kerak, seventeen miles south of the Arnon along the King's Highway. There has been no major excavation at the site, but surface surveys show some slight remains from the Iron Age.

3:27. child sacrifice. Evidence of child sacrifice has been recovered from Phoenician sites in North Africa (Carthage) and Sardinia, and it was also practiced in Syria and Mesopota-

mia during the Assyrian period (eighth to seventh centuries B.C.). Dedicating children to a god as a form of sacrifice is found in several biblical narratives. They can be explained as a means of promoting fertility (Mic 6:6-7) or as a way of obtaining a military victory (Judg 11:30-40), as here. In no case, however, does Yahweh consider this an acceptable sacrifice (Deut 18:10). An eighth-century B.C. Phoenician inscription speaks of sacrifices made to Molech before battle by the Cilicians and their enemies.

4:1-7

Provision of Oil for Destitute Woman

4:1. company of the prophets. See comment on 2:3.

4:1. debt slavery. Because of the fragile nature of the environment in much of the ancient Near East, farmers and small landowners often found themselves in debt. Their problems could magnify if a drought and resulting poor harvests continued over more than one year, and they could be forced to sell their land, goods and eventually even their family and themselves into debt slavery. Israelite law takes this situation into account by providing a fair period of labor service to the creditor as well as a time limit on servitude for the debt slave. No one could serve more than six years, and when slaves were freed they went out debt-free. This would have been a good solution for some, but without their land to return to, many may have chosen to remain in the service of their creditor or to move to the cities to find jobs or to join the military.

4:2. oil. The oil was olive oil, used as shortening in cooking. It was usually mixed with the grain before baking but was sometimes spread over the dough.

4:8-37

Elisha and the Shunammite Woman

4:8. Shunem. Shunem was located at the eastern end of the Valley of Jezreel on the southwest slope of the hill of Moreh. The town is listed in Egyptian itineraries and shows remains from the Iron Age.

4:10. room on the roof. The typical Israelite house of the Iron Age was what is referred to as the "four-room house." On the ground floor it featured a room that stretched the whole width of the house. The front section was divided into three parallel rooms perpendicular to the back room. The center of these three was often an open courtyard area. Most of these houses are believed to have had second stories, though these are rarely preserved for archaeologists' view. The particular architectural terminology used in this verse remains obscure.

4:16-35. giving son, taking son, reviving son. In the Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat, the upright king, Danil, was given a son (Aqhat) by the gods. Falling into disfavor with the gods, his life is taken, but then apparently restored again, revived by the gods. Though none of the details of the Aqhat narrative show any similarity to the account here, the basic motif concerning the power of deity to give, take and give back is a familiar one.

4:18-20. cause of death. The death of the son is usually attributed to sunstroke, though other suggestions range from cerebral hemorrhage or cerebral malaria to meningitis. The few details given make it difficult to achieve any confidence in diagnosis.

4:23. New Moon or Sabbath. Keyed to their use of a lunar calendar, ancient Israelites marked the first day of the month, with its "new moon" phase, as a festival day (every 29-30 days). As on the Sabbath, all work was to cease (see Amos 8:5), and there were sacrifices to be made (Num 28:11-15). In the monarchy period, the king became a prominent figure in these celebrations (see Ezek 45:17). New Moon festivals were also prominent in Mesopotamia from late in the third millennium down to the Neo-Babylonian period in the middle of the first millennium B.C. This would have been a convenient opportunity for people to consult a seer to seek an oracle, which might explain the connection between Elisha and these holy days.

4:25. Mount Carmel. Since there is no information concerning where Elisha is staying in the Carmel range, it is difficult to be precise, but the distance from Shunem to the area of Carmel is about twenty miles.

4:27. taking hold of feet. Taking hold of the feet was a gesture of self-abasement and entreaty. Though this gesture occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament, in Akkadian literature a wide range of fugitives or supplicants take hold of the king's feet to demonstrate their submission or surrender and make their petitions.

4:29. tucking cloak into belt. In order to make sure that a longer garment did not interfere with more strenuous activity, the lower edge of the cloak could be turned up and tucked into the belt.

4:29. laying staff on boy's face. There is no other reference to a prophet being equipped with a staff (the rod of Moses is a different Hebrew word), and the other passages where this word is used speak only of a nondescript stick used for support—often a crutch or cane. From verse 31 it would appear that Elisha and Gehazi considered it possible that the staff would revive the boy. In Akkadian incantation texts a staff is sometimes the instrument by which exorcisms against the *asakku* demons (bringing disease and fever) are effected. Since it was the boy's head that hurt, the staff is laid across his face.

4:34. Elisha's procedure. In Mesopotamian incantation literature the touching of part to part is a means by which demons exercise power over their intended victims—it is the idiom of possession. In this belief, vitality or life force can be transferred from one body to the other by contact of each part. By imitating the procedure believed to be used by demons, the prophet is able, through the power of Yahweh (notice the prayer), to drive the demons out and restore the boy's life. This is often considered to be one of the clearest cases of sympathetic magic in the Bible.

4:35. sneezing seven times. The word translated "sneezed" occurs only here and its meaning is uncertain. From the context, other possibilities would include "convulsed" or "moaned."

4:36-41
Poison Stew

4:36. Gilgal. Uncertain location; see comment on 2:1.

4:38. pot. This is a wide-mouthed cooking pot that could be made of either pottery or metal.

4:39. ingredients of stew. The poisonous ingredient is generally considered the yellow gourds known as colocynths, popularly referred to today as apples of Sodom. They can be fatal.

4:41. adding flour. Flour or meal was believed to possess magical power able to remove evil magic. It is often used in magical incantations and rituals in the ancient Near East, but not quite in this way. Sometimes a flour paste is used to make a figurine that is then used in a magical ritual. Other times the flour is sprinkled in a circle around something that the ritual is to be performed on. As is often the case, Elisha is using procedures that would have some familiarity with the world of magic, but never quite in the common way or with the ritualistic elements.

4:42-44
Feeding the People

4:42. Baal Shalishah. Baal Shalishah is traditionally located at Bethsarisa on the plain of Sharon about fifteen miles west-northwest of Joppa. Other interpreters, however, favor a site closer to Gilgal such as Ein Samiya in the eastern part of the hill country of Ephraim about six miles northwest of Bethel.

4:42. gift for Elisha. The gift is comprised of the firstfruits that would generally be given as an offering to the sanctuary for use by the priesthood. As a man of God, Elisha apparently qualified as a recipient of these gifts.

5:1-27
Elisha and Naaman

5:1. Aram/Syria. The land of Aram, north of the land of Israel, was known by the Greeks as Syria. Current evidence suggests that the Arameans inhabited the upper Euphrates throughout the second millennium, first as villagers and pastoralists, then as a political, national coalition. During this period they are alternately allies and the most troublesome foes of Israel.

5:1. leprosy. Those studying the language have concluded that the term often translated "leprosy" is more accurately rendered "lesion," or, less technically, "scaly skin." Such patches could be swelled or weeping, as well as flaking. Similar broad terminology also exists in Akkadian, where the Babylonians likewise considered it an unclean condition and the punishment of the gods. Clinical leprosy (Hansen's disease) has not been attested in the ancient Near East prior to the time of Alexander the Great. None of the most prominent characteristics of Hansen's disease are listed in the ancient texts, and the symptoms that are listed argue against a relationship to Hansen's disease. The condition discussed in the text is not presented as contagious. Descriptions would suggest that modern diagnoses would include psoriasis, eczema, favus and seborrheic dermatitis, as well as a number of fungal-type infections. The great cultural aversion to skin diseases may be that in appearance and sometimes odor they resemble the rotting skin of the corpse and are therefore associated with death. This natural revulsion adds considerably to the victim's outcast status when combined with the quarantine that is ritually rather than medically motivated.

5:5. Naaman's gift. The gift accompanying Naaman is exorbitant—a king's ransom. Ten talents equals thirty thousand shekels, about

seven hundred fifty pounds of silver. The six thousand shekels of gold equals about one hundred fifty pounds (one gold shekel equaled fifteen silver shekels). Converted to today's buying power, it would be in the vicinity of three-quarters of a *billion* dollars. One can get an idea of the proportions by understanding that a typical wage would have been ten silver shekels per year, and one gold shekel would purchase one ton of grain.

5:6. request to foreign king for healing. A number of examples exist of kings sending to other kings for help in the area of healing sickness. Babylonian exorcists were prized by the Hittites, and Egyptian doctors were famed for their healing skills, especially in their treatment of eye diseases.

5:7. tore robes. The tearing of robes, especially royal robes, was a sign of mourning. This would have signaled a national crisis or tragedy. We are never told which king of Israel this is, though much of Elisha's interaction is with Jehoram.

5:10. trip to the Jordan. Since Elisha is probably in Samaria (see comment on verse 24), the trip to the Jordan would have been about forty miles. There is no easy, direct route from Samaria to the Jordan. He probably would have gone back the way he came: north to Dothan, through the Dothan Valley to the Valley of Jezreel, from Jezreel through the Gilboa pass to Beth Shan and then on to the Jordan.

5:10. washing in the Jordan. In the Mesopotamian *namburbi* rituals protective purification is accomplished by dipping seven times in the river facing upstream and seven times facing downstream. This ritual also includes releasing gifts for the god Ea into the river. The flowing water was believed to carry the impurities to the netherworld. Again, Elisha's chosen procedures are ones that would ring a note of familiarity to those who lived in this world of magical rituals. On the medical level there are a number of locations in Israel (e.g., near Tiberius) that boast of hot springs capable of restoring healthy skin from any number of conditions. Nevertheless, the text refers specifically to the Jordan River, which could not be confused with a mineral spring.

5:11. expected procedure. Naaman obviously had expected different methods to be used. The elevation of the hand here ("elevation" preferred rather than "waving") often accompanied invocations or incantations. Praying with raised hand is referred to in the Aramaic Zakkur inscription and is depicted in numerous reliefs (right hand, palm inward, elbow bent). There is a series of Akkadian incantations called *shuilla* (raising of the hand). The extant copies date to about this period. These compositions include invocation and praise of deity leading up to a prayer seeking appeasement, protection and the removal of evil. It would have been unusual in the ancient worldview for rituals to be performed without the presence of the specialist reciting incantations, accompanied by appropriate gestures, and orchestrating the procedures. The absence of the specialist leads Naaman to think that any body of water could serve the purpose of cleansing. He expected Elisha, the practitioner, to make the difference, while Elisha is careful to remove himself from such a role.

5:12. Abana and Pharpar. The variant reading Amana is probably to be preferred in light of Mount Amana in the Anti-Lebanon range and the Amana River (today known as the Barada) that flows into the plain of Damascus from its flanks. The Pharpar is less certain, though it may be the river el-Awaj, which flows down from the flanks of Mount Hermon to the marshes southeast of Damascus.

5:17. carrying earth back. Naaman makes it clear that his reason for carrying the dirt has to do with sacrifices. This suggests that he intends to build an altar of the earth that he has brought back with him (the word for "earth" here is the same that is commanded for use in altar construction in Ex 20:24; see comment there for further information).

5:18. temple of Rimmon. Rimmon (=Ramman, "thunderer") is believed to be a title of the storm god, Hadad, the head of the Aramean pantheon. Though this association is confidently made, there has been no occurrence of this title outside the Bible (but see Hadad Rimmon in Zech 12:11). The limited excavations in Damascus have not unearthed the temple referred to here, but a basalt orthostat (an engraved standing stone) from this period found incorporated into the substructure of the Umayyad mosque suggests that the mosque was built over the site of this temple.

5:22. company of the prophets. See comment on 2:3.

5:22-23. Gehazi's request. Considering what Naaman had been prepared to offer, Gehazi's request is extremely modest, yet it is still a considerable sum. A talent of silver is three hundred years of wages (for someone making thirty to thirty-five thousand a year, that would be like getting about ten million dollars), and Naaman doubles it. Gehazi is trying to set himself up for life.

5:24. the hill. The word NIV translates "hill" is a technical term for the acropolis area usually

connected to a royal city. This suggests that Elisha is currently living in Samaria.

5:26. rebuke to Gehazi. Whether the money was from Naaman's personal wealth or from the treasury of the Aramean king, Gehazi could have reasoned that he was simply taking back what had been plundered from Israel. But Gehazi does not have charity or replenishment of the national coffers in mind. Elisha's reference to olive groves, vineyards, livestock and servants all reflects what Gehazi could purchase for himself with the money. His newfound wealth would have bought him a life of luxury and leisure. Thus Gehazi was reducing the high prophetic calling to a mercenary vocation that exploited divine power for personal gain.

5:27. transfer of disease. In the ancient world, witches and sorcerers were believed to be able to impose disease through hexes and curses. Rituals to remove various ills (the *namburbu* rituals for instance) usually involved transferring the evil to an object of some sort and then disposing of the object. One would have thought that in the ritual washing, Naaman's disease would have been transferred to the water and carried away. Naaman, however, has also been in contact with the gifts he brought, and here they are treated as a means of transfer of the evil from Naaman to Gehazi. This resembles what we would call contagion (though no medical contagion connected to the infections of skin diseases could have been contracted through natural means so quickly).

5:27. Gehazi's doom. See the comment on leprosy at 5:1. This is not a death sentence, for this condition is not life threatening or even health threatening. It could be categorized as a social disease in that its main consequence is that the victim is excluded from society as an undesirable outcast. Comparison to "snow" most likely concerns the flakiness rather than the color ("white" is added in the NIV).

6:1-7
Recovery of the Axhead

6:1. company of the prophets. See comment on 2:3.

6:2. poles (beams) for houses. Their problem is that the place where they assemble to be instructed by Elisha is too small, so they determine to work together to build a more adequate facility. The Jordan valley, being heavily forested, would be the natural place to find the necessary wood (acacia, tamarisk and willow would be the most likely).

6:5. iron axhead. Though this period is already well into the Iron Age and iron is becoming more widely available as technology and smelting procedures are being improved, implements of iron remain expensive and valuable.

6:6. "floating" axhead. One category of magic involved rites of contact and transference. Through contact with magically endowed objects, properties or characteristics were believed to be transferred from one object to another. The biblical text does not mention what type of wood Elisha cut, but in Mesopotamian practice tamarisk wood was often used in such rituals. Though some may be reluctant to see God's prophet making such extensive use of what appear to be magical practices, the fact remains that these would have appeared as magical to the ancient observer; see comments on 4:34; 4:41; and 5:11.

6:8-23
Blinded Arameans Captured by Elisha

6:9-11. prophets giving military information. In the examples of prophetic activity in the ancient Near East, military advice is commonly given by prophets to kings. The information given by Elisha is far more specific than the examples known from other literature.

6:13. Dothan. Located at Tell Dothan, this is an imposing site covering about twenty-five acres. It is ten miles north of Samaria on the main route used by merchants and herdsmen going north to the Jezreel Valley. The area around the city (the Dothan Valley) provided choice pasture land, so it developed into a major city site as early as the Early Bronze Age (3200-2400 B.C.) and would have served as a natural landmark for travelers. Though it is not mentioned in extrabiblical material, archaeology of the site has confirmed a major settlement on the site for Iron Age II.

6:17. horses and chariots of fire. The text does not say the horses and chariots fill the mountains (plural), but the mount (singular) and that they surround Elisha. This suggests that the "mount" is the tell on which the city of Dothan is located (some two hundred feet above the surrounding plain). They represent a protective bodyguard for the prophet. Yahweh is often portrayed as the "Lord of Hosts"—the com-mander of the heavenly armies. One contingent of his chariotry is here to engage in battle. For more on the horses and chariot of fire see comment on 2:11-13. For information about Yahweh as a divine warrior see comment on 1 Samuel 4:3-7.

6:18. blindness. The word for blindness here is used elsewhere only for those gathered out-

side Lot's house in the town of Sodom (Gen 19). It is a term related to an Akkadian word for day-blindness and also serves in Hebrew (as in Aramaic) to refer to night-blindness (pertinent to Gen 19). Both of these conditions are seen in Akka-dian texts as requiring magical remedies. Day-blindness (hemeralopia) and night-blindness (nyctalopia) have vitamin A deficiency as their principal cause, and vitamin B deficiency may contribute to the sense of confusion evident in both passages. It is therefore of interest that liver (rich in vitamin A) figures prominently in the magical procedures used in Mesopotamia to correct the condition. In an interesting section of the Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta the Assyrian king reports how the gods took his side in the battle. Shamash (the sun god and the god of justice) is said to have blinded the eyes of the enemy.

6:19. trip from Dothan to Samaria. The ten-mile trip would have taken some time when trying to lead a debilitated army of confused men who cannot see very well.

6:21. "father" as title. The title "father" is used to designate the leader of a group in both Hebrew and Akkadian. Likewise a "son" is therefore a member of that group. The king's use of the title indicates his recognition of Elisha's status and reflects his respect for the man of God.

6:22-23. treatment of prisoners. "Captives of the bow" is an expression found in Akkadian texts to describe persons who have been taken as part of the plunder. They are then at the disposal of the victor, who can employ them in slave labor, sell them or set them free. It is Elisha's intention to make use of this opportunity to create friendly relations with the Arameans. The feast laid before them is a banquet or even a ceremonial meal usually accompanying a special occasion or establishing a treaty agreement.

6:24—7:20
Siege of Samaria

6:24. Ben-Hadad. Aramean history at this time is still in need of much clarification, with at least part of the problem caused by several rulers with the name of Ben-Hadad (meaning "son of [the god] Hadad"). The issue is further complicated by the fact that Shalmaneser III's inscriptions name the ruler of this time Hadadezer (see comment on 2 Sam 8:3). The first Ben-Hadad has been referred to in 1 Kings 15. He ruled during the first part of the ninth century, though no precise dating is possible. In 2 Kings 8 the king murdered by Hazael (about 842) is named Ben-Hadad, and Hazael is later succeeded by his son, also named Ben-Hadad (2 Kings 13:24). The name Bir-Hadad occurs in an inscription dedicated to the god Melqart, but again it is unclear which Ben-Hadad this refers to. It has been suggested that the sequence may be Ben-Hadad I (1 Kings 15), Ben-Hadad II (1 Kings 20), Hadadezer (Shalmaneser Inscription, considered by some a variant name of Ben-Hadad), Ben-Hadad III (Melqart inscription, 2 Kings 8), Hazael, Ben-Hadad IV (2 Kings 13). There is no other material from the ancient Near East to help unravel this at this time. If this passage is in its proper chronological place, Ben-Hadad III would be the necessary identification. If the arrangement is viewed as more thematic than chronological, the besieging king may be the successor of Hazael.

6:25. siege leading to famine. The whole idea of siege is to drive the population to the extremities of hunger and thirst so that they capitulate without a fight. Famine in this case is not an environmental condition, but the results of the siege when food supplies have been exhausted.

6:25. prices of undesirable foods. The "donkey's head" would have been one of the least desirable things imaginable to eat for food, yet here it is selling for exorbitant prices. Recall that the standard wage was only about one shekel per month. The second item, literally "dove's dung" (NIV note), may really be pigeon manure, which has been known to be used for food in dire times, or it could refer to pods from a thorny variety of acacia, as it does occasionally in Akkadian. Whether it was being used for food or fuel, even a few ounces of it cost many months pay. In the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin (who ruled in Mesopotamia toward the end of the third millennium), six and a half quarts of barley (less than a week's worth of meals) was said to be worth fifty shekels of silver (five years pay) during time of siege.

6:29. cannibalism. Cannibalism is a standard element of curses in Assyrian treaties of the seventh century. It was the last resort in times of impending starvation. This level of desperation could occur in times of severe famine (as illustrated in the Atrahasis Epic) or could be the result of siege (as during Ashurbanipal's siege of Babylon, about 650 B.C.) when the food supply had become depleted, as mentioned in this text and anticipated in the treaty texts. Siege warfare was common in the ancient world, so this may not have been as rare an occasion as might be presumed.

6:32. elders. The elders represent the influen-

tial families of a town or tribe. They are sitting with Elisha as one likely to receive an oracle concerning a suggested course of action or a proclamation that deliverance is near. Meanwhile the unidentified king has lost patience with what has apparently been a long wait for the oracular information (v. 33) and has decided that the siege is punishment from Yahweh. In Israel the distinction was not always sharply drawn between the prophet as *proclaimer* and the prophet as *instigator.* This confusion occurs because the widespread belief in the ancient world still persisted in Israel that the utterance of words by skilled individuals had the power to coerce the gods to act accordingly. The Israelite king has decided that Elisha must have had some role in inducing Yahweh to take this action against Samaria.

7:1. change in prices. A seah is about seven and a half quarts and would be enough to make about a week's worth of meals for a single adult, so the cost is still inflated (but see comment on 6:25 to see how much better it is). Information on prices is provided in Babylonian literature. Whereas in normal circumstances a shekel would buy about a hundred quarts of barley, here it buys only fifteen. During Ashurbanipal's siege of Babylon, barley was going for ten quarts for a shekel. Basic subsistence level for a family of four would be about four quarts of barley per day.

7:2. officer. The term used here is thought to originally have described the third man in a chariot crew who was responsible for holding the shield to protect the driver and the archer. As time goes on it is used outside of chariotry contexts and probably refers to an armor-bearer or, in an administrative role, the king's adjutant.

7:2. floodgates of heaven. The text uses the poetic phrase "windows of heaven" to describe the openings through which the rain came down. This is not scientific language but reflects the perspective of the observer, much as we would speak of the sun setting. The only other occurrence of such a term in ancient Near Eastern literature is in the Canaanite myth of Baal building his house, where the "window" of his house is described as a rift in the clouds. But even there it is not associated with rain. The officer is speaking generally of God's provision, because the issue under discussion is food, not water.

7:3. leprosy. For information on the skin conditions translated here as "leprosy" see the comment on 5:1. These outcasts have even fewer resources at their disposal than the people of the city.

7:6. Hittite and Egyptian armies. The Hittites had left their Anatolian homeland several centuries earlier and had resettled in regions north of Aram, centered in the city-states of Carchemish and Karatepe. It is likely that even Hamath would still be considered a Hittite state at this time. There was already a history of warfare between these Hittite states and the Arameans. Egypt is more difficult here, for there is little evidence to suggest Egypt was active or interested in the Levant during this period. Additionally, the reference to kings (plural) of Egypt (obscured by the NIV) would be odd. Some have suggested that rather than Egypt (Hebrew: *mṣrym)* the text refers to Musri *(mṣry),* though there has been no consensus on where that might be located. The party referred to here should be understood as the same Musri appearing in the inscriptions of Shalmaneser III from this period. Musri is included among the allies from the "Land of Hatti" that fought against Shalmaneser III at Qarqar in 853 and is listed right after Jehu of Israel in the tribute list on the Black Stela of Shalmaneser III from 841. If this Musri is Egypt, as many suppose, then it demonstrates that Egypt was active in the region. If it is a location in north Syria, its identity remains unknown. Some favor this option because it is also named as a neighbor of Arpad (north of Aleppo in North Syria) in the Aramaic Sefire treaty of the eighth century, though others see this Musri as the king's name rather than a place name.

7:10. gatekeepers. The gates of an enclosed city were always locked at night, and, of course, they have been barred during the length of the siege.

7:15. Aramean retreat. The leaders of Samaria suspect a ruse well known in the ancient world—an ambush set by appearing to have given up and gone home. Perhaps the most well-known application of this ruse was its use by the Greeks against Troy in the war several centuries earlier recorded in the *Iliad.* The fleeing Arameans were trailed as far as the Jordan, some forty miles away.

8:1-6
The Shunammite Woman's Land

8:2. land of the Philistines. Though Samaria typically experiences slightly more rainfall per year than the southern coastal plain (land of the Philistines), the alluvial flood plain of the coast is less dependent on the rainfall and would be the logical area to try to weather a famine.

8:3-6. confiscation of land. Land that had been deserted typically reverted to crown

property until a claim was made. The fact that the woman is making the claim suggests that her husband had died, in which case she would be able to claim the land on behalf of her son, who would be the rightful heir to the property.

8:6. income from land. Generally a person would not expect to receive back income from the land for the period of absence. That would be considered the reimbursement to those who had kept the land up and worked it.

8:7-15
Hazael Becomes King of Aram

8:7. Damascus. A trip from Samaria to Damascus was about 125 miles and would have taken a little over a week on foot. Damascus is the capital of Aram and the royal seat. For more information on the site see comment on 2 Samuel 8:5.

8:7. Ben-Hadad. For the confusion concerning the identification of any given Ben-Hadad see the comment on 6:24. Since this is the time of Hazael's accession to the throne, the year is 842 B.C. Shalmaneser indicates that Hazael murdered Hadadezer.

8:8. Hazael. Hazael is referred to in the records of his contemporary, Shalmaneser III of Assyria, where he is identified as a usurper. He reigned from 842 to about 800 B.C. He is also named on a couple of fragmentary Aramaic and Assyrian inscriptions. When the western coalition that had withstood Shalmaneser III at Qarqar fell apart during the 840s, Hazael remained anti-Assyrian and held out for a number of years both in pitched battle and under an unsuccessful siege of Damascus (though he paid heavy tribute). From 836 on Shalmaneser was busy elsewhere (mostly in Urartu) and then was succeeded by weak rulers, leaving Hazael free to focus his attention on Israel for most of his reign. For information concerning his military actions against Israel see comment on 10:32.

8:8. consulting Yahweh. Even though the Arameans did not worship Yahweh, they would not have denied his existence or power. The polytheism of the ancient world was an open-ended system in which divine power was respected no matter what the source. Likewise prophets were held in high esteem and a chance to consult one in time of sickness was not to be missed. Though it is possible that the religious personnel connected to the worship of Baal might have been offended (see comment on 1:2), people would often take that risk to get oracular information from the divine realm.

8:9. gift. As in the case of Naaman, the gift offered is exorbitant. In the ancient world gifts to deity were often attempts to manipulate and obligate, and this must be viewed in the same way. Since prophets were believed to have influence over the gods they represented, this was the king's way of procuring a favorable oracle. He was trying to buy not a falsified report but the prophet's words of power that would carry divine power in their train.

8:12. treatment of conquered cities. The tactics listed here are all standard procedure for eliminating the possibility of future rebellion. The burning of fortified cities would destroy any hope that one might be used for a defensible rallying point for later revolution. The execution of men, children and even unborn babies decimates any present or future army. Ninth-century Assyrian conquest accounts speak of burning the young boys and girls. The practice of ripping open pregnant women is mentioned very rarely. It is a practice attributed to Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (about 1100) in a hymn praising his conquests. It is also referred to in passing in a Neo-Babylonian lament.

8:13. dog. Dogs were considered general pests, making this comparison a common one in statements of humility or self-depreciation. Similar use is found in the Lachish letters and the Amarna correspondence.

8:16-24
Jehoram of Judah

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 21.

8:25-29
Ahaziah of Judah

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 22.

9:1-29
Jehu's Coup

9:1. anointing of kings. Anointing a king was common practice in some parts of the ancient Near East. Among the Egyptians and Hittites, anointing was believed to protect a person from the power of netherworld deities. Much of the evidence comes from Hittite sources describing enthronement ceremonies. There is no evidence of kings being anointed in Mesopotamia. In Egypt the pharaoh was not anointed, but he anointed his officials and his vassals. His anointing of them established

their subordinate relationship to him and indicated his protection of them. In the Amarna texts there is reference to a king of Nuhasse (in modern Syria) being anointed by the pharaoh. This model would fit the idea of Jehu's anointing as an indication that he would have the support of the prophets and, presumably, Yahweh. In 2 Samuel 2:4, when the people anoint David, some sort of contractual agreement between David and the people he will govern is suggested. In Nuzi, individuals entering a business agreement anoint one another with oil, and in Egypt, oil anointment is used in wedding ceremonies. In Israelite practice, anointing was a sign of election and often closely related to endowment by the Spirit. Additionally, throughout the ancient world anointing symbolized an advance of a person's legal status. Both concepts of protection and change of status may correlate to the king's anointing, for it would offer him protection on the throne and identify him with the divine realm.

9:1. Ramoth Gilead. The site of Ramoth Gilead has not been identified with certainty, but most accept Tell Ramith for its size, location and Iron Age pottery found in surveys. It has yet to be excavated. If this is the correct identification, it is located on the King's Highway at the juncture where the road south from Damascus would turn west to cross the Jordan near Beth Shan and enter the Jezreel Valley to connect with the main route of the Trunk Road (see sidebar on Trade Routes in Genesis 38).

9:6-10. prophets and inspired coups. In the southern kingdom of Judah, succession to the throne was permanently established by the covenant with the Davidic line. The northern kingdom, Israel, had come into being by means of a prophetic pronouncement (1 Kings 11:29-39), but there was no guarantee of dynastic succession. Each of the major dynasties (Jeroboam, Baasha, Omri, Jehu) rose and fell in accordance with prophetic pronouncement. Sometimes the designated king was content to wait for the proper time (Jeroboam), while in other cases, such as this one, the prophetic proclamation initiated a coup. In the ancient Near East priests often play significant political roles, but no prophets from the ancient Near East are known to have played the same role as these Israelite kingmakers. Nonetheless, throughout the ancient world it was believed that prophets not only proclaimed the message of deity but in the process unleashed the divine action. In Assyrian king Esarhaddon's instructions to his vassals, he requires that they report any improper or negative statements that may be made by anyone, and he specifically names prophets, ecstatics and dream interpreters. It is no wonder, then, that a prophet negatively disposed toward a king must somehow be controlled lest he bring about all sorts of havoc. One can perhaps understand why a king would be inclined to imprison such a prophet, whose very words might incite insurrection or impose doom.

9:14. battle at Ramoth Gilead. The sequence of events is very complex here, because this is 841, the same year that Shalmaneser III of Assyria invaded Aram and engaged in a series of military encounters with Hazael. According to Shalmaneser's records, Hazael met him in pitched battle at Mount Hermon and was defeated. Hazael then safely retreated to Damascus, which was unsuccessfully besieged. Upon failing to overthrow Damascus, Shalmaneser vented his fury on the area of Hauran, just east of Ramoth Gilead, from where he marched to Mount Carmel and received tribute from Jehu. The march from Hauran to Carmel must have gone through the Jezreel Valley. If these events are all to fit together, one would have to suppose that Aram had moved against Ramoth Gilead in the early spring and was met by the combined forces of Judah and Israel. Shalmaneser typically left for his campaigns about May first, and it is about 550 miles from Assyria to Damascus, so he would not be arriving until maybe mid-June. As soon as Hazael received word that Shalmaneser was coming, he rushed north and met the Assyrian army at Mount Hermon. Jehu, still at Ramoth Gilead, likewise got the news of the Assyrian advance and was faced with the question of what Israel's position would be. Gathering the support of the pro-Assyrian party and strengthened by the prophetic anointing, he proceeded with the coup. During the period that Shalmaneser was failing in his siege of Damascus and laying waste the area of Hauran, Jehu was exterminating the house of Ahab and the followers of Baal. Once he established his control, he willingly gave Shalmaneser access across Jezreel and paid tribute at Carmel.

9:14-16. Trip from Ramoth Gilead to Jezreel. It is about forty-five miles from Ramoth Gilead to Jezreel. Jezreel is a fifteen-acre site situated at the southeastern entrance to the Jezreel Valley between the Hill of Moreh and Mount Gilboa. It was here that Ahab had built a winter capital. Excavations have unearthed a large royal enclosure from this time period occupying a large portion of the mound (see comment on 9:30).

9:17-20. sending messengers to approaching

rider. The rapid approach of a small chariot contingent only allows for a few possibilities, and none of them are good. They are either in flight from the enemy or are coming with evil intent. The rider sent out could serve either as a messenger to bring word back to the king or as a negotiator. What is unusual is that in such an uncertain situation the kings would ride out (apparently with no bodyguard) to meet Jehu (v. 21) and thus expose themselves to danger.

9:21. Naboth. For the background of the events concerning Naboth see comments on 1 Kings 21.

9:22. idolatry and witchcraft. This accusation is given as a cause for deposing a queen mother as early as the mid-second millennium, when the Hittite king Murshili II opposed his late father's Babylonian wife on the claim that she practiced sorcery. It should be remembered that both of these kings are related to Jezebel in that she is the mother of Jehoram and the grandmother of Ahaziah.

9:27. Beth Haggan-Gur/Ibleam-Megiddo. Ahaziah takes the road south from Jezreel. This is the direction of home (Judah) but is also the direction toward the northern capital city, Samaria, where he could expect to find protection. The road south skirts the eastern edge of the Jezreel Valley along the foot of the Gilboa mountains. Beth Haggan is where the road climbs out of the valley to the plain of Dothan and then into the hills of Samaria. Ibleam is at the top of the rise at the northern end of the plain. It is nearly ten miles from Jezreel. In full flight in a chariot this distance could have been covered in less than half an hour. But he is still fifteen miles from Samaria. When the decision is made to head for Megiddo, he must turn to the northwest, but it is only twelve miles away and could likewise offer sanctuary to the wounded king. It is also an easier road on level ground as it travels along the southwestern edge of the Valley of Jezreel. Beth Haggan is modern Jenin and is referred to in the Egyptian execration texts and called Gina in the Amarna texts. There is a seven-acre tell there with Iron Age pottery. Ibleam is named in Thutmose III's annals and is identified with Khirbet Belameh. Neither of these sites has been excavated.

9:30—10:17
Extermination of Ahab's Family

9:30. Jezebel's actions. In the ancient world powdered kohl (either galena [lead sulfide] or stibnite [antimony trisulfide]) mixed with oil or water was used as makeup to outline the eye and accentuate its almond shape. Hairdressing may have included scenting, coloring or plaiting. Jezebel's purpose was to be seen as attractive in every way: physically, socially and politically. There is a familiar motif of a woman looking out the window that is represented beautifully in ivory carvings found at Nimrud, Samaria and Arslan Tash (in which she is adorned with an Egyptian wig). In literature the woman is gazing into the distance awaiting news of a husband or son who has gone off to war (see comment on Judg 5:28). In contrast, the ivories are often thought to represent a prostitute, perhaps connected to the worship of Astarte. This could then be a subtle reminder of Astarte and the foreign worship sponsored by Jezebel (note the accusation Jehu made against her in v. 22).

9:30. Jezreel palace. The palace at Jezreel was excavated in the early 1990s. The rectangular enclosure covers about eleven acres and is surrounded by a casemate wall with towers at the corners. It featured a six-chambered gate, a moat and earthen ramparts. The moat was cut from rock and averaged thirty feet wide and at points was nearly twenty feet deep. The moat used in Palestine was a dry moat (called a fosse), probably intended to prevent tunneling under the walls of the city. Jezreel was about twenty-three miles from Samaria.

9:31. calling Jehu "Zimri." The dynasty of Omri, of which Ahab and Jezebel were a part, had seized power from the usurper Zimri (see 1 Kings 16). By alluding to this incident, she may be warning Jehu that his coup will not necessarily lead to a secure hold on the throne but that he in turn is likely to be overthrown. Her question, "Is it peace?" not only suggests negotiation but also queries whether he really believes his destruction of the house of Ahab will bring peace for the country or for him. The alternative would be to ally himself with her and thus take advantage of some continuity. If her makeup has been applied to make her alluring, she may be suggesting that he take over the harem of the former king and thereby establish his legitimacy (for this practice see comment on 2 Sam 3:7). The loss of the harem to a claimant to the throne is described in the annals of Sennacherib as a sign of being deposed.

9:32. eunuchs. Eunuchs were those officers entrusted with the care and supervision of the royal harem. Having been castrated, they posed no threat to the women of the harem and could not engender children by the harem women who might be mistaken for royal heirs. It should be noted that the Hebrew word used here may not be limited to eunuchs—some believe it extends more broadly

to administrative officials. It is logical in this context, however, to think of the queen being accompanied by keepers of the harem.

9:36. devoured by dogs. Assyrian practices (especially Ashurbanipal) include leaving corpses in the street for dogs to devour (as well as pigs, jackals and birds). On one occasion the corpses were chopped up and fed to dogs. Treaty curses also included invoking this doom on rebels. The intention of this atrocity was typically to eliminate any possibility of proper burial and thus to doom the individual's spirit to wander restlessly rather than enjoy a peaceful afterlife. Perhaps most interesting is the Akkadian text in the Maqlu collection of incantations that places a curse on a sorceress (see v. 22) that dogs would tear her to pieces. For more information see comment on 1 Kings 16:4.

10:1. Jezreel. See comment on 9:14-16.

10:6. wiping out predecessor's line. Leaving any living relatives of a king who had been forcibly deposed from the throne by assassination was an invitation to civil war. The relatives would be honor-bound to avenge the death of the previous king, and they would be certain to find those who would support their bid to regain the throne. Such annihilation of ruling families was common practice both in Israel and in the ancient Near East at large.

10:8. heads in baskets. The Assyrians made a practice of piling up the heads of those that had been killed in battle or punished for their rebellion. It was common in this period for such piles to be placed just outside the city gates as a warning to the inhabitants that rebellion was treated harshly.

10:11. group executed. The term translated "close friend" here is a technical term used both in Akkadian and Ugaritic sources describing those who enjoy the sponsorship of the court. They are royal wards who enjoy court privileges and were probably non-Israelite. Additionally Ahab's family, administration and religious personnel were executed.

10:12. Beth Eked of the Shepherds. This location must be somewhere along the nearly thirty-mile route between Jezreel and Samaria, but it has not been identified with any confidence. If it refers to a place where shepherds congregated or gathered their sheep, somewhere around the plain of Dothan would be logical.

10:12-14. treatment of Ahaziah's relatives. Since Jehoram of Israel was the uncle of Ahaziah of Judah, all of these relatives of Ahaziah are at least indirectly associated with the bloodline of the house of Ahab. That is sufficient to bring a death sentence on their heads. The well here is a cistern that would have been very natural in an area where shepherds gathered. It was just such a cistern in which Joseph's brothers imprisoned him around this same area of Dothan.

10:15. alliance with Jehonadab. Jehonadab is the leader of the Rechabites, a rather obscure clan in Israel that apparently lived an ascetic lifestyle and was known for its commitment to a seminomadic existence (some think because of their vocation as itinerant craftsmen) and for its religious conservatism (see the reference to them in Jer 35 some two centuries later).

10:18-27
Extermination of the Cult of Baal

10:19. the great Baal (enthronement) sacrifice. Part of the rhetoric that accompanied the promises of new kings in the ancient world was that they would be more devoted to the national or local gods than their predecessors. This often included commitments to repair, restore, enlarge or embellish the sanctuary. This strategy would gain the support of the priesthood and the pious populace, and, hopefully, bring divine approval of the new reign as well. It was politically correct for the king to take his place as royal patron and foremost of the supporters of the local deity. It is possible that Jehu is calling for an enthronement celebration in which he will take the throne as the vassal of Baal, whose enthronement as king of the gods would likewise be recognized. To be absent from such an event could easily be considered treason.

10:21. temple of Baal in Samaria. Excavations in Samaria have not yet located any remains from Ahab's temple of Baal. It has been suggested that the temple contributed to the concept being promoted by Ahab and Jezebel that the city was the sacred precinct of Baal. This would mean it functioned as an independent political unit, just as Zion often did in the south. Therefore, even after Jehu had been made king of Israel and Ahab's line had been wiped out, control of Samaria, especially the temple precinct, had to be approached separately.

10:22. robes from the keeper of the wardrobe. These robes would have been cultic vestments for the worship of Baal (see Zeph 1:8). It is additionally likely that the occasion and the use of the sacred robes would have prohibited any weapons from being worn—a distinct advantage for Jehu's men.

10:26. sacred stone. Standing stones often occupied the place of the sacred niche in Canaanite sanctuaries in place of an image. These stones were often plain but occasionally

had a figure of the deity carved in relief on the face of the stone.

10:27. use as latrine. It was the practice to rebuild temples on the sites where they had traditionally been because it was believed that the god had revealed the location and it was holy ground. By making it into a latrine area (or perhaps a garbage dump), Jehu was insuring that it would never be the site of a temple again. This greatly reduced any possible resurgence of the official Baal cult in Samaria.

10:28-36
Jehu of Israel

10:32. Hazael's actions against Israel. No military details are given here, but the text describes the loss of the entire Transjordan region to Hazael. After 838 the Assyrians were absent from the west for several decades, and this allowed the Arameans to begin to build their own little empire. This continued during the reign of Jehu's successor, Jehoahaz (see comments on 2 Kings 12—13).

10:34. Jehu in Assyrian records. The fact that Jehu quickly paid tribute to Shalmaneser III upon his accession to the throne of Israel suggests that he probably enjoyed the support not only of the religiously conservative Yahwist party but also of the pro-Assyrian faction of the government (see comment on 9:14). This party saw the breakdown of the western coalition as leading inevitably to defeat by the Assyrians and was tired of the perpetual warfare. Jehu is portrayed in the uncomplimentary posture of prostration on the Black Stela of Shalmaneser that reports the tribute he brought to the Assyrian king in 841. His tribute consisted of items of silver and gold and some javelins.

11:1-21
Athaliah

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 22—23.

12:1-21
Joash of Judah

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 24.

13:1-9
Jehoahaz of Israel

13:1. chronology. According to Thiele, Jehoahaz of Israel came to the throne in 814 B.C. in the twenty-third year of Joash of Judah. He reigned until 798 B.C. This was a period when the Assyrians had focused their attention elsewhere. As a result the Arameans under Hazael were trying to enlarge their control of the area.

13:3. Hazael's control of Israel. Hazael was king of Aram-Damascus around 842-800. He is also known from an ivory fragment from Arslan Tash in Syria and from a cylinder seal found at the Assyrian city of Assur. The Assyrians claimed to have taken booty from Hazael. The Aramean king fought with the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III in 841 and was defeated, although the Assyrians were unsuccessful in taking Hazael's leading city of Damascus. The Assyrian threat diminished after 836, and Hazael was able to concentrate on attacking Israel and Philistia.

13:5. deliverer from Aram. The "deliverer" (coming from the same Hebrew root as Messiah) in this case is not mentioned by name. The phrase is reminiscent of the deliverers in the period of the judges. It may have been a neighboring ruler, such as Zakur of Hamath or Adad-Nirari III of Assyria, both of whom were powerful at this time. Even Joash of Judah has been suggested as a possibility.

13:6. Asherah pole. One common feature of Canaanite worship and of syncretistic Israelite worship on "high places" and in city shrines is the erection of Asherah poles. There is some uncertainty about whether these were simply wooden poles, erected to symbolize trees and perhaps containing a carved image of the fertility goddess, or whether they were part of a sacred grove. The reference in 17:10, which refers to Asherah poles beside "every spreading tree," seems to indicate that these were poles erected for cultic purposes rather than planted trees. As the consort of El, Asherah was a popular goddess whose worship is mentioned in Ugaritic texts (1600-1200 B.C.). The Asherah cult continued to be prominent in Phoenicia in the first millennium B.C., when it presumably was introduced into Israel during the dynasty of Omri and Ahab. Her prominent appearance in the biblical narrative indicates that her cult was a major rival to Yahweh worship. For more information see the comments on Exodus 34:13 and Judges 6:25.

13:10-25
Jehoash of Israel

13:10. chronology. By Thiele's reckoning, Jehoash began his reign in 798 B.C. (the thirty-seventh year of Joash of Israel) and ruled for sixteen years (until 782). During this period the Assyrians became more active, and

their influence in the west occupied the attention of the Arameans (see comment on 13:22-25). Joash is mentioned by name in the inscriptions of the Assyrian king Adad-Nirari III (810-783).

13:14. chariots and horsemen of Israel. This phrase, also found in 2 Kings 2:12, appears to have been a popular slogan during the period of the Aramean wars. Elisha was active in the military affairs of Israel and had gained a reputation for mediating Yahweh's participation in Israel's wars. In the mythology of the period there were deities who served as the charioteers to bring the divine warrior into battle (see comment on 2:11). This title may have recognized Elisha's role as a similar one—when he came, Yahweh came with him.

13:15-19. arrow symbolism. Although the acts here performed by Elisha resembled non-Israelite magical phenomena, and no explicit reference to the God of Israel is mentioned, there is an undercurrent of divine will. This particular ritual, apparently in imitation of belomantic (divination by means of arrows) practices, is not attested in Mesopotamian sources, although bows and arrows were often used in their magic rituals.

13:22-25. encounters with Aram. Here the biblical text concurs with Assyrian sources. During the reign of the Assyrian king Shamshi-Adad IV (824-811 B.C.) the Assyrians were concerned with campaigning in Babylonia to the exclusion of the west. Thus the Aramean states were able to thrive. By the reign of Adad-Nirari III (811-783) the Assyrians shifted their emphasis to the west once again. A number of commemorative inscriptions of Adad-Nirari describe the defeat of Damascus and Arpad (other powerful Aramean states) and the collecting of tribute. Jehoash is also recorded as having given tribute to the Assyrians in a stele from Tell al-Rimah. Thus Damascus was weakened by Assyria enough to allow for the deliverance of Israel, which in turn became a client state of Assyria.

14:1-22
Amaziah of Judah

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 25.

14:23-29
Jeroboam II of Israel

14:23. chronology. Jeroboam II became king in 782 by Thiele's chronology. He may have been coregent with his father Jehoash for eleven years previous to this (793), which was counted as part of his reign. During this time Israel was free of threat from both Aram and Assyria, allowing prosperity and expansion in a time of relative security.

14:25. restoration of borders. Jeroboam's expansion restored Israel to the size it had been during the reign of Solomon. Lebo-Hamath (modern Lebweh [Ematu in the Ebla texts; Lab'u of Assyrian sources]) on one of the sources of the Orontes is in the northern Baqa' of Lebanon, forty-five miles north of Damascus. This was the southern border of the land of Hamath and therefore the northern border of Canaan, and designates the northern corner of the empire. The name appears in city lists of the Egyptian king Thutmose III (fifteenth century B.C.) and the annals of Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria (eighth century B.C.). The Sea of Arabah (or Wadi Arabah, Amos 6:14), now the Dead Sea, was the southern border of the kingdom.

14:25. Gath Hepher. Gath Hepher is only mentioned here as the home of Jonah. It has been identified with el-Meshed, a site a few miles northeast of Nazareth.

14:27. preclassical prophecy. In the early periods of the monarchy the prophets primarily addressed the king and his court, much as their ancient Near Eastern counterparts did. These prophets have been termed "preclassical." Beginning in the eighth century, however, the prophets increasingly turned their attention to the people and became the social-spiritual commentators that we most readily identify with the prophetic institution; these are the classical prophets and the writing prophets. Their role was not to predict as much as it was to advise of God's policies and plans. In this context, Jonah is in the role of the preclassical prophet, while in the book of Jonah, his role is more like the classical prophet developing at this time. For more information about prophecy in the ancient Near East see comment on Deuteronomy 18:14-22.

14:27. blotting out. The phrase "blotting out" stems from the image of washing a papyrus scroll clean in order to use it again, typical of Egyptian practice. Moreover, erasing the name of an ancestor from an inscription in Mesopotamia angered the gods. Thus Yahweh decided not to erase Israel's name (i.e., destroy it) but promised salvation.

14:28. Damascus, Hamath, Yaudi. Damascus and Hamath were well-known Aramean polities (for more information see comments on 2 Sam 8). Yaudi, however, is not so easily identified. Yaudi is likely the Iaudi of Assyrian

sources, which is always identified with Judah. Assyria was in no position to oppose Israelite expansion from about 773 to 745 B.C., during the reign of Jeroboam.

15:1-7
Azariah (Uzziah) of Judah

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 26.

15:8-12
Zechariah of Israel

15:8. chronology. The brief reign of Zechariah was in 753 B.C. He was a contemporary with Azariah (Uzziah) of Judah (c. 792-740 B.C.).

15:13-16
Shallum of Israel

15:13. chronology. Shallum succeeded Zechariah in 752 B.C. and reigned for only one month. Azariah was still on the throne of Judah.

15:16. Tirzah. Tirzah was a royal residence of Jeroboam I. It probably became the capital city of the northern kingdom in the time of Baasha and remained the capital until Omri gave the position to Samaria. It has been identified as Tell el-Farah seven miles northeast of Shechem on the road to Beth Shan. It is favored by good elevation, a consistent water supply (two springs that feed the wadi Farah) and a strategic location on the trade route. It also has ready access to the fords of the Jordan at Adam. The gate and fortifications were rebuilt from the Middle Bronze remains, and there is evidence of central planning in the building of new residences throughout the city. Its political importance may also be inferred from its mention in Shishak's list of conquests during his invasion of Palestine.

15:16. Tiphsah. Tiphsah (or Tappuah) may have later been called Thapsacus in Syria, a city on the bend of the northern Euphrates River. The name Thapsacus is not attested until the Greek writer Xenophon in the fourth century B.C. The city of Tiphsah is also listed as one of Solomon's cities (1 Kings 5:4). Tiphsah's distance from Israel shows that Menahem had great influence during a period of Assyrian decline.

15:16. treatment of pregnant women. The practice of ripping open pregnant women is mentioned very rarely. It is a practice attributed to Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (about 1100) in a hymn praising his conquests. It is also referred to in passing in a Neo-Babylonian lament.

15:17-22
Menahem of Israel

15:17. chronology. Menahem's reign is attributed by Thiele to the years 752-742 B.C. Like the three previous Israelite kings, he was a contemporary of Azariah of Judah. His reign overlaps with the beginning of the Neo-Assyrian empire under Tiglath-Pileser III.

15:17-22. Menahem in Assyrian inscriptions. Menahem is mentioned along with other Levantine kings in the Assyrian annals as paying heavy tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III (also known as Pul or Pulu). He also appears on an Assyrian stele found recently in Iran. The tribute list includes silver, gold, tin, iron, elephant hides, ivory, blue-purple and red-purple garments, multicolored linen garments and camels. Menahem, presumably, did not send all of these items but only a portion of them.

15:23-26
Pekahiah of Israel

15:23. chronology. Pekahiah, son of Menahem of Israel, began his reign in 742 B.C. and reigned for two years. Azariah was still the monarch in Judah.

15:25. citadel of the royal palace. This term is also found in Isaiah 13:22, where it is parallel to "palaces of pleasure." There the context appears to refer to a specific structure within the palace complex. It is likely a type of fortification. The Assyrian kings constructed major palatial complexes that were often called "fortresses of the king." They would provide a defensible area inside the city in case the walls were breached or there was a revolt within the city.

15:27-31
Pekah of Israel

15:27. chronology. The text states that in Azariah's last year as king of Judah, Pekah became king of Israel. He is credited with twenty years of rule. Thiele dates his reign from 752 to 732 B.C., thus making him a contemporary of Menahem and briefly Pekahiah. If this is true, then there was more than one person who claimed to be monarch in Israel during this period, which would be consistent with the turmoil described by the writer(s) of 2 Kings. The writer(s) of 2 Kings may have dated Pekah's reign from the es-

tablishment of a separate kingdom on the east of the Jordan. This complexity has yet to be unraveled.

15:25-31. Pekah and Assyrian campaigns. Pekah is found in the Assyrian annals of Tiglath-Pileser III as Paqaha. The Assyrian king claims that when the Israelites overthrew Pekah, Tiglath-Pileser replaced him with Hoshea, the last king of Israel (732 B.C.). Subsequently, the Assyrians demanded heavy tribute from Israel. Pekah is also mentioned on a jug fragment from Hazor. The text simply reads, "wine belonging to Pekah."

16:1-20
Ahaz of Judah

For information on verses 1-9 see comments on 2 Chronicles 28.

16:10. Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser at Damascus. This meeting took place after Damascus fell in 732. Ahaz, as a loyal vassal, was expected to be present to reaffirm his submission and join the celebration over the king's victory.

16:10. Damascus altar. The reproduction of this altar appears to result from Ahaz being impressed with it rather than from Assyrian compulsion. Judging from what is known of Assyrian practice of this time, it appears that they did not force their vassals to adopt the worship of their chief god, Assur. Thus it should be considered artistic innovation rather than ritual syncretism. Currently no archaeological or textual information exists to provide for an informed delineation of the features.

16:14. bronze altar. See comment on 2 Chronicles 4:1. This is the main altar of the courtyard, used for all of the animal sacrifices.

16:14. rearrangement of altars. The bronze altar had been positioned directly east of the temple, that is, in front of the entrance. Ahaz's new altar had originally been placed between the entrance to the courtyard and the bronze altar, but now became the central focus as the bronze altar was moved out of the east-west axis to a side location north of the new altar. The new altar thus effectively replaced the bronze altar.

16:15. divided functions. The rituals performed on the new altar are characteristically Israelite. There is no cultic innovation here, nor are foreign rituals being incorporated into Israelite practice. The new altar picks up all of the prescribed functions of the sacrificial system. The one function that is left to the bronze altar is one that is not described in Israel's ritual literature. The verb that is used (NIV: "seeking guidance") means to examine or inspect, and may suggest sacrifices in which the entrails of sacrificed animals were examined for omens. It is unclear why Ahaz should reserve that function for the traditional altar.

16:17. tribute. The activity described here is part of the process of tribute gathering. Basins for transporting water from the main laver stood on carts featuring side panels and wheels. Similar objects have been found in Cyprus dating to about the time of Solomon. The bronze bulls that supported the laver (see 2 Chron 4:2-5 for description) would have gone far to make up the quota of bronze that was wanted for the tribute payment. In the ninth century Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal received bronze bulls as part of a tribute payment.

16:18. adjustments for the king of Assyria. It is difficult to be certain whether the described actions are undertaken in order to gather additional tribute for the Assyrians or whether they reflect changes that will underline and confirm Ahaz' submission to Assyrian suzerainty. The reference is to obscure architectural terms.

17:1-6
Hoshea of Israel

17:1. chronology. Hoshea became king in 732

THE WESTERN CAMPAIGNS OF TIGLATH-PILESER III, 734-732

From early in his reign (starting about 743) Tiglath-Pileser was active in Syria attempting to control the trade routes through this economically strategic region. By 738 he had collected tribute from most of the major parties in the area (including Damascus, the port cities and Samaria). During the next few years he was occupied in Urartu (in the Lake Van area to the north), and by 735 he had brought control to that region. In 734 he began what is known as the second western campaign. His initial objective was to march through the region as a show of power to reiterate his control (especially of the trade route) and collect tribute. His route took him down the Great Trunk Road to Gaza. No opposition is noted in any of the sources. In 733 the Assyrian armies returned, with Damascus as the main target. Though the Arameans suffered serious losses, Damascus successfully withstood a forty-five-day siege by the Assyrians. In this campaign Tiglath-Pileser ranged down into the region of Israel. Large sections of Israel were annexed and made into Assyrian provinces, and fortified cities such as Hazor and Megiddo were destroyed. Over thirteen thousand Israelites were deported, but no replacement inhabitants were shipped in, thus depleting the population of Lower Galilee for several generations. The final stage of the campaign came in 732, when Damascus fell and was annexed. In Israel Pekah was executed in favor of the pro-Assyrian Hoshea.

B.C. as a result of the Assyrian decimation of much of the northern kingdom. The synchronisms between the northern and southern kingdoms during this period are very complex, and there are no easy resolutions. It is generally supposed that there were several coregencies that are one cause of the apparent confusion. Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III claims in his annals to have put Hoshea on the throne of Judah.

17:4. relations between Hoshea and Assyria. Because of the reestablishment of Egyptian power in the Levant, Hoshea saw fit to negotiate with Egypt in order to be free of Assyrian power. The Egyptian king So has not been absolutely identified, but Osorkon IV who ruled in the eastern delta region of Egypt (Tanis, Bubastis) from 730 to 715 B.C. has been considered a likely match. Nonetheless, Hoshea's appeal to Egypt was unsuccessful. It is not certain exactly when Hoshea was arrested by the Assyrians (or deported). The records of the brief reign of Shalmaneser V (ruled 727-722) are comparatively poor. Sargon II (ruled 721-705) mentions the Samarians (i.e. Israelites) but not a king, suggesting that the king may have already been deported.

17:5-6. the fall of Samaria. The Assyrian sources describe the "ravaging" of Samaria (c. 724-721), which may have denoted the entire land. Some archaeological evidence for the destruction has been found at the Israelite city of Shechem. This accords with the typical Assyrian strategy of wasting the territory of a particular state and then surrounding the main city, which had now been cut off from its resources. Both Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar II used this policy against Jerusalem. The fact that the siege of Samaria lasted three years although the Assyrians were unmatched in siege warfare shows that it was heavily fortified. The city fell in 722/721. Although Shalmaneser V is given credit for the conquest of Samaria in the Bible, his successor Sargon II claimed the credit in the Assyrian annals. Sargon also claims to have rebuilt the city.

17:6. policy of deportation. The Assyrian deportation policies had been in effect for nearly four centuries by this time. Sargon claimed to have deported 27,290 people from Samaria. The record is not clear as to whether these were all men and whether they came from the land of Samaria or just the main city. The Assyrian king claimed that he took enough men to form a regiment of fifty chariots. The Assyrians also had a policy of relocating other conquered peoples into Samarian territory (though Tiglath-Pileser appears to have departed from that policy by not repopulating Galilee in 733). Sargon claims to have repopulated the city of Samaria with other deportees. The deportation policy was intended to remove from conquered peoples anything that they might rally in defense of. If they have no land and no nation, and their ethnic identity has been compromised (through forced assimilation), there is no identity to fight for.

17:7-41

The Sins and Fate of Israel

17:9. high places. The picture portrayed in the biblical narrative is that prior to the construction of the temple in Jerusalem, sacrifice and religious ritual commonly took place at local shrines or *bamoth.* They were constructed for this purpose and in most cases appear to be an installation that could be entered and within which cultic activity took place (see the comment on 1 Sam 9:12-13). Many of them may have had an urban setting, although this does not preclude their existence outside city walls on near by hills. Their actual appearance and the furnishings associated with the high places are unknown, but the large number of references to them as sacrificial sites suggests that some may have been quite elaborate. Eventually the monarchy and the Jerusalem priesthood attempted to suppress the use of the high places because of their desire to emphasize Solomon's temple as "the place which Yahweh will choose" and to eliminate the syncretism that thrived at the high places. For more information on high places, see the comments on Deuteronomy 12:2-3.

17:10. sacred stones. Standing stones or *maṣṣebot* were apparently a common feature of Canaanite religion and also appear as memorials in a number of Israelite covenantal contexts (see Ex 24:3-8; Josh 24:25-27). Their association with Asherah, Baal and other Canaanite deities is the basis for their being condemned as a rival and threat to Yahweh worship. Archaeologists have discovered sacred stones at Gezer, Dan, Hazor and Arad. In the latter two cases, they are clearly within a sacred precinct and part of the cultic practices at these sites. The Hazor stones include incised representations of upraised arms and a sun disk. The stones at Dan are in the gateway, and the clear remains of the presentation of votive offerings were evident.

17:10. Asherah poles. One common feature of Canaanite worship and of syncretized Israelite worship on "high places" and in city shrines is the erection of Asherah poles. There is some uncertainty about whether these were simply wooden poles, erected to symbolize

trees or perhaps containing a carved image of the fertility goddess, or whether they were a part of a sacred grove. The reference here to Asherah poles beside "every spreading tree," seems to indicate that these were poles erected for cultic purposes rather than planted trees. As the consort of El, Asherah was a popular goddess whose worship is mentioned in Ugaritic texts (1600-1200). Her prominent appearance in the biblical narrative indicates that her cult was a major rival to Yahweh worship. Pictures on seals excavated in Palestine show Asherah as a stylized tree in the Iron Age. For more information see the comments on Exodus 34:13 and Judges 6:25.

17:11. burning incense as pagan ritual. Incense was used for a variety of reasons in the extrabiblical world. The Phoenicians used it to prepare the body of the king for future life. One inscription from Byblos has a king describing himself as lying on incense. It was also used in the cult of the dead at Canaanite Ugarit. In Mesopotamia, incense was used for dedicatory and propitiatory offerings. They believed that the incense helped transport prayers to the deity, who would then inhale the incense. All of these practices were condemned by the writers of Scripture.

17:16-17. unacceptable worship practice. The molten images of calves or bulls were typical cult items in Canaan. Calf images have been found at a number of sites in this region (for more information see comments on 1 Kings 12:28). Worship of the starry hosts refers worship of the celestial gods (sun god, moon god and Venus particularly; in Babylonia, Shamash, Sin and Ishtar respectively), who were primary in most ancient religions. Controlling the calendar and time, seasons and weather, they were viewed as the most powerful of the gods. They provided signs by which omens were read and they looked down on all. The Zodiac is not yet known at this time. For information concerning Baal see comments on Judges 2:11-13. Evidence for "passing [or burning] children through the fire" outside of Scripture is scant but known in the Assyrian and Aramean world (see comment on Deut 18:10). Divination and enchantments were also well-known in Mesopotamia. Divination assumed that there was knowledge to be gained about the activities and motives of the gods through the use of various indicators (such as entrails of sacrificed animals). Thousands of omens and incantations have been uncovered in the past one hundred and fifty years of archaeological research.

17:24. resettlement of Samaria. Although the king of Assyria is not mentioned here, Assyrian sources claim that Sargon II reorganized the area in 720 B.C. These same texts do not cite the specific people groups that were deported to Samaria. However, some Arab tribes were transported to Samaria within five years of the reorganization. Babylon was under Assyrian control during this period. Cuthah is identified with Tell Ibrahim, twenty miles northeast of Babylon. Avva is now identified with the town of Awa (Ama, Akkadian, Amatu in eastern Babylonia). Hamath was the major Aramean city on the Orontes River in Syria. Sepharvayim has been tentatively identified as Sipirani, south of Nippur, though Shabarain in Syria is still a possibility. Whatever the case, Assyrian policy was to resettle an area with a diverse population.

17:25. god-sent lions. Ravaging wild beasts were considered one of the typical scourges that deity would send as punishment. As early as the Gilgamesh Epic in Mesopotamia the god Ea had reprimanded Enlil for not sending lions to ravage the people rather than using something as dramatic as a flood. The gods used wild beasts along with disease, drought and famine to reduce the human population. A common threat connected to negative omens in the Assyrian period was that lions and wolves would rage through the land. In like manner devastation by wild animals was one of the curses invoked for treaty violation (see also Deut 32:24).

17:25-29. syncretism in Samaria. Assyrian inscriptions from the age of Sargon II state that the new settlers were taxed as if they were Assyrians. Furthermore, they were instructed in the proper way to revere God and king. Most groups in antiquity believed that gods had jurisdiction over precise geographic areas. Thus Yahweh had ownership of Samaria and was worthy of worship. Nonetheless the settlers brought their own deities. In the open-ended thinking that accompanied ancient polytheism, there was always room for more gods. If a god had demonstrated power, it would be dangerous not to acknowledge him (see comment on Josh 2:11). Sargon had effected a religious syncretism in the area, with the express purpose of lessening the impact of nationalistic tendencies.

17:30-31. list of gods. The deity Succoth Benoth is not known from Mesopotamian sources. Benoth may be Banitu (fem. "the creator"), often used as a term for Ishtar. Nergal was the Mesopotamian god of plagues and of the underworld. His principal cult center was in fact at Cutha (twenty miles northeast of Babylon). Ashima is known from an inscription from Teima in Arabia as well as from

some Aramaic personal names, but nothing is known about the deity. The Avvites are now identified with the town of Awa (Ama, Akkadian, Amatu in eastern Babylonia). Nibhaz and Tartak have been identified with the Elamite deities Ibnahaza and Dirtaq (Dakdadra). Adrammelech is thought to represent Addir-Melek. Addir is a title meaning "mighty one" and is applied to both Baal and Yahweh. Melek means king and would refer to the divine king. Lastly, Anammelech is believed to represent an assimilation of the Canaanite goddess, Anat (or her male counterpart, An) with Melek (a title often applied to the West Semitic deity Athtar). Little is known of these last two gods, but some associate them with the god Molech (see comments on Lev 18:21; Deut 18:10).

18:1—20:21
Hezekiah of Judah

18:1. chronology. See comments on 2 Chronicles 29.

18:4. bronze serpent, Nehushtan. Nehushtan is not attested outside Scripture. The term is apparently a conglomeration of the Hebrew terms for bronze *(neḥoshet)* and serpent *(naḥash).* Figures of serpents crafted in copper or bronze have been found in numerous locations in the ancient Near East. They were apparently cultic images. Often the image of the serpent is held by a deity. It was especially prevalent in Syro-Palestine in the late second and first millennia B.C. Nehushtan appears to have been a deity of healing (especially snake bites), possibly considered an intermediary between Yahweh and the people of Israel (see comment on Num 21:8-9). A well-known bronze bowl from Nineveh with Hebrew names on it depicts a winged snake on a pole of some sort.

18:8. defeat of the Philistines. The Philistine seaports had been in Assyrian control since Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.). Hezekiah likely invaded this area in 705 after the death of Sargon II of Assyria in battle. Counting on the vulnerability of Assyria, Hezekiah probably commandeered anti-Assyrian groups in the area to begin open rebellion against the powerful state. The purpose of the attack was to loosen Assyria's hold on the trade routes to Egypt. Sargon's successor, Sennacherib, however, was able to establish pro-Assyrian governors in Philistia.

18:11. places of northern deportation. The areas of deportation of the Samarians are not all precisely known. Halah was a city and province northeast of Nineveh. Sargon's capital was built there using enemy captives as laborers, probably including Israelites. Habor (Habur) was a large tributary of the Euphrates in eastern Syria. The area had a large Aramean population. Gozan (Tell Halaf) was a city by the headwaters of the Habur River and was the chief city of the Assyrian province of Bit Bahian. Israelite personal names have been found in the Assyrian documents from Gozan. These areas had suffered a decline of population because of the constant Assyrian incursions in the region in previous centuries. In this region the deportees were probably farming the king's lands. The "cities of the Medes" were probably regions of Media in northwest Iran that were controlled by Assyria. Sargon's campaigns to Media are well documented. Sargon's inscriptions record the resettlement of the fortress cities of Harhar and Kishessu by deportees. These Israelites would have been serving in a military capacity on the front line.

18:14-16. Hezekiah's tribute. The inscriptions of Sennacherib state that Hezekiah paid thirty talents of gold (about one ton) and eight hundred talents of silver (about twenty-five tons). The Assyrian texts are more detailed, as they claim that Hezekiah was required to send his daughters, concubines, male and female musicians, ivory, elephant hides and various other objects.

18:17. Sennacherib's officials. Tartan, Rabsaris and Rabshakeh appear in some translations, while the NIV refers to them as "supreme commander," "chief officer," and "field commander." The NIV is correct that these are titles rather than names. They are well-known from Assyrian texts. The first, Tartan (Akkadian, *turtan*), the "field marshal," was the chief military officer. He represented the king and was sometimes the crown prince. The second, Rabsaris (Akkadian, *rab sha reshi*), the "chief eunuch," was probably the representative of the separate military division, the king's bodyguard. The third, Rabshakeh (Akkadian, *rab shaqe*), the "chief cupbearer," is thought to be the provincial governor.

18:17-37. Sennacherib threatens Jerusalem. For information see comments on 2 Chronicles 32.

19:2. Shebna the secretary. Shebna was a high-level bureaucrat during the reign of Hezekiah. He was at one point a "royal steward," a position of uncertain function. The royal steward was probably the top civil servant in the administration. The office is documented numerous times in the text as well as in the corpus of official seals and their bullae

(see sidebar in Jer 32). Shebna was later demoted to scribe or secretary (presumably because of some unknown scandal). A tomb has been found near Jerusalem with a fragment of a personal name (with Yahweh as an ending) and the title royal steward. Some believe this to be the tomb of Shebna referred to in Isaiah 22:15-16.

19:8. Sennacherib against Libnah. Libnah was in the Judean Shephelah eight miles northeast of the fortress city of Lachish. It is probably to be identified either with Khirbet Tell el-Beida or Tell Bornat (five miles further west), strategically located by the Wadi Zeita guarding the best route to Hebron from the coast. The Assyrian annals describe Sennacherib besieging Gath and Azekah, and wall reliefs at Nineveh show the siege of Lachish. Libnah was in this vicinity, showing that the Assyrian monarch was slowly moving toward the intended victim, Jerusalem.

19:9. Tirhakah. Tirhakah (Nubian: Taharqa) was a Kushite king of Egypt in the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty (reigned 690-664 B.C.). For geographical identification of Cush see comment on Numbers 12:1. Although no extrabiblical text confirms this, the biblical title "King of Kush" may have been given to him while he was crown prince. He was an energetic builder in Egypt, refurbishing temples and city walls at Memphis (his royal residence), Thebes and Napata. He left numerous inscriptions throughout Egypt. Tirhakah campaigned vigorously in the Levant preceding 674 B.C. In that year, Esarhaddon of Assyria attacked Egypt, only to be driven back by Tirhakah's forces. Three years later, however, Esarhaddon captured Memphis, causing the Egyptian monarch to flee to the south. Another Assyrian force came in 666 B.C., causing him to flee to Nubia. He was still recognized as king of Egypt until his death in 664.

19:12-13. list. Gozan was in Syria, where deportees from Israel had been sent (see comment on 18:11). Haran was west of Gozan along the Balikh River in present-day Turkey. Rezeph (Rasappa) mostly likely was the city that became an Assyrian provincial capital in Syria east of Emar and west of Mari along the upper Euphrates. The Aramean tribe of Bit-Adini (Eden) in northwest Syria had been conquered by Shalmaneser III (reigned 858-824 B.C.) and resettled in Telassar, which was most likely Til-Ashshuri ("mound of the Assyrians"), a site in the Zagros Mountain range near the Diyala River in Iraq. Hamath and Arpad were major Aramean city-states in Syria conquered by Tiglath-Pileser III (reigned 745-727 B.C.). Sepharvayim has been tentatively identified as Sipirani, south of Nippur, though Shabarain in Syria is still a possibility. Hena and Ivvah are unknown.

19:15. enthroned between the cherubim. The cherubim were winged creatures associated with the Israelite ark of the covenant and Yahweh's presence. They also accompanied Yahweh in his travels through the heavens (see Ps 18:11). They appear in Assyrian mythological texts as Karibu, angelic intercessors. In Assyrian art they are shown as various composite creatures with one or more faces (human, bovine, aquiline, lionlike) and two or four legs. For more information see comment on Exodus 25:18-20.

19:23. cutting down the cedars of Lebanon. Isaiah is paraphrasing the boasting of the Assyrian king Sennacherib. The Assyrian royal annals of the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. employed the motifs of traveling through difficult passes, cutting mighty trees and supplying the army with water. Sennacherib claimed to have felled the Lebanon cedars and used them to build his royal palaces and public buildings in Nineveh.

19:28. hook in the nose. This image has parallels in Assyrian literature and iconography. Esarhaddon is depicted on a stele from Zinjirli in Syria as leading Baal of Tyre and Tirhakah of Egypt by a rope tied to a ring through their lips. Ashurbanipal claims to have pierced the cheeks of Uate' (king of Ishmael) with a sharp edged tool and put a ring in his jaw. Thus Isaiah is again mocking Assyrian practices.

19:29 renewed agriculture. The verse implies that the countryside had been ravaged by the Assyrian army. That the Assyrians intentionally devastated an enemy's countryside is well attested in their annals. Tiglath-Pileser III destroyed the surroundings of Damascus by cutting its orchards. His annals describe similar destruction during his campaigns in Babylonia. In spite of all this, Isaiah tells Hezekiah that the "aftergrowth" would be sufficient for two years, before normal fieldwork resumed.

19:32. no arrow or ramp. Sennacherib has a detailed description in his annals concerning the sieges of forty-six cities and towns of Judah. Furthermore, the Assyrian king claims to have "caged up" Hezekiah in Jerusalem and surrounded the city with "earthwork." However, nowhere in the annals does Sennacherib claim to have begun a siege at Jerusalem, as he did at the other towns. He continues to describe the tribute sent to him by Hezekiah but not the capture of the city itself. For more information see the sidebars in

2 Chronicles 32.

19:35. deity wiping out enemy. In one of Ashurbanipal's inscriptions he claims that Erra (the deity representing plague) struck down Uaite (Arab king of Shumuilu) and his army for failing to keep the terms of their treaty agreement.

19:37. Nisroch. No divinity by this name is known from Mesopotamia. It may be an intentional alteration of a deity's name, such as Marduk, Nusku or Ninurta. This event took place on the twentieth day of the tenth month in the year 681, twenty years after the siege of Jerusalem.

19:37. Ararat. Ararat (or Urartu) was a powerful kingdom in present-day Armenia around the vicinity of Lake Van, Lake Urmia and Lake Sevan. Esarhaddon mentions his brothers who fought against his succession but does not state where they sought refuge. However, Esarhaddon demanded from the king of Shurpia in southern Ararat that he extradite runaway Assyrians, some of whom may have been the brothers in question. The kingdoms of Ararat posed a constant threat to the Assyrian's northern border for about three centuries (c. 900-600 B.C.). Excavations there have exposed a thriving civilization with sophisticated iconography and literature.

20:3. Hezekiah's prayer. A prayer of the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal I (mid-eleventh century B.C.) is preserved in which he asks for healing from an illness on the basis of his faithfulness to the goddess Ishtar. Besides identifying himself as humble, reverent and beloved by the deity, he speaks of the many rituals that he has faithfully carried out. He mentions his tears and anxiety, and begs for gracious healing. The text of Hezekiah's prayer is found in Isaiah 38:9-20; see comments there.

20:7. poultice of figs. Fig cakes may have been used as condiments and for medicinal purposes at Ugarit. Both later rabbinical Jewish and classical sources (e.g., Pliny the Elder) shared the belief that dried figs had medicinal value. Poultices were sometimes used for diagnosis rather than for medication. A day or two after the poultice was applied, it would be checked for either the skin's reaction to the poultice or the poultice's reaction to the skin. One medical text from Emar prescribes the use of figs and raisins for such a process. They helped determine how the patient should be treated and whether or not he would recover.

20:11. shadow of the stairway of Ahaz. The "shadow of the stairway of Ahaz" may have been a type of sundial. The Qumran Scroll of Isaiah 38:8 renders this phrase "on the dial of the Ahaz roof chamber." A similar idea may be a house model excavated in Egypt that contains two flights of stairs for telling time. On the other hand the structure may have been simply steps leading to a roof or higher structure where shadows were cast at a certain time of the day. The text here does not mention that the structure was used to tell time. Alternatively it may have been something that was used to worship astral deities. If it does represent a mechanism for telling time, it would be the only mention of such a device in the Old Testament. Sundials are known in the Old Testament world from Babylon and Egypt, with archaeological samples going back to the fifteenth century B.C.

20:12. Merodach-Baladan. Merodach-Baladan (or Berodach-Baladan) is the Marduk-apla-idinna II of Assyrian and Babylonian sources. He was a Chaldean sheikh of the Bit-Yakin tribe who was allied with Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria against another Babylonian ruler (c. 731 B.C.). Ten years later Merodach-Baladan took the throne of Babylon, and Sargon II was unable to remove him until 710 B.C. Once again he became a local Chaldean sheikh and was vassal to the Assyrian king. Upon Sargon's death in battle in 705 B.C. Merodach-Baladan helped to instigate a rebellion against Assyrian rule. It is here that the narrative of 2 Kings is likely to be placed. Based upon Hezekiah's actions against Assyrian rule, he apparently did act in concert with Merodach-Baladan's strategy. The Babylonian sheikh deposed the Assyrian appointee to the Babylonian throne and ruled from nearby Borsippa (703 B.C.) until he was deposed by Sennacherib, the new king of Assyria, in the same year. Merodach-Baladan fled to Elam, where he soon died.

21:1-26
Manasseh of Judah

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 33.

21:13. plumb line. The measuring line and plummet were ordinary tools used for the construction of mud-brick buildings throughout the Near East. A site was surveyed with a measuring line (usually a rope, cord or thread). The chief builder used a plumb line, weighted with tin or a stone, to test the integrity of the structure.

21:18. garden of Uzza. The garden of Uzza has not been located with any certainty. Some have speculated that it was at the cemetery located in the village of Siloam, east of the City of David. However, Uzza may be a short form

of Uzziah, the leper king of Judah. Thus this may have been Uzziah's private garden that was used by later kings.

22:1—23:30
Josiah of Judah

For information on this section see comments on 2 Chronicles 34.

23:1. function of the elders. The elders (patriarchal family heads) played a major role in the early tribal organization of Israel and evidently still had a function during the monarchy. Elders had been given authority in their local communities and may still have played a limited role in the political leadership during the monarchy. City elders also played a limited role in preserving stability and enacting laws in their communities in Babylonia. However, they did not initiate policy, as the central monarchy controlled the power source of the state, the economy and the armed forces.

23:2. public reading of documents. Even after the invention of the alphabet, many of the people in the ancient Near East were illiterate, and thus the public reading of documents had an important function. Assyrian sources describe heralds standing at city gates reading royal pronouncements to groups of onlookers.

23:3. pillar. The king stood near a pillar or column (platform, according to the Jewish writer Josephus). It may have been a standing structure in the temple reserved for royalty. No clear parallels for this custom exist elsewhere in the Near East.

23:4. constellations and starry hosts. Worship of the starry hosts refers to the worship of the celestial gods (sun god, moon god and Venus particularly; in Babylonia, Shamash, Sin and Ishtar respectively), who were primary in most ancient religions. Controlling the calendar and time, seasons and weather, they were viewed as the most powerful of the gods. They provided signs by which omens were read, and they looked down on all. By the end of the second millennium a major compilation of celestial omens, the seventy tablets of the work known as *Enuma Anu Enlil,* had been compiled and was consulted for nearly a thousand years. Stamp seals from Israel in this period show that astral deities were very popular. There were many constellations recognized by the Mesopotamian astrologers (many, though not all, the same we recognize today, transmitted through the Greeks), but the Zodiac is not yet known at this time. For more information see comment on 2 Chronicles 33:5.

23:4. Kidron Valley to Bethel. Kidron Valley was east of the City of David. Bethel was about ten miles along a main transportation route due north of Jerusalem. Bethel had been the site of the shrine of the golden calf until a century earlier, when the northern kingdom had fallen to Assyria. Josiah also desecrates the altar there (see vv. 15-16), so that is an appropriate place to dump the desecrating ashes of these religious articles.

23:5. pagan priests. The term "pagan, idol priests" (Hebrew, *komer)* has many parallels in the ancient Near East, especially from Assyria. Kumru priests are known from Old Assyrian Period documents from Cappadocia (c. 2000-1800 B.C.) and from a single document from Mari during the reign of the Assyrian king, Shamshi-Adad I (reigned 1814-1781 B.C.). An Arabian queen was given the title of kumirtu priestess in an inscription of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668-631 B.C.). *Kumra'* is also the word for priest in Aramaic in the first millennium B.C. It is plausible that these priests mentioned here served the shrines of West Semitic deities such as Baal and Asherah, though some consider them renegade priests of Yahweh.

23:6. scattering of the dust over graves. The sequence of burn-grind-scatter-eat is also found in a Ugaritic text to indicate total destruction of a deity—every destructive action is being carried out. The scattering of the dust on the graves is a final act of desecration on the image.

23:7. male shrine prostitutes. The Hebrew term, *qedeshim,* refers to "sacred males." Little is known about this practice, but it was thoroughly condemned and may well have had to do with cultic prostitution (see Deut 23:18-19). Cognate terms are found in Akkadian and Ugaritic, where they are also not clear in terms of function. The root means to be ritually clean. A *qadishtu* in Akkadian was a woman of special status. She had particular functions in the temple (midwife, wet-nurse and devotee of the god of the temple) none of which appear to be obviously of a sexual nature. A similar situation can be found at Ugarit. The condemnation of the males here in 2 Kings 23:7 may have had to do with the fact that they were devotees of foreign deities.

23:7. weaving for Asherah. Apparently the women were weaving types of coverings or vestments to adorn the Asherah statue (or pole). The fashioning of woven and embroidered garments used to place on the statues of gods in Mesopotamia is well known.

23:8. desecrating high places. Desecration of sacred places occurs when forbidden cultic practices are performed there. The laws for

preserving the purity of Yahweh's sacred places are outlined in the book of Leviticus, but these desecrate the temple because they represent things not acceptable in Yahweh's presence. Other actions may cause desecration to the shrines of other gods. There were, however, certain common desecrating actions. Turning what had once been a sacred area into a graveyard (see v. 14) or a latrine (see 10:27) would bring permanent desecration.

23:8. Geba to Beersheba. Geba (modern Jaba) was a small village in the territory of Benjamin about six miles north of Jerusalem. No excavations have been conducted there, but surface surveys have found Iron Age remains on the site. It overlooks the strategic pass across the deep canyon of the Wadi Swenit from Micmash that leads from the north into the region of Jerusalem. It probably functioned as a border shrine city. It is paralleled with Beersheba, the southernmost town in Judah. Archaeologists found a dismantled horn altar there that may have been destroyed during the period of Josiah. At any rate the phrase here makes it clear that Josiah purged the entire land of Judah (from north to south) of foreign worship practices.

23:8. shrines at the gates. At Dan standing stones were found at a shrine just inside the city gate, and the clear remains of the presentation of votive offerings were evident. It is thought that the standing stones represented some of the deities of cities that had fallen to Israel. The votive offerings would be in fulfillment of vows made to those deities (perhaps for their aid in overthrowing the city the Israelites were fighting against). For more information on standing stones see comment on 17:10.

23:8. gate of Joshua. The gate of Joshua is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, and its precise location is not known. It may have been an alternative name for one of the Jerusalem gates. This was presumably the gate of the governor of the city, who was the highest official in the city administration. A seventh-century B.C. seal from Judah has been found with an inscription in a cartouche reading "governor of the city." There is an artistic scene on the seal that is reminiscent of Assyrian symbolism.

23:9. eating unleavened bread. The term here for unleavened bread is either a generic term for grain offerings or unleavened cakes to be eaten at the Passover celebration. Since leaven was associated with spoilage, and therefore impurity, unleavened bread was used in most sacred ceremonies.

23:10. Topheth, Ben Hinnom, Molech. Topheth was the cultic installation where children were offered to the god Molech. The word is thought to signify the hearth where the child was placed. The Hebrew term has parallel terms in both Ugaritic and Aramaic with the meaning "furnace, fireplace." Scholars have thought that Topheth was at the edge of the valley of Ben Hinnom before connecting with the Kidron Valley. The valley of Ben Hinnom has been identified with Wadi er-Rababi southwest of the City of David. Many consider Molech to be a netherworld deity featuring rituals with Canaanite origins focusing on dead ancestors. An eighth-century B.C. Phoenician inscription speaks of sacrifices made to Molech before battle by the Cilicians and their enemies. The name Molech appears to be related to the Hebrew term *mlk* ("to rule"). Sacrifices to Molech were done at the installation of Baal, which may mean that the term was an epithet of Baal himself, as well as other deities (Jer 32:35).

23:11. horses and chariots dedicated to the sun. White horses were used in important ritual functions in Assyria and were usually associated with Ashur and Sin, major deities in the Assyrian pantheon. White horses were dedicated at the feet of a certain deity. Moreover a number of Assyrian deities rode a horse-drawn chariot on festival days. In Assyrian mythology the sun (god) was carried across the sky in a chariot driven by his charioteer Rakib-il. In the syncretism referred to here, Yahweh was probably being worshiped as a sun god, and the chariot and horses represented his vehicle. Archaeological evidence is provided by Iron Age horse figurines with solar disks and by the Taanach cult stand, which portrays a horse with a sun-disk on its back. This would have some similarity with the golden calf imagery where the calf served as a pedestal or the ark of the covenant that functioned as a footstool. None of these portray deity, but they represent his throne.

23:12. upper room of Ahaz. The upper room typically functioned as an audience chamber, so these were in a prominent location in the palace.

23:13. hill of corruption. The Hebrew phrase for "Hill of Corruption" is probably a wordplay on "Mount of Ointment, or Olives." It has been precisely identified as the hill rising above the modern Arab village of Silwan.

23:13. Solomon's idols. The amenities that Solomon had provided for his foreign wives included the construction of altars and shrines for their worship of their own gods (see the comments on 1 Kings 11:5-7).

23:14. covered with human bones. It is presumed that the human bones were thrown onto the refuse so no one would try to retrieve the items. This was because of the taboo of coming into contact with dead bodies (see comment on Num 19:11).

23:16. exhumation. Josiah is fulfilling the prophecy in 1 Kings 13:2. In both Mesopotamia and Israel the worst criminals were not accorded a proper burial, and their bones were either burned or discarded. This was the worst possible thing for an individual, since one's spiritual existence was intertwined with their physical existence (for more information see comments on Num 3:12-13 and Joshua 8:29). Thus if one's bones were destroyed, the individual's existence was also extinguished.

23:21-30. Passover celebration. For information see comments on 2 Chronicles 35.

23:31-35
Jehoahaz of Judah

23:31. chronology. Jehoahaz began and ended his short reign of three months in 609 B.C., not long after the final collapse of the Assyrian empire at Harran and on the verge of the monumental struggle between Egypt and Babylon for supremacy in the Near East.

23:33. relations with Egypt. The Levant was an unstable area after the collapse of Assyria in 612-610 B.C. Egypt and Babylon now fought a furious war for supremacy in the area. Egypt apparently tried unsuccessfully to lift the siege of the last Assyrian center at Haran in 610-609 B.C. Josiah of Judah tried to block Egypt's invasion of Syria but was wounded at the battle of Megiddo and subsequently died. Because of the power vacuum in the area, Judah became an Egyptian protectorate (609-608 B.C.). Four years later the Egyptians, although delayed, now traveled north and battled the Chaldeans at Carchemish, suffering a tremendous defeat (605 B.C.). The Chaldeans followed by invading Egypt in 601-600 but suffered heavy casualties. At any rate, Judah was only temporarily under the leadership of Egypt.

23:33. Riblah in Hamath. Riblah (modern Tel Zerr'a) was an important administrative and military town near Kadesh on the Orontes River in Syria about twenty miles south of the major Aramean center of Hamath. The Assyrians had set up a fortress here in the eighth century. Later Nebuchadrezzar II of Babylon used it as headquarters during his campaigning in the west.

23:33. tribute imposed on Judah. This is considerably less than the fine imposed upon Hezekiah (three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold; 2 Kings 18:14). The percentage of silver (seven thousand five hundred pounds) to gold (seventy-five pounds) is also different (100:1 instead of 10:1).

23:34. name changing. The name change was somewhat minimal, as the theophoric element (God's name contained in the name) was altered, from El- (generic for god) to Jeho- (for Yahweh). The name change probably had to do with a loyalty oath to a new overlord, which the Assyrian kings had also done. In the previous generation, Psammeticus I of Egypt (father of Necho) was renamed Nabushezibanni by the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal when he was installed as a district ruler. Notice also the name change for Daniel and his friends (Dan 1:6-7).

23:36—24:7
Jehoiakim of Judah

23:36. chronology. Jehoiakim's reign of eleven years was from 609 to 598 B.C. During this time, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon fought a fierce battle at the Egyptian border in 601-600 with unclear results. Both armies were severely depleted, and the Chaldean king was unable to invade Egypt. This may have encouraged Jehoiakim to rebel against Babylon.

24:1. Nebuchadnezzar and Jehoiakim. Nebuchadnezzar II took the throne of Babylon in 605 B.C. after his victory against Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish in the same year. From that time on Jehoiakim was vassal to Babylon during most of his reign. The Babylonian Chronicle states that the Chaldeans were able to wrest control of the Levant from Egypt after this. Nebuchadnezzar attempted to follow up with an invasion of Egypt (601-600). This attack apparently crippled the Chaldeans for a brief period, possibly causing Jehoiakim to ally himself with Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar's response was to attack Judah with garrison troops from the west. Jehoiakim was captured and shackled (see 2 Chron 36:6), but appears to have avoided exile since he died in Judah.

24:2. invading raiders. The Chaldeans were the designation of the Semitic-speaking people of Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. They are mentioned in Assyrian records as inhabiting Babylonia by the beginning of the first millennium B.C. Though we are most familiar with the Arameans connected to the Aramean state north of Israel, there were also eastern Arameans, a Semitic-speaking people who inhabited much of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, who often appear alongside the Chaldeans. It appears that the Chaldeans were more of a town-based group, while the Arameans were seminomadic. According to Babylonian sourc-

es, the Moabites and Ammonites were subjects of Babylon and were thus required to send troops against a recalcitrant neighbor.

24:7. Babylon versus Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar II attempted to follow up his victory over the Egyptians at Carchemish by invading Egypt in 601-600. They met at the Wadi of Egypt (probably the Wadi el-Arish on the eastern edge of the Nile Delta region). There was evidently a fierce battle, and the troops of Nebuchadnezzar were unable to conquer Egypt. However, the Babylonians were able to regroup for another campaign in the Levant soon thereafter, and the Egyptians were unable to muster a defense against them.

24:8-17
Jehoiachin of Judah

24:8. chronology. Jehoiachin's brief reign was in the last month of 598 and the first two months of 597. Since Jehoiachin appears to have come to the throne while Nebuchadnezzar's army was on the way to Jerusalem, his father, Jehoiakim, can be seen as instigating the trouble that brought the Babylonians west.

24:10-11. 597 siege of Jerusalem. In response to Judah's rebellion, the Chaldeans attacked Jerusalem in 597. The Babylonian Chronicle states that the siege lasted a mere three months, probably the entire reign of Jehoiachin. Although Nebuchadnezzar took credit for the victory in his annals, he did not preside over the campaign but left it to his generals. The relative ease with which the city was captured may be explained by the fact that it was during winter and food would have been scarce. The city's population would have been much larger than normal, since those in the outlying areas of Judah sought refuge in Jerusalem.

24:12. Jehoiachin's imprisonment. The quick surrender by Judah may be the reason why the Babylonians were somewhat lenient in their treatment of the Judahites. The deportation of a rebellious monarch was common treatment by both the Assyrians and Babylonians. They were looked upon as rulers that had broken a loyalty oath with the Babylonians (or Assyrians) and were duly punished. The conquerors normally installed a monarch who was sensitive to their cause, often from the same royal house in order to preserve some sense of continuity with the local population.

24:14. deportation. Though we have no records from Babylon concerning deportation practices, it can be assumed that they inherited Assyrian administrative practices to a certain extent. It was typical policy to deport influential people (rich and the military) as well as skilled workers, who could be employed cheaply in Babylon. The "poor of the land" were either not useful or were not considered a threat by remaining in the land of Judah.

24:17. name changing. As with Jehoiakim, Mattaniah was required by the Babylonians to change his name. The Babylonian Chronicle simply states that Nebuchadnezzar II appointed a king of his choice in Judah and that the new king "was after his heart," meaning that he had been "domesticated" by the Babylonians. As before, the Babylonians thought it in their own best interest to give the king another Hebrew name, so as not to incite rebellion.

24:18—25:26
Zedekiah of Judah and the Fall of Jerusalem

24:18. chronology. Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, reigned from 597 to 586. Necho II (r. 610-595), Psammeticus (r. 595-589) and Apries (r. 589-570) were rulers of Egypt, while Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 604-562) ruled the Chaldean empire.

25:1. siege of Jerusalem. The Babylonians evidently used a siege "wall" (as opposed to a ramp) to attack Jerusalem in 587-586. Assyrian sources describe Esarhaddon using the same type of contraption for his conquest of Shurbia, a Urartian kingdom south of Lake Van, in 672. Esarhaddon claims that his troops "climbed over the siege wall to do battle." This siege wall was probably made higher than the city wall, so as to allow the soldiers to climb atop the defender's wall. As with the Assyrians during Sennacherib's siege of 701, the Babylonians systematically destroyed the Judahite fortresses on the countryside, including Lachish (see Jer 34:7). Another purpose in removing the military threats surrounding Jerusalem was to discourage any Egyptian interference.

25:4. flight of army. It can be assumed by the context of this difficult verse that the king and his bodyguard attempted to escape by the east. The "men of war" may refer to the Babylonian soldiers who made a breach in the city wall, causing Zedekiah to flee.

25:5. plains of Jericho. The king took the Arabah Road (see v. 4), the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, which was in the steppe land of the Jordan Valley rift. The plains of Jericho are stretches of flat and dry ground east of Jericho. It was an open area, which made it easy for the Babylonian troops to retrieve the fugitives.

25:7. Zedekiah's treatment. Blinding was a common treatment of rebellious slaves (even

subject kings) in the ancient Near East. The Assyrian vassal treaties mention blinding as a curse for a future violator of a loyalty oath. Other Assyrian sources mention the blinding of one eye of prisoners of war, in order that they could still be used as a work force but would have been rendered incapacitated in war. Zedekiah was put in a "house of punishment," corresponding to an Assyrian word for prison.

25:8-10. fall of Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan, the commander of the Babylonian armed forces, was the "chief cook" mentioned in a list of high officials of Nebuchadnezzar II. The title "chief cook," like that of "chief cupbearer," was an archaic term for those in high positions in Assyrian and Babylonian courts. They were often sent on military and diplomatic missions (e.g, the Rabshekah was the "chief cupbearer" to Sennacherib, 2 Kings 18:17). Nebuzaradan was responsible for the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, for sending Judahite high officials to be executed (vv. 8-12, 18-21) and for the deportation of a number of the Judahites a few years later (c. 582 B.C.; Jer 52:24-30). Typical of Assyrian and Babylonian practice, Nebuzaradan destroyed the major public centers in the city and the protective walls of the city to make it vulnerable to further attack.

25:13-17. plunder of Jerusalem. The writer of 2 Kings is probably reciting this list of items from nonextant official temple records of Judah. It can be compared to 2 Kings 17:15-20, where the original manufacture of the items was recorded. The large list of bronze objects may be a booty count. The items in 2 Kings 17 that were omitted here had been sent to Assyria in previous years (e.g., twelve bronze bulls were sent by Ahaz to Tiglath-Pileser III; 2 Kings 16:17). No Babylonian sources describe the inventory taken from Jerusalem.

25:22. governorship. It is possible that Gedaliah had previously been in the service of King Zedekiah, based upon a seal impression of the late seventh century B.C. from Lachish that reads, "belonging to Gedaliah, the Royal Steward." Alternatively, however, that bulla may refer to another Gedaliah of this period (see Jer 38:1). The name Gedaliah is also found on an ostraca from Arad. He was probably a ranking member of the "pro-Babylonian" party in Jerusalem. Similar to the Assyrians, the Babylonians desired to found an administrative core with a strong Babylonian presence in Judah. Contrary to Assyrian practice, however, the Babylonians did not repopulate Judah with people from other parts of the empire.

25:23-25. Mizpah. This was the capital of what was left of Judah. Mizpah is an eight-acre site located about eight miles north of Jerusalem. For information concerning its earlier history see comments on 1 Samuel 7:5 and 2 Chronicles 16:6. Recent reassessment of excavation reports have identified an occupation level from this period. One of the artifacts found at the site was a seal belonging to "Jaazaniah, the servant of the king"—likely the same individual mentioned in verse 23.

25:27-30
The Release of Jehoiachin

25:27-30. Jehoiachin in Babylon. The thirty-seventh year of Jehoiachin's exile was 560 B.C. Evil-Merodach (Babylonian, Amel-Marduk, "the man of Marduk") ruled Babylon from 562 to 560. He was the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar II. He was assassinated by his successor Neriglissar. Very few sources remain from his brief reign. Jehoiachin was given the "seat of seats" by Evil-Merodach, implying that there were other royal prisoners in Babylon. The Unger Prism gives a list of kings who were prisoners in Babylon during the reign of Evil-Merodach. They include the kings of Tyre, Gaza, Sidon, Arvad and Arpad. Jehoiachin is mentioned on a rations list from Babylon, confirming the biblical information that he was fed at the king's table.

1 CHRONICLES

1:1-54
Genealogies of Adam Through Jacob and Esau

1:1-4. Adam's sons. More detail of this section of the genealogy may be found in Genesis 5.

1:5-27. Noah's sons. More detail of this section of the genealogy may be found in Genesis 10 and 11.

1:13. peoples of Canaan. For more information on these people groups see comment on Exodus 3:8.

1:29-54. non-Israelite descendants of Abraham. Comments on these genealogies can be found as follows: Hagar (Ishmael) in Genesis 25:12-18; Keturah, Genesis 25:1-6; Esau, Genesis 36.

2:1—7:40
Genealogies of the Twelve Tribes

2:42-55. prominence of Caleb. Caleb and Joshua were the only representatives of the exodus generation to enter the land of Canaan. Caleb was given a special land grant within the tribe of Judah's holdings in the vicinity of Hebron (Josh 14:6-15). Since the genealogies are being used for land claims, it is important for Caleb's standing to be recognized.

3:1-16. royal line of David. The other prominent line in the tribe of Judah was, of course, the royal line. A number of these names are represented in variant forms from those that were used in Kings: Abijah/Abijam; Joram/Jehoram; Azariah/Uzziah; Shallum/Jehoahaz; Jehoiachin/Jeconiah. Most of these can be explained in one of three ways: (1) variations within spelling of the divine name in the name; (2) variant words with the same meaning; or (3) throne name versus personal name.

3:17-24. postexilic descendants of David. Most of these individuals are unknown outside of this list. Exceptions are Zerubbabel, of whom considerably more is known (see comment on Ezra 3:2), and Hattush (v. 22) who is known only as one who returned with Ezra (Ezra 8:2).

4:21. linen workers at Beth Ashbea. The reference to Mareshah earlier in the verse leads to the suspicion that Beth Ashbea too should be located in the Shephelah between the Jerusalem hills and the coastal plains, but it is impossible to be more specific at this time. Guilds of craftsmen were typically connected with particular towns that had chosen to specialize in that industry. Knowledge of the craft would be passed on from generation to generation. An Alalakh text lists over sixty such house industries as early as the fifteenth century B.C. Textile production was a common industry that was done on a small scale in most homes, but also could support large industrial centers. Linen technology required the processing of flax as well as spinning, dying and weaving facilities.

4:21. men of Cozeba. If it can be identified at all, Cozeba is likely a variant spelling of Achzib in the Shephelah. This has tentatively been associated with the modern site of Tel el-Beida, about five miles from Mareshah.

4:21. king's potters at Netaim and Gederah. It can be assumed that the palace or temple sought to attract to itself the best artisans of the trades that they had need of. Sponsorship would have included providing supplies, workshops, equipment and perhaps some slave labor to help with menial tasks. Addi-

SIGNIFICANCE OF GENEALOGIES TO POSTEXILIC AUDIENCE

Though most of the material of Chronicles covers the history of the preexilic period, it is written for those who returned from the Babylonian exile in the sixth and fifth centuries, and reestablished themselves in the land. Genealogies to them represented the charter of their identity. Their covenant with the Lord had established them as an elect people of God living in the land promised by him. Their family lineage was their certificate of membership. It was their heritage and their legacy. Often in the ancient world genealogies served sociological rather than historical functions. Instead of offering a strictly sequential report of the order of generations, they were designed to use continuity with the past as an explanation of the current structure and condition of society. Israel carried along with this an additional theological emphasis and significance that was inherent in their genealogical reports. Continuity with the past would give meaning to their current theological situation. Individuals in the ancient world found their identity not in their individualism but in their solidarity with the group. This included not only those that made up their contemporary kinship group but extended throughout the generations. The genealogies were their way of fitting themselves into this pangenerational solidarity. Every generation is not necessarily represented. One might compare the selective list of heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11. Americans today take pride in being able to trace their ancestry back to those who crossed on the Mayflower or those who signed the Declaration of Independence. The difference is that in Israel these connections gave rights and privileges rather than being simply status symbols.

tionally they would receive rations, clothing and other needs. The towns mentioned here are again to be found in the Shephelah, but there is no consensus concerning their specific identification.

4:41. Meunites. A number of very different opinions exist concerning the identification of this group. The first is that it should be identified with the Minaeans of South Arabia. Their control of the incense trade had extended up into the region of Palestine by the fourth century. Others would identify the group with the Mu'unaya mentioned in the inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III. A third possibility links them to the town of Maon south of Hebron in the hill country of Judah.

4:42-43. new Simeonite territory. The new territory occupied by the Simeonites is due south of their assigned territory in the Negev but probably still west of the Arabah and east of Kadesh-barnea. Moving to this area entails a migration of perhaps forty or fifty miles.

5:1. Reuben's forfeiture. For information on this incident see Genesis 35:21-22.

5:8-9. area of settlement. The Reubenite settlement is in Transjordan alongside the north half of the Dead Sea from the Arnon River (Wadi Mujib) on the south to the Medeba plateau and Mount Nebo on the north. An area often held by the Moabites, it is about twenty miles square.

5:10. Hagrites. The inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III mention a tribe of Arameans called the Hagaranu that some have associated with the Hagrites. At this time, however, little is known of them.

5:16. territory of Gadite settlement. Gilead and Bashan are two areas that cover nearly one hundred miles (north-south) of Transjordan. Gilead is the hilly section of Transjordan between the Jabbok on the south almost to the Yarmuk on the north. Bashan is in the area (known today as the Golan Heights) bordered by Mount Hermon to the north, Jebel Druze (Mount Hauran) to the east, the Sea of Galilee to the west and the Yarmuk region to the south. Bashan proper, more limited to the region of the (upper?) Yarmuk, is a broad, fertile plateau region noted for its grazing. Salecah (v. 11) is about sixty miles east of the Sea of Galilee, south of Mount Hauran. The pasturelands of Sharon refer to a location in Transjordan that remains unidentified. The Moabite Inscription also refers to such an area, but does not locate it.

5:19. battle against the Hagrites and allies. The allies with the Hagrites are Arabian tribes. Jetur (by Roman times, Itureans, northeast of Galilee, see Luke 3:1) and Naphish are known from Ishmael's descendants (Gen 25:15). The region of Naphish is referred to in a seventh-century letter to the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal. Nodab (perhaps Adbeel in Gen 25:13) may also be listed in Assyrian records (Tiglath-Pileser III) as a tribal group in Transjordan. Aside from these passing references, nothing is known of these peoples or of this battle.

5:21. plunder. The numbers of livestock and human captives are incredibly large. In comparison, the totals from twenty years of campaigning by the extremely successful Shalmaneser III produced 110,610 prisoners, nearly 10,000 horses and mules, over 35,000 cattle, nearly 20,000 donkeys, and nearly 185,000 sheep. Sennacherib's campaign to Babylon netted 20,000 people, 11,000 donkeys, 5,000 camels, and 800,000 sheep.

5:26. Assyrian relocation of Transjordanian tribes. Tiglath-Pileser III (originally named Pulu) invaded Upper and Lower Galilee in 733 B.C. and reported that he deported 13,520 people (see comment on 2 Kings 15:29). In this campaign the northern kingdom of Israel was reduced to only Samaria and its surroundings, which survived independently for another twelve years. The relocation sites focus on the middle Euphrates, where Gozan (Guzanu=Tel Halaf, about one hundred miles east of Carchemish) is located on the Habur River. Halah is identified as Halahhu of the Assyrian inscriptions, which was located about eight miles northeast of Nineveh.

6:31-46. Levitical musicians. David's three chief musicians, Heman, Asaph and Ethan, all have long and distinguished pedigrees going back to their ancestor Levi through various lines. In the ancient world there were musicians' guilds that serviced shrines and sanctuaries. As early as the third millennium in Egypt there were priests that oversaw the musicians who performed in worship. Hittites and Babylonians both had musicians among temple personnel. Many religious situations, from individual rituals to ceremonies to festivals, were accompanied by musical performance (both vocal and instrumental). For more information see comment on Amos 5:23.

6:48-49. respective duties of Levites and Aaronide priests. The Aaronide priests were more directly involved in the performance of sacrifices and the duties connected to the holy place. The Levites were more directly connected with the other aspects of the sacred enclosure. These would include controlling access to the sacred area and providing for the supply and upkeep of the sanctuary

(see details in 9:22-33).

6:55-56. distinction between villages and pasturelands. The land immediately surrounding Hebron was part of the grant to the Levites. This verse clarifies, however, that the settlements in the Hebron region, including the arable land around them, was still the portion of Caleb.

6:64. Levitical cities. For information on the Levitical cities see comments on Numbers 35:1-5 and Joshua 21:3-40.

7:28-29. territory of Ephraim and Manasseh. Ephraim's settlements ranged from Bethel in the south to Shechem in the north and did not include either the coastal plain (Gezer was the western limit) or the Jordan Valley. Manasseh was positioned north of Ephraim, and included the Samarian hills (up to Gilboa) and the Carmel range skirting the southern end of the Jezreel Valley (thus including Taanach and Megiddo). Manasseh territory included the Jordan Valley (Beth Shan) and the coastal plain (Dor) up to the Carmel promontory.

9:1. royal genealogical lists. There would be a number of reasons to keep genealogical lists in the official palace archives. First, whether land possession was on the basis of royal grant or divine grant, it was tied to families. Therefore property disputes often had to be settled by reference to genealogical records. Second, conscription for government service, whether in labor corvees or for military duty, was conducted on the basis of census figures, as was taxation. Census records typically would have been organized by genealogical categories.

9:3. significance of resettlement lists. This list is composed of those who settled in Jerusalem. It is distinct from the previous lists because they all addressed ancestral holdings being resettled. The reason Jerusalem had so few to live in it is that many of the families of Jerusalem had been decimated in the Babylonian destruction of that city. For people of other tribes to live in Jerusalem, they would have to neglect (if not give up) their ancestral lands in their tribal territories. Willingness to make that sacrifice in order to repopulate Jerusalem merited special notice.

9:22-27. gatekeepers. One of the most important tasks assigned to priestly personnel was controlling access to the temple precinct, the inner circle of the "sacred compass" (on this concept see comments on Lev 16:2 and Num 18:1-7). Defiling the sanctuary with impurity required a purification offering ("sin" offering, see comment on Lev 4:1-3) and could bring punishment on the individual as well as the people. The gatekeepers had to prevent unqualified intrusion. There were also many valuable items in the temple precinct. Gold and silver were plentiful and a temptation to the unscrupulous individual who may not have feared divine retribution for trespass or theft of temple property. These valuables also had to be guarded. Misappropriation of that which was sacred required a reparation offering ("guilt" offering, see comment on Lev 5:14-16). The gatekeepers were charged with guarding against these offenses.

9:28-33. other Levitical duties. All sorts of skills were useful within the priestly ranks. Accounting for the sacred vessels (remember, mostly made of gold) involved inventory procedures, a control and record of usage, and care for and storage of the vessels. The consumables also had to be inventoried and replenished, and there were special sacred recipes for some of the mixtures that were used (see comment on Ex 30:23-25).

10:1-14
The Death of Saul

For comments on the details of this section see 1 Samuel 31.

11:1-9
David Becomes Kings and Conquers Jerusalem

For comments on the details of this section see 2 Samuel 5.

11:10-47
David's Mighty Men and Their Exploits

For comments on the details of this section see 2 Samuel 23:8-39.

12:1-40
David's First Army

12:2. ambidextrous warriors. Left-handedness was not acceptable in the ancient world because it was generally associated with evil or demons. As a result, anyone who was left-handed became ambidextrous because the use of the left hand in many situations was not approved. In battle, however, the ability to use either hand could become a distinct advantage. For instance, battle strategies were often designed to force the enemy to be moving to their left while fighting. For a right-handed soldier, this would put his shield (in

his left hand) away from the enemy and expose him to attack. An ambidextrous soldier could easily switch the shield to his right hand without compromising his ability to fight as he moved. An ambidextrous bowman using a tree or rock for protection would have a wider range of target available because he could shoot from either side without exposing himself to the enemy.

12:15. crossing the Jordan at flood stage. The first month begins in March, when the spring temperatures were melting the snow in the mountains and causing the Jordan to reach flood stage. There is an interesting inscription of Sargon II of Assyria (eighth century) where he claims that he led his army across the Tigris and Euphrates at flood stage as on dry ground. On the one hand, this posed considerable risk to those crossing, but on the other hand (for that very reason), it often made surprise attacks possible because no one would be expecting the crossing to be made.

12:23-40. tribal alliance as foundation for kingship. Israel was still a tribal society despite the decision to have a king at their head. As a result, any potential king needed to procure the backing of the tribal leadership and the military contingents of the clans to support his bid for the throne.

13:1-14
Failed Attempt to Bring the Ark to Jerusalem

For comments on the details of this section see 2 Samuel 6:1-11.

14:1-17
Victory over the Philistines

For comments on the details of this section see 2 Samuel 5:17-25.

15:1—16:43
Bringing the Ark to Jerusalem

15:1. David's building projects in Jerusalem. The only project the biblical text names is the royal palace. Archaeology has, unfortunately, not been able as yet to identify any other buildings built in Jerusalem in the time of David. For the royal palace see comment on 2 Samuel 5:11.

15:20-21. music styles. The terms "alamoth" (used in the titles of Psalm 46 with a possible variation in Ps 48:14 and the title to 9) and "sheminith" (psalm titles to 6 and 12) are left untranslated in the NIV because there is still uncertainty concerning their technical meanings. The former term in its nontechnical use means "maidens" and is therefore sometimes interpreted as being in the soprano range. The latter term means "eighth" and is thought to suggest a certain placement on the octave. Akkadian texts demonstrate the knowledge of the seven-note scale and various keys ("tunings"). Some of the Akkadian notations also concern the intervals used for filling out the chords (e.g., thirds).

For comments on the remaining details of this section see 2 Samuel 6:12-23.

16:26. gods are idols. See comments on Leviticus 26:1 and Deuteronomy 4:15-18.

16:39. tabernacle at high place in Gibeon. Outside of Chronicles there is no specific mention of the tabernacle being at Gibeon. Gibeon is located just six miles northwest of Jerusalem, and 1 Kings 3:4 identifies it as the most important high place and indicates a functioning altar there.

16:42. instruments in worship in the ancient Near East. See comments on 6:31-46.

17:1-27
Covenant Promises to David

For comments on the details of this section see 2 Samuel 7.

18:1-17
Establishment of David's Kingdom

For comments on the details of this section see 2 Samuel 8.

19:1-19
Ammonite War

For comments on the details of this section see 2 Samuel 10.

20:1-3
Defeat of Rabbah

For comments on the details of this section see 2 Samuel 11:1; 12:29-31.

20:4-8
Battles with the Philistines

For comments on the details of this section see 2 Samuel 21:15-22.

21:1-30
David's Census

For comments on the details of this section see 2 Samuel 24.

22:1-19
Preparations for the Building of the Temple

22:2. stonecutters. The dressed stone used in this period is known as ashlar masonry. An iron chisel was used to dress the margin around the edges, while the central part of the rock face was left unworked. In the area around Jerusalem limestone was particularly abundant and could be quarried nearby, but harder stone had to be brought from greater distances. Basalt was available in quantity in the Galilee and the Golan; granite was available in the southern Arabah near Eilat under a cover of sandstone. To quarry large blocks, wooden wedges were driven deeply into cracks and then soaked with water. As the wood expanded it would split the rock. Heavy blocks were moved into place by means of lead balls being spread on the block below. Subsequent blocks would flatten the lead balls.

22:3. iron nails and fittings. At this period iron was being widely used but was still considered decorative. The fittings were most likely decorated plates or bands attached to the door by the nails.

22:3. bronze work. Bronze was refined in a crucible, and then molds were used to give it its shape.

22:4 cedar wood. The principal use of cedar was for making the intricate paneling in the interior rooms. A second possible use was in the beams that would have been interspersed between the courses of stone work. Many of the carvings that were done for the temple used olive wood rather than cedar.

22:14. one hundred thousand talents of gold. This is an immense amount of gold. Its weight of 3750 tons would fetch about $45 billion at today's prices, but it represents far more in buying power equivalence. This is by far the largest amount of gold referred to in the Old Testament. Elsewhere in Chronicles there is mention of 3000 talents (112 tons) of gold (1 Chron 29:4). Outside of Chronicles the largest number is 666 talents (25 tons) of gold, which was the amount Solomon was said to receive yearly. In Egypt the largest known donation of gold and silver made by a pharaoh to the gods is the 200 tons by Shishak (who got lots of it from Jerusalem). In Assyrian inscriptions, kings such as Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II and Shalmaneser III rarely list the specific amount of gold taken in tribute or plunder, and when they do it is usually between ten and fifty talents. Centuries later Persepolis was believed to possess the richest hoard in the ancient world. At the time of Alexander's conquest its treasure of gold and silver was valued at 120,000 talents (=4,500 tons) of silver.

22:14. how much gold? In 1993 the statistics for the world mineral reserve base listed a total of 55,435 tons. The United States Central Bank gold reserve was about 9000 tons. A cube of pure, solid gold that is one foot per side weighs 1200 pounds (worth over $7 million in today's market). Solomon's contribution would have filled a standard two-car garage floor to ceiling with such blocks (6250 of them). If the builders would have stacked up blocks such as this they could have built the outer walls of the two main chambers of the temple one foot thick around three sides (with dimensions of 90 by 30 by 30.

22:14. one million talents of silver. As with the number in the last entry this is an enormous amount (almost 40,000 tons) and far exceeds anything else from biblical or extrabiblical sources.

23:1—26:32
Levites and Their Duties

23:28-31. duties of the Levites. See comments on 9:22-33.

24:6. scribe. Scribes in the ancient world were the accountants, the historians, the journalists, the personal secretaries, the tutors and the librarians of their day. Much of a scribe's training involved language and writing, and his apprenticeship would give him additional specialized skills. While many scribes were never more than clerks or middle-class functionaries, some scribes gained wide renown as sages, and others could rise to the rank of prime minister, as is evident in the texts form Ugarit.

25:1. connection between music and prophecy. Typically prophets would use various procedures in order to prepare themselves for receiving prophetic oracles. Music played an important role in inducing a trancelike state (ecstasy) that was seen as making one receptive to a divine message. In the Mari texts there is an entire class of temple personnel who were ecstatics and who often provided prophetic messages.

26:15. storehouse. This term occurs only here and in Nehemiah 12:25. In Akkadian the term refers to the outbuildings at the gates of temples, which fits well the more specific usage in Nehemiah.

26:16. Shalleketh gate. This is the only reference to this gate, and its positioning and function are obscure. From the context it appears to be on the west side (the rear) of the temple area but is not the west gate. Since there is a

forum area to the west (see comment on 26:18), perhaps this gate led into the west end of the forum area while the west gate led from the forum into the temple area.

26:16-18. role of the gatekeepers. One of the most important tasks assigned to priestly personnel was controlling access to the temple precinct, the inner circle of the "sacred compass" (on this concept see comments on Lev 16:2 and Num 18:1-7). Defiling the sanctuary with impurity required a purification offering ("sin" offering, see comment on Lev 4:1-3) and could bring punishment on the individual as well as the people. The gatekeepers had to prevent unqualified intrusion. There were also many valuable items in the temple precinct. Gold and silver were plentiful and a temptation to the unscrupulous individual who may not have feared divine retribution for trespass or theft of temple property. These valuables also had to be guarded. Misappropriation of that which was sacred required a reparation offering ("guilt" offering, see comment on Lev 5:14-16). The gatekeepers were charged with guarding against these offenses.

26:18. court *(parbar).* This obscure architectural term is thought (on the basis of the Temple Scroll from the Dead Sea Scrolls) to refer to an open area (similar to a forum) just west of the sanctuary (that is, at the rear of it) featuring free-standing pillars.

26:20. temple treasuries. See comment on 26:16-18.

27:1-24
Army Divisions and Officers

27:1. significance of lists. Part of the duty of Israelites to their king and country involved service in the army when necessary and regular duty on the corvee labor crews. This latter used forced labor as a form of taxation. This list, however, concerned the organization of the former along militia lines that were not organized strictly by tribe. In the transition to a standing army, the militia system called upon each division to serve one month of "active" duty, thereby forming a rotating standing army in addition to the professional full-time troops and the mercenaries.

27:24. wrath on Israel. For information concerning this see comments on 2 Samuel 24.

27:25-34
Administration

27:25-31. king's property. These stewards had oversight of the estate and assets of the king. Royal holdings existed throughout the land because property that had no heirs reverted to the crown. Likewise, those who had become debtors to the king for one reason or another worked the land for the king. Besides real property and its produce the king also owned flocks and herds that were grazed throughout the land.

28:1-21
Charge to Solomon to Build the Temple

28:1 royal administration in the ancient Near East. The categories listed in this verse include representatives of each tribe (a vestige of the twelve-tribe system that preceded the monarchy), all officers of the military (both king's bodyguard and national army), royal stewards, administration of the palace (scribes, eunuchs, advisers, "cabinet" officials) and David's special forces (an elite group of operatives that did not necessarily function within an organized military structure). No reference is made to priests or Levites, but perhaps their presence is assumed (v. 21). Bureaucratic structures are evident in the ancient Near East as early as the fourth millennium B.C. Magistrates, bailiffs, judges, heralds and inspectors all were part of urban and village administration. But the list in this passage is the administration of the king and state—royal administration, not social administration. One could compare and contrast the Assyrian structure a few centuries later that featured three major officials under the king, roughly equivalent to American secretary of state, president's chief of staff and chairman of the joint chiefs of staff. A second layer would have included much of the palace administration.

28:2. footstool symbolism. The ark was a wooden box, open at the top, approximately three to four feet in length and over two feet in both width and height (based on eighteen inches per cubit). A golden cover, decorated with two winged cherubim, sealed the ark, securing the tablets of the law within it. Its primary function was to store the tablets and to serve as a "footstool" for God's throne. In Egypt it was common for important documents that were confirmed by oath (e.g., international treaties) to be deposited beneath the feet of the deity. The Book of the Dead even speaks of a formula written on a metal brick by the hand of the god being deposited beneath the feet of the god. Therefore the footstool/receptacle combination follows known Egyptian practice. In Egyptian festivals the images of the gods were often carried in procession on portable barques. Paintings portray

these as boxes about the size of the ark carried on poles and decorated with or flanked by guardian creatures. A similar-sized chest with rings (for carrying with poles) was found in Tutankhamun's tomb.

28:11. temple architecture. Temples are typically classified by archaeologists on the basis of the arrangement of the chambers through which one gains access to the inner recesses and by the orientation of the main chamber where the presence of the god is represented. "Direct axis" architecture allowed one to walk in a straight line from the altar to the inner shrine (cella). "Bent axis" required a ninety-degree turn between the altar and the place where the image stood. The door through which one entered the rectangular cella in the direct access arrangement could either be on the short wall ("long room") or the long wall ("broad room"). Solomon's temple was of the "direct axis" style, but it was neither long room nor broad room because the holy of holies (cella) was square, not rectangular. Solomon's temple also featured an antechamber between the altar and the cella as well as a portico, courtyard and many siderooms. These were also common elements in ancient Near Eastern temple architecture. A ninth-century temple at Tell Tayanat in Syria features the exact structure of a portico with two free-standing pillars, a long antechamber and a small cella all on a direct axis, thirty-eight feet by eighty-three feet (Solomon's was thirty by ninety).

28:15-17. temple accessories. Archaeologists have unearthed many examples of temple accessories in excavations throughout the ancient Near East including a variety of braziers, shovels and containers. For more information on specific implements see comments on 2 Chronicles 4.

28:18. cherubim as chariot. This verse has the only explicit connection between the cherubim and a chariot motif. In Ezekiel 1 and 10, creatures that are identified with cherubim accompany Yahweh's mobile throne, but that is never called a chariot. Biblical descriptions as well as archaeological discoveries (including some fine ivory pieces from Nimrud in Mesopotamia, Arslan Tash in Syria and Samaria in Israel) suggest the cherubim are composite creatures (having features of a number of different creatures, like the Egyptian sphinx), often four-legged animal bodies with wings. The cherubim appear in ancient art with some regularity, flanking the thrones of kings and deities, for instance on the side of the throne picture on Ahiram's sarcophagus.

29:1-9

Donations Toward the Temple

29:2. onyx. Sometimes translated "carnelian" or even "lapis lazuli," the precise identification of this stone is unknown.

29:2. turquoise. Another possibility here is "antimony," and some believe it represents the mortar that was used to set mosaic patterns (see next entry).

29:2. stones of various colors. The reference to stones of various colors suggests the use of mosaics. In the classical world mosaics were very popular. The stone was not artificially colored, but rather stones of different shades were imported from wherever they could be found to give color to the mosaic. The earliest mosaic floors were made from colored pebbles laid out in geometric designs. Only later did they begin cutting the stone into cubes (tessellation) and forming them into pictures. No examples of mosaics in the Near East have been found earlier than the eighth century B.C. (Gordion in Asia Minor), though the art of inlay was known as early as the third millennium (as in the royal standard of Ur).

29:2. marble. Some translations call this alabaster. Marble had to be imported from Greece and is not evident in the ancient world until its introduction into Phoenicia in the Persian period. Marble capitals (the decorative tops of pillars) are not attested archaeologically in the Near East until the first or second centuries A.D., though pillars of the material referred to in this verse are mentioned in Esther 1:6, where the same material is used in an inlaid floor. Oriental alabaster was a calcium carbonate-like marble, unlike European alabaster, which is gypsum. It was used for fine vessels throughout the region during the biblical period, as well as for columns in architecture. In Sennacherib's "palace without rival" mostly white limestone was used, though he had some access to alabaster.

29:4. amount of precious metals. This comes out to over one hundred tons of gold and over 250 tons of silver. In Egypt the largest known donation of gold and silver made by a pharaoh to the gods is the two hundred tons by Shishak (who got lots of it from Jerusalem). In Assyrian inscriptions, kings such as Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II and Shalmaneser III rarely list the specific amount of gold taken in tribute or plunder, and when they do it is usually between ten and fifty talents. More comparable is the amount of 9,000 talents of gold and 40,000 talents of silver Alexander the Great is said to have taken from the Persian capital, Susa.

29:4. Ophir. Gold from Ophir is mentioned in an eighth-century inscription from Tell Qasile. The precise location of the site is unknown. The fact that it was shipped in at Ezion Geber suggests an Arabian location, though sites in India and East Africa have been considered.

29:7. amount of leaders' gifts. Five thousand talents of gold is nearly 200 tons and the amount of silver is twice that. Another amount of gold is measured in darics—the coined money of the Persian empire. Clearly the author of Chronicles has converted this amount to his own contemporary units. A daric is a gold coin that probably got its name from its originator, the Persian king, Darius the Great, toward the end of the sixth century B.C. This was the first coining of money in the Near East (though the Greek world had been coining money for over a century). The daric bore the image of an archer and weighed about .3 ounces. Ten thousand darics would therefore equal about one hundred eighty-five pounds (about two and a half talents). Perhaps the Chronicler did not just include this with the other gold talents because that part of the donation was given in ingots that had already been sized for merchant transactions. Even before money was being coined, there was limited use of standardized weight pieces either in ingot currency (no decoration or consistent shape), or ring money (in various ring shapes) as early as the second millennium.

29:10-30
Solomon's Coronation

29:21. coronation sacrifice. Burnt offerings and fellowship offerings are two of the most general types of sacrifices. The former often accompanied petition, while the latter served as an opportunity for festive celebration and a communal meal before the Lord. Typical use of this offering in a national context was for ratification of treaties or covenant agreements. Here, the sacrifices were being offered to make petition for God's blessing and in preparation for a feast that would create an alliance between Solomon and those in attendance.

29:29. sources in Chronicles. The Chronicler cites many different sources that he used in the compilation of his work. Most of these have not survived, though the canonical books of Samuel and Kings would have been among them. The sources mentioned here are records of three famous prophets of the period of David, though we do not know whether they are memoirs, anthologies of prophecies or some other type of document. There is no extant literature from the ancient world that is attributed to a court prophet, except those found in the Bible, so there is little precedent for identifying the nature of these works.

2 CHRONICLES

1:1-17
God's Blessings on Solomon

1:3. high place at Gibeon. Located about four miles northwest of Jerusalem, Gibeon (el-Jib) lies in the Benjaminite hill country with several nearby springs and an elaborate tunneled water system making it an important local settlement. The cultic site or high place where Solomon made his huge offering of one thousand sacrifices (1 Kings 3:4) may have actually been on a promontory called Nebi Samwil, about a mile south of Gibeon. The city's prominence is also found in its inclusion in Shishak's list of cities during his Palestine campaign. The use of a high place is not condemned by the biblical writer prior to the construction of the Jerusalem temple and the implementation of "Jeroboam's sin" (see comments on 1 Sam 10:8; 1 Kings 12:28-31).

1:3. Tent of Meeting. See the comments on Exodus 27:21 and 33:7-10 on the construction and use of this sacred installation during the wilderness period. The fact that it has been separated from the ark is only found in this narrative.

1:4. Kiriath Jearim. This village had served as the storage place for the ark of the covenant after its return from the Philistines (1 Sam 7:1-2). The town has been identified with Tell el-Achar, nine miles west-northwest of Jerusalem, but this is unsubstantiated by archaeological finds or extrabiblical references. Its association with Mahaneh Dan in Judges 18:12 puts it in that general area (see the comment on Judg 13:25). This location places it only six miles from Gibeon.

1:5. bronze altar. See Exodus 38:30 and 39:39

for the construction of this altar, which was supposed to stand in front of the tent of meeting (see also 2 Kings 16:14). The presence of the tent of meeting and the bronze altar at Gibeon while the ark was moved to Jerusalem suggests two different, major religious centers prior to the construction of the Jerusalem temple.

1:5. assembly inquiry. Inquiry usually refers to posing an oracular question to the deity, but no question is stated or implied here. A persuasive variant reading understands the search ("inquiry") to be for the altar rather than for an oracle from the Lord. This would make sense prior to the temple-building activities in the following chapters. With the anticipated construction of a new sanctuary, it is important to collect the relics that had been associated with the traditional shrine. Significant holiness would be attached to this altar that had been used by Aaron himself several centuries earlier. If there is an oracle being sought here, it likely concerns the desire to build a temple. Such work was not begun without specific divine approval (see comment on 2:1).

1:6. one thousand burnt offerings. In its magnitude, this can be compared to the mass sacrifices in Exodus 24:5-8 and 1 Kings 8:5. Such extravagance generally marks major covenantal events or the initiation of a new relationship with Yahweh. The huge piles of offerings on tables depicted in Egyptian tomb paintings may parallel, at least in terms of quantity, the devotion and power exemplified in Solomon's offerings at Gibeon.

1:7-12. incubation dreams. Though the passage in Chronicles does not mention a dream, 1 Kings 3 provides that detail. It was common practice for individuals or groups to travel to shrines, make offerings and then sleep before the altar in the hope of obtaining a dream message from the god of that place (see the comments on Gen 28:13-15 and 1 Sam 3:3). The setting therefore was extremely important to incubate a dream theophany (as in the dream of the Ugaritic hero-king Keret). In the vision the person is aroused by the god's appearance and a call to be alert to their pronouncement. Among the many examples from ancient Near Eastern literature, the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal describes a dream in which Ishtar appeared to him, and the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus records several dreams in which Marduk or Sin stood before him in all of their glory.

1:7. God's offer. In auditory message dreams such as this (see comment on 1 Sam 3:4-10), it is not unusual at all for conversation to take place between the deity and the king. The dream functions to validate either the kingship or a proposed undertaking of the king.

1:8. Solomon's acknowledgment of God's patronage. Similar phrasing can be found throughout the ancient Near East as kings recognize the deity who has established them. The Hittite king, Muwattalli II, for instance, cites his own unworthiness in comparison to his father's status and accomplishments. He then recognizes the deity as having raised him up and established him on the throne.

1:12. granting of wisdom. Kings of the ancient Near East were supposed to be wise, and it was not unusual for them to credit deity for bestowing wisdom on them. The Assyrian king Sargon was proclaimed to be the wisest ruler in the world thanks to the gods Ea and Belet-ili. The god Asshur assures Sennacherib in a dream that his wisdom had surpassed the wisdom of the experts. Ashurbanipal boasts not only of his great learning and wisdom, but of his technical knowledge and his ability to debate the learned. He credits Shamash and Adad for granting him his wealth of wisdom.

1:14. Solomon's chariots and horses. The accumulation of such a large force of chariots indicates his intention to emulate the grand military displays of his neighbors and rivals. For conflicts in open country and on broad plains, the chariot, accompanied by detachments of infantry and cavalry, was both a shock weapon and a mobile platform for archers. The huge numbers of chariots recorded in the Assyrian annals at the Battle of Qarqar (853 B.C., see comment on 22:1) indicate just how important commanders considered them in their military planning. Solomon's contingent of chariots is not as large as the two thousand that Ahab contributed to the western alliance at that battle. In the thirteenth century the Hittites and their allies had amassed twenty-five hundred chariots to confront Rameses II at the Battle of Qadesh.

1:14. Solomon's stables. The wide distribution of stable facilities uncovered by archaeologists throughout Israel (Megiddo, Tell el-Hesi, Lachish, Beersheba, Hazor) suggests extensive use of chariot corps in the armies of Israel and Judah. The common architectural style found in most of these stables (long hall, divided lengthwise into three aisles by pillars, and a single door) indicates both attention to function and a common building program. They featured low stone pillars with holes for tethering, and large, shallow stone mangers (similar to those depicted on Assyrian monuments). Large installations would have been

necessary to house and exercise these trained stallions. The Megiddo stables (those found generally dated to Ahab's time) could have housed up to 480 horses. When other stable facilities found by archaeologists are included, nearly 800 stalls can be identified.

1:15. Solomon's gold. For statistics concerning the gold of David and Solomon, see the comments on 1 Chronicles 22:14.

1:16-17. trade with Egypt. Solomon's role seems to have been as a "middleman" between Egypt and Anatolia in the horse and chariot trade. The Phoenicians had established most of the commercial links and provided the ships to carry goods throughout the Mediterranean. With them as his trading partners and Solomon's strategic location on the land link between Africa and Asia (see his horse farms in 2 Chron 8:3-4), it would be a natural expectation that Israel would tap the financial markets during a period of relative peace. As early as the Amarna period fine horses were being imported from Egypt, and the Hittites also imported from Egypt. Both Assyrian and Hittite sources differentiate between the large horses available in Egypt (Nubian horses) and their own smaller horses.

1:16. Kue. Located in the lowlands of southeastern Turkey in what is known in classical sources as Cilicia, Kue emerged from the destruction of the Hittite empire in 1200 B.C. to become a major trading center. In addition to its mention as one of Solomon's trading partners, Kue is found in the Assyrian annals as one of the participating states at the Battle of Qarqar (853 B.C.) and in the Karatepe inscription of Azitawada (late eighth century B.C.).

1:17. cost of chariots and horses. The cost of chariots found in inscriptional material ranges from sixty to one hundred shekels per chariot. The fact that Solomon is paying many times that price suggests that these are not ordinary chariots but ornamental chariots used in display and procession contexts. These are widely attested in both Egypt and Mesopotamia. The luxury transportation of the day, these were typically gilded with all variety of gold, lapis lazuli and precious stones. The Amarna letters refer to a chariot of the Mitannian king that was gilded with over three hundred shekels of gold. The price for the horses is also high but not outrageous for a good quality animal. In second-millennium Hittite sources a chariot horse could be bought for twenty shekels. But there are examples in Syria and Babylon from early in the second millennium to the middle of the first millennium where two to three hundred shekels were paid.

1:17. export trade with Hittites and Arameans. For them to receive horses and chariots by any overland route, the Hittites (see comment on 2 Kings 7:6) and Arameans would have had to deal with Solomon and his Phoenician trading partners. During the eleventh and tenth centuries B.C., the Aramean tribes had taken advantage of the weakness of Assyria and Babylonia to establish small states, such as that at Damascus (see the comments on 1 Kings 11:23-25). Realizing that the Assyrians were still capable of reemerging as a major force (as they were to do in the ninth century), it would have been good policy for both Cilicia and Aram to continue to train and equip strong armies, even in the face of inflated prices.

2:1—4:22
Solomon Builds the Temple

2:1. temple building in the ancient world. Early in the second millennium, Gudea, ruler of Lagash, receives instructions through incubation dreams that he is to build a temple for the goddess Ningirsu. The text reports his gathering of materials (wood, stone, gold and silver) and assembling a work force. At the completion of the work there is a dedication feast lasting seven days. As a result of his labor, Gudea is promised long life and a successful reign. Similar details are given over a millennium later when Esarhaddon is instructed to rebuild the famous Esagila temple in Babylon. Another interesting account of temple building is found in the Ugaritic epic in which the god Baal is building a house for himself. Again the elements of gathering appropriate materials, amassing a work force and celebration upon completion are all present.

2:2. conscript labor. The corvee for public works projects like the construction of the temple would be conscripted on the basis of a census. Considering the huge number of projects undertaken during Solomon's reign, it seems likely that native Israelites as well as resident aliens would have served in the corvee. Indications of this are found in Jeroboam's position as chief of the corvee in the Joseph tribes (1 Kings 11:28) and the stoning by the northern tribes of another corvee officer, Adoniram (1 Kings 12:18). The use of forced labor was already widespread in Syria in the second half of the second millennium. The excesses associated with "forced labor" are also used as one of the charges against the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus in the Cyrus Cylinder.

2:2. carriers. As with any labor group, there would have been a division of labor between

the skilled and the unskilled. Presumably those delegated to the task of "carrying" would have been unskilled "strong backs," who would have hauled stone, timber and building materials and tools. Such heavy labor generally fell to prisoners of war or slaves in Mesopotamian documents. In this case, where resident aliens were involved, they may have served in this capacity, but that would depend on individual skills or background.

2:2. stonecutters. The parallel passage in 1 Kings 5:15-18 indicates the need for quarriers who wrenched the stone from the cliffs as well as more highly trained Phoenician Gebalites (from Byblos) who dressed the stone for use in the construction of the temple. The work at the quarry was accomplished by cutting trenches (about two feet wide all around) to isolate the stone that was to be used. Then wooden wedges were driven in at the bottom and drenched with water. The resulting expansion of the wood freed the bottom of the stone. Though this took no great skill on the part of the laborers, a supervisor with training would be needed to determine where the trenches should be cut so as to procure the best pieces of stone. The next stage was rough shaping. After this the true masons took over as they dressed the stone surfaces and gave it the proportions needed. The work was done with such precision that no mortar was needed. The Egyptian "satire on the trades" describes the cramped back and thighs of the stonecutter who destroys his arms fashioning "costly stones" for buildings. The work of stonecutters is depicted on some of the wall panels decorating Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh.

2:2. size of work force. The total work force is 153,600 (vv. 17-18), divided into three groups: carriers, stonecutters and officers. Numbers such as these may reflect approximate totals of all those who were recruited to work on the temple over the years it took to build, rather than the number working at any given time. Assyrian and Babylonian kings typically got their work force through their military campaigns. In fact, it was the need for a work force that sometimes instigated military activity. In one report, Ashurnasirpal gathered nearly fifty thousand to work on the city of Kalhu.

2:3-16. royal correspondence. There are many examples of royal correspondence from the ancient Near East, which contain requests for building supplies (such as the cedars of Lebanon), luxury items and diplomatic exchanges. The letter carried by the eleventh-century Egyptian priest Wenamon contained a request for cedar logs and made mention of the long-standing, multigenerational relationship between the pharaoh and the kings of the Phoenician coast. The kings of Mari regularly wrote to their vassals and allies, exchanging news and describing the arrival of manufactured goods, animals and raw materials that they had requested or purchased. In this context, Solomon's exchange of letters with Hiram, although not structured in the formal style typical of extrabiblical correspondence, provides a sense of business as usual.

2:4. burning incense. See the comment on Exodus 30:7-8 for the use of incense in the tent of meeting and evidence of its use elsewhere in the ancient Near East. The burning of incense was a regular part of worship of the gods throughout the ancient Near East, so this is a necessity that would be familiar to Hiram.

2:4. consecrated bread. See the comment on Leviticus 24:5-9 on the preparation and weekly presentation of the "show bread." This sacrifice symbolized both God's presence as well as the promise of fertility found in the covenant. It was common practice in the ancient Near East to set food before the gods, though Israelite practice in this regard was quite different from that of her neighbors (see comment on Lev 1:1-2).

2:4. Sabbaths, New Moons, feasts. See the comments on Numbers 28 and 29, which discuss Israel's religious calendar. Though the recognition of Sabbaths is so far unique to Israel, observances at the New Moons and annual festivals would have been familiar obligations to Hiram and the Phoenicians.

2:5. basis for the claim of Yahweh's superiority. Similar claims of superiority for their patron gods can be found in the Assyrian annals for Ashur and the *Enuma Elish* creation story for Babylon's god Marduk. Such would be the expected rhetoric for any nation in internal documents. When one nation claims superiority of its god(s) over the god(s) of another nation, it is usually based on military supremacy or acts of power. Such claims have greatest credibility when they are found in the mouths of those who have worshiped the other god(s) now being considered inferior. Such is the case in Rahab's statement (based on military supremacy and acts of power; Josh 2:11) and Naaman's exclamation (based on healing act; 2 Kings 5:15).

2:7. imported craftsmen. When Assyrians or Babylonians went on campaigns intended to round up a labor force, a prime objective was to procure skilled craftsmen (see the list of those exiled in 2 Kings 24:14, 16). On the one

hand the sheer demand often required more craftsman than were available locally. Additionally, however, some peoples had further developed certain technologies because of the natural resources that were available to them. Craft guilds often were made up of families that had developed their own techniques and trade secrets that would be practiced and passed on from generation to generation. Such skills were desirable, and merchant trade could establish a reputation that would put such craftsmen in high demand.

2:7. blue and crimson yarn. These were the most exotic and desirable dyes that were available in the ancient world and were very expensive. They had been used in decorating the tabernacle and in embroidering the priestly vestments. The "blue cloth" has more recently been interpreted as a blue/purple or violet color. The dye for this color was one of the major imports of Phoenicia where it was extracted from the murex snail *(murex trunculus)* which inhabited shallow coastal waters of the Mediterranean. An ancient refinery has also been found at Dor along the northern coast of Israel. One chemist estimated that a quarter of a million snails would be needed to produce one ounce of pure dye. This dye was used in the manufacture of the most sacred objects.

2:8. types of lumber. Essentially cedar and cypress trees were to be used for the beams and other structural supports. This usage follows the pattern set by other ancient Near Eastern kings like Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon for their monumental buildings. Almug in 1 Kings 10:11-12 is red sandalwood imported from Ophir (native to India and Ceylon) and is a luxury hardwood used for furniture since it can be highly polished. The algum of Chronicles may be Grecian juniper, a tall coniferlike fir used for timber. Typically they used hardwoods that polished to a fine finish with nice grain or fragrant odor. A number of these woods are also impervious to bugs or mildew. Iron-headed axes and two-handed copper pullsaws were among the principal tools used to prepare the timber. Egyptian tombs and tomb paintings provide much information concerning these and other tools.

2:10. payment of woodsmen. While the wages to be paid to the Phoenician woodsmen are set in an agreement for the totality of the project, it may be assumed that each worker received a daily wage/ration for his labor. These men, while they might have belonged to a guild of woodsmen, may have also included *ḫupshu* laborers (mentioned in Amarna, Nuzi and Assyrian texts), who depended for their livelihood on what they could earn each day. The 125,000 bushels each of wheat and barley and the 120,000 gallons each of wine and oil would have served as rations for six to eight thousand workers for three years.

2:14. engraving. Engraving could be done on bone, ivory, shells, stone, gems, wood and metal of various sorts. The art of engraving included the shaping and inscribing of precious and semiprecious stones as seals and insignia. These cylinder seals and stamp seals were used throughout the ancient Near East as personal identification and the means of sealing official documents and contracts with the names of the participants. In the temple much of the furniture as well as the paneling required engraving work.

2:16. wood delivered by raft. The trade in cedar logs from Lebanon is well attested in Egyptian (Old Kingdom through the eighth century) and Assyrian sources. For a time Tiglath-Pileser III ordered the trade stopped between the Phoenicians and their Egyptian and Philistine trading partners, fearing the construction of a fleet or a growth in wealth sufficient to make them dangerous. Transport of the logs along the Palestinian coast south would have involved either tying them together into rafts, which required staying very close to shore for fear of storms breaking them up, or loading them on ships. Assyrian reliefs show Phoenician ships both loaded with logs and towing them. Reliefs at Sargon's palace show cedar-log rafts being floated down the river for use in his building projects, a process that was used as early as 2000 B.C. in Gudea's temple project. Joppa was the closest port to Jerusalem in antiquity and was the natural debarkation point for the logs. From Tyre to Joppa was nearly one hundred miles; the inland trek from Joppa to Jerusalem was about thirty-five miles.

2:17-18. aliens as conscript labor. See the comment on 2:2 and 2:7 on the use and acquisition of conscript labor.

3:1. Mount Moriah. This identification is intended to associate the site of the temple with the sacrifice of Isaac (see the comment on Gen 22:2) even if it is in name only.

3:1. threshing floor of Araunah. See the comments on 2 Samuel 24:18-25 for David's purchase of this facility. The threshing floor, like the city gate, served as a legally significant spot where grain was distributed, disputes settled (see 1 Kings 22:10), and where God's manifestation might occur (see Judg 6:36-40). A threshing floor would also be outside the walls of the city and elevated to take advantage of the winds to blow away the chaff. The

choice of a temple site in the ancient world was an important matter that often absorbed a good deal of time and energy. It was believed that the deity was the one who would designate the spot. No such process is indicated here. Instead a site with already long-established sacred traditions serves the purpose. There are no oracles asked or any designation of location offered through divine messages.

3:2. chronology. The building begins early in Solomon's reign in the mid-960s. The second day of the second month is in the spring when the rainy season and the early festivals are past. The first day of the month would probably have been the New Moon festival, so the second day begins the work.

3:3-4. dimensions. The text in Chronicles describing the physical dimensions of the temple is incomplete, and the measurements given are different from those found in 1 Kings 6:2 (sixty cubits long by twenty cubits wide by thirty cubits high). Chronicles omits the height for the main structure but lists twenty cubits for the height of the portico in verse 4. This measurement may then be based on simply the foundations. There is also some variation in terminology, but that may be explained by the changes in language usage over time. The cubit "of the old standard" is slightly shorter than the common standard in Deuteronomy 3:11. Unlike Mesopotamian descriptions of temples that intend to glorify the king who built the temple, the biblical text gives information sufficient for the reader to visualize (if not precisely reconstruct) the building.

3:4. portico. The portico was the outermost section of the three parts of the Jerusalem temple. This would be consistent with the pattern found in the temple at Tainat and elsewhere in Syria and Phoenicia. It seems to be an "attachment" rather than an integral part of the temple complex and, unlike the two inner chambers, has no doorway. In construction it most resembles the great court of the palace (see 1 Kings 7:12). While the main inner chamber and the holy of holies effectively comprise the "house of Yahweh," the portico matches traditional Near Eastern architecture as the courtyard attached to major dwelling places.

3:5. palm tree and chain designs. The use of a palm tree motif in monumental construction in the ancient Near East also appears most graphically in the wall paintings of the palace of Mari during the reign of Zimri-Lim (eighteenth century). The palm symbolizes fecundity and is the source of the date, a major asset to the economy and food supply of the entire area. The chain design is expanded in the Chronicles version, while it only adorns the capitals of the bronze pillars in 1 Kings 7:17. In Egyptian temples, the palm and lotus pillars represent the conceptualization of the temple as a microcosm of the earth that is the domain of the deity.

3:6. gold of Parvaim. While Parvaim is most likely a place name, its location is unknown. Suggestions have identified it with Yemen and northeast Arabia, but there is no site associated with the term. Its relation to gold may be based on a standard of purity, either associated with etymological links to *parim,* "young bulls," or *para,* a fruit-bearing tree. In both cases the color of the blood or fruit may have given rise to styling this gold as particularly high grade.

3:7. carved cherubim. The description of the wall carvings parallels 1 Kings 6:29. These winged beings, symbolic of God's presence, were also embroidered into the curtains as well as the veil covering the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle (Ex 26:1). An inscription of Agum-kakrime in the second half of the second millennium refers to his contributions and building of a shrine for the gods Marduk and Sarpanitum. The doors to this shrine are decorated with pictures of a horned serpent, a bison, a dog, a scorpion man and several demons, including the protective laḫmu-demons. The contemporary temple at 'Ain Dara in Syria also featured many carvings of sphinxes and lions.

3:8. six hundred talents of gold. For the relatively small chamber of the Holy of Holies alone to be inlaid with six hundred talents (39,600 pounds) of gold would have been quite extravagant. It seems more likely that this amount would have been applied as thinly beaten sheets to the decoration of the entire inner walls of the temple. For comparisons concerning amounts of gold see comments on 1 Chronicles 22:14.

3:9. gold nails, fifty shekels. Contrary to the NIV rendering, this difficult text probably conveys that fifty shekels worth of gold was used to plate iron nails used to attach the gold inlay to the walls. Nails weighing fifty shekels (14.75 ounces) would be too heavy, while fifty shekels weight of gold nails would not be enough to do the job.

3:10-13. sculptured cherubim. These free-standing figures made of olive wood served as guardians or wardens of the Holy of Holies (compare 1 Kings 6:23-28), much as they do the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:24). The architecture of ancient Near Eastern temples evoked images of the Garden (as a residence or audience hall of deity) in several particulars. Composite winged creatures positioned by pillars

stylized to look like trees (usually date palms) were common especially in Syria-Palestine and the upper Euphrates region. Like those whose wings cover the ark of the covenant within the Holy of Holies, these gold inlaid cherubim also function as the symbol of God's presence and a sort of throne. Ancient Near Eastern iconography frequently pictures the thrones of kings and deities flanked by composite winged creatures. The Canaanite equivalent for the storm god Baal was the figure of a bull upon which he is often depicted as standing (compare Ps 18:10 for Yahweh "riding" the cherubim). For more information see comment on Exodus 25:18-20.

3:14. curtain. According to the account in 1 Kings 6:31-32, the two sections of Solomon's temple were divided by a wooden door, which was inlaid with gold and decorated with carvings of cherubim, palm trees and flowers. The Chronicler describes also how the curtain served as a second barrier. In New Testament times the temple also had both doors and a curtain. Separating the holy precincts from the secular world and its impurity was required in the architectural design of ancient temples.

3:15-17. free-standing pillars. For more information see comments on 1 Kings 7:15-22. Their placement may be compared to the sacred architecture of the shrines at Shechem, Hazor and Tyre.

3:16. chains with pomegranates. Pomegranates are a symbol of fertility both in the ancient Near East and in the promises of the covenant (Deut 8:8). Ancient reliefs show a pomegranate-topped scepter used by kings and priests bringing sacrifices. A recently recovered ivory pomegranate (probably the top of just such a scepter) contains the Hebrew inscription "belonging to the temple of the Lord," suggesting its use by priests.

4:1. bronze altar. The use of bronze for sculptured items appears to have begun during the monarchy period. This sacrificial platform was a square, thirty feet to a side, with smaller levels forming steps to its altar. Like other altars, this one functioned symbolically as "God's table," upon which sacrifices were placed in acknowledgment of Yahweh's gifts of fertility (see 1 Kings 8:64 and 2 Kings 16:14). The huge size of this platform and altar most likely precludes it being cast as a single object. Instead it was probably constructed of wood and overlaid with bronze (compare the smaller altar described in 2 Chron 6:13).

4:6. basins. Archaeologists have found a bronze stand that would have held just such a basin dating from the twelfth century B.C. The stand had wheels and was decorated with winged composite creatures (see 1 Kings 7:29).

4:2-5. the "Sea." The "molten sea" (see 1 Kings 7:23-26) has parallels in Assyrian reliefs from the time of Sargon II (eighth century B.C.). There two massive cauldrons are portrayed, resting on the forelegs of bulls at the entrance to the Musasir temple. Its practical function was, like the laver in the tabernacle (Ex 30:18-21) and the ten basins (v. 6), for ablutions by the priests. Additionally, some have attributed to it a symbolic value. With its twelve bulls representing the twelve tribes and its monumental size (forty-five feet in circumference), it may have evoked images of Yahweh's role as Creator God and Lord over the chaotic waters of the earth. In this way, Yahweh eclipses the Canaanite deities Yamm and Baal and the Babylonian god Marduk, who represent sea and storm (see Ps 29:10; 104:1-9; Is 51:9-10).

4:7. lampstands. The ten golden lampstands (see 1 Kings 7:49) are a significant difference from the single lampstand in the tabernacle (Ex 25:31-38). They were probably cylindrical in shape, made of wood and covered with gold leaf. Placed on either side of the temple's interior, their light and golden reflection magnified the sense of splendor and glory inherent in Solomon's temple and God's presence (see Jer 52:19; 2 Chron 13:11; 29:7 for additional references to these "specified" objects). Along with the tables and incense altars or braziers, these furnishings provided the sense of this place being the "house of Yahweh."

4:8. tables. For information on the function of the tables and the use of the bread see comment on Leviticus 24:5-9.

4:8. sprinkling bowls. The golden bowls are also mentioned in 1 Kings 7:50, but the Chronicler supplies the figure of one hundred for them. Their exact function is unclear, but they may have been used to dip water from the basins (v. 6) or to collect blood from sacrifices (see Ex 24:6, 8; 27:3).

4:9-10. layout of the courts. This Phoenician-style, tripartite plan is also found in the temple at 'Ain Dara in northwest Syria. In this way the sacred precincts will be noted as restricted to priestly function and clearly divided from that portion of the temple complex that may have adjoined more secular buildings.

4:11. pots, shovels, sprinkling bowls. Completing the list of cultic objects fabricated by Hiram are those associated with sacrificial offering and incense. Incense shovels have been discovered in excavations at Tel Dan (see Lev

16:12-13). The pots were used to store ashes from the incense altar, and the bowls held blood from the sacrifices (Ex 38:3; Num 4:14). All of these dedicatory objects are designed to properly deal with the remains of sacrificial offerings. The disposal of ashes and the proper collection and use of blood were necessary to insure the purity of the altar and the temple.

4:16. meat forks. Archaeologists have discovered a number of large forks and these may be the items described by the Chronicler (see their inclusion in the lists in Ex 27:3 and Num 4:14). The priestly portion of the sacrifice was prescribed in Leviticus 7:28-36 to be the right thigh and the breast. However, in the story of the premonarchic shrine at Shiloh an instance is found of priests drawing sacrificial meat out of a common, boiling pot (see the comment on 1 Sam 2:13).

4:17. geography. Zarethan is located "in the plain of the Jordan," east of the river and halfway between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee in Joshua 3:16 and 1 Kings 4:12. The exact site is not yet determined, although Tell es-Sa'idiyeh and Tell el-Meqberah are among the suggested locations. Succoth is located at Tell Deir Allah about a mile north of the Jabbok River and about three miles east of the Jordan River. Remains from this period have been found on the site. The area on the top of the tell is comparable to one football field, about one and a quarter acres. It was a small settlement that was involved in a bronze smelting industry.

4:21. floral work. A much more graphic description of the floral design on the lampstands (almond blossoms) can be found in Exodus 25:31-40 and 37:17-24. A similar example of a blossom motif has been found on a lampstand from Megiddo and on miniature pillars found at Arslan Tash. The lotus pattern is also common in Canaanite and Egyptian decor. The sense of constant fertility, here a reminder of the covenant, might be the purpose for this design.

4:21. lamps and tongs. The list provided by the Chronicler of golden sacred utensils includes the lamps attached to the multi-stemmed lampstands and the tongs used to carry coals to and from these lamps and the incense altars (see 1 Kings 7:49; Is 6:6). These tongs may have also been used to remove extinguished wicks, which would be relit and replaced within the lamp. The quality of the "fine" or "pure" gold used to plate even utilitarian objects like tongs or "snuffers" is a testament to their importance in cultic ritual.

4:22. wick trimmers. Wick trimmers would have been employed to prevent the wicks, floating in the cups containing oil on the lampstands (Ex 27:20), from sputtering or refusing to ignite (see Is 42:3). It would have been a regular task of the priests to tend the lamps (Ex 30:7), and they may have employed a trimmer to insure that there was no interruption of ritual or an extinguishing of the light (Is 42:3; 43:17). Since this is an unusual Hebrew term, some scholars translate the word as "musical instruments," based on Mesopotamian texts and Assyrian reliefs depicting the use of music accompanying temple ritual and the "divine meal."

4:22. ladles and censers. The word used here and in 1 Kings 7:50 for censers is one of two types of fire pans—in this case one with a long handle (see Lev 10:1; Num 16:6). Incense and a hot coal would be placed on the implement and carried about to cense a room or altar. The Qumran texts mention such a firepan used to carry fire into the temple. New Kingdom Egyptian drawings depict the use of handled censers as part of a ritual to ward off evil or being carried in procession. Ladles were used to dispense oil into the lamps or carry incense to the altars or censers (1 Kings 7:50).

5:1—7:22
Solomon's Dedication of the Temple

5:3. festival of the seventh month. The Chronicler mentions only the number of the month, not its name, Ethanim. See the comment on this autumn month in 1 Kings 8:2. One of the common systems of calendars simply used numbers rather than names to designate the months. The festival referred to is the harvest festival of Booths (Succoth).

5:12. linen clothing. Although linen garments were generally reserved for the use of priests (Lev 6:10; 16:4), on this special occasion, the Levites and musicians are also clothed in linen. The linen for the clothing worn by the priests was imported from Egypt where it was also distinctively used for priests' garments. Angels, too, are said to be dressed in linen.

5:12. musical instruments. Cymbals, harps, lyres and trumpets are all typical musical instruments of the time and are attested in ancient Near Eastern texts, reliefs and paintings as early as the third millennium B.C. There is still some disagreement among authorities as to which of the Hebrew words in this passage ought to be translated "harp" and which one as "lyre." The one the NIV translates "lyre" is a

ten-stringed instrument, while the one translated "harp" is thought to have had fewer strings. Both are hand-held with frames made of wood. Cymbals are made of bronze and are in the percussion group, so the only remaining question concerns their size. The trumpets are not the ram's-horn trumpets that are referred to in other contexts. Tubular flared trumpets were used in this period in military as well as ritual contexts. This is depicted on Egyptian reliefs as well as evidenced by actual instruments found, for example, in the tomb of King Tut (a silver trumpet nearly two feet long).

6:12-13. prayer posture. Solomon's posture in verse 12 and in 1 Kings 8:22 is initially standing with his arms upraised and palms opened upward as he addresses the assembly and prays a dedicatory prayer for the temple. It is implied from 1 Kings 8:54 that Solomon at some point had knelt down, and that detail is supplied in 2 Chronicles 6:13. The incantation prayers of Mesopotamian sources, such as that to Ishtar, imply prostration of the supplicant as well as a ritual of raising the hands. Hittite sources suggest similar postures and gestures. Royal prayers are not uncommon, though it is difficult to discern whether they are precomposed or spontaneous.

6:22. role of oaths in judicial process. See the comments on Deuteronomy 1:9-18 for background on the use of oaths. They are quite common in ancient Near Eastern law codes, where they appear in cases of theft and instances of damage to property. They also appear in treaty-making contexts, where the god(s) are called as witnesses to the agreement.

7:5-7. number and types of sacrifices. Burnt offerings, grain offerings and fellowship offerings are all mentioned here. See the comment on Leviticus 3:1-5 on the fellowship offerings and the burning of the fat prior to consumption of the sacrificial meat, and the comment on Leviticus 2:1-3 and 6:14-23 for the regulations regarding the grain offering. We are not told how many of the sacrifices were burnt offerings (which were totally consumed on the altar) and how many were fellowship offerings (which were used for festival meals). It appears that the king is providing much of the meat for a religious communal feast for those in attendance. These numbers are large but are not out of proportion with some of the other figures found in ancient Near Eastern literature. When in 879 B.C. King Ashurnasirpal II threw a dedication party for his palace in the Assyrian capital city of Calah, he provided five thousand sheep, one thousand lambs and cattle, five hundred deer, five hundred gazelles, thirty-four thousand fowl and ten thousand fish.

7:8. Lebo Hamath to Wadi of Egypt. See the comment on 1 Kings 4:21 on the boundaries of Solomon's kingdom. The "entrance" to Hamath (Ematu in the Ebla texts), Lebo Hamath, is most likely modern Lebweh on one of the sources of the Orontes. This was the southern border of the land of Hamath and therefore the northern border of Canaan, and designates the northern corner of the empire, about forty-five miles north of Damascus. The Wadi of Egypt would be the Wadi al-Arish.

7:12-22. God's response. There are a number of interesting features to this divine speech. First, rather than the typical ancient Near Eastern practice of choosing the site prior to the construction (see comment on 3:1), God's choosing is indicated at the dedication. Second, even though the temple was seen as the place of God's presence, in verse 14 he still makes it clear that he will hear their prayers *from heaven*. Nonetheless, third, his name, eyes and heart will be in the temple. "Name" represents an extension of self. Eyes were understood as representing gathering of information and, therefore, "knowing." In English, "heart" is used metaphorically for the seat of emotions in contrast to logic and reason. Hebrew uses it as the center of both emotions and reason/intellect. This usage is also true of the related Semitic languages such as Ugaritic, Aramaic and Akkadian. For more information on temple ideology see next comment. The prayers that God will hear at the temple would not come from organized prayer meetings once a week but from the petitions (national, royal, priestly or individual) that would be associated with the burnt offerings. Finally, the threat against the temple and the people who would neglect it is paralleled in the ancient Near East in the gods who abandon their temples and their cities because of offenses, typically in the category of ritual neglect. Here Israel is warned against neglect of the law, which included rituals, but was much more extensive.

7:16. temple ideology in the ancient Near East. The temple here is seen as the receptacle of God's power on earth. It is from there that he will see what is happening and from where he will act (emotions and decisions). In the ancient Near East the temple was considered to be a microcosm of the land. It represented either the cosmic mountain (Mesopotamia) or the primeval hillock (Egypt) out of which all else emerged. It was a palace that paralleled the palace where the deity dwelt either in heavenly

places or on the heavenly mountain. The deity was believed to be "in" the statue that was his representation in the temple; but the idol was not the deity (for more information on idols, see comments on Deut 4).

8:1-18
Solomon's Accomplishments

8:2. villages given by Hiram. See the comment on 1 Kings 9:11, which describes how Solomon transferred twenty cities in the Galilee region to Hiram of Tyre. If these are the same cities referred to there, it is possible that Hiram is returning them for any of several reasons. If this is referring to a different incident, the text offers no information concerning the location of the cities or the arrangements that led to their transfer.

8:3. Hamath Zobah. In earlier passages these are two separate areas (see comments on 2 Sam 8), but by the time of Solomon they appear to have been joined under one ruler. Zobah and Hamath were at the extreme northern border claimed for Solomon's kingdom. Any expedition there would be more likely in the form of a pacification campaign or show of force, such as the Mesopotamian kings' claims of expeditions "to the sea." Hamath was known for its pasturage and was later used by Assyrian kings as a way station for grazing horses. It is not unlikely that Solomon could also have made this use of it, as he imported horses from Kue (see comment on 1:16).

8:4-6. building projects. See the comment on 1 Kings 9:15-19 on Solomon's building projects. Tadmor is the oasis of Palmyra (about 125 miles northeast of Damascus) on the caravan route linking Palestine to northern Arabia. The twin cities of Upper Beth Horon, Beit Ur el-Foqa (about two miles northwest of Gibeon), and Lower Beth Horon, Beit Ur et-Tahta (about a mile and a half further to the northwest, and about one thousand feet lower in elevation), guard the Beth Horon pass. The pass leads into the Aijalon Valley (referred to in the Amarna texts as Ayyaluna), the major route from the hill country to the coastal plains. It has been suggested that Beth Horon is the city referred to as Bit Ninurta in the Amarna letters. Baalath is generally identified with Kiriath Jearim or a site in its vicinity east of Jerusalem (Josh 15:9; 18:14). Listed as a city within Judah (Josh 15:60), the site is commonly identified with Tell el-Azhar, nine miles west-northwest of Jerusalem, but this is unsubstantiated by archaeological finds or extrabiblical references. The effect of all this effort is to fortify strong points, establish trading stations along major commercial routes and make it clear that Solomon's jurisdiction is recognized along his borders.

8:7-10. forced labor. See the comments on 2 Chronicles 2:2, 7 regarding the use of resident alien populations on forced labor projects.

8:13. Sabbaths, New Moons and three annual feasts. See 2 Chronicles 2:4 for a similar list of major religious obligations—from weekly to yearly. For the three annual feasts see the comments on Deuteronomy 16:1-17.

8:17. Ezion Geber and Elath. Ezion Geber was a port city located at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba and may be either Tell el-Kheleifeh (which some identify as Elath) or on the island of Jezirat Far'on (Coral Island), the only site in the region with evidence of an ancient harbor area. The latter has been substantiated by underwater archaeological work that showed massive walls and jetties (though not Iron Age) and a small amount of Iron Age pottery. Study has shown its use by Egyptian mariners and the technology used for the artificial harbor is similar to that found at Phoenician Tyre. Elath is a settlement on the north coast of the Gulf of Aqaba that served as a trading port for the Red Sea and Arabian shipping.

8:18. Ophir. This nation supplied large quantities of exotic wood and precious stones (1 Kings 10:11), as well as serving as either a source or market for gold (1 Kings 9:28). Outside the Bible the only mention of Ophir is in an inscription from Tell Qasile (eighth century B.C.), and it does not aid in establishing its location. Suggestions for Ophir's location include Arabia, India and the Somali region of Africa.

9:1-12
The Queen of Sheba

9:1. Sheba. Suggestions on locating Sheba most often place it in the southwestern corner of the Arabian peninsula (possibly Yemen). This would place it in close proximity to the trade routes from Mesopotamia, as well as the links, through shipping on the Red Sea, with Africa and India. Sheba had contact with Syria-Palestine as early as the mid-second millennium. Solomon's new trading center and harbor at Ezion Geber in the Gulf of Aqaba may have threatened Sheba's camel caravans with competition. It would be only natural that the ruler of this area would want to establish friendly relations with a growing commercial power. The queen here is not mentioned by name, though Assyrian contacts with Arabia in the

first half of the first millennium often dealt with powerful queens. She may have been either the ruler or the consort of the ruler, dispatched by her husband on this important diplomatic mission. The journey was about fourteen hundred miles long and would have taken many weeks.

9:1-4. test of wisdom. The wisdom contest is a familiar theme in ancient Near Eastern literature. Babylonian literature represents it in the context of fables that use animals or plants as the combatants. Even from Sumerian times the literature reflects the staging of debates that will determine which party is the wisest. Kings were supposed to be characterized by wisdom—it came with the territory, though typically the gods were credited with having bestowed it. Ashurbanipal boasts not only of his great learning and wisdom, but of his technical knowledge and his ability to debate the learned. He credits Shamash and Adad for granting him his wealth of wisdom. Proofs of wisdom included rebuilding cities and temples, developing previously unused land, constructing irrigation works and conducting ritual observances. Most of these were construed as acts of piety.

9:4. food on his table. One expression of extreme wealth would be the display of quantities and varieties of food on the royal table. It was a singular honor to eat at the king's table and the number of persons who could be accommodated there was a sign of the power of the ruler. It also functioned as a human parallel to the divine banquet table so often portrayed in Mesopotamian epic texts (such as in the Tale of Adapa). Royal banquets in the ancient Near East featured an extensive and sophisticated *haute cuisine*, as has been demonstrated by the tablets preserving many ancient recipes.

9:4. seating of his officials. The size of Solomon's bureaucracy and power as a monarch might be estimated by the number who would regularly be seated at his table. It was also a further expression of the wealth of his kingdom that he could continuously provide for these men (note Jezebel's accommodation of 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah in 1 Kings 18:19).

9:4. attendants and cupbearers. The multitude of Solomon's retainers and the sumptuousness of their official liveries provided the queen of Sheba and others with graphic proof of his wealth and power. It also established Solomon's court as being on a par with those of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Persia, who also judged power by the number of servants in evidence.

9:9. 120 talents of gold. Among the gifts brought by the queen of Sheba is a quantity of gold amounting to nearly eight thousand pounds (four tons). Such an amount would perhaps better be termed a tribute payment or a share contributed in the establishment of a business partnership. In 1 Kings 9:14 this is the same amount received from Hiram of Tyre. For information concerning amounts of gold see comment on 1 Chronicles 22:14.

9:9. spices. Sheba would have been set right on the principal trade routes for frankincense and myrrh, both of which were on a par with gold in terms of value. Evidence of the incense trade can be found in the reliefs at Deir el-Bahari depicting the pharaoh-queen Hatshepsut's expedition to Punt in southern Egypt. Similarly, the aromatic oils, perfumes, medicinal and embalming substances followed these same trade routes. They would be a fitting gift to add to the king's treasury. For more information on frankincense see comment on Leviticus 2:1. For more information concerning the use of spices see comment on Exodus 30:23-24.

9:9. precious stones. Hoards of precious stones have been found in excavations at Megiddo, Gezer and Ezion Geber, including carnelian, agate and alabaster. Engraved gems, used as signets or jewelry, have appeared at Phoenician sites as well as at Ugarit and Byblos, and Egyptian scarabs made of steatite or faience are found at many sites. In the ancient Near East stones (including gemstones of various sorts) were believed to have apotropaic value (offering protection from spirit forces). A seventh-century B.C. Assyrian handbook preserves a list of various stones and what they "do"—possibilities range from appeasing divine anger to preventing migraine headaches. One ritual text lists twelve precious and semiprecious stones that are to be used to make a phylactery to be worn as a necklace. Additionally, unusual nonprecious stone was treasured for use in mosaics (see comment on 1 Chron 29:2).

9:10-11. algumwood. See the comment on 2 Chronicles 2:8 on this species of juniper and its relation to almug wood, sandalwood, in 1 Kings 10:11-12.

9:11. harps and lyres. Musical instruments can be constructed of a variety of different woods, and this could effect their sound quality (see sandalwood and juniper in the comment on 2 Chron 2:8). Images of the lyre have been found on a Megiddo ivory plaque (twelfth century B.C.) and coins. Harps appear in many contexts, including the Egyptian relief from the time of Rameses II (thirteenth century B.C.)

of a blind harpist. For more information on harps and lyres see comment on 5:12.

9:13-31

Solomon's Wealth

9:13. 666 talents of gold. This is an incredible amount equal to about twenty-five tons of gold. Perhaps one way to make comparison would be the tribute lists of the Assyrian annals (Sennacherib is said to have demanded thirty talents [nearly a ton] of gold from Hezekiah). This amount represents a vast trading network generating revenues far beyond those of most other nations (note the amounts recorded in 1 Kings 9:14, 28 and 10:10). For information concerning amounts of gold see comment on 1 Chronicles 22:14.

9:15-16. gold shields. The five hundred shields of "hammered gold" (a term peculiar to this context) were designed for ceremonial purposes and as a demonstration of Solomon's wealth. The larger shields weighed 7 1/2 pounds, while the smaller shields contained 3 3/4 pounds of gold. They are mentioned in the story of Shishak's looting of Jerusalem in 1 Kings 14:25-28 along with their replacement by bronze shields (clearly a sign of changed economic posture and a step away from Israel's "golden age"). Ceremonial showpieces (such as the gold swords and axes at Ur) have been found at excavations. Ceremonial bronze shields have been found by archaeologists in the ancient Near East, but no gold ones as yet. Nevertheless, Sargon II lists six gold shields in his booty list from Urartu, each said to weigh over fifty pounds.

9:17-19. throne. The magnificent throne of Solomon's palace can be compared, at least in materials and construction, with Phoenician furniture, such as the eighth-century ivory throne recovered from tomb 79 in Salamis, Cyprus. On the sarcophagus of the Phoenician king, Ahiram, he is portrayed on a throne flanked by winged lions. Sennacherib's reliefs depicting the plunder taken from Lachish (701 B.C.) include images of decorated thrones. Like the throne of the Ugaritic Epic of Baal, Solomon's was elevated above all others, demonstrating his position of power. The golden footstool also has a Ugaritic counterpart, indicating that only the king could sit in a relaxed position, totally secure in his authority and possession of the land (for the ark as Yahweh's footstool see comment on 1 Chron 28:2).

9:20. Palace of the Forest of Lebanon. See the comment on 1 Kings 7:1-12 for the description of this palace. The likelihood that it functioned as both a royal residence as well as an arsenal is indicated by the golden shields displayed there (vv. 15-16) and the storage of more practical weapons in Isaiah 22:8.

9:21. trading ships. The mention of large cargo vessels known as Tarshish ships seems to indicate a type of ship employed in the Red Sea and Arabian coastal trade (see Is 2:16). Here the Chronicler refers to ships dispatched to Tarshish (a source of precious metals in Jer 10:9 and precious stones in Ezek 28:13, probably located in the western Mediterranean—possibly Carthage or southwestern Spain). This would greatly expand Solomon's trading links and suggests an even broader commercial partnership with the Phoenicians. For more information about ships see comment on 1 Kings 22:48.

9:21. ivory, apes and baboons. In addition to the large quantities of gold generated by Solomon's commercial enterprises, luxury items were also transported from exotic places to Israel. The Hebrew terms of the "ivory, apes and baboons" only appear in this passage and are probably loan words or Hebrew approximations of the native words. For example, there is some uncertainty whether to translate the third term as "baboons" or "peacocks." Eleventh- and tenth-century Assyrian kings also boasted of collections of exotic animals, specifically including the mention of apes.

9:25. chariot cities. Typically a chariot team included three horses with only two being used at any one time and the third kept as a reserve. The three would be stabled together, so twelve thousand horses for four thousand pens is the correct proportion, indicating four thousand chariot teams. Nevertheless, 1 Kings 10:26 reports that Solomon had fourteen hundred chariots. This is a large contingent of chariots but not as large as the two thousand contributed by Ahab to the western alliance that met the Assyrians at the Battle of Qarqar in 853 (see comment on 1 Kings 22:1). In the thirteenth century the Hittites and their allies had amassed twenty-five hundred chariots to confront Rameses II at the Battle of Qadesh. The implication is clear that Solomon had stationed sufficient forces on his borders to insure adequate protection and a strike force capable of quick retaliation or punitive campaigns.

9:29. sources. The parallel text to this summary statement on Solomon's reign is found in 1 Kings 11:41-43 (see comment there for information about royal annals). However, the Chronicler's list of additional sources of information includes the writings of two of Solomon's contemporaries, the prophets Nathan

and Ahijah. The third source, the visions of Iddo the seer, may refer to the figure in 2 Chronicles 12:15. Their citation is both an indication that the Chronicler drew his account from a variety of written and oral sources and may also suggest a direction or perspective he would encourage the reader to pursue further.

10:1—12:16
The Reign of Rehoboam

10:1-2. chronology. The year of these events is pretty firmly established at 931 B.C. (see comment on 12:2).

10:1. Shechem. The choice of Shechem for this political summit meeting suggests two things: (1) Rehoboam is in a weak political situation in comparison to David, since in 2 Samuel 5:1 the tribal leaders came to David's capital at Hebron to acknowledge him as king, and (2) having the meeting in the heart of territory associated with the premonarchic leadership of Joshua (Josh 24) and cultically a rival to Jerusalem (see the comment on 1 Kings 12:25) put Rehoboam at a further disadvantage. In fact Rehoboam was taking a chance in coming here away from his own power center. His lack of insight and administrative finesse in the negotiations are thus presaged by the meeting site.

10:4. Solomon's harsh labor. Just as the Persian king Cyrus charges his Babylonian rival Nabonidus with inflicting "forced labor service" on his people, the elders of Israel ask for a reduction in this practice by Rehoboam's administration. There is precedent in Mesopotamian documents for a new king to issue a *mesharum* decree manumitting a class of slaves or reducing the tax burden for a city or a district. Clearly there were grounds for discontent among the tribes, and a compromise was needed to hold the kingdom together.

10:6-8. elders. There seems to have been a division within the royal household/bureaucracy between "new" and "old" men (i.e., those who had been elevated to the status of adviser to the king recently and those with long service). The "elders" would represent those who had been in office during the time of Solomon. They may have come either from the royal family (half brothers, cousins like Jonadab in 2 Sam 13:3) or the civil service. The newcomers would most likely be made up of Rehoboam's own cousins and half brothers that were his contemporaries. The Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh and Aka also features a situation in which Gilgamesh seeks advice first from the elders (who advise against rebellion), and then the young men of the city (who make up the armed forces, and advise rebellion). There also the advice of the young men is followed.

10:11. whips/scorpions. The practice of using whips to drive slaves or animals, or as an instrument of torture has a long history. Some have identified the scorpions here as the type of whip that has fragments of metal or glass attached to the tip (which the Romans called "scorpions"). So far this type of whip is not attested either in excavated finds, reliefs or literature prior to Roman times. In one Akkadian word list, however, a copper scorpion is listed along with copper fetters for slaves. Akkadian scholars have tentatively identified this as a barbed metal tip of a scourge.

10:16. tenuous union of Israel and Judah. The rallying cry of the northern tribes had been raised once before during Sheba's revolt (see the comment on 2 Sam 20:1). It is easy to think that the unity of the twelve tribes of Israel as a single people was natural and intrinsic. But that is not the case. In fact they were twelve independent tribal units with much to drive them apart. The unity that had been achieved during the time of David and Solomon was achieved only with great skill and effort, and in a time of prosperity. However, the elements that hold such political entities together were only a generation old and, like chiefdoms (such as that organized by Saul among the Israelite tribes), it is still too dependent on the personality of the ruler. The tendency of chiefdoms and empires is to fragment at the least provocation. Now the cost of unity and the differing perspectives of north and south easily drove a wedge between them when it became clear to the northern tribes that Judah and the Davidic house had no intention of compromising with their requests for more local autonomy and lower taxes.

10:18. death by stoning. See the comment on Deuteronomy 13:10 for stoning as a method of capital punishment. Adoniram's death is like the first shot of a rebellion or a riot. It is almost poetic justice that the man in charge of public works (including the movement of rocks) should die in a hail of stones.

11:1. 180,000 fighting men. This is an extremely large number for just the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. It is about the same number of soldiers that served in the combined armed forces of America during the entire course of the Revolutionary War. Modern estimates of the actual total population size during this period suggest that there were no more than three hundred thousand inhabitants in the southern kingdom. In Neo-Assyrian records from the ninth and eighth century the size of the Assyrian army increases from

about forty-five thousand (Shalmaneser III) to over two hundred thousand (Sennacherib). The twelve-nation western coalition confronted Shalmaneser at the Battle of Qarqar with as many as sixty thousand. The largest Hittite force reported was nearly fifty thousand (for the Battle of Qadesh, thirteenth century). All of this suggests that the word translated "thousand" in these passages should be rendered by its alternate meaning, "companies" or "divisions." Rather than a specified number, it has been suggested that each clan supplied a division with the number varying dependent on the size of the clan. Later in history these companies were standardized as having a thousand, but here there may be far fewer in a division.

11:2-4. prophetic oracle related to battle. In this period of preclassical prophecy the prophets of Israel served in very much the same role as did their ancient Near Eastern counterparts (see comments on Deut 18:14-22). One of the most frequent areas addressed concerned, as here, the advisability of military activity. Since it was believed that God's involvement was essential for the success of the military, the entire sequence begins with the divine command to go into battle. This divine command can be seen as typical in the royal inscriptions of the Assyrians. It was also important to consult the deity about timing and strategies. Sometimes, however, oracles were received unsolicited or unexpectedly. One example of this is found in a Mari text that describes a dream warning King Zimri-Lim not to go on campaign.

11:5-12. fortified cities of Judah. All of the cities listed, except Adoraim (modern Dura, three miles west of Hebron), are known from other sources (for instance, in the invasion of Shishak, see 12:2) and are located in Judah. They form an inner line of defense of the Jerusalem hills. There are four groups, ranging north to south, at strategic points guarding major approaches and highways: (1) Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa and Beth Zur guard the eastern boundary; (2) Soco, Adullam, Gath and Maresha guard the west; (3) a southern line of defense includes Lachish, Ziph and Adoraim; (4) Zorah and Aijalon seem to function as northwestern fortresses, while Hebron (David's old capital in 2 Sam 2:1) may function as a staging point or regional center for both the south and the west. Archaeological research has not provided much help in identifying the building that Rehoboam did, though a few of the sites (particularly Lachish) show some evidence of this fortification work.

11:11-12. provisions for fortified cities. The garrisons within Rehoboam's fortress cities had to maintain a good stock of provisions and weapons in order to be effective guardians of the border. Like the Mari administrative lists detailing the amount of food, oil and beer necessary to sustain troops for various periods of time (ten or fifteen days or a month), the Chronicler has provided an abbreviated summary (lacking quantities and the times for regular delivery) of rations.

11:15. goat and calf idols. For information concerning the calves see comment on 1 Kings 12:28. Goat idols most likely refers to satyrlike demons who were believed to haunt the open fields and uninhabitable places. They are referred to only a few times in the Old Testament and have no known parallels in the ancient Near East.

11:22-23. princes as administrators. One of the principal methods of training the crown prince as well as other members of the royal family was to appoint them to administrative positions. Abijah's position might even be considered a coregency with his father Rehoboam (see 21:2-4). The Egyptian records and Mesopotamian annals regularly describe the appointment of royal sons as governors or district administrators (for example, see the Assyrian king Shamshi-Adad's appointment of his sons Yasmah-Addu and Ishme-Dagan to rule portions of his kingdom).

12:2-4. Shishak's invasion. Shishak's own account, recorded on the walls of the temple complex dedicated to Amon at Karnak (Thebes), contains a list of over 150 cities that he claims to have conquered, along with vague references to tribute garnered from the land of Syria. Jerusalem is not mentioned in the list, and the sites that are chronicled are in both southern and northern Israel. Using Gaza as a base, several divisions proceeded through the Negev, while the main force went through the Shephelah toward Jerusalem. It then turned north through the central hill country, went westward through the Jezreel Valley to Megiddo, and then followed the Trunk Road south along the coast. His itinerary also included a foray into Transjordan, crossing east at Adam and then back west heading to Beth Shan. Archaeologists have identified destruction levels at many of the named towns coinciding with this time period.

12:2. chronology. Egyptian sources place Shishak's reign and the founding of the Twenty-Second Dynasty between 945 and 924 B.C. Rehoboam's accession to the throne came in 931, so his fifth year would be 927, a plausible time

after the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdoms.

12:3. Libyans, Sukkites, Cushites. Among the Egyptian troops are levies from southern and western areas bordering on Egypt (Libya, Nubia). Since Shishak is a Libyan, it seems reasonable to expect he would include regiments of his own tribal peoples in his campaign. It is also known that he conducted campaigns in Nubia and probably had coerced their cooperation in this joint venture. The Sukkites do not appear elsewhere in the Bible but are known from thirteen and twelfth-century Egyptian sources (there called *Tjukten)* as a people related to the Libyans. Their twelve hundred chariots are comparable to what Solomon's force had been (see comment on 1 Kings 4:26).

12:9. Shishak's booty. Many of the gold and silver objects that had been manufactured for the temple, including the famous golden shields (see comment on 9:15-16), were carried away as tribute paid to avoid the destruction of Jerusalem. This may have made up the lion's share of the two hundred tons of gold and silver that Shishak reports having contributed to the temples of his gods.

12:13. Rehoboam's mother. Since Solomon is known to have married women from many countries, including Ammon (see 1 Kings 11:1), it is not unusual that Rehoboam's mother, Naamah, should be an Ammonite. Her marriage would most likely represent a political alliance between the two countries. The practice of regularly naming the mother of the kings of Judah may indicate that the office of queen mother was significant (see comment on 1 Kings 2:19).

12:15. sources. The genealogical lists of Iddo the seer may be compared to other works associated with this prophetic figure (2 Chron 9:29 and 13:22), but he is not named in any of the narratives of this period. The "records of Shemaiah" are probably a separate, extrabiblical history that the Chronicler drew on in creating his summary of events. Shemaiah is the prophet who warns Rehoboam against civil war and who exhorts him to repentance in the context of Shishak's invasion (see 2 Chron 11:2; 12:5).

12:15. wars between north and south. There were no full-scale wars between the two states, but the continual border skirmishes, lasting until the reign of Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:44), would have been troublesome and bloody enough to cause a continual drain on their resources. They might be compared, on a smaller scale, to the conflict between David and Ishbaal in 2 Samuel 2:12-32.

13:1-22

The Reign of Abijah

13:1-2. chronology. This is the first appearance of the synchronistic recording of Israel's and Judah's kings (see 1 Kings 15:1). However, unlike the writer(s) of Kings, the Chronicler only uses this dating formula in this single instance. Based on Jeroboam's accession in 930 B.C., Abijah's rule began in 913.

13:2-20. battle between Abijah and Jeroboam. The location of the battle, Mount Zemaraim, has not yet been positively identified but is usually placed in the vicinity of Bethel. The most familiar identification is with Ras et-Tahuneh. The rhetoric in Abijah's speech suggests that his intention is to reunite the north and south, by conquest if necessary. This is open pitched battle rather than the siege of a city. As is common in Chronicles, the size of the armies (1.2 million) is much larger than expected but is not the largest in ancient reports. Herodotus has usually been considered guilty of gross exaggeration when he reports that the army Xerxes fielded against the Greeks was comprised of five million people. For comparison, consider the Battle of Gettysburg with combined forces of 165,000. Additionally, the half-million casualties for the northern kingdom in this one battle would rival the bloodiest battles in history. In ancient records the Assyrian king Arik-den-ili claims to have killed 254,000. His nearest rival is Sennacherib, who claimed he inflicted 150,000 casualties at the Battle of Halule. Allied casualties in the First Battle of the Somme (France, 1916) were about 623,000. This battle lasted six months and is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the bloodiest ever. At the Battle of Gettysburg combined losses were reported at 50,000, only one-tenth of what is reported here. One of the bloodiest battles of ancient history was between the Romans and the Huns at Châlons-sur-Marne (France, 451) where there were 200,000 casualties. For more information see comment on 11:1.

13:5. covenant of salt. In the hot climate of the ancient Near East, salt was necessary for the health of humans and animals, and was the principal food preservative (texts from ancient Mari describe its trade value). When treaties or alliances were made, salt was employed to symbolize that the terms would be preserved for a long time. Babylonian, Persian, Arabic and Greek contexts all testify to this symbolic usage. In the Bible, likewise, the covenant between the Lord and Israel is iden-

tified as a covenant of salt—a long-preserved covenant. Allies entering into such an agreement would generally share a communal meal in which salted meat was featured. Thus the use of salt in the sacrifices was an appropriate reminder of the covenant relationship. Additionally, salt impedes the action of yeast (leaven), and since leaven was a symbol of rebellion, salt could easily represent that which inhibited rebellion.

13:8. golden calves in battle. There is ample precedent for an army to bring their divine images with them into battle. In the divine warrior motif the deity is fighting the battles and defeating the deities of the enemy. Standards or statues of the deity were usually carried to symbolize their presence. Assyrian kings of the ninth and eighth centuries regularly refer to the divine standard that goes before them. The ark, as Yahweh's standard, represents the Lord as clearing the way before the Israelites and leading the armies into Canaan. This concept is not very different from the Assyrian belief that the gods empowered the weapons of the king and fought before him or at his side. Nearly every army in the ancient Near East included priests and diviners (as seen in the Mari texts), prophets (2 Kings 3) and portable sacred objects (Assyrian Annals of Shalmaneser III [858-824 B.C.]). In this way, the god(s) could be consulted on the battlefield or invoked to lead the soldiers to victory.

13:11. priestly rituals. For further information on these ritual activities see comments on Leviticus 6:8-13 and Exodus 25:23-30.

13:19. towns taken by Judah. Bethel, as the site of Jeroboam's southern cult center, was a significant conquest. Later biblical texts make it clear that it was firmly back in Israel's control by the time of Jeroboam II and Amos (Amos 7:10). Jeshanah, near Bethel and seventeen miles north of Jerusalem, has been identified with Burj el-Isaneh, and Ephron (Ophrah in Josh 18:23) is generally identified with et-Taiyibeh, four miles northeast of Bethel. Rehoboam's victory gains him control of the two major routes crossing from the territory of Judah into Israel. These routes run north on either side of Bethel and converge just south of Shiloh. The territory involved comprises about twenty square miles.

13:22. source. The "annotations of the prophet Iddo" is probably by the same prophet mentioned earlier in 2 Chronicles 9:29 and 12:15. Curiously, the only appearance of this prophet's name is in connection with these source materials. He does not appear in any of the narratives.

14:1—16:14

The Reign of Asa

14:3. foreign altars. The amenities that Solomon had provided for his foreign wives included the construction of altars and shrines for their worship of their own gods (see the comments on 1 Kings 11:5-7). These may have been some of the altars destroyed by Asa.

14:3. high places. For more information on high places, see the comments on 1 Kings 3:2-3 and Deuteronomy 12:2-3.

14:3. sacred stones. Standing stones or *maṣṣebot* were apparently a common feature of Canaanite religion and also appear as memorials in a number of Israelite covenantal contexts (see Ex 24:3-8; Josh 24:25-27). Their association with Asherah, Baal and other Canaanite deities are the basis for their being condemned as a rival and threat to Yahweh worship. Archaeologists have discovered sacred stones at Gezer, Dan, Hazor and Arad. In the latter two cases they are clearly within a sacred precinct and part of the cultic practices at these sites. The Hazor stones include incised representations of upraised arms and a sun disk. The stones at Dan are in the gateway, and the clear remains of the presentation of votive offerings are evident.

14:3. Asherah poles. One common feature of Canaanite worship and of syncretized Israelite worship on "high places" and in city shrines is the erection of Asherah poles. There is some uncertainty about whether these were simply wooden poles, erected to symbolize trees or perhaps containing a carved image of the fertility goddess, or whether they were a part of a sacred grove. The reference in 2 Kings 17:10, which refers to Asherah poles beside "every spreading tree," seems to indicate that these were poles erected for cultic purposes rather than planted trees. As the consort of El, Asherah was a popular goddess whose worship is mentioned in Ugaritic texts (1600-1200). Her prominent appearance in the biblical narrative indicates that her cult was a major rival to Yahweh worship. For more information see the comments on Exodus 34:13 and Judges 6:25.

14:7. fortification. Although the Chronicler does not list any of the cities fortified by Asa, it is clear that he had a solid reputation as a builder. Mesopotamian annals and regnal-year titles regularly comment on the king's building activities as evidence of his success. The Chronicler also wishes to include "building" as the hallmark of a "good king," the result being a time of peace and prosperity.

14:8. army equipment. The division of task

within the military is illustrated by Asa's infantry used as shock troops (carrying large shields and spears) and his Benjaminite archers (compare the equipment issued to Uzziah's troops in 2 Chron 26:14). The palace reliefs of the Assyrian king Sennacherib include depictions of soldiers armed with lances and a circular shield used for defense and as a weapon in close fighting. The reliefs of Shalmaneser III portray his archers in long coats of mail and accompanied by a shield-bearer to keep the bowman's hands free and to protect him from missiles. Perhaps the Benjaminite forces did not utilize these auxiliaries, or they attached their smaller shield to their arm so that they maintained some protection while they shot their volleys.

14:9. Zerah the Cushite. Since the Cushites are often identified with the Nubian Egyptian pharaohs (see comment on 2 Chron 12:3), some scholars have identified Zerah with Osorkon I, the Egyptian pharaoh at this time (about 897). Osorkon, the son of Shishak, however, is Libyan, not Nubian. Therefore, if Zerah came with Egyptian forces, he must be a Nubian general working in cooperation with the Twenty-Second Dynasty (who had exerted some control over Nubia during the days of Shishak). Others think it more likely that Zerah was a chief of a Bedouin tribe (see comment on Num 12:1 for this variation of "Cush"). For discussion of the size of the armies see comment on 13:3-20. Hebrew has no word for "million"—the text here refers to "a thousand thousands" (or, a thousand divisions) and would be expressive of an innumerable force. Compare to how we might use "a month of Sundays" to talk about a long, long time.

14:9. chariotry. Considering the number of troops marshaled by Zerah, there is a surprisingly small number of chariots. Even so, each army had its own strengths, and three hundred is still a strong force of chariots. As we know from Mesopotamian and Egyptian records and palace reliefs, two- or three-man chariot crews worked from these mobile platforms to fire volleys of arrows, to carry commanders or messengers about the battlefield and for frontal attacks. Armies often were organized around chariot groups, with contingents of infantry attached to each chariot commander. For comparative sizes of chariot forces see comment on 1:14.

14:10. geography. The battle between Asa and Zerah takes place near Mareshah, a city fortified by Rehoboam and identified with Tell Sandakhanna on the southwestern border of Judah. It is located about four miles northeast of Lachish and nearly thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem. Zephathah (perhaps to be identified with the Zephath of Judg 1:17) only appears in this text. Since it is said to be a valley north of Mareshah, it is probably to be identified as Wadi Guvrin, just north of Mareshah and Beit Guvrin.

14:12-14. Gerar. See the comment on Genesis 20:1 for this site in the western Negev region, whose exact location is still undetermined (Tel Haror, about twenty-five miles southwest of Beersheba, is the most likely choice). Gerar may be the name of a region rather than a city-state, thus explaining the devastation of its cities by Asa.

15:8. detestable idols. Idols are not referred to specifically. The word refers to anything that is utterly revolting or disgusting from a ritual or religious standpoint, particularly prohibited food and objects used in unapproved foreign worship practices.

15:10. chronology. If Asa is attempting to tie his assembly and sacrifice to a major religious festival or event, then the third month contains the theophany at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:1) and the Feast of Weeks (Lev 23:15-16). Since a renewal of the covenant is also part of this event, Asa may be commemorating the covenant renewal at Mount Sinai (Ex 24). The year date places this celebration in 892.

15:16. Asherah pole. See the comment on 14:3 for discussion of the Asherah pole. The influence and political status of the queen mother (see comment on 1 Kings 2:19) could have undermined Asa's reform measures, and this may explain why he so utterly rejected her action and totally destroyed the object.

15:16. Kidron Valley. Located just east of the walls of the city of Jerusalem and containing one of the principal water sources for the city, the Gihon Spring, this would be an excellent staging area for King Asa's destruction of idols. Solomon had erected cult places for Ashtoreh, Chemosh and Molech here (1 Kings 11:7), but later reforming kings like Asa, Hezekiah (2 Chron 29:16) and Josiah (2 Kings 23:13) used the valley to make a show of ridding the nation of corruption.

15:19—16:1. chronology. There are some problems in reconciling the date provided here for the conflict between Asa and Baasha and the information in the parallel text in 1 Kings. For more information see comment on 1 Kings 15:33.

16:1. Ramah. Located just five miles north of Jerusalem, Baasha's incorporation of Ramah (er-Ram) into his territory would have been a cause of great concern for Judah. Just as Rehoboam had extended his control of the main

north-south arteries between Israel and Judah five extra miles (see comment on 13:19), so now Baasha pushes his control of the same arteries five miles south of the traditional line between the nations. There have been no excavations on the site.

16:2-3. treaty with Ben-Hadad. Based on the manner in which this treaty is described here and in the parallel text in 1 Kings 15:18-19, it would appear that Aram had been maintaining a policy of nonintervention, perhaps awaiting the best offer from the warring parties. Ben-Hadad I ruled during the first part of the ninth century, though no precise dating is possible. For information concerning the difficulties of Aramean history of the ninth century see comment on 1 Kings 20:1.

16:4. conquests of Aram. Ben-Hadad's attack on northern Israel, at the instigation of Asa, cost Baasha an important trade corridor. The cities captured in this campaign (see 1 Kings 15:20) include Dan (the northern cult shrine), Ijon ('Ayyun) at the northern end of the Huleh Basin (about ten miles north of Dan), Abel Maim (Abel Beth-Maacah in 1 Kings), all of which are on the road between Syria and the Phoenician coastal cities of Tyre, Sidon and Acco. The fact that Ijon is mentioned first suggests an attack from the west and ranging south. It is unknown how long Aram was able to hold these towns, but they are clearly back in Jehu's hands a few decades later, according to 2 Kings 10:29. The inscription from Dan mentioning another Syrian campaign against northern Israel suggests that this was a continual threat that had to be faced by Israel's rulers.

16:6. Geba and Mizpah. These two cities, now refortified by Asa with materials taken from the defenses at Ramah, guard the northern border of Judah. Geba (modern Jaba', four miles northeast of Jerusalem) appears elsewhere as the northern limit of Judah (2 Kings 23:8) and functions as the guardian of the Micmash Pass. Mizpah (Tell en-Nasbeh, eight miles north of Jerusalem) stood as the fortress dominating the watershed highway on the frontier between Israel and Judah. By fortifying these cities Asa cut off further action against Ramah. Mizpah is about three miles north of Ramah guarding the road from Bethel to Ramah. The excavations at the site have uncovered a wall with eleven towers dating to this period. The wall was twelve to fifteen feet thick and thirty-five to forty feet high. Geba is about two miles east of Ramah blocking access from that direction.

16:7. seer. Although Hanani the seer only appears in this passage, he is mentioned as the father of Jehu the prophet in 1 Kings 16:1; 2 Chronicles 19:2; 20:34. The title seer, *ro'eh*, apparently was an alternative term for prophet (*nabi'*; see the comment on 1 Sam 9:9).

16:9. eyes of the Lord. This imagery provides a sense of the universality of Yahweh's vision (equivalent to omnipresence) and involvement (reflecting his sovereign control). A Babylonian boundary stone from the end of the second millennium speaks of the moon god Sin as "the eye of heaven and earth."

16:12. foot disease. Some attempts have been made to diagnose Asa's foot disease as gout (uncommon in biblical times) or gangrene brought on by the obstruction of blood flow. The fact that Asa chose to consult only physicians, who were at times associated with magical rituals or, at best, herbal remedies, further demonstrates his failure to seek God's aid and thereby contributed to his own death.

16:14. fire in his honor. Royal tombs were hewn into the sides of cliffs. The funeral rites for Asa are quite elaborate and include the burning of spices in his honor as well as a general lamentation and internment in his family tomb. The fire does not imply cremation of the body or an attempt to mask the odors associated with a diseased body, but was rather an expensive display of the king's wealth. The practice is well known among Assyrian kings, where it was used as an apotropaic ritual.

17:1—21:3
The Reign of Jehoshaphat

17:2. fortified towns in Ephraim. As noted in 2 Chronicles 15:8 Asa had extended his control northward into the Ephraimite hill country. It seems a natural continuation of this policy for Jehoshaphat to fortify these unspecified cities. There is also no specific mention of the number of troops stationed here. We know from the Lachish letters of a later period that regular correspondence was maintained with these types of outposts and that fire signals were used as an early warning system.

17:3. consulting Baal. "Consulting" refers to asking the deity for oracles. This would usually occur at a shrine dedicated to the deity, and the oracle would be mediated by the priests of that deity. In the ancient world oracular answers were often given by diviners, who would read favorable or unfavorable answers in the entrails of a sacrificed animal. Even while the Israelites fully acknowledged Yahweh as their national patron deity, some were

inclined to continue to associate Baal with fertility and to consult him regarding agricultural issues. Also on daily issues such as sickness and health, they sometimes chose to look for information from Baal rather than from Yahweh (see 2 Kings 1:2).

17:6. removed high places and Asherah poles. See comment on 14:3.

17:11. Arabs. The Arabs referred to in the Old Testament inhabited the fringes of the Syrian desert, extending also into the Negev and the Arabian peninsula. Arabs begin to be mentioned in Assyrian royal inscriptions at about this time (for instance, they were one of the allies in the Battle of Qarqar).

17:12. building projects. Most of this building was military in nature providing garrisons, supply centers and border outposts to guard the entries into the land. Archaeological evidence of a line of fortresses in the Jordan Valley and adjacent to the Dead Sea may be associated with his reign. Supply centers were meant to stockpile food and other necessities in case of siege or famine.

17:14-19. Jehoshaphat's army. The conscript army of Jehoshaphat is exactly twice as large as that of his father Asa, well over one million men (see 2 Chron 14:7). For discussion of army sizes see comment on 13:2-20. Its divisions into clans follows the pattern found in other levies (1 Chron 27:1). Looking beyond the large numbers, the style of listing the contingents suggests a form of regimentation and a careful report reflecting proper protocol with regard to rank and organization.

18:1. marriage alliances. The wives of an ancient ruler or his children usually represented political alliances. Marriage was a tool of diplomacy throughout the ancient Near East. Towns, city-states, tribes or nations who wished to ally themselves with a ruler or come under his protection sealed the treaty with the marriage of a daughter of their chief family to the suzerain or his son. For instance, Zimri-Lim, the king of Mari (eighteenth century B.C.) used his daughters to cement alliances and establish treaties with his neighboring kingdoms. Similarly, Pharaoh Thutmose IV (1425-1412 B.C.) arranged a marriage with a daughter of the Mitannian king to demonstrate good relations and end a series of wars with that middle Euphrates kingdom. Solomon's seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines were a measure of his power and wealth, especially his marriage to the daughter of the pharaoh. The marriage alliance between Jehoshaphat and Ahab matched Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, with Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram.

18:2. down to Samaria. Jerusalem is quite a bit higher in elevation than Samaria, but even if they had been equal, one would still have gone down to Samaria because of the descent out of the Jerusalem hills to go in most any direction. The distance between these two capital cities was about forty miles.

18:2. slaughtering sheep and cattle. Treaties were typically concluded amidst a great feast that would feature a ceremonial meal. These animals would have been sacrificed as an offering bringing divine sanction to the agreement.

18:2. Ramoth Gilead. The site of Ramoth Gilead has not been identified with certainty, but most accept Tell Ramith for its size, location and Iron Age pottery found in surveys. It has yet to be excavated. If this is the correct identification, it is in Transjordan about forty-five miles east of Jezreel. It is strategically located on the King's Highway at the juncture where the road south from Damascus would turn west to cross the Jordan near Beth Shan and enter the Jezreel Valley to connect with the main route of the Trunk Road (see sidebar on Trade Routes in Genesis 38). In 1 Kings 20:34 the Aramean king had promised to return the cities taken from Israel. It is possible that this has not been done, and Ramoth Gilead has remained under Aramean control. This battle brings the death of Ahab and therefore must be in 853 after the Battle of Qarqar against the Assyrians (see comment on 1 Kings 22:1) in which Israel and Aram were allies.

18:4. role of the prophet. In this period of preclassical prophecy the prophets of Israel served in very much the same role as their ancient Near Eastern counterparts (see comments on Deut 18:14-22). One of the most frequent areas addressed concerned, as here, the advisability of military activity. Since it was believed that God's involvement was essential for the success of the military, the entire sequence begins with the divine command to go into battle. This divine command can be seen as typical in the royal inscriptions of the Assyrians. It was also important to consult the deity about timing and strategies. During the time of Saul and David this type of information was usually gained through the priest's manipulation of oracular devices (see comments on 1 Sam 14:10; 22:10; and 23:9-12). Now, instead of asking questions of a priest to receive oracular responses, the questions are being posed to the prophet who, as representative of God, offers the prophetic oracles as messages from God in response.

18:7. prophesying ill. Throughout the ancient world it was believed that prophets not only proclaimed the message of deity but in the process unleashed the divine action. It is no wonder, then, that a prophet negatively disposed toward a king must somehow be controlled lest he bring about all sorts of havoc. In Assyrian king Esarhaddon's instructions to his vassals he requires that they report any improper or negative statements that may be made by anyone, but he specifically names prophets, ecstatics and dream interpreters. One can perhaps understand why a king would be inclined to imprison a prophet whose very words might incite insurrection or impose doom.

18:9. thrones at the threshing floor. Because of the importance of agriculture and fertility the threshing floor was often a place of ritual importance. Threshing floors were large, flat, open areas and certainly could have been useful for other purposes besides threshing. It is no surprise, therefore, that they should double as an open-air facility when space constraints or the desire for public visibility rendered the palace facilities inadequate. In the Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat, Danil, the king, publicly judges cases at the threshing floor outside the gate of his city.

18:16. scattered like sheep without a shepherd. An inscription of Sargon II of Assyria reports that the commander of the enemy troops fled like a shepherd whose flock had been stolen but later was captured and carried away in fetters.

18:18. vision of the throne room of Yahweh and his council. The familiar picture of a heavenly throne surrounded by the heavenly council is well known from the Ugaritic texts (most notably the Epic of Keret), though this Canaanite council is made up of the gods of the pantheon. Examples occur also in the tenth-century building inscription of Yehimilk from Byblos and the Karatepe stele of Azitawadda. In the Akkadian *Enuma Elish* it is the assembly of the gods that appoints Marduk as their head. Fifty gods made up this assembly, with seven in the inner council. In Israelite belief the gods were replaced by angels or spirits—the sons of God or the heavenly host. Usually one would expect this council to be plotting strategies to go to war on behalf of Israel, but instead the discussion is directed against Ahab.

18:19. council seeking volunteers. In the Ugaritic Epic of Keret the head of the assembly, El, asks for volunteers from the assembly to drive out the illness of Keret. In the end, however, El ends up taking the task on himself and creates a being to effect the healing.

18:19-22. luring spirit. This is a "mole" operation. When David wanted to undermine the success of his rebellious son, Absalom, he plants one of his advisors, Hushai, in Absalom's inner circle. His assignment is to suggest a strategy that will suit Absalom's natural inclinations but will actually work to David's advantage and accomplish David's plan (2 Sam 15:32-37; 16:15—17:14). Here the same process is at work. God has planned to act against Ahab who is seen as being led to his intended doom through the strategies suggested by trusted advisors (the prophets) that will coincide with his natural inclinations.

18:24. hiding in an inner room. The term used here refers to the place of utmost privacy. One usually retreats there to be alone or to find shelter.

18:26. Micaiah's imprisonment. Prisons were not used in the ancient world for reforming criminals. A hardened criminal might more likely find himself on permanent assignment on a labor crew. Prisons not connected with a labor crew were often located in the palace or temple, though they were sometimes simply pits. Some prisoners were in custody pending a trial, but most prisoners were either working off a debt or were political prisoners. This latter group was considered dangerous to the stability of the state rather to the health of the society. Punitive measures for this group often involved humiliating public display rather than isolated incarceration. Micaiah is being imprisoned to await the outcome of his prophecy and the battle—that will constitute his hearing and trial.

18:29. Ahab in disguise. In Assyria, when there was a bad omen (usually an eclipse) warning of evil tidings for the king, the ritual of the substitute king was sometimes performed. This is attested as early as 800 B.C., but is best known from the seventh century. In this ritual another individual was dressed in the robes of the king, and various rites and incantations were performed to identify this individual with the king. This person then took the brunt of the ill-fate that was to befall the king (usually death). It was believed that in this way the evil tidings could be redirected and the king could avoid his fate. While there is little here that would suggest a substitute king ritual, a similar mentality is minimally reflected in Ahab insofar as he expects to avoid the proclaimed doom on the king by not dressing as the king. It must be noted, however, that the avoidance of evil is more prominent here than the transfer of evil represented in the substitute king ritual (for more informa-

tion on the ritual transfer of evil see comment on 2 Kings 5:27). Most significantly, there is no designated substitute unless Jehoshaphat, by retaining his royal regalia, is intended to function in that role. He became, at the very least, a lightning rod for the doom, just as it was planned for the substitute to be. While Ahab's disguise may in fact fool the enemy soldiers, the greater intention may be to deceive the supernatural forces that would fulfill the destiny which had been prescribed against him.

18:30. Aram's strategy. While the infantry was absorbed in hand-to-hand combat, the Aramean chariotry was specifically targeting the king of Israel. Chariotry typically had very particular objectives in the course of the battle, rather than becoming entangled in the general melee. They might make the initial charge into the infantry, but then would be used to contain the parameters or to pursue certain targets, as here. The strategy of targeting the king was to be able to inflict punishment on him that would prevent future incidents.

18:33. sections of the armor. Armor is described here as made up of two parts: a solid breastplate and a scale-armor kilt. The arrow struck either between the two or between the joints of the scale armor. One of the best descriptions of scale armor comes from the Nuzi texts, where a coat of mail was made up of anywhere from seven hundred to over a thousand bronze scales of varying sizes. These scales were sewn onto a jerkin of leather or cloth. The front and back were sewn together at the shoulders (with a space for the head) and probably reached to the knees. By the ninth century some iron scales were being used.

19:5. appointment of judges. In the Mari documents from the Old Babylonian Period in Syria (c. 2000-1600 B.C.), judges were appointed by the king to perform special tasks, such as assisting in the administration of a territory, acting as a territorial governor, conducting military campaigns and intervening in domestic legal affairs. One can assume that the judicial appointments of Jehoshaphat had more narrowly focused tasks, primarily in the arena of legal affairs. As evidenced by the preface to the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1750 B.C.) and the statements made by the "Eloquent Peasant" in Egyptian wisdom literature (c. 2100 B.C.), the standard for behavior for those in authority is to protect the rights of the poor and weak in society. "True justice" (see Lev 19:15) is expected of kings, officials and local magistrates. In fact, the "world turned upside down" theme found in the book of Judges and in prophetic literature (Is 1:23), describes a society in which "laws are enacted, but ignored" (for example, in the Egyptian Visions of Neferti [c. 1900]). An efficiently administered state in the ancient Near East depended on the reliability of the law and its enforcement. To this end every organized state created a bureaucracy of judges and local officials to deal with civil and criminal cases. It was their task to hear testimony, investigate charges made, evaluate evidence and then execute judgment (detailed in the Middle Assyrian Laws and the Code of Hammurabi). There were some cases, however, that required the attention of the king (see 2 Sam 15:2-4), and appeals were occasionally forwarded on to that highest magistrate (as in the Mari texts).

19:6-7. judicial system. The term for "judges" was used for both God and humans. Their authority came from God, and their main role was to keep harmonious relations between Israelites (or Judahites in this case). During the monarchy the judges were clearly subordinate to the monarch who appointed them. Thus they did not rule as they did in the period of the judges but governed under the auspices of the king. In the ancient Near East, leaders, whether tribal, military, city, provincial or national, had the obligation of judging the cases under their jurisdiction. There was no trial by jury, though at times a group of elders may have been involved in judging a case. When only one individual judge was involved, the danger of favoring the powerful or the wealthy was very real. Both in ancient Near Eastern documents and the Bible impartiality is valued, along with discernment. There were no lawyers, so most people represented themselves in court. Witnesses could be called, and oaths played a very significant role since most of our scientific means of gathering evidence were not available.

19:8-11. role of Levites and priests. After the division of the monarchy many Levites and priests in the north were cut off from Jerusalem and other southern sanctuaries. Jehoshaphat required the Levites and priests, along with the patriarchal family head, to take over the functions of the judges in Jerusalem (i.e., judging disputes). The Levites were in essence court functionaries who carried out the decisions of the court (see comment on Deut 18:6-8). The roles of priests and judges often overlapped, because oracles were frequently used to decide cases. In situations where physical evidence was not present or was insufficient, a verdict could be determined by the reading of omens. This meant that plaintiffs had to consult religious professionals (Levitical priests in Deut 17:9), whose service

included seeking divine verdicts. Many who would come to the capital city of Jerusalem with a legal case would be seeking this type of assistance, so it is logical for this Levitical judiciary to be set up there.

19:11. administrative structure. The Jerusalem court was thus composed of Levites, priests, family heads and judges. There are some parallels with the Egyptian administrations in Dynasty 22 (tenth to eighth centuries B.C.).

20:1. Moabites and Ammonites. Shalmaneser III of Assyria mentions in his annals an Ammonite king, Ba'sa son of Ruhubi, who contributed soldiers to the Aramean confederacy that fought against Assyria in 853 and 841 B.C. The Moabite king was probably Mesha, known from 2 Kings 3 and from a long inscription in Moabite in which he describes his rebellion against Israel (see comment on 2 Kings 3:4). This particular invasion cannot be found in any extrabiblical source. It may have been during a period in which the western coalition against Assyria had broken down and individual states were fighting against one another.

20:1. Meunites. A number of very different opinions exist concerning the identification of this group. The first is that it should be identified with the Minaeans of South Arabia. Their control of the incense trade had extended up into the region of Palestine by the fourth century. Others would identify the group with the Mu'unaya mentioned in the inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III. A third possibility links them to the town of Maon south of Hebron in the hill country of Judah. They appear with other groups that inhabited the southern border of Judah.

20:2. Edom. The heartland of Edom is east of the Arabah (the deep gorge extending south from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba) from the Zered (Wadi el Hasa) to the Gulf of Aqaba. During most of the period from David until Jehoshaphat, Edom had been an annexed territory of Judah. Here it appears the Edomites have gained some degree of independence, and their territory served as the strategic base for this raid against Jerusalem.

20:2. Hazazon Tamar/En Gedi. The location of Hazazon Tamar is unknown, but some have placed it near the southern end of the Dead Sea, possibly at el-Hasasa, between En Gedi and Bethlehem. The oasis of En Gedi lies midway down the Dead Sea and approximately thirty-five miles southeast of Jerusalem. Fed by a continuous spring, it is a splash of life and color in the midst of an otherwise barren landscape. It has served as a cultic site, military outpost and commercial center during its long history. There are a number of fortresses from the period of the monarchy that have been discovered in this area. One is at the spring, while another is at the top of the cliff that offers a view of travelers for miles around.

20:10. Mount Seir. Mount Seir was in Edom. Seir is generally considered the mountainous central region of Edom (elevations generally over five thousand feet) between Wadi al-Ghuwayr on the north and Ras en-Naqb on the south. In this case, the term probably referred to the entire land of Edom itself.

20:16. pass of Ziz. The pass of Ziz has often been associated with the Wadi Hasasa, which drains about nine miles southeast of Tekoa into the Dead Sea. The context of the passage suggests that the pass was an important link between Jerusalem and En Gedi.

20:16. desert of Jeruel. The wilderness of Jereul was southeast of Tekoa on the descending plain to En Gedi.

20:19. Kohathites and Korahites. The Kohathites and the Korahites were two of the principle families that were involved in the leadership of the Jerusalem temple during the period of the monarchy. They were also two of the most important Levitical families (or clans). In the genealogy of 1 Chronicles 6:22-24 (also see Ex 6:18, 1 Chron 6:31), the Korahites were descended from the Kohathites.

20:20. Desert of Tekoah. The Desert of Tekoah extended east of Tekoa (Khirbet Tequ'a), a town in the highlands of Judah. The area was approximately twelve miles south of Jerusalem.

20:26. Valley of Berakah. The location of the Valley of Berakah ("blessing, praise") is not precisely known. Some scholars believe it may have been Wadi Berekut, between Tekoa and En Gedi.

20:28. harps, lutes and trumpets. The lyre had a widespread use in the ancient Near East. Egyptian tomb paintings show individuals from the Transjordan playing the lyre. The harp was evidently used in Nebuchadnezzar's orchestra (see Dan 3). In Israel it was a wooden instrument with eight strings (see 1 Chron 15:21). There were different types of trumpets used in ancient Israel. This particular type of trumpet was used on military and religious occasions to summon the people. Trumpets are occasionally depicted in the art of the ancient Near East, including the bronze figure of a trumpet player from Caria in southwest Turkey (c. 800 B.C.).

20:31. chronology. According to Thiele, Jehoshaphat ruled 872-848 B.C., and most other reckonings only differ a year or two from

those dates. It has been suggested that he was coregent with his father Asa for the first three years of his reign. Contemporary kings in Israel were Ahab, Ahaziah and Joram. Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III ruled Assyria. No references to Jehoshaphat have yet been found in extrabiblical materials.

20:33. high places. For more information on high places, see the comments on 1 Kings 3:2-3 and Deuteronomy 12:2-3.

20:34. annals. The various annals mentioned in 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles that were recorded in the Book of the Kings of Israel are no longer extant. However, one can surmise that they were similar in structure and context to annals of kings from other areas in the ancient Near East. The Assyrians left detailed military annals of their later kings (from about 1100 B.C. onwards), describing military campaigns, strategy, relations with client kings and piety toward national gods. Hittite, Egyptian and Babylonian annals from the mid-second millennium B.C. are similar in nature. It can be assumed that other kingdoms in Syro-Palestine also composed annals.

21:1. chronology. By Thiele's reckoning, Jehoram ruled 853-841 B.C. It has been suggested that he was coregent with his father Jehoshaphat for the first five years of his reign. Contemporary kings in Israel were Ahaziah and Joram. This is a critical period featuring numerous western campaigns by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (see comment on 1 Kings 22:1).

21:3. gifts. Jehoshaphat followed a precedent of Rehoboam by placing his sons in fortified towns where they were well provided for (by means of the gifts, see 2 Chron 11:23). This was a well-known Assyrian practice. For example, Esarhaddon (reigned 681-668 B.C.) placed his elder son, Shamash-shum-ukin, on the throne of Babylon, while his younger son, Ashurbanipal, was given the throne of Assyria. Nonetheless, the elder son did not find this "gift" satisfactory and began a civil war soon thereafter.

21:4-20
The Reign of Jehoram

21:4. killing brothers. The practice of removing all other possible claimants to the throne was a well-known practice in the Old Testament (see Judg 9:5 and 2 Kings 11:1) and the ancient Near East. Because of monarchs having multiple marriages (or multiple concubines) and therefore many sons, there were often a large number of claimants to the throne. Rameses II of Egypt (reigned c. 1292-1225 B.C.) had over fifty sons, for example. Since most kingdoms did not always employ the practice of primogeniture, the succession to the throne was often in question.

21:6. relations to Ahab. Marriage alliances between kingdoms was not only a common custom but was considered indispensable for forging good relations with potentially hostile neighbors. One can reconstruct the present scenario here in 2 Chronicles. Jehoshaphat was a close ally of Ahab and thus cemented this alliance with the marriage of his son Jehoram to Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel. Of course, this also brought in Baalistic worship to Judah from Phoenicia, the homeland of Jezebel. See comment on 18:1.

21:7. lamp for David. Lamps were often used metaphorically in Israel to symbolize life and prosperity. They were often placed in tombs for this reason. The expression "his lamp" is often used in Scripture to symbolize life. As an eternal flame is a symbol of endurance and remembrance, so the reign of a descendant of David in Jerusalem provides a link to God's promise to David's dynasty (2 Sam 7:8-16). Similar uses of the word in Ugaritic and Akkadian are tied to perpetuation of rule or divine presence. Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III is referred to as the light of all mankind. An Old Babylonian idiom expresses a family having no descendants by the image of its brazier going out.

21:8-10. Edom's revolt. Although this revolt is not described elsewhere in Scripture or in extrabiblical sources, there are destruction levels at Ramet Matred Negev dating from either the raid of Shishak (late tenth century B.C.) or the revolt mentioned in this passage.

21:10. Libnah. Libnah was a major fortress city in Judah that was one of the line of defenses of the capital city, Jerusalem. Thus, if the city revolted, the entire land of Judah was left vulnerable. The town of Libnah is usually identified with either Khirbet Tell el-Beida (nine miles northeast of Lachish) or Tell Bornat (about five miles further west), strategically located by the Wadi Zeita guarding the best route to Hebron from the coast.

21:15, 18. Jehoram's disease. One opinion is that Jehoram's "disease of the bowels" may have been chronic amoebic dysentery. Additionally, some suggest the more specific consequence of a massive rectal prolapse.

21:16-17. invasion of Philistines and Arabs. The invasion here was probably a series of raids from the west (Philistines) and south (Arabs), from well-known enemies of Judah. From the context of the passage it may be assumed that the raid was in response to the

vulnerable situation that Judah was in because of the Edomite rebellion.

21:19. fire in his honor. The funeral rites denied Jehoram were often quite elaborate and include the burning of spices in honor of the dead as well as a general lamentation and internment in the family tomb. The fire does not imply cremation of the body or an attempt to mask the odors associated with a diseased body, but was rather an expensive display of the king's wealth. The practice is well known among Assyrian kings where it was used as an apotropaic ritual.

21:20. tombs of the kings. The Judahite kings were buried in the City of David, a small ridge bordered by Kidron, Hinnom and Tyropoeon Valleys. The kings from Rehoboam to Ahaz were buried here (except for some notable exceptions). Later kings were either buried in the "garden of Uzziah" (Manasseh and Amon) or in their own tomb (Josiah). The burial place of Hezekiah and the successors of Josiah is not mentioned. The site of the royal burials in the City of David has not been determined with certainty. Many of the Egyptian kings of the New Kingdom (c. 1550-1050 B.C.) were buried in the Valley of the Kings in separate tombs. There was apparently no such common royal burial place for the kings of Assyria.

22:1-9
The Reign of Ahaziah

22:1. raiders with Arabs. The raiders mentioned as having come with the Arabs are likely related to those mentioned in 2 Chronicles 21. Thus they may have been Philistines and other diverse groups who sought to capitalize on the weakness of the Judahite monarchy. They certainly concluded that Judah was weaker without the Davidic dynastic line in power.

22:2. chronology. Ahaziah ruled in 841 B.C. and was a contemporary of Shalmaneser III of Assyria (reigned 858-824 B.C.). By this time most of the coalition that had withstood Shalmaneser at the Battle of Qarqar had been dismantled, and anti-Assyrian sentiment was becoming less and less popular.

22:5. war against Hazael. The family ties between Judah and Israel explain the joint attack against Hazael of Aram of Damascus. The parties of the western coalition had broken down and were now fighting amongst themselves.

22:6. Jezreel. Jezreel has been identified with Zerin/Tel Yizra'al at the east end of the Jezreel Valley in the territory of Issachar. The city was about fifteen miles southeast of Megiddo. It was the winter capital of the Israelite kingdom by the reign of Ahab. With the destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians (722/21 B.C.), Jezreel lost its importance, which it failed to regain. For more information see 1 Kings 21:1.

22:9. Samaria. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel for two centuries. Omri constructed the city in the early ninth century B.C., and it was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722/21. The city was built on a hill rising three hundred feet above the nearby valleys. It was located along the crossroads of major trade routes that lead to Shechem, the Jordan Valley, Megiddo, Jezreel and Jerusalem. The site has been extensively excavated in this century. For more information see comment on 1 Kings 16:24.

22:10—23:21
Athaliah the Usurper

22:10. Athaliah's executions. As queen mother (see comment on 1 Kings 2:19) during the reign of her son Ahaziah, Athaliah enjoyed an exalted position as "sovereign," which was evidently an official title. This afforded her a special influence on ceremonial and political matters. Following the custom of other dynasts, the usurper Athaliah attempted to destroy the members of the previous Davidic dynasty, in the same fashion that usurpers in the northern kingdom had killed off members of the previous dynasty. Such annihilations of ruling families was common practice both in Israel and in the ancient Near East at large. There is wide precedent in Mesopotamian texts for the elimination of all rival claimants to the throne when a king comes to power.

22:11-12. hiding in the temple. It is not certain where the last remaining Davidide was hidden. Medieval scholars theorized that there was a penthouse where the priests retired that was off-limits to Athaliah. However, no temple bedroom is ever mentioned in Scripture. At any rate the boy was concealed in the lodgings of the high priest in the temple precinct. Besides being a place to which very few would have access, temples in the ancient world were a place of sanctuary and protection.

23:1-3. priests' political power. In much of the ancient Near East the priesthood wielded considerable political power. They had land holdings, independent assets that came as gifts to the temple and an emotional hold on the people. In Israel the power of the prophetic institution is more evident than that of the priests,

but it is likely that the priests also carried some political clout. The wife of the high priest Jehoiada, Jehosheba, was the daughter of Joram, the previous ruler, and thus Jehoiada was connected to the royal line by marriage.

23:5. Foundation Gate. The Foundation Gate is called the Sur Gate in 2 Kings 11:6. Its location cannot be determined with certainty.

23:9. weapons from the temple. It is not certain where these weapons were stored, as there is no mention of a temple armory in Scripture. Likely these are ceremonial pieces used by the king in processionals and kept on display. It is possible that they also included important weapons that had been captured in battle or taken as tribute. The Hebrew terms used for the weapons are rare. The Hebrew term that the NIV translates as "small shield" was long obscure but is now recognized as a technical term borrowed from Aramaic referring to a bow case. Ceremonial bow cases are pictured in later Persian reliefs.

23:10. temple geography. The palace guard apparently surrounded the palace on all sides and protected the route from the palace to the temple. From its description in 1 Kings, the temple of Solomon appears to have been enclosed in the larger palace complex. Very little is known of the layout of the temple precinct and palace complex of this time.

23:11. copy of the covenant. This appears to be a document that frames a constitution or charter of some sort. One possibility is that it details the people's subordination to the king and the king's subordination to the Lord. In Egypt the coronation ceremony involved a proclamation by the god Thoth that gave the official approval of the gods for the king's accession. The theme of a covenant between king, subject people and god can also be found in the Hittite annals of the late second millennium B.C. and Assyrian vassal loyalty oaths during the mid-first millennium B.C. In Assyrian records there is a ceremony where Esarhaddon of Assyria made a binding covenant with the people of Assyria to be loyal to his successor, Ashurbanipal. What is different in Scripture is the mention of a document that was physically handed over to the king, which is not mentioned in the extrabiblical sources.

23:11. anointing. The acts here are regular features of the accession ritual of the kings of Israel and Judah. First, the ram's horn was blown to signify the people's recognition and submission to the new king. The phrase "long live the king" is attested in a number of places in the historical books of Scripture and in the enthronement psalms (47, 93, 96, 97, 99). It was used after the accession of the king to the throne. The anointing of the king was also a symbolic gesture of the divine favor of the king before Yahweh. For more information on anointing see comment on 1 Samuel 16:1.

23:13. king's pillar. This may have been one of the two entry pillars at the entrance of the temple, Jachin and Boaz (see comment on 1 Kings 7:15-22). Ezekiel describes the "prince's station" at the "doorposts of the gate" of the temple (Ezek 46:2). The king may have stood on some kind of a platform reserved only for himself.

23:15. Horse Gate on the palace grounds. The Horse Gate was a gate of the temple enclosure and not the Horse Gate of the city. It may have been a passage through which mounted riders entered the city from the east (Jer 31:40).

23:17. destruction of temple (=house) of Baal. This is the only reference to the "House of Baal" in Jerusalem (parallel to 2 Kings 11:18). Thus its location can only be a source of speculation. It may have been a private shrine in the vicinity of the palace. There is, however, a large structure excavated at Ramat Rahel, two miles south of Jerusalem, that has similarities to the palace at Samaria. Its location compares to the location of the Baal Temple of Samaria, which was outside the acropolis of the city. The reaction of the populace to the destruction of the temple of Baal is similar in nature to the purge orchestrated by Jehu some years earlier. All evidences of the previous regime were eliminated. In New Kingdom Egypt, Thutmose III attempted to destroy all vestiges of the reign of Hatshepsut, while Horemheb (and others) did the same to the Aton kings.

23:19. doorkeepers. The doorkeepers were evidently royal guards who were responsible for the entrance to the temple precinct by which the king normally passed (see also 1 Kings 14:28; 2 Kings 11:19). The exact route from the temple to the palace is unclear. It may have been south between the temple mount and the City of David.

23:20. Jerusalem geography. The temple mount was at the highest point on the northern end of the City of David. The palace was situated just south of (and probably adjoining) the temple complex. Immediately southeast was the Kidron Valley, which separated the Temple Mount from the Mount of Olives. Southwest of the City of David was the Ben Hinnom Valley.

24:1-27
The Reign of Joash

24:1. chronology. Joash ruled from 835 to 796 B.C. and was a contemporary of Jehu, Jehoa-

haz and Jehoash of Israel. Shalmaneser III, Shamshi-Adad V and Adad-Nirari III ruled Assyria during this period.

24:4. ideology of temple restoration in the ancient Near East. The temple was the center of culture, economy and society in Syria, Mesopotamia and Israel. It served as the house of the city's patron deity, and thus the god's presence was considered to exist there. It was incumbent upon the ruler of the city to attend to the "care and feeding" of the deity. The statue of the god was bathed, clothed and fed daily. Just as important as the king's military success was his attention to the upkeep of the god's house. Countless building inscriptions from both Assyria and Babylonia attest to the king's piety because of his restoration of a certain god's house. Similarly, those who rebuilt or restored Yahweh's were accorded this same type of piety. Restoration entailed both physical and ritual aspects. A neglected temple would need structural repairs (see comment on v. 13) and perhaps the restoration of pilfered furniture and accessories. It is possible that gold objects or gold plating on walls would need to be replaced. Then the temple would need to have its sanctity reestablished through appropriate rituals. Finally, it would need to be provided with funding and personnel so that it could operate.

24:5. collection of funds. The collecting of funds for the restoration of a temple was a common occurrence by monarchs in the ancient Near East. Often, though, the monarch would restore the temple by means of corvee labor or by collecting building materials from his subjects. The initial collection procedure is described only in 2 Kings 12:5-7 and was unsuccessful. It entailed receiving funds from the "treasurers" (NIV). This word only occurs in this context and has now been identified in both Ugaritic and Akkadian texts dealing with temple treasuries. It could refer either to officers who distributed temple assets or to the assets themselves.

24:5. taxation in Israel. There are surprisingly few words in Scripture for "tax." The most common term was a generic word meaning to "evaluate for taxation." The term is used for the tribute that Israelite kings were obliged to pay ruling overlords. It was also used in connection with collecting funds for the temple, as here. The process of taxation is described in 1 Samuel 8:15-17. The king could also exempt a household from taxation (see 1 Sam 17:25). Solomon had a core of governors who periodically collected taxes (1 Kings 4:7-19). It appears that the rebellion against Rehoboam was motivated by tax abuse. Ostraca from Samaria record deliveries of wine for the use of the king, with the phrase, "for the king." These ostraca were from several sites that were probably depots where the local taxes were gathered. Another aspect of taxation was forced labor (see Ex 1:10; Josh 16:10; 2 Sam 20:24). Although taxation in Mesopotamia is much better documented, it appears to have similar attributes to taxation practices found in Israel.

24:6. Tent of the Testimony. The Tent of the Testimony was more commonly called the Tent of Meeting or tabernacle (see comment on Ex 33:7-10). It was the central place of worship for the Israelites before the construction of the temple of Solomon. It was the shrine that housed the ark of the covenant and various other cultic objects. The tabernacle continued to play an important link to Israel's history, even during the monarchy, and one gets the impression that somehow the tent was set up inside the temple precinct (see 1 Kings 8:4 = 2 Chron 5:5).

24:11. shared custody of funds between king and priests. The sharing of custody for funds used in temple restorations is attested in the records of Assyrian king Esarhaddon (seventh century). Here also there are accusations on both sides regarding who is responsible for the delay in the project.

24:12. repair crew. The regular maintenance of the temple complex was the responsibility of the "workmen in charge of the temple." Major repairs had to be contracted out to skilled workers. The listing of these skilled laborers is typical of contemporary Assyrian records.

24:13. nature of the work. It appears that the skilled workers restored the temple to its original foundations. The skilled workers were carpenters, builders, masons and stonecutters. The term for "builder" was used for both skilled and unskilled laborers who worked primarily with mudbrick. The carpenter was responsible for all of the wood items in construction, including the roof, door, window and stair fittings, and various cultic objects in the temple. The mason/stonecutter quarried the stones from natural caves or drove shafts in the hillside. Then the stones were cut and fitted into place. It will be remembered that Solomon contracted Phoenician craftsmen to build the temple. It is not expressly stated that foreign workers were used to refurbish the temple during the reign of Joash.

24:14. articles for the temple. The cultic vessels mentioned here were made by Solomon's craftsmen (1 Kings 7:50) and were distinct from those made by the Phoenicians (1 Kings 7:13-47). They became booty for Nebuchadnezzar II during his capture of Jerusalem

more than two centuries after Joash. The terms are best described as "vessels for the service and for the burnt offering, bowls and gold and silver vessels."

24:15. Jehoiada 130 years old. Jehoiada lived longer than Moses (120 years) and Aaron (123 years), showing his great favor with God. The fact that the Chronicler called attention to Jehoiada's age shows his great importance, equal to any of the Judahite monarchs. Egyptian texts considered 110 to be the ideal old age, while Mesopotamian ideas targeted 120. In the sixth century, Adad-Guppi, the mother of the Babylonian king Nabonidus, is said to have lived to the age of 104.

24:18. Asherah poles. The Asherah poles were apparently man-made objects and often were situated near trees (see Jer 17:2), although they may have actually been living trees on occasion (see Deut 16:21). The Asherah cult object symbolized the goddess herself. The poles were often associated with the image of the goddess, which was a separate item altogether. For more information see comment on 2 Kings 13:6.

24:23. war in spring. In the ancient Near East spring was a popular time in which to commence military ventures. First of all, the weather in the winter was prohibitive for extensive military travel. Second, because of harvesting in the spring, invading armies were able to forage for food. The Assyrian annals make a point of describing any particular military campaign that happened during the winter or the dead of summer, when there was unbearable heat for the soldiers.

24:23-24. war with Aram. In the last decades of the ninth century the Aramean kingdom of Damascus was relieved of Assyrian pressures and was able to assert its influence south and west into Judah (see comment on 2 Kings 10:32). There was an attack on Gath (probably Gittaim in the northern Shephelah, not Philistine Gath), which posed a direct threat on Jerusalem (see 2 Kings 12:18). The Aramean king at this time was Hazael (see comment on 2 Kings 8:8), who ruled from 843 B.C. to near the end of the ninth century.

25:1-28
The Reign of Amaziah

25:1. chronology. Thiele assigns to Amaziah the years 796-767 B.C. He was contemporary with Jehoash and Jeroboam II of Israel. Adad-Nirari III, Shalmaneser IV and Ashur-Dan III ruled Assyria during his time.

25:5. size of military. The term in Hebrew for thousand, *ʾeleph*, is also employed for "unit," which makes more sense in this passage. Thus Amaziah's census found three hundred units of available men to be soldiers, and there is no precise number of available soldiers given in the text. For more information on numbers see comments on 2 Chronicles 11:1; 13:2-20.

25:6. mercenaries. The use of mercenaries in ancient Near Eastern warfare was widespread. The Assyrians began to rely heavily on mercenaries by the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (reigned 745-727 B.C.). Although mercenaries were experienced and well trained, their loyalty was often called into question when they did not get their pay in a timely fashion, or if they were fighting against a kindred foe. Ionian mercenaries left the Persian camp and fought for the Greeks at the Battle of Plataea during the Persian wars (480 B.C.).

25:6. hundred talents of silver. The talent was the largest weight measure used in the Near East. It was comparable to three thousand shekels at Alalakh and Ugarit in Syria and in the Old Testament (Ex 38:25-6). One hundred talents of silver weighed about three and one quarter tons. Obviously this was the total amount spent hiring the mercenaries and comes to one talent of silver for each division. This is not exorbitant pay and was just "earnest money"—the real payoff would come in the plunder.

25:11. Valley of Salt. The Valley of Salt has been identified with Wadi el-milh, east of Beersheba, about three miles due south of the Dead Sea. There are numerous areas in the region where the cliffs are high enough for people to be thrown to their death.

25:11. Seir. Seir was the biblical name for part of the country of Edom and was often used as a synonym for Edom. So "the sons of Seir" would be another name for the Edomites. Seir is listed as a geographic toponym in the Amarna letters from Egypt (fourteenth century B.C.).

25:12. styles of execution. Throwing enemy prisoners off a cliff is not known as a style of execution outside of this passage. It was likely the most convenient form of execution because of the geographical circumstances. In A.D. 67, during the Jewish revolt against Rome, thousands of Jews from Gamla hurled themselves off the cliff rather than be captured by the Romans.

25:13. Samaria to Beth Horon. Beth Horon is at the ascent between the Valley of Aijalon and the hill country, about twelve miles northwest of Jerusalem. From where the armies are, the main road home goes north from Arad to Hebron where it swings a bit to the west and

then proceeds north through the Shephelah. From Arad to Beth Horon along this road is about fifty miles. The city of Samaria was over fifty miles further north of Beth Horon and was the capital of the northern kingdom, so cannot be the city intended here. Either there was another "Samaria" in Judah, not known elsewhere in Scripture, or the text originally read something like "Hebron." Since most of the mercenaries' pay came from plunder, this was their way of collecting.

25:14. gods of Seir. It is generally assumed that these would be the images of the Edomite gods. The national god of the Edomites was Qos. It is not unusual that worship should be offered to deities of defeated nations. At Dan standing stones were found at a shrine just inside the city gate, and the clear remains of the presentation of votive offerings were evident. It is thought that the standing stones represented some of the deities of cities that had fallen to Israel. The votive offerings would be in fulfillment of vows made to those deities (perhaps for their aid in overthrowing the city the Israelites were fighting against).

25:21. Beth Shemesh. Beth Shemesh was a town about fifteen miles west of Jerusalem in the Shephelah region between Jerusalem and the coastal territory of Philistia. It was an important fortress town that guarded the Sorek pass from raiders who desired to plunder Jerusalem. The site of Beth Shemesh (Tell er-Rumeliah) has remains showing an extensive Canaanite occupation of the city before the Israelite conquest.

25:23. topography of Jerusalem. Scholars have supposed that the Ephraim gate was located at the northwest corner of the city of Jerusalem, while the corner gate was at the northeast corner. The northern portion of Jerusalem was the only direction that allowed easy accessibility to the town. Other areas of the wall did not make for easy access because of the Valley of Ben Hinnom to the southwest and the Kidron Valley to the southeast.

25:24. plunder of Jehoash. Assyrian records often show that the family of the defeated king was sent under guard to Assyria to be hostages in order to guarantee the good behavior of the king. Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859) is described as "taking hostages and establishing victory." Here the identity of the Judahite prisoners is not mentioned, but it can be assumed they were either part of the royal family or important members of the nobility.

25:27. Lachish. Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) was a major fortress city in the Judahite Shephelah. It is not surprising that Amaziah went to this town, since it was in the line of defense surrounding Jerusalem. Both the Assyrians and the Babylonians captured Lachish in their invasions of Judah in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. Located about thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem, the site covers some thirty acres.

26:1-23
The Reign of Uzziah

26:2. Elath. Elath (or Eloth) was the seaport constructed by Solomon at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba (see comment on 2 Chron 8:17). It was closely associated with the nearby port of Ezion Geber. It opened trade for Judah with Arabia, Africa and India. Uzziah apparently attempted to revive the Red Sea trade instituted by Solomon.

26:3. chronology. Uzziah's long reign is calculated by Thiele as lasting from 792 to 740 B.C. Scholars postulate that he had a long coregency with his father Amaziah on one end of his reign and with his son, Jotham, on the other. He was a contemporary with Jeroboam II (for forty of the fifty-two years), Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekah and Pekahiah of Israel. Adad-Nirari III, Shalmaneser IV, Ashur-Dan, Ashur-Nirari V and Tiglath-Pileser III ruled Assyria. Assyria was weak during most of this period, allowing for expansion and prosperity for both Israel and Judah. Uzziah's name has been found on a seal from Tell Beit Mirsim. Tiglath-Pileser's records mention a king named Azriau of Yaudi, but most do not equate this individual with Uzziah.

26:6-8. military successes. Although there are no other literary sources which describe Uzziah's victories over the Philistines, Arabs and Meunites, there is archaeological evidence of destruction at the Philistine city of Ashdod, which may have been done during the time of Uzziah. There is also evidence that Uzziah constructed fortresses in these newly conquered territories. Gath (Tell es-Safi; see comment on 1 Sam 5:8), Ashdod and Jabneh form a triangle about ten or fifteen miles on each side that dominates the northern section of the Philistine plain directly west of Jerusalem. Tell Mor near the Philistine city of Ashdod provides one example of such a fortress. Since Uzziah was not able to expand north because of the power of Israel under Jeroboam II, he turned his attention to the west and south, subduing people groups that had taken advantage of previously unstable conditions in Judah. For more information on the Meunites see comment on 20:1. The site of Gurbaal remains unidentified.

26:9. Jerusalem towers. Although the towers

built by Uzziah have not been identified, they were presumably similar to the towers built by the Assyrians at their major cities of Nineveh, Calah, Assur and Dur-Sharrukin. Dur-Sharrukin was a fortress built by Sargon II (reigned 721-705 B.C.), with towers strategically placed at the four corners of the city. See 2 Chronicles 25:23 for a description of the gates where the towers of Uzziah were built. Recent discovery of a massive tower in the vicinity of the Gihon Spring may yet prove to be part of these fortifications.

26:10. towers in the desert. There is archaeological evidence of Uzziah's building activity in Judah. The tower in the stratigraphic level IIIB at Gibeah was probably built in this period. The intensive building activity at Tell Abu Selimeh may also date from this period. There is evidence of early buildings and cisterns at Qumran and Ain Feshkha that date to Uzziah's reign. Fortifications, cisterns and farms have also been located in the Negeb area near Beersheba.

26:11-13. Uzziah's army. Evidence of Uzziah's power is shown by the fact that he had a standing army and did not have to rely upon conscripting soldiers during times of conflict. Assyrian sources indicate that Uzziah's army was significant enough to have taken part in a coalition against Tiglath-Pileser III during his invasion of the Levant in the mid-eighth century B.C.

26:14. arms. The wealth of Uzziah afforded him the opportunity to arm his soldiers with the traditional weaponry in the Near East in the Iron Age. The weapons mentioned here were also those listed as ones used by the Assyrian army. The Assyrians describe their weaponry in detail in their annals, and they are often depicted in wall reliefs at the king's palace. It can be presumed that Uzziah began to build up his army because of the threat of Assyria and of neighboring Israel.

26:15. machines. The "machines" made by Uzziah were probably protective shielding devices mounted on the walls providing protection for defenders to throw stones and shoot arrows at the enemy. The material remains from the Judahite fortress at Lachish attest to the nature of Uzziah's constructions. Additionally, they are represented in the Assyrian wall reliefs at Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh. In the past some interpreters had suggested that these were catapults, but there is no evidence of the use of catapults this early.

26:16-19. Uzziah's offense. Uzziah's offense was a direct violation of priestly prerogatives concerning the temple worship (Num 16:40). The altar of incense was located inside the outer chamber of the temple which denied access to all but officiating priests. The sacrilege he was charged with ("unfaithful," NIV v. 18) is the offense that was addressed by reparation offerings (see comment on Lev 5:14-16).

26:19. leprosy. Mari king Yahdun-Lim calls down a curse of leprosy on whoever desecrated the temple that he was dedicating, so it is clear that this is a common connection. Those studying the ancient Near Eastern languages have concluded that the term often translated "leprosy" is more accurately rendered "lesion," or, less technical, "scaly skin." Such patches could be swelled or weeping, as well as flaking. Similar broad terminology also exists in Akkadian, where the Babylonians likewise considered it an unclean condition and the punishment of the gods. Clinical leprosy (Hansen's Disease) has not been attested in the ancient Near East prior to the time of Alexander the Great. None of the most prominent characteristics of Hansen's disease are listed in the text, and the symptoms that are listed argue against a relationship to Hansen's disease. The condition discussed in the text is not presented as contagious. Descriptions would suggest that modern diagnoses would include psoriasis, eczema, favus and seborrheic dermatitis, as well as a number of fungal-type infections. Because of this, it is not clear exactly what type of skin disease Uzziah had. Comparison to "snow" most likely concerns the flakiness rather than the color ("white" is added in the translations that contain it). The great cultural aversion to skin diseases may be that in appearance and sometimes odor they resemble the rotting skin of the corpse and are therefore associated with death. This natural revulsion adds considerably to the victim's outcast status when combined with the quarantine that is ritually rather than medically motivated. It is not certain whether Uzziah was quarantined because of the disease or because of his cultic offenses. Naaman had a similar disease and was able to continue his duties as commander in chief. It is presumed that Jotham, son of Uzziah, took over official duties as coregent after Uzziah's cultic offense.

26:23. Uzziah's tomb. There is an epitaph now preserved in the Israel Museum marking the burial place of Uzziah, king of Judah. It represented a secondary burial of his bones.

27:1-9

The Reign of Jotham

27:1. chronology. Jotham ruled from 750 to 732 B.C. and was possibly coregent with his fa-

ther Uzziah for ten years and with his son Ahaz for three years. Extrabiblical evidence of Jotham's reign includes a signet ring found at Tell el-Kheleifeh with his name and the picture of a horned ram. He is also named on a bulla found of Ahaz's royal seal.

27:3. Upper Gate of the Temple. Little is known of the architectural history of the temple after Solomon. The Upper Gate of the temple was located at the north entrance to the temple enclosure. Jeremiah was confined to the Upper Benjamin Gate, which was probably the same as the Upper Gate.

27:3. hill of Ophel. The hill of Ophel is identified as the section between the temple mount and the southern ridge known as the city of David. Apparently it featured fortifications that surrounded the temple-palace complex. Some believe that there was a citadel located here that was itself designated "the Ophel."

27:4. forts. Jotham continued his father's extensive building programs in Judah by constructing fortress cities in the highlands of Judah, most likely as a line of defense against invasion. Not only did he build forts in the wooded areas, he may have engaged in a program of forestation. No excavations have as yet identified fortifications that can be definitively connected to Jotham. It is in his reign, however, that the Neo-Assyrian Empire takes shape under Tiglath-Pileser III. Undoubtedly the renewed emphasis on defense projects reflects the rising threat.

27:5. Ammonites. The Ammonites lived north of the Moabites in the region around the Jabbok River. They are known from Assyrian records as Bit-Ammon and as the land of Benammanu. At the end of Jotham's reign, the king of Ammon was Sharib. No Ammonite or Assyrian records illumine the history of the Ammonites prior to 733. They had paid tribute to Uzziah but apparently tried to break free of Judah's control and had to be suppressed with force.

27:5. amount of tribute. The amount of tribute given by the Ammonites is very large and compares with the terms that the Assyrians gave to Judah during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:14-17). A hundred talents of silver was over three tons, while ten thousand cors each of wheat and barely were about sixty-five thousand bushels each (see comment on 2:10).

28:1-27

The Reign of Ahaz

28:1. chronology. Thiele places the rule of Ahaz from 735 to 715 B.C. This would make him a contemporary of Hoshea, the last king of Israel, as well as of the Assyrian kings Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser V and Sargon II. The chronology of this period is very complicated, and the numbers from one system to another vary considerably. Most systems depend on a complex combination of coregencies. One possibility with Ahaz is to see him as being thrust onto the throne by a pro-Assyrian faction within the administration of Judah as early as 741 with the hope that cooperation with Assyria could maintain peace. Ahaz is named (referred to by the longer form of his name, Jehoahaz, in Assyrian, Iauhazi) in one of Tiglath-Pileser's building inscriptions as having paid tribute. A bulla (seal impression) of his royal seal has also been found.

28:2. cast idols. Ahaz cast idols of the Baals of Canaan, not to local representations. The plural (Baals) may be used as a parallel with the plural Elohim, the generic name for the Hebrew God. Casting idols for worship was specifically condemned in the Mosaic Law (see Ex 34:17). Metal casts of Canaanite deities (including Baals) have been found at numerous sites in Palestine.

28:3. Valley of Ben Hinnom. The Valley of Ben Hinnom was on the south side of Jerusalem and joined the Kidron Valley at the southeast corner of the city. Access from the city to Ben Hinnom came from the Potsherd Gate and the Valley Gate. The valley became infamous for Baal worship because of the acts of Ahaz and Manasseh. Josiah defiled the region in order to prevent future idolatrous acts (2 Kings 23:10).

28:3. sons passing through the fire. The biblical writers distinguished between the practice of the nations of burning their children in the service to their gods (Deut 12:31 and 2 Kings 17:31) and the idolatrous Israelites who "passed their sons and daughters through the fire." If "passing through the fire" was something different than child sacrifice, it is not certain what it was. In Deuteronomy 18:9 "passing through the fire" appears with other Canaanite divination practices. There are hints from contemporary Assyrian sources of burning children in this period. In some Assyrian economic documents the penalty clauses include "burning children to Sin."

28:4. high places, spreading trees. The worship at high places is not attributed to other Judahite kings but to the people of Judah (e.g., 1 Kings 22:44). A different verbal form is used in Hebrew to denote illegal sacrifices at shrines opposed to legal sacrifices at the Jerusalem temple. Ahaz, of course, was condemned for his illegal sacrifices. For more information

on high places see comment on 2 Kings 17:9.

28:5. defeat by Arameans. This is a description of what is called the Syro-Ephraimitic War. One popular reconstruction maintains that states in the region of Syria and Palestine (including Israel and Aram) had forged a coalition to fight against the rising power of Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser III. Rezin of Aram-Damascus headed this coalition in 733 B.C. One year earlier, Aram and Israel attempted to force Ahaz of Judah to join the coalition against Assyria. The two states sought to dethrone Ahaz (see Is 7:6). Upon an appeal from Ahaz, Assyria marched west in 733-732 B.C. and devastated the area, ending the Damascene state and setting up a puppet king in Israel (Hoshea). Others believe that the aggression of the Syro-Ephraimite coalition reflected only their own ambitions for expansion and had nothing to do with a coalition against Assyria. The Assyrian annals of Tiglath-Pileser III are badly mutilated, but a general picture of the Assyrian conquest can be obtained.

28:14-15. treatment of prisoners. The Assyrian annals and wall reliefs depict the harsh conditions of those who were deported from their own territory. The males are normally naked, often with hooks in their nose or lips, and some are missing limbs. Others are carrying their worldly belongings with them. It appears that the Israelites had a similar policy, which was condemned by the prophet Oded. The extent of care and mercy described in these verses is, therefore, remarkable.

28:16. Ahaz asking help of Assyrians. In response to the invasion of Judah by the other Syro-Palestian states, Ahaz appealed to Assyria. Although the Assyrian annals do not explicitly state his appeal, he is listed as one of the kings who gave tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III.

28:17-18. military difficulties. Not only was Ahaz fearful of Aram-Israelite invasions, it appears his appeal to Assyria was for his war against Edom and Philistia. Recent excavations along the ancient border between Edom and Judah have confirmed the expansion of Edom into the Negev of Judah at towns such as En Hatzeva and Qitmit. Pottery ostraca from Arad that contain military correspondence from this period also show that Edomite invasions were considered imminent. The Philistines expanded their presence into the Shephelah region, regaining control of the area that had been under Judean control during the reign of Uzziah (see comment on 26:6-8). The description includes the three main passes into the Judean hills (the Aijalon, Sorek and Elah Valleys). There are no archaeological finds that illumine this Philistine conquest in any of the sites mentioned here. Tiglath-Pileser's campaign of 734 included the Philistines among his targets. This led to setting up a stele in Gaza in 734 and the conquest of Ashkelon in 733. An Assyrian letter from Nimrud indicates the unstable conditions that existed in Palestine at this time. The territories lost by Ahaz were not returned to him but organized into Assyrian provinces.

28:23. gods of Damascus. Most of the people groups in the ancient Near East believed that the gods had limited geographic jurisdiction. The god's land was in effect under the stewardship of the monarch. Normally the gods did not have control of events occurring in other regions (where other gods had jurisdiction). Since most wars were conducted as holy wars, credit was given to the god(s) of the victorious army. As early as the mid-third millennium B.C. the Sumerian city of Lagash claimed that their gods gave them victory over neighboring Umma. Here Ahaz is making a frank admission that since the Arameans had been victorious over him, their gods were more powerful and in the right. The gods of Damascus were from the Aramean pantheon and included Hadad (the storm deity), which was most probably the proper name of Baal, known from Canaanite sources. Ahaz also made a large altar to the "gods of Damascus" (see 2 Kings 16:9-16). It is not clear whether the altar was Phoenician, Aramean or even Assyrian. It was to replace the bronze altar built by Solomon. The temple that Ahaz visited was probably that of Hadad-Rimmon (cf. 2 Kings 5:18). However the rites described here are typically Israelite.

28:24. furnishings of the temple. The furnishings of the temple probably included vessels, utensils, furniture and tools. According to 2 Kings 16:17-18 Ahaz was required to send very precise items, including the "Sabbath canopy," to the king of Assyria. The Assyrians did not normally interfere with local cultic practices. It appears that Ahaz sent them to satisfy a metal tribute obligation.

28:24. altars at every street corner. Babylonian texts speak of small open-air shrines or niches on street corners or courtyards. One text says that there were 180 of them in the city of Babylon to the goddess Ishtar. These shrines featured a raised structure with an altar on the top and seem to have been frequented primarily by women. In this sense the word "corner" may refer to what is basically a cultic niche.

28:25. each town with a high place. The

whole land of Judah was now made a center of foreign cultic practices. The Assyrians (and Arameans, for that matter) did not require any people group to switch allegiance to different gods, but a tributary group may have felt that their relationship with the conquerors would improve if they followed their deities. For information about high places see comment on 2 Kings 17:9.

29:1—32:33
The Reign of Hezekiah

29:1. chronology. Hezekiah's dates are the most controversial, and Thiele, in acknowledged contradiction to some of the biblical synchronisms, assigns him the date of 715-687 B.C., contemporary with Sargon II and Sennacherib of Assyria. Egyptian monarchs of this period were Shabako, Shebitku and Taharqa. Many consider it more likely that Hezekiah came to the throne in 727 and that his encounter with Sennacherib in his fourteenth year (2 Kings 18:13) took place when Sennacherib was still only the crown prince leading the armies for his father, Sargon II. Assyrian records confirm that there was a campaign to the west against Ashdod in 713. This represents the beginning of a lengthy series of conflicts between these protagonists that came to a climax in the siege of Jerusalem in 701 after Sennacherib had ascended to the throne. Archaeological evidence of Hezekiah's reign includes a seal found at Tell Beit Mirsim with Hezekiah's name that dates to his reign. The royal jar-handle stamps found in Syro-Palestine from the late eighth century onward probably also originated during Hezekiah's reign. Along with the expansion and building at Jerusalem (see the comment on 32:5), there is a great shaft at Lachish that was probably built in this period.

29:3. ideology of temple restoration in the ancient Near East. The temple was the center of culture, economy and society in Syria, Mesopotamia and Israel. It served as the house of the city's patron deity, and thus the god was believed to be present there. It was incumbent upon the ruler of the city to attend to the "care and feeding" of the deity. The statue of the god was bathed, clothed and fed daily. Just as important as the king's military success was his attention to the upkeep of the god's house. Countless building inscriptions from both Assyria and Babylonia attest to the king's piety because of his restoration of a certain god's house. Similarly, those who rebuilt or restored Yahweh's house were accorded this same type of piety. Restoration entailed both physical and ritual aspects. A neglected temple would need structural repairs and perhaps the restoration of pilfered furniture and accessories. It is possible that gold objects or gold plating on walls would need to be replaced. Then the temple would need to have its sanctity reestablished through appropriate rituals. Finally, it would need to be provided with funding and personnel so that it could operate.

29:4-15. the Levites. The Levitical families had not played a major role in the Jerusalem cult since the time of Jehoshaphat, over a century earlier. In accordance with typical restoration procedures, Hezekiah used the traditional priestly families to cleanse the temple and restore it to ritual purity. He then restored them to their original functions (see comment on 19:5).

29:15 consecration. Consecration is a process of ritual purification to prepare someone for association with that which is holy. Procedures varied from one culture to another, but most shared the idea that some ritual process was necessary so that impurity could be removed and the sanctity of the deity's house preserved. The priests were presumably consecrated based upon the detailed rules found in Exodus 29.

29:16. Kidron Valley. The Kidron Valley southeast of the temple was connected to Ben Hinnom, which had long been a dumping ground for the people of Jerusalem. Hezekiah, like Josiah, attempted to cleanse the Jerusalem temple complex by taking all of the illegal cultic items to this valley. The Kidron Valley was also used as a burial ground for the common people.

29:17. calendar. The first month was Nisan, which spanned our spring months of March and April. This was the beginning of the religious calendar of festivals. The purification procedure moved from the outer areas toward the inner ones, because each area had its own ritual requirements. When one level of purity was reached, an area could be entered. The next level of purity would allow access to the next, and so on. It took eight days to consecrate the areas contiguous to the temple, and eight more to carry out the procedure on the temple structure itself.

29:17. consecration of articles. The temple was rededicated in three steps; the temple was cleansed, it was then reconsecrated, and then there was the inaugural dedication ceremony. The articles that Ahaz removed had to be reconsecrated, because they had been removed from the sacred precincts and so were no longer pure.

29:21-24. sacrificial ritual. There were no sac-

rificial rituals used in the dedication of the tabernacle. When the temple of Solomon was dedicated, the animals sacrificed were too numerous to count. Nowhere does the text offer instructions for the numbers reflected here. For information about the sin offering see comments on Leviticus 4:1-3 and 4-12.

29:25. musical instruments. For harps and lyres see the note on 2 Chronicles 20:28. There were two kinds of cymbals used in the ancient Near East. One consisted of two shallow metal plates held with one in each hand and struck together. The others were shaped like a cup. One cymbal was held stationary while being struck with the other one. It is not certain which type of cymbal was employed here, but they were probably made of bronze.

29:27-30. singing. Reference to the words of David and Asaph suggests the Levites probably used a hymnal or psalter, possibly somewhat like the book of Psalms. Most ancient Near Eastern monarchs employed singers (both male and female) for use in the palace and temple. The Mari archives describe in detail the female singers and the daily food supplies that were needed for their sustenance. Over twenty-four classes of singers are known in Israel (1 Chron 25). The names of the three heads of families of singers are also known (Asaph, Heman and Ethan; 1 Chron 6:18-32). The singers were presumably free men, but slaves were also attached to the temple (Ezra 2:43-58; Neh 7:46-60). Women played a role in the music of the tabernacle (Ex 38:8), but there is no clear reference to there being female singers associated with the temple.

29:29-30. posture of worship. Some texts indicate that the Israelites prayed standing upright (1 Sam 1:26; 1 Kings 8:22; Jer 18:20). Other texts describe a kneeling posture (e.g., 2 Chron 6:13), the raising of the hands (Ps 28:2; Is 1:15; Lam 2:19) and even total prostration (Ps 5:8; 99:5, 9). Posture may have varied depending on the nature of the prayer. The Israelites were not unique with regard to their posture in prayer. There are many examples from Mesopotamia describing individuals in all of the postures mentioned above. For example, the incantation prayers of Mesopotamian sources, such as that to Ishtar, imply prostration of the supplicant as well as a ritual of raising the hands. Hittite sources suggest similar postures and gestures.

29:29-30. worship in the outdoors. The Israelites of Jerusalem normally prayed at the temple courts, facing the sanctuary itself (Ps 5:8; 28:2; 138:2). The Jew outside Jerusalem faced in the direction of the city of Jerusalem and temple (1 Kings 8:44-48). In most ancient Near Eastern cultures the common person did not have access to the inside of a temple but did his worship in the temple courts. The temples of the ancient world were not built to be houses of worship but residences for the divine presence. Worship (prayers and sacrifices) was carried out at the temple, but there were no regular worship services at which all of the faithful gathered.

29:31. thank offerings. The thank offerings were types of fellowship offerings (see comment on Lev 3:1-5). Portions of this offering were consumed on the altar, while the worshiper ate the remainder.

29:32-33. animals for burnt offerings. The provisions for the burnt offerings are found in Leviticus 1:1-17. Verse 32 numbers the burnt offerings, which were fully consumed by fire, while verse 33 enumerates the thank offerings, which included a token burnt portion with the rest used as a basis for a communal meal. This combination of offerings was common in public ceremonies.

29:35-6. sacrifice and feasting. Biblical feasts were different in purpose, content and origin from those of other peoples in the ancient Near East. Ancient Near Eastern feast days coincided with the New Year or the change of seasons. The Israelite took part in the feast as one who was indebted to the grace of Yahweh. The feasts of their neighbors typically included periods of mourning, processions, the performance of sacred dramas (as well as other entertainment) and an opportunity to ask oracles of the deity.

30:1. Hezekiah's initiative toward northern kingdom. The northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered by the Assyrians (see comment on 2 Kings 17:5-6), who were now bearing down on the remainder of the western states. Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, had instituted a policy of cooperation with Assyria, which is documented by his incorporation into the Assyrian tribute lists. Hezekiah attempted to reclaim some of the territory of Israel which had been gained by Uzziah and lost by Ahaz (see 2 Kings 18:4-8). Hezekiah's political ambitions could only be accomplished with the establishment of a religious base in the north. Hezekiah probably began these initiatives as a result of the death in battle of Sargon II of Assyria (705 B.C.). With Assyria in turmoil, Hezekiah began to expand his territorial horizons. This eventually results in the invasion of Syro-Palestine by Sennacherib (701 B.C.).

30:1-3. reinstitution of Passover. The disaster of the fall of Samaria likely caused an internal reformation in Israel that was sympathetic to Hezekiah's policies and his attempt to reunify

the nation in the worship at Jerusalem. Refugees from the north had no doubt fled to Judah after the Assyrian conquest, especially since Israel had now taken on aspects of syncretism (the mixing of worship with foreign religious elements). The national celebration of Passover fit well into Hezekiah's designs to reunify the nation. Both the Israelites and Judahites were able to hearken back to a past event which both groups shared, the exodus.

30:2-3. timing of Passover. The Passover was normally held on the fourteenth of the first month in the Hebrew calendar. However, there was a provision (Num 9:6-13) that allowed those who were either unclean or absent on a distant journey to observe the Passover in the second month. Hezekiah delayed the celebration to allow the northerners to attend.

30:13. pilgrimage feasts. There were three major feasts in the Hebrew calendar that called for pilgrimage to Jerusalem (for discussion see comments on Ex 23:15-17). During these feasts the number of pilgrims in Jerusalem made for very crowded conditions. Pilgrimage was more limited in the ancient Near Eastern religious practice, because most worship took place at local shrines of patron deities. Nevertheless people in outlying regions would make pilgrimage to shrines. Possible evidence of this occurs in the discovery of caravanseria, such as that at Kuntillet Ajrud, where graffiti was left by travelers who may have been pilgrims (though maybe merchants). In Babylonia some may have traveled to the capital to participate in New Year's Enthronement festivals, but it was not part of the religious expectation. In Egypt it was more likely for the gods to travel around to their various shrines in procession rather than for people to travel to any sort of centralized shrine.

30:15-17. Passover rituals. Hezekiah's Passover deviated from the general practice in two ways. First, the time of the celebration was different (see the note 2 Chron 30:2-3), and second, the Israelites were exempted from certain ritual prescriptions. Because many in the assembly had not sanctified themselves, the Levites presided over the slaying of the paschal lambs, a task normally done by the heads of families, most of whom were not sanctified in this instance (Num 9:6). However, those who were unclean were allowed in some instances to eat the paschal lamb.

30:21. Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was established to memorialize the deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt (see comment on Ex 12:14-20). It was one of three annual festivals and was normally observed on the fourteenth day of the first month. For seven days unleavened bread was eaten and no manual labor was done. Sacrifices were offered on the first and last days of the festival (Num 28:16-25; Deut 16:1-8).

30:23-24. Hezekiah's provision of animals. It appears that the king is providing much of the meat for a religious communal feast for those in attendance. These numbers are large but are not out of proportion with some of the other figures found in ancient Near Eastern literature. When King Ashurnasirpal II throws a dedication party for his palace in the Assyrian capital city of Calah, he provides 5,000 sheep, 1,000 lambs and cattle, 500 deer, 500 gazelles, 34,000 fowl, and 10,000 fish (879 B.C.).

31:1. sacred stones and Asherah poles. See the comment on 2 Kings 17:9.

31:1. high places and altars. See the comment on 2 Kings 17:9.

31:2. functions of the Levites. Hezekiah reaffirmed the functions of the Levitical order established by Solomon. Thus the priests were in charge of the offerings, and the Levites were in charge of the worship (also see the comment on 2 Chron 29:15).

31:3. king's contributions. In contrast to the contributions for the festival in 30:23-24, this verse speaks of regular and ongoing contributions funding the operation of the temple. Hezekiah followed the precedent of Solomon by providing burnt offerings on a regular basis for the temple services (2 Chron 2:4). The provisions for the offerings are described in Numbers 28—29. In the ancient Near East the king (representing the corporate nation) was the foremost worshiper of the national god. Therefore it would be expected that the palace would play a major role in supplying the regular sacrifices.

31:4. Levites' portions. The portion for the priests and Levites was delineated in Numbers 18 (see comments there), where the gifts were for the priests (v. 12) and the tithes were for the Levites (v. 21). Clearly Hezekiah was making a great attempt to have the religious officials devote themselves to the duties prescribed in the five books of Moses.

31:7. calendar. The third month corresponded to mid-May through mid-June on our calendar. Although this month was called Sivan in the postexilic period, the name is not known during Hezekiah's time. The seventh month, Ethanim (Tishri in the postexilic age), corresponded to mid-September through mid-October. The fact that the ingathering lasted from the third to the seventh month means that it included the harvest of every major crop

(May, lentils, barley; June, wheat; September, dates, grapes; October, olives).

31:11. storerooms in the temple. Most ancient Near Eastern temple complexes contained auxiliary rooms for storage, kitchens, priestly quarters and other various nonreligious functions. For example, the temple of Ninkarrak at Terqa in Syria (c. 1600 B.C.) had a large kitchen storage complex and priestly quarters (for dressing, not as a residence). Thus the new storerooms of Hezekiah were probably in addition to previously existing rooms.

31:14. keeper of the East Gate. One of the most important tasks assigned to priestly personnel was controlling access to the temple precinct, the inner circle of the "sacred compass" (on this concept see comments on Lev 16:2 and Num 18:1-7). Defiling the sanctuary with impurity required a purification offering ("sin" offering, see comment on Lev 4:1-3) and could bring punishment on the individual as well as the people. The gatekeepers had to prevent unqualified intrusion. There were also many valuable items in the temple precinct. Gold and silver were plentiful and a temptation to the unscrupulous individual who may not have feared divine retribution for trespass or theft of temple property. These valuables also had to be guarded. Misappropriation of that which was sacred required a reparation offering ("guilt" offering, see comment on Lev 5:14-16). The gatekeepers were charged with guarding against these offenses. An additional task clarified here is disbursing officer. The east gate is the most important since the temple faces east.

32:1. Sennacherib's campaigns. Sennacherib conducted military campaigns primarily in two regions during his reign (705-681 B.C.). He had at least one major campaign in Syro-Palestine which centered around Jerusalem and Hezekiah's rebellion (701). He also campaigned vigorously in Babylonia, another major problem area during his reign. He was confronted with constant opposition by Chaldean rebels under the direction of Merodach-Baladan (see comment on Is 21:9), culminating in Sennacherib's brutal sack of Babylon in 689 B.C.

32:3. water supply. The water supply included springs, wells and conduits. The springs and wells outside the city were stopped up in order to prevent the Assyrians from using them. The Assyrian threat caused Hezekiah to secure Jerusalem's water supply. This is what is referred to as Hezekiah's tunnel. It is cut through bedrock for 1750 feet from the Gihon spring on the east of the city by the Kidron Valley to the Pool of Siloam on the western flank of the southern tip of the city. In the late 1800s an inscription was found inside the tunnel that describes the diggers' meeting as they dug from both ends. For more information on water systems see the comment on 2 Samuel 5:8.

32:5. expansion of wall of Jerusalem. Recent archaeological study has shown evidence of the enlargement of the city of Jerusalem dur-

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SENNACHERIB'S INSCRIPTIONS

Our material for Sennacherib's reign is derived from various sources. The "annals" are not precisely annals as such, as they were not contemporary with the campaigns they described but are referred to in this way because they were in a formal chronological succession. Many of the inscriptions were deposited in the compartments of building foundations; some were even found in their original locations. The annals generally passed through a number of editions. One intriguing nonannalistic text is a fragment of a literary type called a "letter to God."

The account of the campaign against Jerusalem was probably composed several months after the campaign itself (c. 700 B.C.). In addition to depositing the texts in building foundations, the Assyrians displayed their inscriptions as bas reliefs illustrated on the palace walls. There are a number of copies of this campaign inscribed upon large barrel-shaped cylinders. There are also stone carved reliefs at Nineveh relating to the Assyrian siege of Lachish (an important fortified city of Judah), which were found in room 36 of Sennacherib's palace. The annals describe the destruction of a wide area of Judah but do not mention the taking of Jerusalem, as drastic operations against the Judahite capital were never completed, although Sennacherib claims to have encircled Jerusalem with watchtowers. Forty-six cities of Judah were plundered, many of which were given over to their rival, Philistia. There is no statement about Sennacherib being magnanimous with Hezekiah as he was with the king of Tyre. Other rulers were replaced in this area (e.g., Sidra of Ashkelon). The testimony of the Assyrian sculptures is important; Lachish was exhibited, but not Jerusalem. The annals claimed that over two hundred thousand Judahites were taken captive (but not necessarily into captivity), and a number of Philistine cities that rebelled were also identified as having been taken. Sennacherib placed responsibility for Judah's fate in the hands of Hezekiah (the Assyrians typically blamed the enemy monarch for the invasion). We are told that the Assyrians demanded from Hezekiah his daughters, weapons, women, gold and numerous other artifacts. The lists of tribute are the longest and most detailed of any of Sennacherib's inscriptions, suggesting that the author sought to draw attention away from the fact that Jerusalem had not been taken. Hezekiah, however, was subdued. This battle had been won, but Hezekiah was still an Assyrian vassal, and he sent tribute to Sennacherib back at Nineveh.

ing Hezekiah's time, as well as an expansion of the city's population. He appears to have augmented fortifications and probably established administrative centers and command posts. Excavations in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem have found segments of Hezekiah's wall that extended the enclosed portion of the city perhaps as much as seven hundred yards to the west of the north-south ridge that the city had occupied prior to this time.

32:9. siege warfare. The Assyrian reliefs at Nineveh depicting the siege of Lachish show battering rams, seven siege engines and Judahite deportees, as well as Sennacherib, seated on a lounge chair, watching the booty of Lachish pass by. The panels assert the expert military technology of the Assyrians. Their army was very orderly, with bowmen, spear throwers, slingers, ramps and siege engines. The siege engines were heavily armored four-wheeled vehicles (earlier models had six wheels) with a long, pointed, iron-headed shaft protruding from the front. They were ten to twenty feet long and four to six feet high. From the top they were open in the back and closed in the front. Sennacherib's innovations to this war machine included covering it with leather. Additional mobile towers were used to move archers close to the ram to protect it with cover fire. There are numerous other wall reliefs depicting Assyrian siege warfare throughout the ancient Near East. Nevertheless, the Assyrians preferred the technique of negotiation, as described in 2 Kings 18—19.

32:11. deity's role in battle. It was not unusual in the ancient Near East for military events to be directed by foreign gods. Yahweh was thus presented as being on the side of Assyria, and Judah was to be defeated (see Is 7:19; 10:5-6; 2 Chron 35:20-2)! This is paralleled in texts that show enemy gods calling upon the Assyrians. In one Assyrian text, Marduk calls upon Sargon II to come and invade Babylon. In a Babylonian text, Marduk calls upon Cyrus of Persia to come and take the city. In a similar manner, Yahweh is viewed as mustering the armies that will come and overthrow Babylon (Is 13:4). For more information on the divine role in battle see comments on Exodus 15:3; 1 Samuel 4:3; 8:7; 17:37.

32:12. god's high places removed. This action had been part of Hezekiah's reform designed to establish centralized worship only in Jerusalem. From the biblical author's standpoint, this would have been a positive accomplishment. From the Assyrian perspective, however, this action could be used against Hezekiah in a couple of ways. First of all, Assyrians would have considered it a negative thing to reduce the shrines at which a deity could be worshiped. From their perspective, the more worship the better. Second, it is possible that they would also have understood Hezekiah's action in light of a common practice in the ancient world: when invasion was imminent, the images of gods were often gathered from outlying shrines and collected in the capital city.

LACHISH

The city of Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir), was a powerful garrison city or royal citadel. Fortified by Rehoboam (c. 920), it was strategic because it strengthened a weak northern boundary. The city was a rectangular mound located in the Shephelah foothills between the Judahite hills and the coastal plain, resting on a natural promontory, surrounded by deep valleys on all sides. Lachish had an outer and inner gate complex, with an inner wall that was over twelve feet thick. The gate chambers had bronze pieces in debris dated to the Assyrian period. Eighteen ostraca (pottery shards with writing on them) from the Chaldean period relating to Nebuchadnezzar's invasion have been found. Lachish was subject to two sieges in the period of just over one century; many of those levels are mixed and hard to separate. As the city is enveloped by hills on all sides, the possible Assyrian siege site exists only at the southwest corner, although there is presently no archaeological evidence placing the position of the Assyrian camp. Over the whole area of the town is indication of destruction, including much charcoal debris. There is a siege ramp with heaped stones. It is the oldest attested in the Near East and the only one that is archaeologically attested in Israel. Similar-looking ramps have been depicted on Assyrian wall reliefs. The city was demolished within a few feet of its foundation. All buildings were consumed by fire and show an intense burning, along with reddened bricks. The floors were strewn with smashed vessels and utensils. The city was ransacked; only unimportant and heavy items remained. Hundreds of arrowheads were found, as well as twenty pieces of scale armor, and a bronze crest mount for a helmet. A mass of fifteen hundred human bones and decapitated human skulls (considered by the excavators to be civilians) which had rolled down the apex into a large pit were found. Thrown on top of the bones were many animal bones (including pig) and many pottery vessels. Over four hundred of the jars were also found here stamped *lmlk* ("for the king"); the only dated context for these jars is at Lachish. The Assyrians felt that this siege was of paramount importance. As stated, they created an entire room of reliefs at Nineveh commemorating the venture. The Lachish room (36) was situated in a strategic place in the palace, intending to show the conquest of Judah and Lachish. The panels show the Assyrian army advancing toward the city in three columns, with a landscape similar to that of Lachish behind the host; thus scholars were given an unprecedented opportunity to compare a Neo-Assyrian stone relief depicting an ancient city and the site itself.

This was one of the steps taken by Merodach-Baladan in the days of Sargon. The rhetoric of the invader would follow the line of thinking that these gods were upset and deprived because of having been removed from their shrines. The invader can then fashion himself as having been called in by these gods to restore them to their rightful place.

32:18. Hebrew versus Aramaic. The Judahite scribes told the Rabshakeh (see comment on 2 Kings 18:17) to stop speaking Hebrew, since they did not want the people on the wall to hear this message. He was asked to speak in Aramaic, which was the language of the Judahites after the exile, but not at this point. He surprised them with his knowledge of Judahite (biblical Hebrew). The crude response by the Rabshakeh showed that his role was to persuade and to agitate. The Rabshakeh (as provincial governor) may even have been an Israelite employed in the service of Sennacherib, like Nehemiah and Ahiqar (a "wise sage of Esarhaddon" identified as an Israelite in the book of Tobit). Aramaic is a language closely related to Hebrew. At this period it had already become the diplomatic language of the ancient Near East.

32:27-29. Hezekiah's prosperity. Hezekiah's prosperity is described in terms of the increase in royal assets. The gold, gems and spices suggest success in trade and perhaps in collection of tribute. The crops and herds suggest bountiful harvests and the administrative savvy to collect and stockpile effectively. Such success is surprising in light of his vassal status and would serve as evidence of God's blessing.

33:1-20
The Reign of Manasseh

33:1. chronology. Manasseh's long reign is placed by Thiele from 696 to 640 B.C. This may include a coregency with his father. Contemporary Assyrian kings were Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. Significant Egyptian kings were Taharqa and Psammeticus I. Assyria continues to exercise strong influence in the west during most of this period.

33:4-5. altars in the temple. The location of the two temple courts has puzzled scholars. The floor plan of the temple in 1 Kings 6 describes only the inner court in any detail. Thus the exact placement of these altars in the very large enclosed area of the outer court is not known.

33:5. Manasseh's pagan practices. The heavenly host (sun, moon, stars and constellations) was worshiped at the altars in the temple courts and on the roof of the palace (see 2 Kings 23:12). There are ancient Near Eastern texts from Syro-Palestine as early as the second millennium B.C. that describe astral worship. This practice was also common throughout Mesopotamia at this time, and stamp seals from Israel show that astral deities were very popular there as well. The stars were believed to be mediators between gods and men, and able to control events on earth. Assyrian kings are occasionally portrayed wearing emblems of the planets, which, of course, were closely associated with particular deities (for more information see comment on 2 Kings 23:4). Assyrian policy of this time did not override or restrict local religious practice, so there is no reason to think that Manasseh was being forced to set up these worship practices.

33:6. sons passing through the fire. Evidence for this practice outside of Scripture is rare indeed. Assyrian legal texts describe a penalty clause as "he will burn his son to Sin (a lunar deity), and his daughter to Belet-seri." Also see the comment on 2 Chronicles 28:3.

33:11. Manasseh's relations with Assyria. Manasseh inherited from his father Hezekiah a small vassal state subject to Assyria. The annals of Esarhaddon of Assyria (reigned 681-668) mention Manasseh along with a group of kings from the Syro-Palestine region who were required to transport material to Nineveh for a building project. Esarhaddon's successor, Ashurbanipal, also lists Manasseh in a group of rulers who sent gifts to him. In both of these texts, Manasseh is described as a loyal vassal.

33:11. Manasseh's imprisonment. When Esarhaddon died, the rule of Assyria was divided between his two sons. Ashurbanipal was given Assyria and soon dominated his brother, Shamash-shum-ukin, who had been given control over Babylonia. In actuality, Shamush- shum-ukin was little more than a governor, and, by 652, apparently tired of his subordinate role, he led a bloody civil war (supported by the Elamites) that lasted for five years. It ended when Shamash-shum-ukin was killed in the fire that swept through the city of Babylon after a two-year siege. It is documented that Shamash-shum-ukin had attempted to recruit support among the vassal states, and some have speculated that Manasseh had aligned himself with the Babylonian governor during the revolt. It is interesting that Manasseh was imprisoned by the Assyrians at Babylon (with other rebels to witness the result of a failed revolt?), rather than at Nineveh. Rebellious client kings were often deported by the Assyrians for undetermined periods. There is evidence that those

who "repented" (i.e., were domesticated by the Assyrians) were often returned to their throne.

33:12. Manasseh's prayer. The text of Chronicles records nothing concerning the content of Manasseh's prayer, but later Apocryphal literature preserves an elegant prayer that is attributed to him.

33:14. expansion of Jerusalem. The expansion of the Jerusalem fortifications by Manasseh may not have been for the same reasons as his father Hezekiah (see comment on 32:5). The rising power of Egypt under Psammeticus I may have caused the Assyrians to help fortify Judah, which was fast becoming a buffer state. Remains of fortifications that may have been constructed during the reign of Manasseh have been found at Tell el-Hesi and Arad.

33:21-25
The Reign of Amon

33:21. chronology. Amon's brief reign was from 642 to 640, during the rule of Ashurbanipal of Assyria.

34:1—36:1
The Reign of Josiah

34:1. chronology. Josiah was king of Judah from 640 to 609. Ashurbanipal's reign was followed by a period of anarchy in Assyria, ending in that nation's collapse in 610. Psammeticus I and Necho II were kings in Egypt. Nabopolassar was the king of Babylon (626-605). This was a period in which Assyria was collapsing and Babylon was moving into Assyrian territory. Egypt was attempting to take advantage of the confusion to stake a claim to Palestine.

34:3-5. religious purge. The most famous purge of antiquity was when the Egyptians rejected the religious reforms of Akhenaten in the fourteenth century. It was during the brief reign of Tutankhamun that the attempt was made to return to the worship of the traditional gods through the traditional priests and to eradicate the heresy of Akhenaten. This included restoring the ancient shrines and temples, providing them the assets and personnel needed to operate and returning that which had been confiscated. The competing shrine and capital city that had been established by Akhenaten at Amarna was abandoned. Horemhab destroyed the temples at Amarna, dismantled the site and recycled the materials into other building projects. What was left was burned. Evidence of Josiah's purge is found in the record preserved in Israelite stamp seals. The seals portraying familiar symbols of fertility gods, sun god and astral deities of earlier periods are replaced in this period with seals that contain only the inscription identifying the individual, with occasional decoration such as pomegranates.

34:6. purging of north. Though there had been purges of high places and pagan altars in the past (e.g. by Hezekiah), Josiah's purge was unprecedented for its thoroughness. Second Kings 23:15 adds that he burned the high places in the north, which had not been done before. He was able to do this because of the weakened Assyrian hold on the region.

34:8. ideology of temple restoration in the ancient Near East. The temple was the center of culture, economy and society in Syria, Mesopotamia and Israel. It served as the house of the city's patron deity, and so the god was believed to be present there. It was incumbent upon the ruler of the city to attend to the "care and feeding" of the deity. The statue of the god was bathed, clothed and fed daily. Just as important as the king's military success was his attention to the upkeep of the god's house. Countless building inscriptions from both Assyria and Babylonia attest to the king's piety because of his restoration of a certain god's house. Similarly, those who rebuilt or restored Yahweh's temple were accorded this same type of piety. Restoration entailed both physical and ritual aspects. A neglected temple would need structural repairs and perhaps the restoration of pilfered furniture and accessories. It is possible that gold objects or gold plating on walls would need to be replaced. Then the temple would need to have its sanctity reestablished through appropriate rituals. Finally, it would need to be provided with funding and personnel so that it could operate.

34:9. funding of restoration. Information given here suggests that some sort of temple tax was levied to provide for the necessary funds. The collecting of funds for the restoration of a temple was a common occurrence by monarchs in the ancient Near East. Often, though, the monarch would restore the temple by means of corvee labor or by collecting building materials from his subjects.

34:10-11. workers and materials. The regular maintenance of the temple complex was the responsibility of the "workmen in charge of the temple." Major repairs had to be contracted out to skilled workers. The listing of these skilled laborers is typical of contemporary Assyrian records. The skilled workers were carpenters, builders, masons and stonecutters. The term for "builder" was used for both

skilled and unskilled laborers who worked primarily with mudbrick. The carpenter was responsible for all of the wood items in construction, including the roof, door, window and stair fittings, and various cultic objects in the temple. The mason/stonecutter quarried the stones from natural caves or drove shafts in the hillside. Then the stones were cut and fitted into place.

34:12-13. role of the Levites. These were all typical functions for temple personnel in the ancient Near East. For more on the role of the Levites see comment on 19:8-11.

34:14. finding of the Book of the Law. The discovery of old documents found during the repairs of temples is known from both Egypt and Mesopotamia. Scrolls were found located in the masonry of buildings in Egypt, while foundation deposits and stelae were often found in Mesopotamia. In earlier times foundation inscriptions (for instance, inscribed on bricks) had been used to dedicate the building project to the deity. These gradually became more elaborate, and by this period it was common to bury a foundation box when building a temple or palace. These would include royal inscriptions describing the king's military and building accomplishments. One purpose of these documents was to offer information to any king who might undertake the restoration of the building in future days. These recoveries were often duly recorded. Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon (reigned 556-539) is well known for his search for ancient documents buried in buildings. Shabaka, an Egyptian pharaoh from about 700, claims to have found a forgotten theological text concerning Ptah's creation of the world on a badly damaged ancient papyrus. He had the text (today called the Memphite Theology) inscribed on stone. The Book of the Law (or teaching) may have been a document that had been enshrined in a foundation box or concealed in the walls of the temple. Alternatively, it could have been found in the temple archives. It is not certain which books of the Old Testament it contained, but it at least included Deuteronomy.

34:22. prophetesses. Prophetesses, though somewhat rare, are known from Mesopotamia. The Mari texts from Syria in the early second millennium give evidence of both male and female prophets. Women are also known to have spoken out as prophetesses during the reign of Esarhaddon of Assyria. The females appeared to have served in the same function as the male prophets.

34:22. keeper of the wardrobe. One of the functionaries of the Baal temple in Samaria had a similar title (see 2 Kings 10:22). There is also a Babylonian text from this period with a similar title. These robes would have been cultic vestments for the worship of the deity (see Zeph 1:8). But in these situations there was an image of deity in the temple to clothe, and that was not the case in the Jerusalem temple. The only wardrobe here would have been that which housed the priestly garments. These would require special care so that they would not become defiled.

34:22. second district. The Second District is also mentioned in Zephaniah 1:10 in connection with the "hills of the city" and the Maktesh quarter. Some have identified this area as the suburbs of the City of David, which grew on the western hill of Jerusalem. Excavations in this area have exposed a large urban settlement dated to this period. For more information see comment on 32:5.

34:29-33. Josiah's reform. See comments on 2 Kings 23:1-20.

35:7. king's contribution. Josiah's contribution to the Passover is comparable to that of Hezekiah. See the comment on 2 Chronicles 30:23-24.

35:10-14. Passover procedures. For more information on the procedures for the Passover see comments on Exodus 12:1-11. For its observance in Hezekiah's day see the comment on 30:15-17.

35:18. unique celebration. This was the first centralized celebration of the Passover since that mentioned in Joshua 5:10-11. The Passover had basically remained a family rite from that date until Josiah's policy change (though see the observance in the time of Hezekiah in 30:15-17). An example of restoring ancient festivals that had been discontinued can be found in the Babylonian Akitu festival. For twenty years (689-669) this enthronement ceremony (the most important of the Babylonian festivals) was not celebrated. It was reestablished by Esarhaddon when Babylon regained its prominence.

35:20. Necho's march to Carchemish. The Babylonian Chronicle states that in 609 Necho was on a mission to aid Assyria, which was attempting to retake the provisional capital of Harran in Syria that had been captured by the Medes and Babylonians the year before. Necho's troops would reinforce the garrison base at Carchemish. The Egyptians had transferred their allegiance to Assyria when they saw that the balance of power had changed from Assyria to Babylon. It can thus be presumed that Necho saw greater opportunity for his own expansionist ambitions in Palestine and Syria if Assyria successfully fended off the Babylonians and Medes. It is easy to

understand Josiah's anti-Assyrian stance, since Judah had been under Assyrian domination for over a century. However, even with Egyptian aid, the Assyrians were unsuccessful in dislodging the Medes and Chaldeans from Harran.

35:22. Battle of Megiddo. The Great Trunk Road (see sidebar on Major Trade Routes in Gen 38) that went across the fertile crescent from Egypt to Babylon proceeds along the coast of Palestine until it reaches the obstacle of the Carmel range. It then moves inland past the city of Megiddo (see comment on Josh 12:21) and into the Jezreel Valley (see comment on Judg 6:33). This is the logical place to intercept an army passing through the region, and many battles have taken place in this famous geographical arena. Nothing is known of this battle outside of Scripture. Although Josiah failed to block the Egyptian movement northward, he may have delayed them long enough so that they were of limited use to the Assyrians in the war against the Medes and Babylonians.

35:25. composition of laments. The lamentation composed by Jeremiah is no longer extant. Lamentation dirges were common for monarchs who had died (especially untimely deaths) and cities that had been taken and destroyed. Aside from the book of Lamentations in Scripture, there are Sumerian lamentations from the early second millennium concerning ruined cities, such as Ur, Eridu, Nippur and Uruk, as well as ruined temples. The literary pattern of the Sumerian lamentations is strikingly similar to the biblical models. The city in question has been allowed to be destroyed by its own god, resulting in a spiritual and physical crisis. Both the Sumerian and biblical lamentations expect a reversal of fortune of the city in question in the future.

36:1-23
The Reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah and the Fall of Jerusalem

See comments on 2 Kings 23:31—25:30.

36:22-23. For information concerning Cyrus and his decree see comments on Ezra 1.

EZRA

1:1-11
The Decree and Provision of Cyrus

1:1. chronology. Based on the proclamation in the Cyrus Cylinder that calls for the rebuilding of the temples of the gods held captive in Babylon, the "first year of Cyrus" most likely refers to 539 B.C., the year he conquered Babylon and issued his decree. Cyrus had become king of Persia (Anshan) in 559 and had spent twenty years consolidating the kingdoms as far north as Lydia in Asia Minor (capturing Sardis in 546 B.C.) before turning against Babylon and its king, Nabonidus.

1:1. Cyrus. Careful use of Herodotus's *Persian Wars* (see sidebar in the book of Esther) and the Babylonian Chronicle reveal that Cyrus was the chief of a Persian tribe (Achaemenid) who won a struggle for power with Astyages, the last king of the Medes, in 550 B.C. By combining the force of these two areas east of the Tigris (modern Iran), he was able to eventually stage campaigns against Lydia (547 B.C.) and, after the capture of Sardis in western Asia Minor, Ionia. He consolidated his northern and eastern borders between 546 and 540 and then turned west to conquer Babylon, adding the Neo-Babylonian kingdom to his domain in 539 B.C. The city of Babylon opened its gates to Cyrus in October of that year, and in return he protected the sanctuary of Marduk from destruction or desecration. His administrative strategy permitted the worship of local gods and the recognition of native cultures. An excellent example of this policy is preserved on what is called the Cyrus Cylinder (see next comment). Cyrus was killed fighting the Scythian tribes on his northeastern border in 530 B.C. and was succeeded by his son Cambyses.

1:2-4. Cyrus Cylinder and Persian policies. It is evident that Persian administrative policy differed from that of Assyria or Neo-Babylonia with regard to the treatment of vassals and their cultures. The Cyrus Cylinder preserves a decree that reflects Cyrus's tolerance of a degree of autonomy for the peoples of his empire. Although it does not specifically mention Judah, it decrees that repairs be made to the

shrines and temples that had been damaged, that all that had been destroyed be rebuilt, and that all sacred images that had been held hostage in Babylon be returned. Excavations of the temple at Uruk have yielded bricks used for restoration of the shrine stamped with the name of Cyrus. Captive peoples were allowed to return to their homelands and were encouraged to serve the Persian empire under royal governors, who in many cases were natives of those countries. All this suggests that rather than ruthlessly condemning and dismantling native cultures, the Persians chose a more benevolent approach. The expectation was that recognition of regional identities and a measure of local autonomy in the form of religious freedom would prevent the breakup of the empire and the almost continuous revolts that the Assyrians and Babylonians faced. It is possible that these policies were due in part to the inclusive nature of Zoroastrianism, the official religion of the Persian court. It should also be understood that the Persians did not turn a blind eye to local rulers who overstepped their bounds or made statements condemning or criticizing the Persian government (see Zerubbabel's reluctance to act despite the urging of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah).

1:2. "God of heaven" in Zoroastrianism. In the Cyrus Cylinder, King Cyrus gives credit for his victory over Babylon to the chief god of Babylon, Marduk. Isaiah 45:1-5 adopts this theme but gives Yahweh the credit even though Cyrus does not "know" him. Both statements fit well with the inclusive nature of Zoroastrianism in which the chief god, Ahura Mazda, is in continual struggle with the dark forces of the evil god Ahriman. Those gods who are perceived as aiding the Persian king, such as Marduk or Yahweh, would be recognized by the Persians as members of Ahura Mazda's heavenly army of the forces of light. The biblical writer in Ezra presses the same point as Isaiah, not mentioning Ahura Mazda but instead proclaiming Yahweh as the God of heaven. The phrase "God of heaven" also appears in the Elephantine papyri, Jewish documents from Egypt from the end of the fifth century. The fact that Yahweh is here called the God of heaven does not reflect Cyrus's personal beliefs. Similar deference was given to other gods when decrees were made concerning the restoration of their shrines.

1:3. God who is in Jerusalem. The reference to the God in Jerusalem reflects the language in the Cyrus Cylinder directing the hostage peoples and their gods to return to their homelands. There is a sense in this verse both of a universal God, motivating the actions of the world's most powerful leader, and of a God whose seat is still, as always, in Jerusalem.

1:4-6. provision of goods and offerings. Since not all of the Israelites chose to return from exile, this statement may refer either to those who remained behind or to their non-Jewish neighbors. If it is the latter, then there is a strong tie to the "despoiling" of Egypt during the exodus, when the Israelites took gold and silver on their departure from Egypt (Ex 11:2; 12:35-36). The "freewill" offerings may be compared to those made to equip the Tent of Meeting in the wilderness (Ex 25:2-9). In this way, both the needs of the returnees (livestock and other provisions) as well as the means of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem were provided for.

1:7-10. articles of the temple. As we know from references in the Mari texts as well as the Cyrus Cylinder, sacred objects, including idols and the many types of vessels used in worship, were taken hostage when a people was conquered. A way of demonstrating the power of your god over the god of conquered people was to desecrate their sacred objects or place them in a position of submission (see Dan 5:1-4 and 1 Sam 5:1-2). Now, as part of the restoration of the temple and proper Yahweh worship there, all of the sacred objects are inventoried, numbered to insure that none are missing and returned to Jerusalem (see comments on 2 Chron 4:8-11 for description of some of these bowls).

1:11. Sheshbazzar. Despite attempts to equate Sheshbazzar with Shenazzar (1 Chron 3:18), in order to give him a Davidic tie as a "prince of Judah" (Ezra 1:8), or with Zerubbabel, in order to reconcile events in Ezra with those in Haggai and Zechariah, it seems that this little known individual has his own separate identity. The title "prince of Judah" may indicate royal ancestry, in which case he should be viewed as a ranking member in the Davidic line. Alternatively the title could refer to a function, in which case he could be seen as the Persian who served in the official capacity of accompanying the exiles back to their land and supervising the transition to a local governorship (turned over to Zerubbabel). He is the first governor appointed by the Persians to administer Judah (Yehud) and is given charge of the sacred vessels as well as the task of laying the foundation for the restored temple in Jerusalem. Archaeologists have recovered jar handles and seals containing the names of three more governors of Judah about which we know nothing else and who were not even mentioned by Ezra and Nehemiah.

1:11. journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. The

most likely route would have taken the returning exiles north, up the Euphrates to either Mari or Carchemish and then south and west to Damascus and on down the caravan route to either the coastal road or perhaps back through the Jordan Valley to Jericho and then northwest to Jerusalem. The distance between Babylon and Jerusalem was roughly nine hundred miles, so the journey would have taken eight to ten weeks.

2:1-70
The Returning Exiles

2:1. province. The province of Judah (Yehud) was part of the satrapy of Babylon until the reign of Xerxes, when it became a portion of the satrapy "Beyond the River" (Trans-Euphrates). The text is thus talking about exiles originally of the province of Judah now returning to Jerusalem. Archaeological finds based on the distribution of coins suggests the province of Judah extended south as far as Beth Zur (six miles north of Hebron), west to Gezer, north to Mizpah and east to the Jordan.

2:2. what is known about leaders. Zerubbabel is known to have been governor under Darius, but Sheshbazzar preceded him. Bigvai (a Persian name) was a governor of Judah following the administration of Nehemiah. Of the others, Jeshua (Joshua in Haggai and Zechariah) served as high priest during the time of Zerubbabel (Zech 3:1-10). It is interesting to find the names Nehemiah and Azariah (an alternative form of the name Ezra) in the list, but possibly they were common ones. Mordecai should not be confused with the relative of Esther, and Mispar and Bilshan are unknown elsewhere. Rehum is mentioned in Ezra 4:7-24 as one of the officials ("commanding officer") who wrote a letter complaining to King Artaxerxes about the activities in Jerusalem.

2:3-67. classes of individuals. The principal groups of returnees consisted of members of clans or kinship groups (17 in vv. 2-19), some listed by geographical region, most of which are north of Jerusalem (22 names in vv. 20-35), as well as members of four priestly families (totaling 4,289, vv. 36-39), and a small number of Levites (just 74 listed in v. 40). The remainder of the inventory of names includes persons associated with the temple or service to the priesthood: musicians, gatekeepers, and 35 temple servants (vv. 43-54), who may have been non-Israelite in origin (there are possible comparisons to be made with Ugaritic and Neo-Babylonian guilds of designated temple servants). A group descended from "Solomon's servants" (vv. 55-58) was also of non-Israelite origin (see forced labor groups in 1 Kings 9:20-21) and was probably attached to the temple community as the need for labor increased. The final group (vv. 59-63) could not maintain their family genealogies far enough back to be able to claim a position in the priesthood but had otherwise escaped assimilation into Babylonian culture.

2:69. amount of gifts. The drachma was equal to approximately half a shekel. The Babylonian shekel weighed about 8.4 grams and was represented in the Persian coin known as the *daric* once it began to be minted in the time of Darius (a few decades after the time of Cyrus). In this way about 565 pounds of gold and 3 tons of silver were provided for the rebuilding.

3:1-13
Rebuilding the Altar and Temple

3:1. seventh month. The seventh month in the calendar year is known as Tishri and is in the autumn (September-October). The tie to the Feast of Tabernacles is also found in Ezra's covenant renewal ceremony in Nehemiah 7:73-8:2.

3:2. Jeshua. Jeshua is the high priest in the early postexilic period. His grandfather, Seraiah, had been executed by Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:18-21; note that Ezra is also from the line of Seraiah, see 7:1). Judah's heir to the throne, Zerubbabel (see next entry), served as governor, but since Judah was still under Persian control, there were restrictions on the extent of his control (so as not to compete with the Persian king). Consequently, rule in the community was now divided between the governor and the high priest, giving the priest a more prominent role. Little is known about him except that he was one of the leaders who helped get the temple rebuilt. There are no contemporary extrabiblical references to him.

3:2. Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the heir to the Davidic throne (grandson of Jehoiachin, see comments on 2 Kings 24) and served as governor of Judah under the Persian king Darius I. There was a significant amount of expectation surrounding him that had a messianic flavor to it. Undoubtedly some expected him to set up the promised kingdom and bring freedom from their slavery (to the Persians). While his duties were primarily secular, he is described in Ezra, along with the priest Jeshua, as the force behind the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Governing under the auspices of the Persian king, he was responsible for maintaining law and order,

and for the collection of taxes. Though Zerubbabel is the last Davidic heir to serve in the role of governor, archaeologists have found a seal of Shelomith (listed as a daughter of Zerubbabel in 1 Chron 3:19), where she is designated as either a wife or an official of Elnathan, the governor who is thought to have succeeded Zerubbabel.

3:2. burnt offerings. The restoration of the temple and the proper worship of Yahweh began with the construction of an altar and the resumption of burnt offerings (see the precedent in Deut 27:6-7). Interestingly, the Elephantine papyri refer to the desire of that community to rebuild their destroyed temple, but they pledge not to stage burnt offerings on their altar so that the preeminence of Jerusalem could be maintained. For general information on the burnt offerings, see comments on Leviticus 1.

3:3. foundation. In order to maintain continuity with worship in the temple in Jerusalem prior to the exile, it was essential that the altar be constructed upon the foundations of the old one (see similar reconstruction in 2 Chron 24:12-13). In this way, the sacred space was revived as the one true spot for the sacrificial rituals of Yahweh worship. In the ancient world the choice of a site for a shrine or temple was never arbitrary. As early as 2000 B.C. the tablets of Gudea record an elaborate dream through which he was instructed concerning the intimate details of the location, dimensions and orientation of a temple. As a result, once an appropriate spot had been identified, rebuilding would always seek to recover the original plan and location. In one of his inscriptions, Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon, reports that he rebuilt the temple of Sippar on the foundations laid by Sargon nearly a century earlier without deviating even an inch. Some archaeological sites in Mesopotamia preserve over a dozen levels of building and rebuilding of temples on the same spot.

3:3. morning and evening sacrifices. Maintaining the continual observance of the daily morning and evening sacrifices was a signal of complete compliance to the temple regimen. According to Exodus 29:38-42 and Numbers 28:3-8 (see comments on both contexts for additional information) this involved the sacrifice of a year-old lamb along with flour, oil and wine each morning and evening. On two other occasions the practice had had to be revived (by Joash in 2 Chron 24:14 and Hezekiah in 2 Chron 29:7, 27-29) after a period of neglect or suppression due to pressures from Assyria.

3:4. Feast of Tabernacles. See the comments on Exodus 23:16b; Leviticus 23:33-43; and Deuteronomy 16:13-17 for information on this major religious festival. Its celebration is also tied to the dedication of the temple by Solomon (2 Chron 5:3) and to the covenant renewal ceremony of Ezra (Neh 8:13-18). In all three cases a new beginning for the people is signaled, and a celebration involving a feast has always been a means of solemnizing a covenant or treaty agreement (see the comment on Gen 31:54).

3:5. New Moon and other sacred feasts. See the comment on Numbers 28:1-30 for background on these religious festivals in the Israelite religious calendar (note also 1 Sam 20:5). What is evident here is the determination to once again regularize religious practice through the restoration of all of the previous sacrificial rituals.

3:7. food, drink and oil. Standard wages for laborers always included a daily ration of food, drink and olive oil (see the list in 2 Chron 2:10). Evidence of this is found in ration lists from Babylon, Mari and many other Mesopotamian cities (including amounts for both free laborers and slaves).

3:7. cedar logs by sea. Just as the eleventh-century Egyptian priest Wenamon contracted with the ruler of Syria for cedar logs that would be transported by sea, here a similar arrangement is made for the transport of logs to the port of Joppa to rebuild the temple (see the comment on 2 Chron 2:16 for additional examples of this practice).

3:8. chronology. Like the temple of Solomon, the construction of this second temple will begin in the spring during the second month, Ziv (1 Kings 6:1, 37). The work is said to begin in the second year of Zerubbabel's arrival at the temple. But the text is never very clear about when Zerubbabel came. He is never explicitly identified as a contemporary of either Shesh-bazzar or Cyrus (though 4:1-5 could suggest such an association), but is always tied to Darius. Ezra 2 is often thought to refer to a separate return, perhaps fifteen years later than the one described in chapter 1. As a result it is not easy to identify which year the second year is.

3:10. importance of foundation. See the comment on 3:3 for the significance of the foundation laid on sacred space. In addition it was the common practice in Mesopotamia to make a foundation sacrifice and bury tablets or cylinder cones describing the laying of the foundation by a king (much like our own practice of including a time capsule in the corner stone of a public building). For example, the foun-

dation inscription of Yahdunlim, a nineteenth-century B.C. king of Mari, describes not only the building of the temple of Shamash but also a campaign to the Cedar Mountains and the Mediterranean Sea. The interest of the Persians in relaying foundations at traditional sanctuary sites is evidenced in Cambyses' personal role in the celebrations for the newly laid foundation of the Neith temple in Egypt around 525.

3:10. trumpets and cymbals. Musical instruments, such as trumpets, cymbals, lyres and harps, are often mentioned as the means of punctuating the start and the procession accompanying religious ritual (see 1 Chron 16:5-6; 2 Chron 25:11-13). The clashing of cymbals might be used to symbolize the clapping of thunder or as a means of marking time for the procession. Trumpets functioned as signaling devices on the battlefield and on occasions of great importance.

3:12. comparison of first and second temple. The splendor of ancient temples was based on several factors. While size could be of some significance, more important were the materials used in construction and the artistry of the craftsmanship. Solomon had far greater resources to commit to the materials than the postexilic community had—even with the sponsorship of the Persian government. The amount of gold, the quality and the size of the stones and the skill of the stonecutters and metal workers were all aspects in which the second temple could not hope to compare favorably with the first. The disappointment of the older generation does not necessarily reflect an obsession with external appearances. It was true then, as it had been at the time of the exodus, that the expense and grandeur of the edifice and its furnishings were a legitimate way to give honor to the God who inhabited the sanctuary. The people felt sadness at their own inability to provide surroundings with splendor commensurate to God's glory.

4:1-24

The History of Opposition to the Rebuilding Program

4:1. enemies of exiles. The land of Israel and Judah was not uninhabited at the time of the return from exile. The descendants of those people who had not been taken to Babylonia as well as those who had been brought into that area by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:1-6) would have existed as distinct population groups. The fact that the writer of Ezra identifies them as "enemies" suggests that there had already been clashes with these people (Ezra 3:3) and that their offer of help in rebuilding the temple was not an honest one. In any case it is likely their understanding of Yahweh worship differed from that of the returned exiles (see 2 Kings 17:33). That would help explain Zerubbabel's curt answer to them.

4:2. Esarhaddon's relocation. After the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C., the Assyrian king Sargon II had ordered the relocation of the bulk of the Israelite population to Halah and to Media (see the comment on 2 Kings 17:6). In their place, peoples from within the Assyrian empire were settled in Israel (see comment on 2 Kings 17:24). Additional deportations must have taken place under the reign of Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C., see comment on Isaiah 7:8). The descendants of these people, possibly taken from Sidon after the campaign of 676 B.C., are described as "enemies of Judah and Benjamin," but they are not in this early Persian period known as the Samaritans.

4:5. Cyrus to Darius. The Persian king Cyrus reigned until 530, when he was killed in battle against the Scythians on the northeastern border of his empire. He was succeeded by his son Cambyses, whose major accomplishment was the conquest of Egypt. However, he was murdered shortly thereafter, and a struggle ensued that eventually resulted in the accession of Darius, who had gained the support of the majority of the Persian nobility and married Cyrus's daughter. He began his reign in 522, and it will be during his administration (515 B.C.) that the Jerusalem temple will be finished.

4:6-23. chronological sequence. The author is writing from the time of Ezra-Nehemiah, about 440 B.C. These early chapters have looked back at the events that occurred nearly a century earlier between 538 and 518. At the mention of the opposition and delay in verse 5, the author digresses to recount the long history of opposition that continued from this initial incident down to his own time, before going back and resuming his story where he left off, about 520 B.C. The common theme throughout this digression is the continual opposition to the desires of the returned exiles in Jerusalem. His digression takes him from Darius through Xerxes and Artaxerxes (who was king in the author's time). Xerxes (Ahasuerus) began his reign in 486/485 B.C. and immediately became embroiled in suppressing revolts in Babylon—an event that may have also sparked uprisings in the western provinces, perhaps even in Yehud. In any case, a general sense of disturbance would have been sufficient reason to delay action on the Jerusalem

construction projects, even into the reign of Artaxerxes (465-424 B.C.), and to cast suspicion on its leaders, given the continued stream of letters charging the Israelites with disloyalty.

4:6. Xerxes. Xerxes (Ahasuerus), the son of Darius, came to the Persian throne in 486/485 B.C. His early years were taken up with putting down revolts in Babylon and in Egypt. The result was the establishment of Babylon as a separate satrapy under the direct control of the Persian government. Subsequently Xerxes continued his father's ambition of conquering the Greeks. His massive army crossed the Hellespont into northern Greece and succeeded in burning Athens. However, the destruction of his fleet at the naval battle of Salamis left his army without an adequate supply line and the death of his general Mardonius in 479 at the Battle of Plataea ended any chance of a victory. Xerxes is known for a number of monumental building projects, but his reign ended in assassination in 465 B.C. For more information see comment on Esther 1:1.

4:7. Artaxerxes. Three Persian kings were named Artaxerxes. The one mentioned in Nehemiah is most likely the successor of Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.). Outside of Scripture, little is known of this king. The Greek historian Herodotus described a taxation list and some poor economic policies that occurred during this king's reign. The Greek city-states, fresh from their victories against the Persians at Salamis and Plataea (480-479 B.C.), used every occasion to undermine Persian authority in the Near East. Thus, Artaxerxes endured two revolts during his reign (see the note on Nehemiah 1:1). He was, however, able to rule for forty years.

4:7. use of Aramaic. Aramaic, a close relative of Hebrew, was already an important language in the Assyrian period (see comment on 2 Chron 32:18), and both the Babylonians and the Persians employed it as the international diplomatic language. While they kept internal documents in Persian (often translated from the Aramaic), correspondence from officials like Tabeel would have been written in Aramaic. In this way, bureaucrats in every part of the empire had a common language for use in carrying out the king's business (compare the Roman use of Greek and modern diplomatic use of French).

4:9-10. titles used by speakers. The title for Rehum, translated as "commanding officer," applies to a civilian official with the power to issue orders or royal edicts. Shimshai's office of "secretary" (*sapar)* required him to make copies of official documents, translate them into Aramaic or some other language, and create tax roll records. These individuals were found throughout the empire, including Elephantine, since their services were always needed by higher ranking officials. The other titles ("judges and officials") are less well defined and probably refer to members of Rehum's entourage.

4:10. Ashurbanipal's relocation. The biblical text does not make any other specific mention of this deportation by the Assyrian king. However, there were many campaigns by each of the Assyrian kings to suppress revolts or to deal with coalitions of opponents (such as the Ashdod Revolt of 711 B.C. referred to in Is 20:1-4). It is easily possible that Ashurbanipal's expedition against the rebellious Babylon in 648 B.C. extended into the western provinces and resulted in a relocation of Israelites implicated in the uprising.

4:12-16. nature of the accusation. The reference made to the returned exiles may mean those who came to Jerusalem during the reigns of Cyrus and Darius or else those who arrived more recently during the time of Artaxerxes I. The officials' concern about the rebuilding of the city seems to imply, based on past experience, that Jerusalem had a history of being a rebellious and troublesome people who will spark further revolts throughout the region. It is also possible that the true threat was from the rebellious satrap, Megabyzus (c. 448 B.C.), who might easily have found Jerusalem a willing ally. The charge that they will withhold taxes is equivalent to treason (a similar charge was made against Hezekiah in the Assyrian annals of Sennacherib). Exaggeration of the situation may be a diplomatic ploy to gain the king's attention and force the people of Jerusalem to go through channels such as requesting permission of royal officials before starting construction.

4:15. nature of the royal archives. Archives would have included annals and chronicles. Royal annals were kept throughout the ancient Near East, with most examples coming from mid-second millennium Hittite kings and from ninth- to sixth-century Assyria and Babylon. The annals could be represented by annalistic royal inscriptions giving detailed accounts of military campaigns. In addition there are court chronicles that give information of important events in each year. No annals from Achaemenid Persia have as yet been discovered by archaeologists, though it is likely that the Persian bureaucracy would also have made an effort to amass as much as possible of the official records of the Assyrians and Babylonians. This would have given them historical perspective

on the peoples they now ruled. It is thus possible that the request that the royal archives be searched would have included previous dealings with Israel and Judah (particularly the annals of Sargon II, Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar) as well as more recent events recorded by the Persian scribes.

4:16. Trans-Euphrates. The region west of the Euphrates river, excluding Babylon, which was a separate satrapy, comprised a very large Persian province ruled by a governor (satrap) as well as subordinates with the title *paḥat* (see Tattenai in Ezra 5:3) and royal investigators known as *patifrasa.* Within the satrapy were smaller administrator units, such as Yehud, which had their own royal appointee governing them.

4:18. translated to what. Although Aramaic was used for all diplomatic exchanges (correspondence, treaties), the official language of the Persian court was Persian. As a result, when the letter was read to King Artaxerxes, the scribe would have translated the Aramaic into Persian for the king's benefit and to maintain a sense of official decorum within the inner circle of the king's court.

4:24. second year of Darius. The narrative now resumes, following the interlude dealing with the construction of the wall system, with the reign of Darius and the issue of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. The second year of Darius would have been 520 or the beginning of 519 B.C. By that time the disputes over his succession to the throne after the death of Cambyses had subsided, and he would be ready to consider matters like the Jerusalem temple.

5:1-17

Tattenai's Letter to Darius

5:1. Haggai. Among the returned exiles were the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Both expressed fervent messianic hopes with regard to Zerubbabel's leadership of the people and both actively promoted the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Haggai is particularly concerned that the returnees had spent their time and energy rebuilding their lives and homes while neglecting the temple (Hag 1:2-11). The name Haggai appears a number of times in the Elephantine papyri (over a century later), but that simply proves it was a fairly common personal name in this period.

5:1. Zechariah. With the meaning "Yahweh remembers," Zechariah was a common name in the exilic and postexilic period. This sixth-century prophet is identified as a member of a prominent priestly family descended from Iddo (see Zech 1:1). His message, like Haggai's, emphasized the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, but he also promoted the increased political role of the high priest alongside the Persian-appointed governor in the province of Yehud.

5:3. Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates. Tattenai was a *paḥat* or *peḥu,* who served under the satrap Ushtannu. He is later appointed as a satrap in a Babylonian source dated to 502 B.C. As the local official on the scene, he took the responsibility for investigating the temple building process and asked for confirmation from Darius as to whether it was legitimate activity. Once he receives affirmation, he demonstrates that he is a good bureaucrat by diligently carrying out the king's orders (Ezra 6:13).

5:3. Shethar-Bozenai. If this is a personal name, it refers to an associate of Tattenai (possibly a scribe) who participated in the investigation of Jerusalem's temple building activities. It is also possible that the name is a title applied to Tattenai meaning "chief clerk of the chancery."

5:8. large stones and timbers in the walls. There is some difference of opinion on the meaning of the Aramaic word translated "large stones." Some commentators tie it to the root meaning "roll" and thus speculate that the large stones were cut in such a way that they could be rolled into place before they were shaped to fit together. Others point to an Akkadian phrase, *aban galala,* meaning ashlar stones. The timbers may have been designed for either earthquake protection or a mimicking of the style of building in Solomon's temple (see comment on 1 Kings 6:36).

5:12. God of heaven. See the comment on Ezra 1:2.

5:12. Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem. It is interesting to compare the arguments made by the elders of Jerusalem for the rebuilding of the temple with those found in the Elephantine letter requesting permission to rebuild the destroyed temple in that Egyptian military colony about 400 B.C. In both cases the "God of heaven" is invoked, as well as arguments of past history. The case in Ezra makes use of an explanation that blames the Babylonian destruction on the unfaithfulness of the people of Judah and the need for a period of cleansing (see Jer 25:8-14). The Persian king is now called upon to serve as the instrument of their religious restoration as his predecessor Cyrus had (see Is 45:1-3).

5:14. Sheshbazzar. See the comment on Ezra 1:11.

6:1-12

Darius Grants Permission

6:1. archives in the treasury of Babylon. See the comment on Ezra 4:15 on archive keeping in the Persian empire. During the reign of Darius, Babylon was still the capital of the satrapy of Trans-Euphrates and thus would be the repository of all records concerning its provinces. Many of these documents would have been on clay tablets or cylinders, although some might have been on papyrus or leather scrolls.

6:2. citadel of Ecbatana. Until 550 B.C. Ecbatana had been the capital of the Medes. It was located in the Zagros mountains in northwestern Iran, at the foot of Mount Orontes. After its capture by Cyrus it became the summer residence of the Persian kings, as they moved their court back and forth between Susa and Ecbatana to take advantage of more temperate climates. The extent of the search for the record of Cyrus's dealings with the Israelite exiles was broadened to this royal archive when nothing was found in the regional center at Babylon. Scrolls of leather were widely used in the Persian empire for this type of document.

6:3. dimensions. The numbers given for the dimensions are generally considered to have confused by a scribe, since the temple of Solomon had been only sixty cubits long, twenty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. Since this temple was to be built on the foundations of the former, it would be expected that it would have the same dimensions. Alternatively, the numbers in the text of the decree may represent ideal figures or maximum allowable dimensions. It is interesting that Cyrus and Darius took such an interest in sponsoring temple building, since temples are not attested (in either literature or archaeology) as playing any significant role in Zoroastrianism, the religion of Achaemenid Persia. Herodotus likewise notes the absence of temples in Persian religious practice.

6:7. rebuilt on its site. One of the tasks most often recorded in Mesopotamian royal annals was temple restoration (for example, those of Ur-Nammu from Ur III and the Kassite king Kurigalzu). Once sacred space has been identified and used for religious purposes, it becomes essential that it remain in use. Thus, kings like Cyrus would expect that the only appropriate site for the restoration of a temple would be on the foundations of the old one (see the comments on Ezra 3:3 and 3:10). This practice also explains why conquering nations or religions tend to build their places of worship on the sites of earlier temples and churches.

6:8. payment out of the royal treasury. The inclusion of dimensions for the restored temple (see v. 3) implies a concern for cost overruns on the part of the Persian government. It is possible that a special tax or levy on the satrap of Trans-Euphrates was exacted to help pay for the restoration project, but these funds would have first been sent to the general treasury and then disbursed as needed to the contractors in Jerusalem. There is also an official stamp given to the project since it has a line in the royal budget. The Cyrus Cylinder (see comment on 1:2-4) is unclear about the extent to which the royal treasury contributed to the rebuilding projects mentioned there, though excavations in a number of sites throughout Babylonia have recovered bricks used for sanctuary rebuilding that are stamped with Cyrus's name. This suggests that the royal treasury financed the project.

6:9-10. use of the goods provided in sacrifice. Darius's generosity as reflected here is also evidenced in inscriptions throughout the empire. In fact, the Egyptians who benefited from his magnanimity dubbed him "the friend of all the gods." The animals mentioned are specifically designated for burnt offerings (see comment on Lev 1:3-4). The ration of wheat, salt, wine and oil may have been divided between the priests and the construction workers, since this is a daily portion, but may have been used in offerings as well. Grain offerings (made with oil and semolina) often accompanied other offerings, and portions were given to the officiating priest (for the use of wheat, oil and salt in these offerings see the comments on Lev 2). For the use of wine for libations see the comment on Leviticus 23:12-13. Josephus reports the provision of funds for temple construction and of these same ingredients for sacrifices to the Jews several centuries later by Antiochus the Great.

6:10. praying for the well-being of the king. This request parallels similar remarks in the Cyrus Cylinder, asking the gods and presumably their worshipers to "recommend" Cyrus and his son to the god Marduk so that they would be granted "a long life." While this may represent a simple desire to receive the blessing of the god, it may alternatively be designed to prevent petitioning the gods to overthrow or curse the king. In fact, Herodotus reports that prayers for the king had to accompany every sacrifice. The Elephantine papyri also offers prayers to a Persian official if he would aid them in the reconstruction of their destroyed temple. The

drafting of a decree so as to portray the king as knowledgeable and concerned about the religious practice of the subjects involved is demonstrated in the Xanthos Charter. This document from Lycia (in modern day Turkey) dated to 358 B.C. formalizes Persian support for the cult there with some of the same issues addressed as here.

6:11. punishment for disobedience. It is common for treaties and royal decrees to end with a curse or clause threatening punishment for disobedience to the stipulations of the document. It would be possible to compare Joshua's curse on the man who would rebuild Jericho in Joshua 6:26 and the curse on any prince who replaces the gate constructed by King Azitawada of Karatepe with this injunction. Such a statement is also found in the epilogue to the Code of Hammurabi, charging future rulers to provide justice or face a curse from the gods. The punishment of impalement is depicted in Assyrian Lachish reliefs and mentioned in a number of royal archives. The practice was to impale the corpse of the executed victim on a pointed stake in public view. Impalement is known in Persia, for instance in Amestris's execution of Inaros (leader of a Libyan revolt) during the reign of her son, Artaxerxes. The victim was thus denied proper burial, as the birds and insects devoured the remains. One curse used by Darius in his inscriptions is: "If you should blot out these words, may Ahura Mazda slay you and your house be destroyed," while another says "What you make, may Ahura Mazda pull down."

6:12. curse in the name of local god. Since many of the peoples of the ancient world believed that gods were localized, that is, tied to particular places and peoples, it would be appropriate that events within that divine "jurisdiction" should be handled by the local deity.

6:13-22

Completion, Dedication and Passover Celebration

6:15. date of completion. Such an important event as the completion of the second temple required careful recording. The date provided places it in the twelfth Babylonian calendar month, Adar, which would have been in February-March. The sixth year of Darius would have been 515 B.C., and the third day of the month of Adar would make the completion date March 12, 515. It should be noted that 1 Esdras 7:5 and Josephus both place the date on the twenty-third of Adar, and this has been preferred by some since the third was a Sabbath.

6:17. dedication sacrifice compared to 1 Kings. See the comment on 2 Chronicles 7:5-7 for dedicatory activity for Solomon's temple. The actual number of sacrificial animals in the dedication ceremony for the second temple is much smaller than at the time of Solomon (1 Kings 8:63): 22,000 oxen versus 100 bulls; 120,000 sheep versus 200 rams and 400 male lambs. The sin offering of twelve male goats is according to priestly ritual (Lev 4:22-26; see the comment on Lev 4:13-32) and fits into Ezra's attempt to reestablish the idea of a twelve-tribe coalition, now reborn through the exile experience and prepared to resume its covenantal relationship with Yahweh in Judah and Jerusalem.

6:19. Passover. There has been no mention of a celebration of Passover since the time of Josiah (over one hundred years earlier; see comment on 2 Chron 35:18). Now, as a part of the rejuvenation of the restored Jewish community in Judah, this ritual (see the comment on Ex 12:1-28), which parallels the escape from bondage just experienced by the returned exiles, must be reinstituted. The date of the fourteenth of Nisan (the first month) is based on the religious calendar (Ex 12:2-6; Lev 23:5). Note the previous celebrations of Passover following the cleansing or renovation of the temple (see comments on 2 Chron 30).

6:21. separated from unclean Gentiles. There are several possibilities for this group of people. It is possible that they were remnants of the people of the northern kingdom or those from Judah who were not taken into exile (see 2 Chron 30:17-21). Their contact, during the period of the exile, with non-Israelites could have been perceived as a contamination from which they would have to consciously separate themselves. It is also possible that the Passover ceremony was, as in Exodus 12:48, extended to proselytes *(gerim)* who had converted to Yahweh-only worship.

6:22. Feast of Unleavened Bread. See the comments on Exodus 12:14-20 and Leviticus 23:6-8. Since the celebration of this festival is also attached to Hezekiah's (2 Chron 30:13) and Josiah's (2 Chron 35:16-17) celebration of the Passover, it is appropriate here as well. The joy expressed in this seven-day celebration is tied to the act of God in "changing the attitude of the king of Assyria" (a symbol for the Persian rulers of Mesopotamia), which has made the restoration possible.

7:1-28
Ezra's Arrival with Commission from Artaxerxes

7:1, 7-8. chronology. If these events occur during the reign of Artaxerxes I, then the seventh year of that king would be 458 B.C. This is nearly sixty years after the events described in the last chapter. The departure date given is the first day of Nisan (April 8) and the date of their arrival in Jerusalem is the first of Ab, the fifth month (August 4). This time of year, spring through midsummer, is dry and hot, and would have required a northern route, avoiding the desert and careful planning to insure adequate water resources were available for the returnees.

7:1-5. Ezra's ancestry. It was important that Ezra be recognized as having the proper credentials so that his mission would be sanctioned and his actions would have the force of law. Unlike Jeshua (see comment on 3:2) there is no suggestion that Ezra was a high priest, but the Aaronide genealogy provided for him (that only provides sixteen generations between Aaron and Ezra; for complete list see 1 Chron 6:5-53) shows that he is of prominent ancestry. The text likely suggests that he is a descendant of the Seraiah who was high priest at the time of the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. Since Jeshua is not mentioned in his ancestry, it is likely that he was either from a different part of Seraiah's line or that this is a different Seraiah (a common name of the period).

7:6-12. Ezra's expertise. Ezra is given a variety of attributes, most of them centering around his ability as a scribe and teacher of the law of the God of heaven. As a scribe, Ezra was possibly a member of the Persian bureaucracy. It was a common practice for ancient Near Eastern governments to employ persons trained not only as secretaries or clerks, but as diplomats and lawyers. These individuals were used to interpret documents from subject and allied peoples. They were also sent on investigative missions to aid the king and his advisors in making decisions (for more information see comment on Neh 8:1). Examples include the seventh-century Assyrian scribe Ahiqar and the description of the scribal profession in the Middle Kingdom Egyptian "Satire on the Trades" where the profession of scribe is praised as a worthy vocation with benefits that far exceed other types of employment.

7:8. four-month journey. As is so often the case, the actual events of a long journey are not recounted here (see Gen 12:1-9). Since they departed in April and arrived in early August, this would have been a dry and hot trek. Most likely they would have taken the northern caravan route (approximately nine hundred miles) up the Euphrates, perhaps turning west at Mari across to Tadmor, then southwest through Damascus and on into Palestine. Considering the size of the company, including whole families, an average of ten miles a day could be expected.

7:14. seven advisors of the king. Based on the reports of Esther 1:14 and the ancient historians Xenophon and Herodotus, we know that the Persian kings relied on a group of seven princes or advisers as their privy council. It would be natural that an investigative commission, such as that given to Ezra, would come in the name of the king and his advisers.

7:14. nature of commission. The Persian kings showed a consistent interest in insuring that their subject peoples maintained the favor of their gods. Restoring temples had been one way to accomplish that, and here we find that obeying religious mandates was another. If the God of Israel was pleased by the people's obedience to his instructions, then by all means they should be enforced. Personnel should be put in place to instruct as well as monitor and assess compliance. It is, therefore, Ezra's commission to determine whether the Jews in the Persian province of Yehud are obeying the law found in the Torah. There had been enough complaints and queries sent from persons there to suggest such an investigative mission was necessary. As a scribe, Ezra has the expertise to handle this mission and to make judgments about compliance. In this way, the Persian king used a member of a subject people (just as Nehemiah was used) to try and insure continued divine approval for his empire and avoid the wrath of God (see v. 23).

7:15-17. Persians offering sacrifices to Yahweh. The Persian kings are known to have made public sacrifices to local deities as a way of showing respect, as well as for the political advantage it would give them in placating the newly conquered people (such as Cyrus's actions for Marduk in the Cyrus Cylinder). The actual list of sacrificial animals and the addition of cereal and drink offerings (see Num 15:2-10) suggests that Jewish experts had been consulted in order to draft the Persian decree. Such a practice is evidenced during the reign of Cambyses (530-522). An Egyptian priest of Sais, Uzahor, played a significant advisory role in attracting the king's interest in the restoration of the sanctuary of Neith and overseeing the process of restoration. This

restoration included laying a foundation, reestablishing the rituals and festivals, and providing for government grants to fund the operation of the temple.

7:22. amounts provided. The ration list issued by Artaxerxes to his provincial officials has limits, but the numbers are still amazingly high: 3 3/4 tons of silver, 650 bushels of wheat, 600 gallons of wine, 600 gallons of oil, and unlimited quantities of salt. These amounts are not necessarily based on an assessment of what is required to operate the temple. Instead, as the next verse suggests, it was calculated as what was necessary to avert the wrath of Israel's god.

7:23. theological mentality. In the appeasement mentality of the ancient world, if God's wrath were not appeased, rebellious factions in Israel could claim that their actions against Persia were taken at the instigation of Yahweh. There was revolt in progress in the Persian empire at the time of Ezra. Inarus, a Libyan, had seized control of Egypt in 460 and had found ready support from the Athenian fleet in the Mediterranean. The revolt was crushed by Megabyzus between 456 and 454, so Ezra's journey (458) comes right at its height. By showing great respect for Yahweh, the temple and the priesthood, Artaxerxes followed previous Persian policy (Cyrus Cylinder), acknowledging the power of the God of heaven and adding a sense of urgency to the decree: "let it be done with diligence."

7:24. temple personnel tax exempt. There may have been a dual purpose behind this exemption from taxation. Ezra was coming into a situation where he was unknown and was associated with a foreign power. Tax exemption would have helped him gain some support from the Jerusalem temple community. Precedent for this practice by the Persians is found in the Gadatas Inscription from the reign of Darius, which granted tax exemption to the priests of the Greek god Apollo.

7:25. appointment of officials. It seems very appropriate that Ezra would have been given the right to appoint magistrates and judges within the area of his jurisdiction. In that way he would not have to contend with judicial opposition, and he could insure a common set of policies (see Jehoshaphat's judicial reform in 2 Chron 19:4-11). Persian administrative structure consisted of a dual set of officials—one for local and customary issues and the other charged with enforcing royal decrees and statutes. It is possible that Ezra would have jurisdiction to appoint both within the Trans-Euphrates satrapy, but more likely, given the reference to the "laws of your God," his prime concern was with local magistrates, who would be dealing with Jewish law throughout the province.

7:26. empowered to punish. Since Ezra is operating under the aegis and with the power of the Persian government, the list of penalties match those of the Persian penal code. Capital punishment and confiscation of goods do appear in Israelite law, but there is no mention of imprisonment, other than house arrest (Lev 24:12), except for prisoners of war and those in protective custody for political reasons (Jer 37:11-16). The word translated "banishment" might better be rendered "flogging" or "corporal punishment" based on its common usage in Persian law. The right to punish signifies the seriousness of Ezra's mission, whether or not he is ever forced to exercise this power.

8:1-36
Ezra Leads the Return to Jerusalem

8:2-14. size of returning group compared to first return. The total number of males listed in Ezra's returning group is 1,513. An estimate of 5,000 total returnees (based on a conservative number of wives and children) would make this group about one seventh the size of that listed in Ezra 2:64-65 (42,360).

8:15. canal of Ahava. This is most likely one of the many canals that radiated out from the Euphrates River near Babylon (at least within a radius of ninety miles). It may also be a settlement along one of these water channels, but variations in the sources (LXX; 1 Esdras 8:61 has Theras as the site) have confused the issue. As a result the exact site is still unknown.

8:17. Casiphia. If this is a place name, then it is in the vicinity of Ahava, but neither site has been identified beyond the general direction north of Babylon. It is also possible, based on the LXX reading, that this is a noun (a variant of Hebrew *kesep*, "silver") and thus reflects either that Iddo was the leader at a treasury site or of a guild of silver smiths.

8:20. temple servants. In addition to the 38 Levites who were induced to join Ezra's returning group, a body of 220 temple servants are also enrolled. The importance of these individuals as assistants to the Levites should not be overlooked. With such a small number of Levites available, their servants would have been essential to proper ritual activity, since there were many menial tasks to be done. Ezra certifies them by the mention of a list of names with their ancestry.

8:21. fasting. Fasting is little attested in the ancient Near East outside the Bible. It generally

occurs in the context of mourning. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with making a request before God. The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and humbling oneself before God (Ps 69:10). As indicated in the text, the Jews are here concerned about their safety. Their request is to procure the protection of God so that their journey may be seen to have been undertaken at his bidding.

8:21-23. danger of being robbed. Since Ezra's group will be traveling without a military escort (compare Nehemiah's entourage in Neh 2:9), the dangers of the road were a serious matter. Political forces were at work upsetting the balance in the western portions of Persia's empire. Plus, an unarmed group, transporting large quantities of gold and silver, might have easily been picked apart by a determined band of outlaws.

8:26-27. amounts. In weighing out and recording the gifts given by the Persian king, Ezra fulfills that portion of his mission. The 650 talents of silver equal 24½ tons, while the 100 talent weights of silver objects and 100 talents of gold each weigh approximately 3¾ tons each. The 20 golden bowls weighing 1,000 darics are equal to 19 pounds. While this is an extremely large amount, it does represent both royal gifts as well as those from exilic Jewish families.

8:31. length of journey. Since it was April at the time of departure, a journey directly across the desert (approximately five hundred miles) would not have been possible. Thus the travelers took a longer, northern route, up the Euphrates and then west to Damascus and on to Palestine (approximately nine hundred miles). See the comments on 1:11 and 7:8.

8:35. sacrifices. See the comment on Ezra 6:17 on the dedicatory sacrifices for the second temple. The Persian king had ordered that these sacrifices be made when the exiles returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:17). Ezra is now recorded carrying out these orders. The mention of "sin offering," as in Ezra 6:17, is a further indication of the need to purify each returning group.

8:36. satraps and governors. The Persian empire was divided into twenty-one satrapies (twenty-two after Babylon became a separate province). Each was administered by a governor or satrap. However, considering the huge size of some of these provinces, it was necessary to have a secondary layers of officials, each known as a *peḥa,* to aid in carrying out tax collection and enforcement of royal decrees (see the comment on Ezra 5:14).

9:1-15
The Problem of Intermarriage

9:1-2. nature of accusation. Ezra is soon informed of a major violation of the Law that he had come to establish: intermarriage with a standard list of non-Jewish people, a practice that endangered the cultural and religious existence of Israel. Endogamy, or marriage only within a select group (which did include converts), had become a tenet for the exilic community (see comment on 9:10-12). They realized that intermarriage would create cultural divisions and weaken their religious identity as a separate and "chosen" people. What makes this charge particularly outrageous is that priests and Levites, who should know the Law (compare Hos 4:6), are also participating in this "unfaithful" practice.

9:1. people list significance. The list of non-Israelite peoples names the standard population groups from the time of the conquest (that the Israelites had been charged with driving out) and mixes in some of those that had treated Israel poorly in the exodus period (Deut 23:3-6). It therefore reflects the time period of the law Ezra is citing rather than the postexilic period. A number of these people groups were no longer in existence in Ezra's time. The intent of the list is not, then, to target these particular peoples but to identify certain categories. In the postexilic context there were those who could be identified as needing to be driven out, as well as those who had set themselves up as enemies of the Jews. Any people identified in one of those categories would thereby be ineligible for intermarriage.

9:3. Ezra's response. Ezra's initial response to the charges of intermarriage are traditional grief rituals: tearing clothing and pulling hair. These practices were common throughout the ancient Near East and are found depicted in Egyptian tomb paintings and in literature (Ugaritic Tale of Aqhat). For more information on these and other mourning practices see comment on Esther 4:1.

9:10-12. the offense of exogamy. Although the prohibition against exogamy, marriage outside the designated group, comes primarily from Deuteronomy 7:1-5, the citation here is actually a synthesis of several passages from Leviticus and Deuteronomy. It was common among ancient Near Eastern societies to marry inside one's clan (endogamy), or to make a

marriage alliance with another friendly group. Cultural attitudes discouraging exogamy can be seen as early as the Sumerians. The myth The Marriage of Martu describes the Bedouin people as barbarians who eat raw meat and do not bury their dead—a group with whom no civilized people should intermarry. The Israelites had been commanded to marry within their "spiritual" clan (i.e., the worshipers of the Lord). In this time period, however, the issues went beyond spiritual homogeneity. Election and covenant issues made landownership theologically significant. Intermarriage was one of the ways that land tenure could be jeopardized and, with it, covenant benefits. The Elephantine texts (Jewish texts less than fifty years removed from Ezra and Nehemiah) show how land became redistributed and lost to a family through foreign women marrying into Jewish families and becoming enfranchised. Marriage with peoples of the land would culturally contaminate the Israelites, weakening their religious identity as a people set apart by God and violating the terms of the covenant that allowed them to "eat the good things of the land" (Deut 6:11).

10:1-44

The Solution to the Problem of Intermarriage

10:3. divorce in the Persian period. There is no specific requirement in Jewish law that a man is to divorce his foreign wife. According to Deuteronomic legislation (Deut 7:1-5), this sort of union was not supposed to occur in the first place. What is known of divorce in the Persian period comes from the Jewish documents from Elephantine. Marriage contracts often included stipulations concerning the disposition of the dowry, bride price, property and children in the event of a divorce. Divorce appears to have been common and uncomplicated, with economic implications being of greatest concern. At Elephantine no reason for the divorce had to be offered.

10:8. forfeiture of property, expelled from assembly. A three-day period is sufficient for all citizens to make their way to Jerusalem to answer for the practice of mixed marriage. Forfeiture of property to the temple (seen also in the apocryphal 1 Esdras 9:4) and expulsion from the assembly are complementary punishments, since membership in the assembly entitled a citizen to property (note the death sentence in 2 Chron 15:13). The crime is considered a violation of the covenant and a sign of disloyalty to the community. As early as Hammurabi's Code sexual crimes could lead to the sentence of exile. In both cases the crime involved inappropriate sexual activity and a violation of societal norms.

10:9. chronology. This event occurs on the twentieth of Kislev (the ninth month) during the third week in December in the year 458 B.C., just over four months since his arrival. The heavy rains and cold in Jerusalem at that time of the year would have certainly discomforted the assemblage. Their trembling and the high emotions associated with the dissolution of their marriages were simply compounded by the weather.

10:13. rainy season. October through February is the cold and rainy season in Judah and Jerusalem. The word used here often describes torrential rains. It would not be unusual for temperatures to be in the forties at this time of year. It is possible that holding an assembly in an open square during the rainy season of late December (the nineteenth) might dampen spirits enough that the men would be willing to compromise and accept Ezra's solution to the marriage issue. However, the discomfort of the cold and the rain might also have raised tempers, especially if the men had to stand there very long. Referring the matter to a commission at least would get them out of the elements.

10:16-17. chronology. A ten-day delay was needed to assemble the commission. They began work on the first day of the tenth month (Tebeth) and continued until the first day of the first month (Nisan). Thus their task required them to make inquiries from late December until late March (March 27, 457 B.C.; about seventy-five days).

10:16-17. what is being investigated. At issue is whether the wives of 110 individuals were in fact non-Israelites. There certainly must have been numerous ambiguities concerning questions of ancestry and regarding which groups the new legal rulings referred to. The list of those questioned includes priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and persons not associated with the temple community. Since many of these men were influential, it may be assumed that the commission had to handle their task diplomatically. Each must have been carefully questioned. The matter of any children by these marriages was determined, since this also affected inheritance patterns within the community. Then each was required to take an oath (see 1 Chron 29:24) to put aside their wives and disown their children by these foreign women. In addition, it would be determined what the appropriate guilt offering should be (see Lev 5:14-26).

NEHEMIAH

1:1-11

Nehemiah's Prayer Concerning His Mission

1:1. Nehemiah. Nehemiah held the important position of cupbearer to the king of Persia in the mid-fifth century B.C. during the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.). A revolt broke out in Egypt in 460 B.C. that took five years to put down. Megabyzus, a satrap north of Mesopotamia, also rebelled in 448 B.C. Thus this was a turbulent period in the life of the empire. Because of this, it can be surmised that the Persians were willing to ally themselves with a number of the minority groups within the empire, such as the Jews. It is thus plausible that Jews such as Nehemiah held high positions within the empire in the middle of the fifth century B.C.

1:1. Kislev. Kislev was the postexilic Hebrew month name corresponding to our mid-November to mid-December. The Jews apparently followed the Babylonian monthly calendar after their deportation to Babylon in the late sixth century B.C. and continued to employ this system into the Persian period.

1:1. chronology. It is not certain what the "twentieth year" refers to. It may refer to the twentieth year of Nehemiah at Susa. More likely is the idea that the twentieth year refers to the reign of Artaxerxes I (r. 465-424 B.C.), and his name was simply omitted (see Neh 2:1). If this is the case, then the twentieth year was 445 B.C.

1:1. citadel of Susa. The citadel of Susa was the winter residence of the Persian kings. It was set apart from the remainder of the city of Susa, an area that had an ancient past. Susa had been inhabited since at least the fourth millennium B.C. Later, Susa was an Elamite stronghold until it was captured by the Medes and Persians in the seventh century B.C. The ten-acre citadel is located on an elevated area on the northern point of the site, the Apadana. The palace was built by Darius and used by several of his successors. Excavation of the palace has identified many of its features, including the audience hall, where the Persian kings held court. It was a square building over 350 feet on each side featuring seventy-two stone columns each estimated at sixty-five to eighty feet tall. Greater Susa, located about 225 miles east of Babylon, was built on three hills overlooking the Shaur River. The diamond-shaped mound is about two and a quarter miles in circumference, covering nearly 250 acres. An additional twenty acres comprises the merchant quarter across the valley to the east.

1:2-3. condition of Jerusalem. Jerusalem still lay in ruins from its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar II 140 years earlier. A city that had its walls and gates broken down was entirely vulnerable to outside aggression. The book of Ezra describes an earlier aborted attempt to restore the walls during the reign of Artaxerxes I (c. 458 B.C.). Thus it is apparent that the individuals were describing this most recent endeavor which failed. Some have suggested Persian action against Jerusalem during the reign of Xerxes, but the evidence is scant, though fighting between the Persians and Greeks in the southern Levant is attested.

1:4. Nehemiah's response. The response of Nehemiah was in fact typical of Jews who were confronted with tragedy (see Ezra 9:3-5). Mourning was often accompanied with the shaving of the head and beard. Fasting was often added to prayer so the individual could concentrate wholly on the issue at hand, at the expense of physical needs.

1:4. "God of heaven" in Zoroastrianism. The term "God of heaven" was well-known in the Persian empire and had become part of the religious language of the Jews. The term is also found in the Jewish correspondence in texts from Elephantine in Egypt dating to the fifth century B.C. The origin of the term can be traced to Zoroaster, an Iranian holy man who probably lived in the late second millennium B.C., although his exact dates are not known and remain controversial. Zoroastrianism had become the religion of the Persian kings by the time of Darius I (r. 521-486 B.C.). The Zoroastrians worshiped the "God of heaven," known as Ahura Mazda, an eternal being with moral designs. They also acknowledged the existence of an evil deity who was the exact counterpart to Ahura Mazda and equal to him in power. Nehemiah, however, does not hesitate to attribute this familiar title to Yahweh.

1:11. cupbearer. The cupbearer in the ancient Near Eastern court held a very important position. He had direct access to the king and thus had great influence. Texts and reliefs describe cupbearers in Assyrian and Persian courts. The cupbearer was in close proximity to the king's harem and thus was often a eunuch, although there is no evidence that this was the case with Nehemiah. Later sources

identify the cupbearer as the wine taster. In addition he was the bearer of the signet ring and was chief financial officer.

2:1-10
Nehemiah Sent on a Mission

2:1. Nisan. The Hebrew month of Nisan corresponds to our mid-March to mid-April. Nisan brought early rains as well as the barley and flax harvests. Nisan was a month name borrowed from the Babylonians during the Jewish captivity. Abib had been the previous name of the month.

2:1. Artaxerxes. Three Persian kings were named Artaxerxes. The one mentioned in Nehemiah is most likely the successor of Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I (r. 465-424 B.C.). Outside of Scripture, little is known of him. The Greek historian Herodotus described a taxation list and some poor economic policies that occurred during this king's reign. The Greek city-states, fresh from their victories against the Persians at Salamis and Plataea (480-479 B.C.), used every occasion to undermine Persian authority in the Near East. Thus Artaxerxes endured two revolts during his reign (see the note on Neh 1:1). He was, however, able to rule for forty years.

2:1. responsibilities of courtiers in king's presence. In Persian reliefs courtiers are sometimes portrayed with their hands shielding their mouths so as not to offend the king by breathing on him. Whether this represents health consciousness (unlikely), the prevalence of bad breath or simply extreme deference is unknown. As a result, however, facial expressions would be somewhat masked. It would have been expected that the joy of being in the king's service would be reflected on every face.

2:5. rebuilding of city where fathers are buried. Family ties were of supreme importance in most ancient Near Eastern cultures. The living inhabitants of a family were required to pay strict attention to the preservation of the remains of family members who had passed on. In the ancient cultures this entailed performing ritual acts to ensure the maintenance of the dead. In Israel the bones of the dead were preserved. It was apparently thought that they did have a conscious existence after death. Joseph implored his family to return his bones to Canaan when they left Egypt, and Nehemiah was concerned about maintaining the tombs of his fathers.

2:6. queen sitting beside king. There are numerous examples in ancient Near Eastern iconography of the queen seated next to the king, usually upon her own throne. Many have argued that queens had an unusually powerful influence at the Persian court in this period, based upon the writings of the Greek historian Herodotus. Artaxerxes' wife was Damaspia, but there is a possibility that the queen's throne was occupied by the queen mother, Amestris, known to be a strong personality (see the comment on Esther 5:3), who was still taking an active role as late as 449 and perhaps was still alive at this time.

2:6. length of journey (distance and time). Nehemiah most likely took a long overland route from Susa to Jerusalem on the Persian Royal Road into northern Mesopotamia and west into Syro-Palestine. The distance was about nine hundred miles and would have taken about four months. That is the length of time it took Ezra to make the journey (see comment on Ezra 7:1).

2:7. governors of Trans-Euphrates. The term used here for "governors" can either refer to a district governor of a small province or a satrap, a major regional governor of the Persian empire. The empire was organized into a large number of compact satrapies that were highly efficient and often somewhat autonomous. The Trans-Euphrates governors ruled the area due north of Mesopotamia in the region of Armenia and Georgia.

2:7. letters of safe passage. Since Nehemiah's purpose was political, he may have anticipated hostility from the local Persian officials. He also may have been concerned because of the unrest that existed in various parts of the empire (see comment on Neh 1:1). Aramaic documents from the fifth century include such a letter. Its main function is to instruct regional officials to provide the travelers with provisions from the king's stores.

2:8. keeper of the king's forest. The keeper of the king's forest had a Hebrew name (Asaph). The forest was probably in Lebanon (which the Persians had overtaken in the mid-sixth century B.C.), although some areas in the coastal plain of Palestine may have served in this capacity. Greek historians such as Xenophon and Diodorus mention local parks under the care of officials of the Persian government.

2:8. use of timber/intended construction. The timber was requested for clearly specified uses: (1) the gates of a citadel, the forerunner of the Antonia fortress, built on the north side of the second temple by Herod the Great; (2) the reconstruction of the city wall (though the walls were built of stone and mud brick, timbers were used for stabilization and for gateways); and (3) for Nehemiah's own residence

(as governor). Though mud brick and stone were the most common materials for residence construction, cedar would be used for interior paneling.

2:10. Sanballat. Sanballat the Horonite was governor of Samaria. He is attested in Aramaic papyri from Elephantine in Egypt, which also mentions two of his sons. Papyri from Wadi Daliyeh give a sequence of Samarian governors, three of whom were named Sanballat. As his sons had names with the theophoric element of Yah, Sanballat may have been a worshiper of Yahweh (although see Neh 13:28). The term Horonite is not clear, although it may simply mean a person who came from one of the towns with the element "Horon" in it. Sanballat opposed Nehemiah because Jerusalem and Judah had previously been under his jurisdiction, though it is unclear whether Judah was part of his province or that he had been given administrative oversight of the Judean district.

2:10. Tobiah. Tobiah was an Ammonite and thus was of foreign origin. He may have been an ancestor to the important Tobiad family from Jordan in later generations. Though it is not expressly stated, he may have been governor of Ammon, as his grandson (also Tobiah) of the third century was.

2:11-20
Nehemiah's Night Inspection

2:13-15. topography of fifth-century Jerusalem. It has been very difficult to locate the places mentioned in these verses. The walls and gates inspected by Nehemiah on the north and west sides no longer exist, or are buried under Herod's temple platform. The King's Pool on the eastern side is probably to be identified with the Pool of Siloam. The valley referred to here is most likely the Kidron Valley. Excavations have shown a strewn mass of stones, which are at least like the ones that blocked Nehemiah's path. Nehemiah had evidently chosen to abandon the eastern slope of the town and to build the new city wall there. Thus the city was certainly smaller than in preexilic times. It is estimated that the circumference of the city at this time was about one and a half miles, enclosing perhaps eighty or ninety acres.

2:16. groups referred to. The *officials* were likely representatives of the Persian empire, either those who had come with Nehemiah or those who had local jurisdiction. The term *Jews* referred to the citizenry at large. The *priests* took on a major role in the life of the Jerusalem community after the exile, with an increasing political role. The *nobles* refers to the heads of the important families in the area, perhaps the equivalent to what are called elders in earlier literature.

2:19. Geshem. Geshem the Arab is known from extrabiblical sources. There is a Geshem in Libyanite and Aramaic inscriptions who is known as the king of Kedar. The name is also found in a later inscription at Beth Shearim, as well as on a silver vessel dedicated by his son Qainu to the goddess Han-'Ilat found at Tell el-Mashkuta in the Egyptian Delta. The Arabs had recently settled in the Negev and Transjordan regions (see Neh 2:10).

3:1-32
Building Assignments

3:1-32. assigning sections. In Assyrian times the building of walls was assigned out by sections to various groups of laborers. When Sargon built his capital at Khorsabad, the wall was assigned in sections to workers from the various provinces of the empire.

3:1. Sheep Gate. The Sheep Gate (other times called the Benjamin Gate) north of the temple mount, exits from the area of the Bethesda Pool (known in this period as the Sheep Pool) into the Kidron Valley. It is toward the northern side of the east wall and would have led to the Jericho road.

3:1. tower of the hundred and tower of Hananel. These two towers were positioned on the northwest side of the city near the Temple Mount. This is about the same location as the Antonia fortress in Herod's Jerusalem.

3:3. Fish Gate. The Fish Gate (otherwise known as the Ephraim Gate) led out of the city toward the northwest. This would be one of the routes one would take to the coastal plain.

3:3. gate structure. The text mentions four parts of the gate: the doors, the beams, the bolts and the bar. Two gate doors were generally set into stone sockets buried just under the ground. The beams flanked the gate on either side. They were made of wood and joined to the wall. The bars slid across the gates and the end fit into holes or brackets in the beam. These bars could be locked in place by a series of small wooden dowels that slipped into holes on a block mounted on the gate. One could therefore not exit the city without a key once the gate was locked.

3:6. Jeshanah Gate. Sometimes called the Old Gate, this gate is generally located just south of the Fish Gate. Some would identify this as the Mishneh Gate that opened into the western quarter of the city.

3:8. goldsmith and perfume-maker. In an-

cient cities certain quarters were occupied by the members of particular guilds. Craft guilds often were made up of families that had developed their own techniques and trade secrets, which would be practiced and passed on from generation to generation.

3:8. Broad Wall. Excavators on the western hill in Jerusalem have uncovered an unusually thick wall (over twenty feet thick) from this period that extends toward the west from the western wall of the Temple Mount. Repairs were not made to the Broad Wall itself for it seems that the western hill was not occupied during this time.

3:9. ruler of a half district. The familiar Assyrian title *rab pilkani,* "head of the district," offers the best understanding of the terminology used only in this context. Unfortunately, little is known of the details of the administrative districting of the region.

3:11. Tower of the Ovens. Most interpreters associate this with the bakers' district, which was situated in this part of town so as to be near the palace and temple complex (see Jer 37:21).

3:13. Valley Gate. The Valley Gate is in the western wall along the slope of the City of David leading into the Tyropoeon Valley. What is believed to be this gate was identified in Crowfoot's excavations in 1926-27. It is approximately twelve feet wide.

3:13. Zanoah. This is a town in the Shephelah region about fifteen miles west-southwest of Jerusalem.

3:14. Dung Gate. The Dung Gate is at the southern tip of the city of David, a little over five hundred yards south of the Valley Gate. It opens into the Valley of Hinnom and the road to the spring at En Rogel and is to be differentiated from the Dung Gate in the present configuration of the city (near the southwest corner of the Temple Mount, dating to the Ottoman period).

3:14. district of Beth Hakkerem. Beth Hakkerem is modern Ramat Rachel, just outside of Jerusalem.

3:15. Fountain Gate. Located at the southeastern side of the city, this gate is only a few hundred yards from the Dung Gate and probably gave access to the Pool of Siloam where the Gihon Spring was channeled. Such a gate was excavated in the 1920s.

3:15. district of Mizpah. Mizpah is identified as Tell en-Nasbeh about eight miles north of Jerusalem.

3:15. wall of the Pool of Siloam and the King's Garden. This pool is generally thought to refer to a canal that channeled the waters of the Gihon Spring for irrigation along the eastern flank of Jerusalem. It was located at the southern end of the city and provided water for the King's Garden, at the juncture of the Kidron and Hinnom Valleys.

3:15. steps from city of David. These steps were located at the southern end of the city to ease the steep ascent from the Kidron Valley. Remains of an ancient staircase have been found in this area.

3:16. half district of Beth Zur. Beth Zur was the southern extremity of the province. It is located about four miles north of Hebron.

3:16. tombs of David. The place often identified to tourists as David's tomb on present-day Mount Zion is a late tradition. The only monumental tombs from the first temple period are in the modern village of Silwan across the Kidron Valley from David's Jerusalem. These are from Iron Age II but are not royal tombs. The Judahite kings from Rehoboam to Ahaz were buried in the City of David (except for some notable exceptions). Later kings were either buried in the "garden of Uzziah" (Manasseh and Amon) or in their own tomb (Josiah). The burial places of Hezekiah and the successors of Josiah are not mentioned. The site of the royal burials in the City of David has not been determined with certainty.

3:16. artificial pool. This was a separate pool from that referred to in the last verse but was in the same vicinity.

3:16. house of the heroes. This most likely refers to the barracks used by the elite troops, represented early by David's mighty men (see comment on 2 Sam 23:8).

3:17. half district of Keilah. Keilah is located nearly between Zanoah (v. 13) and Beth Zur (v. 16), twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem.

3:25. description. The palace area was just south of the temple mount. The tower at the corner of the palace complex was skirted by the city wall, and this angle is most likely the one being referred to.

3:26. Ophel. The Hill of Ophel is identified as the section between the Temple Mount and the southern ridge known as the City of David. Apparently it featured fortifications that surrounded the temple-palace complex. Some believe that there was a citadel located here that was itself designated "the Ophel."

3:26. Water Gate. This gate was across the ridge from the Valley Gate and opened to the east, leading to the Gihon Spring and the Kidron Valley.

3:27. wall of Ophel. The wall of Ophel extended from the Ophel to the southwest along the Kidron Valley to the Water Gate. In earlier times this portion of the wall had been positioned partway down the slope, but Nehemi-

ah repositioned it at the crest of the slope. Portions of this wall have been found in the excavations in the City of David.

3:28. Horse Gate. This gate led from the temple complex east down into the Kidron Valley.

3:29. East Gate. Some associate this with what is now commonly called the Golden Gate on the east side of the temple complex. Beneath the current Golden Gate the arch of an older gate has been observed.

3:31. Inspection Gate. Little is known about this gate, which is sometimes called the Muster Gate. Most would identify it as a gate in the wall of the temple complex rather than in the city wall itself.

3:31. room above the corner. This is generally associated with the northeast corner of the city. It most likely functioned as a watchtower.

3:32. Sheep Gate. See comment on 3:1.

3:32. goldsmiths and merchants. One of the important merchant centers of the city was located by the gates on the north, so it is logical that these groups be assigned this section.

4:1-23
Enemy Opposition

4:1. Sanballat. See comment on 2:10.

4:2. army of Samaria. Though not a military colony, the governor of Samaria had an army to aid the Persian king. However, it is not certain whether these troops were Persian garrison troops or a local militia.

4:2. sacrifices. Typically major construction projects were dedicated with sacrificial rituals. Foundation sacrifices are well known in the ancient Near East.

4:2. bring stones back to life. This phrase may refer to the ancient Near Eastern idea that stones blackened with fire were cursed and could not be reused as building material. The Israelites do not have the time to quarry fresh stone, and the burnt limestone from the previous walls would be too unstable and fragile to reuse.

4:3. Tobiah. See comment on Nehemiah 2:10.

4:18. man who sounded trumpet. Throughout the biblical period trumpets were used for signaling in religious, civil and military contexts. This text speaks of the ram's horn (shofar) that is used for signaling all the way back at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:13). For more information on signaling, see comments on Numbers 31:6 and Joshua 6:4-5.

5:1-19
A Ruling to Aid the Poor

5:3-5. nature of the complaint. Because of the work of reconstructing Jerusalem, these people were not able to produce enough grain to stay alive. They had to buy grain but did not have enough funds, causing them to mortgage their property (fields, vineyards and houses). Furthermore, the Persian kings evidently took over a real estate tax that had been imposed by the Chaldeans. Darius I (r. 521-486 B.C.) levied a tax on the crops yielded in fields. Often both in Israel and elsewhere in the ancient Near East, parents sold their children into slavery to enable them to meet their material needs, hoping to redeem them at a later date (see comment on Ex 21:2-6).

5:7. usury. Usury in its purest sense was the charging of interest for a loan. An individual was forbidden to charge a fellow Israelite interest on a loan (see comments on Ex 22:25; Lev 25:38; and Deut 15:1-11). It was permissible, however, to charge a foreigner interest. Interest is mentioned as being permissible in the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (eighteenth century B.C.). However, these were commercial loans, and there was no counterpart in Israel. An Israelite loan was considered charity and was done to help a needy fellow countryman, not to help a merchant build up his business.

5:11. solution. Any land that had been seized because the individuals had been unable to repay a debt was now to be returned without any conditions. It was a common practice in the ancient Near East to take over one's property (including children) if that person could not repay a debt. It appears that interest had also been raised in this case and was returned to the debtors.

5:14. time period of Nehemiah's governorship. Nehemiah was appointed governor from 445 to 433 B.C. This was his first term as governor. Some believe a second term followed some time later (see comment on 13:6-7). There is no extrabiblical information concerning Nehemiah or his term as governor.

5:14. food allotted to governor. Like a satrap, a Persian governor had the right to collect taxes from his subjects for his own treasury, not just for the Crown. Monies collected in this way paid for local projects and supported the administration. Food and drink went to the governor and his household. Elamite texts from this period discovered at Persepolis (Treasury Texts) reflect this practice as they document outlays from the royal treasury.

5:15. forty shekels. While the previous governors referred to may have been Judean, it is possible that the reference is to non-Jewish governors appointed by the satraps of the region. The only other governor mentioned in

the biblical text is Zerubbabel seventy years earlier. It is unclear in the text whether the forty shekels was an annual amount paid by each citizen or the daily amount used to support the administration. In either case it is a large amount. Storage jars have been found in excavations that are thought to have been used by the Persian governors as a tax-gathering apparatus. Stamp impressions are also believed by some to preserve the names of governors of this period.

5:18. daily provision. The meal provisions for the 150 Jewish officials were likely part of their salary. Like other governors, Nehemiah was required to entertain regularly for both domestic officials and foreign dignitaries. Because of the great cost of this, it is all the more amazing that he did not collect taxes for his personal treasury.

6:1-19

Conspiracy Against Nehemiah and the Completion of the Wall

6:2. Plain of Otto. The Plain of Otto (or Ono) is about twenty-seven miles northwest of Jerusalem. During the Persian period, it was either at the northernmost border of the province of Judah or in neutral territory between the provinces of Ashdod and Samaria. At any rate, it was dangerous territory in which to meet one's enemies.

6:7. prophetic proclamation of kingship. Though there is little known about the prophetic offices in postexilic times, prophets played a role as "kingmakers" in earlier periods. The northern kingdom, Israel, had come into being by means of a prophetic pronouncement (1 Kings 11:29-39), and each of the major dynasties (Jeroboam, Baasha, Omri, Jehu) rose and fell in accordance with prophetic pronouncement. In the ancient Near East priests often play significant political roles, but no prophets from the ancient Near East are known to have played the same role as these Israelite kingmakers. Nonetheless, throughout the ancient world it was believed that prophets not only proclaimed the message of deity but in the process unleashed the divine action. One can understand why rumors of prophetic proclamations might incite insurrection or impose doom.

6:15. time of completion. Although the Jewish historian Josephus (A.D. 37-100) claims the walls were built in two years and four months, the biblical text does say it took a mere fifty-two days to complete the work. There are some parallels in antiquity for such a feat. For example, Thucydides claims that a wall around the city of Athens was built in one month (fifth century B.C.). Since Jerusalem was small (archaeologists consider that the circuit of the wall in this time was merely one and a half miles), only the eastern wall was built from the foundation (as the other walls were refurbished), and archaeologists claim that the work was not one of a high standard, it is not unreasonable to assume that the task was completed in such a short time.

7:1-73

Family Records

7:2. commander of the citadel. The Persians employed numerous military commanders of garrisons throughout their empire. Though often staffed with Persian troops rather than local militia, they were under the command of the governor or his appointees.

7:65. eating restrictions. This restriction is repeated in Ezra 2:63. Those priests with uncertain genealogies were restricted from eating from the "most holy things" (see Lev 2:3; 7:21-36), food that priests ate as their portion after the cultic rites. The Urim and Thummim were oracular devices (see comment on Ex 28:30) that would be used to inquire of God as to the credentials of those who claimed priestly ancestry.

7:70. a thousand drachmas of gold. Gold drachmas were either the Persian daric, the Median shekel or the Greek drachma (which was in more common use). Darics were not coined until the time of Darius. Darics were about 8.4 grams, so one thousand of them would equal about eighteen and a half pounds. The shekel was equal to the daric, while the Attic drachma was the equivalent of half a daric.

7:72. twenty thousand drachmas of gold, two thousand minas of silver. In gross weight this represents about 370 pounds of gold and 2220 pounds of silver (a mina was equal to sixty shekels). To compare this to the amounts used for Solomon's temple, see the comments on 1 Chronicles 22:14. A number of silver coins have been found in archaeological excavations that were minted at or near Jerusalem during the Persian period. These were struck with the inscription *yhd* or Yehud (Judah). They depicted the head of Pallas Athena, with an owl (the insignia of Athens) on the back side. The craftsmanship was clearly inferior to the Greek drachma. The coins had only a fractional value of silver and thus were worth less than counterparts found along the coast at Tyre and Sidon.

8:1-18

The Reading of the Law

8:1. chronology. It is presumed that the Israelites gathered together in the year that Nehemiah arrived, 445 B.C. Ezra would have already been there for thirteen years. The seventh month is Tishri (spans September-October), the beginning of the civil new year and the month that Yom Kippur and the Feast of Tabernacles are celebrated.

8:1. Water Gate. The Water Gate (see Neh 3:26) was near the Gihon Spring and thus afforded access to the water source. It has been argued that the gate referred to a preexilic wall that was not rebuilt by Nehemiah. It is not known whether this gate was included in the new wall or was east of it. In any case, Ezra did not read the Torah in or near the temple.

8:1. scribe. In Persian and general Mesopotamian usage, the position was that of a local commissioner charged with maintaining law and order, but a much broader scope is observable in the ancient world. Scribes would have been trained in reading of the various languages in use at the time, in the production of texts (whether copying, receiving dictation or composing), in the knowledge of traditional literature (canonical and noncanonical), in the range of international literature (particularly wisdom literature) and in the interpretation of literature (perhaps including legal literature or ritual literature). Scribes in Israel were, therefore, experts in the Law of Moses. One of their primary duties was to study the Scriptures. They became paramount in Jewish life in the postexilic period. They may have been organized into families and guilds (see 1 Chron 2:55). Later they were originators of the synagogue service. Many scribes were also priests and/or community leaders, as Ezra was. They were guardians of culture and tradition. Persian interest in this is shown in Darius's commissioning of an Egyptian high priest to reorganize the scribal school and temple practice of Sais. It is likely that scribes had the most significant role in the canonization process of the Old Testament.

8:1. Book of the Law of Moses. The Book of the Law of Moses contained, if not the entirety, at least a large proportion of the first five books of our Old Testament (Genesis—Deuteronomy).

8:3. public reading of state documents. Because of the lack of accessibility of written materials in the ancient Near East, the public reading of state documents by a scribe or herald was a very common occurrence. Letters from Kalhu in Assyria feature an Assyrian official reading a pronouncement in front of the people of Babylon.

8:4. reading platform. The platform referred to here can be compared to the platform Solomon used at the dedication of the first temple (2 Chron 6:13). The term used here has the root meaning of tower, emphasizing the height of the structure, so everyone could view Ezra as he read.

8:5. books or scrolls? Although the Hebrew word is translated as "book," Ezra certainly read from a scroll. Folded pages in the form of a modern book were not in existence until the second century A.D. and did not fully replace the scroll until some two centuries later.

8:5. stand up for reading. Standing up was a sign of respect in the Old Testament (see Judg 3:20; Job 29:8; Ezek 2:1).

8:6. worshiped. The response to the reading of the Scriptures was one of worship. The raising of the hands showed the people's dependence on God (see Ezra 9:5; Ps 28:2; 134:2). Prostration demonstrated their humility before God and his word. Prostrating oneself before a superior was a common occurrence throughout the Near East. The princes in the Akkadian letters from Amarna in Egypt symbolically prostrate themselves before Pharaoh.

8:7-8. interpretation of religious documents. The thirteen people mentioned in verse 7 were Levites who were responsible for the interpretation of the Law (2 Chron 17:7-9). They also translated the text, presumably from preexilic Hebrew into Aramaic, the common language of Palestine by the fifth century B.C. It also is possible that the word "translate" means that the Levites "broke down" the text, or in other words translated or interpreted the text paragraph by paragraph. Akkadian documents have various terms for commentaries on documents as well as attesting an oral commentary tradition. These commentaries are connected to canonical literature such as the omens of *Enuma Anu Enlil* as well as to legal traditions.

8:10. food. We are not told the specific type of feast the Israelites had when they were sent to their homes. It was certainly a feast of thanksgiving, since they were required to give a portion to their neighbors. Eating of the "fat," or choicest portions, was a common occurrence (see Lev 3; 2 Sam 6:19; 1 Chron 12:40-41; 29:22; 2 Chron 7:8-10; 30:21-26).

8:14-17. celebration of the Feast of Booths. For information on the feast see comments on Exodus 23:16; Leviticus 23:33-36, 39-43; and Deuteronomy 16:13-15. The Feast of Booths was normally celebrated on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. The uniqueness of the

celebration appears to have to do with the combination of traditions. Leviticus 23:40 instructs the celebrants to gather branches, and verse 42 tells them to live in booths. But Leviticus does not specify the building of booths, nor does it require pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Deuteronomy 16:15 designates the festival as one of the three pilgrimage feasts but says nothing about gathering branches or living in booths. Ezra's ruling combines these traditions so that the people are gathering branches and building booths in which to live in Jerusalem for the time of the feast.

8:16. Water Gate and Gate of Ephraim. For the Water Gate see the note on verse 1. The Ephraim Gate was part of the preexilic wall (see comment on 2 Chron 25:23) and was located about six hundred feet from the Corner Gate. This gate may have opened in the direction of Ephraim to the northwest. However, there is no mention of this gate in the list in Nehemiah 3.

9:1-38
Confession of Sins

9:1. chronology. The fasting occurred a few days after the celebration of the Feast of Booths, in the seventh month of 445 B.C. If it started on the fifteenth as prescribed in the Law, it would have continued through the twenty-second. In that case it would be odd that there is no mention of the Day of Atonement, which is supposed to be observed on the tenth day of the seventh month. Verse 13, however, suggests that the festivities began on the second day and therefore would have lasted until the ninth. Perhaps the Day of Atonement was also slightly out of time and is represented in this fast, though no reference is made to the rituals of Leviticus 16.

9:1. occasion for fast. Fasting is little attested in the ancient Near East outside the Bible. It generally occurs in the context of mourning. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with making a request before God. The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and humbling oneself before God (Ps 69:10). As indicated in the following prayer, the Jews are here concerned about their own sins and the sins of their forefathers that have violated the covenant. This has become evident in the reading of the law. Their request is to be delivered from foreign rule.

9:1. sackcloth. Sackcloth was a typical sign of mourning and repentance in the Bible. It was a coarse cloth, normally of black goat's hair. It was usually worn next to the skin as a band or a kilt tied around the waist. The symbolic significance of the wearing of sackcloth can be found among the Assyrians, Moabites, Phoenicians and Arameans.

9:6. you alone are Yahweh. This is a typical biblical admission of the absolute uniqueness of God (see comment on Deut 6:4). The uniqueness is expressed particularly in relation to creation and the covenant.

9:6. creator deities in Persian period. The Persians (or at least the Persian state) were primarily Zoroastrian during the period of Nehemiah. They believed that the god representing the power of good, Ahura Mazda, by his spirit created the world perfectly good. However, an equally powerful deity existed, Angra Mainyu, who brought forth evil and ignorance, thus perverting the creation of Ahura Mazda. However, by way of foreknowledge, Ahura Mazda made his creation to combat this evil god, paving the way for the restoration of the world to its original pure state.

9:6. multitudes of heaven. The "(starry) host" early in the verse and the "multitudes of heaven" near the end of the verse translate the same Hebrew term. The term can refer either to the stars or the angelic host, both of which were objects of reverence (and often indistinguishable since the stars were manifestations of gods) in the surrounding cultures. In Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda created all the other gods *(yazatas),* but he was, in some ways, dependent on them and offered sacrifices to them.

9:7-37. recitation of history in prayer. The reciting of Israel's history in prayers or hymns is a common occurrence in the Bible (e.g., Ps 78; 105; 135; 136). In this regard the Israelites were unique. Their neighbors referred to the New Year in prayers but did not refer to either creation or past historical events.

9:20. Spirit to instruct them. Because of the phrase "your good Spirit," a common appellation for the Zoroastrian god, Ahura Mazda, some have argued for a Persian influence upon Judaism. However, the differentiation between the Spirit of the Lord and an evil spirit was used long before any contact between the two peoples (see 1 Sam 16:14; 1 Kings 22:23-24). Additionally, in the Persian period the Israelites were not shy about adopting titles familiar from Zoroastrianism and attaching them instead to Yahweh (see comment on 1:4). Such reuse of familiar divine titles can be observed as early as Abraham (see comments on Gen 14:17-24).

9:36. slaves to the Persian king? The Jews, like all other people groups of the Persian empire, were subjects of the Persian king and were required to pay taxes. In virtually all ancient Near Eastern monarchies all inhabitants were considered slaves (or subjects) to the king. However, the monarch himself was a slave to the national deity (Ashur in Assyria, Marduk in Babylon).

9:38. seals. Seals were very commonly used throughout the ancient Near East from Egypt to Iran from the fourth millennium B.C. onward. Literally thousands of seals have been found in archaeological excavations. They were used as a mark of authenticity and prestige, to witness a document or to prevent anyone from entering doors or opening other receptacles. The most common form of seal in Mesopotamia was the cylinder seal, but Israelites favored stamp seals. Most seals were engraved by a skilled seal-cutter, using a variety of materials. Hundreds of Hebrew seals have been found, as well as over one thousand jar handles with seal impressions.

10:1-39
Decision of the People

10:30. endogamy clause. The legal background for this clause is found in Ezra 9:1-2. Since the Law of the Pentateuch, Israelites had been forbidden to take foreign wives (see comment on Deut 7:3). The Israelites had intermingled with the nations about them and thus had been contaminated by their religious practices. It was common among ancient Near Eastern societies to marry inside one's clan (endogamy) or to make a marriage alliance with another friendly group. The Israelites were thus encouraged to marry within their "spiritual" clan (i.e., the worshipers of the Lord). In this time period, however, the issues went beyond spiritual homogeneity. Election and covenant issues made landownership theologically significant. Intermarriage was one of the ways that land tenure could be jeopardized and, with it, covenant benefits. The Elephantine texts (Jewish texts less than fifty years removed from Ezra and Nehemiah) show how land became redistributed and lost to a family through foreign women marrying into Jewish families and becoming enfranchised.

10:31. Sabbath regulations. Sabbath regulations prohibited Israelites from engaging in their vocations on the seventh day. At first this would have included mostly farming and herding activity. As Israel developed a merchant economy in the monarchy period, the prohibition had been applied to engaging in the vocation of trade, that is, in the selling of merchandise. In this postexilic period the question arose whether buying of merchandise from those not prohibited from selling it (foreign merchants) was permitted on the Sabbath. It could be argued that buying is not the exercise of one's vocation. Nevertheless, the community leaders extended the Sabbath prohibitions to apply to selling as well as buying.

10:31. seventh year regulations. The "seventh" year described here is likely the sabbatical year described in Exodus 23:10-11 and Deuteronomy 15:1-3 (on which see comments). It is speculated that Nehemiah was combining the two and perhaps even regulating their observance so that everyone was practicing the two together at the same time. This would certainly have made the law more enforceable.

10:32-33. temple tax. Originally there was no annual tax levied for the upkeep of the temple. Exodus 30:13 prescribes one-half of a shekel to be paid to the temple at the time of a census, but that is a different matter. Though the Persian kings Darius I and Artaxerxes I had promised to assist the building of the temple (see Ezra 6:9-10; 7:21-24), they had not endowed its operation budget (though Ezra 7:21-22 may refer to some ongoing aid). Coinage had become the economic standard during the reigns of Darius and Xerxes. The development of a cash-based economy during this period required cash support for the operations of the temple. The third of a shekel mentioned here was probably due to an adjustment made to adapt to the monetary system used in the Persian empire. At this time the basic coin of the Persian empire, the daric, weighed 8.4 grams and was equated to the Babylonian shekel. The Aramaic *zuz* was one-half of that and equivalent to the Greek drachma. The standard Israelite shekel, however, had long been 11.4 grams (as was the Assyrian shekel), but there was also a royal shekel ("heavy" shekel in Ugaritic terminology), which is represented in archaeological finds as weighing 12.5 to 12.8 grams. Therefore a *zuz*, at 4.2 grams, could be roughly equated to one-third of the traditional royal shekel.

10:34. wood provision. In the monarchy period the temple had sufficient staff to gather the wood that was necessary. Cutting wood was one of the jobs assigned to the Gibeonites in Joshua 9:27. In this period, however, the temple is significantly understaffed, so an alternate plan is necessary for the provision of the wood.

10:35. firstfruits commitment. The general religious principle involved in offering the

"firstfruit" (animal, vegetable or human) to the gods is based on the promotion of fertility. From earliest times, the assumption is made that the gods create life in its various forms and that they expect to receive as their due offering the first of the harvest or the firstfruit of the womb. Israelite religion tempered this by allowing for the redemption of some animals and all human firstborn males (Ex 13:11-13; Num 18:14-15). The giving of the firstfruits could also take on a political character. The Assyrian annals of Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) contain his command that conquered peoples pay their firstfruit offerings of sheep, wine and dates to the gods of Assyria. In Israel the firstfruits of the harvest were traditionally part of the support of the priests. Numbers 18:12-13 specifies grain, wine and oil. Here fruit trees are added to the list.

10:36. firstborn commitment. Since human children and unclean animals were redeemed, this practice provided for some "cash flow" for the temple operations. For more information on the laws concerning the firstborn see comment on Exodus 13:1-3.

10:37. offerings to priests and Levites. Whether or not the worshiper ate a portion of the sacrifice, a number of the sacrifices provided an opportunity for the priests to eat. This was also true in Babylonian practice, according to which the king, the priest and other temple personnel received portions of the sacrifices. As early as Sumerian texts it was considered a grievous crime to eat that which had been set apart as holy. Most peoples in other ancient Near Eastern religious traditions were required to maintain temples in much the same way. The food was to be "consumed" by the god(s) but, of course, was instead eaten by the temple personnel. For more information on tithing see comment on Numbers 18:31-32.

11:1-36
Populating Jerusalem

11:1-2. why would people not want to live in Jerusalem? The mere fact that lots were cast implies that some were forced to live in Jerusalem. Lot casting was considered in the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean world as a way of allowing God (or the gods) to determine the fate of a certain situation. Thus the people who were chosen to go considered it a divine mandate (for more information about the casting of lots see comments on Josh 7:14-18 and Jonah 1:7-10). Since Jerusalem had been devastated and was the point of great contention between the Jews and neighboring peoples, it was not an attractive nor a safe place in which to live in the fifth century B.C. Additionally, it can be understood that people would not be anxious to abandon their farms and jeopardize their landholdings.

11:23. singers under the king's orders. The king referred to here is most likely the Persian king Artaxerxes I, who was interested in the continuation of the cultic practices (see Ezra 4:8-10; 7:21-24). Most ancient Near Eastern kings from the third millennium B.C. onward employed professional singers in their courts. For instance, Zimri-Lim of Mari (c. 1780-1760 B.C.) had a large retinue of singers connected to his court. For singers in Israel see comment on 2 Chronicles 29:27-30.

11:24. the king's agent. There is evidence in the sources dealing with the Persian empire of high-level emissaries who represented the king in the various satrapies. They occasionally appear in the Persian court to make appeals on behalf of the satrap, and they report to the king about activities in the region and advise him on local matters.

11:25-36. territorial settlements. All of the names of the cities in the list appear in Joshua 15, except for Dibon, Jeshua and Meconah. The list shows that the Jews lived in a comparatively large area. The Judah list focuses on the Negev and the Shephelah, while the Benjamin list covers the central hills and the coastal plain. This may offer the parameters of the Persian province.

12:1-26
List of Priests and Levites

12:8. in charge of songs of thanksgiving. There is a detailed account of the organization of the Levitical choir and orchestra by David in 1 Chronicles 15:16-24. However, few other descriptions of the music of the court are given. There may have been an equal number of males and females in the choir (see Ezra 2:65). Some have argued that the choir actually chanted rather than sang. Apart from this passage we have no evidence of the responsibilities of the person in charge of the songs of thanksgiving. Musicians are counted among temple personnel in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions and included both male and female singers. A chief singer is mentioned in one text from Nimrud.

12:24. instructions of David. The only instructions for worship associated with David are those found throughout 1-2 Chronicles (e.g., see 1 Chron 15—16; 23—29).

12:25. gatekeepers who guarded the storerooms at gates. For a discussion of the func-

tion of the gatekeepers see comment on 1 Chronicles 9:22-27.

12:27-47

Dedication of the Walls

12:27. cymbals, harps and lyres. For information concerning musical instruments see the comments on 2 Chronicles 5:12 and 29:25. The terminology used for musical instruments in Israel has close parallels with terms used at Ugarit.

12:28-29. surrounding villages. The guild villages are all in close proximity to Jerusalem: Netophah, southeast of Jerusalem, Geba and Azmaveth, two Benjaminite cities six miles north of Jerusalem. Beth Gilgal was likely a longer term for Gilgal near Jericho.

12:30. purifying gates and wall. It is unclear what is meant by the purification of the gates and wall, as it is an unprecedented idea in the Bible. The term used here normally applies to objects used in rituals or to places where rituals were performed, though houses that have mildew needed to be purified (see comments on Lev 14:34-53). If the former is in mind, it may reflect an idea of the sanctity of Jerusalem as a holy city. If the latter, it seeks to remedy the uncleanness brought on at the time the walls were destroyed (specifically by corpse contamination or idolatrous practices performed in the gates or on the walls, or generally from their moral corruption; see Jer 13:27). The purification ritual is not described here. The walls may have been sprinkled, a concept that was practiced with the cleansing of private houses.

12:31-37. placement of first choir. The processions appear to have begun in the vicinity of the Valley Gate on the west side of the city. This first choir procession walked southward (counterclockwise) on the top of the wall to the Dung Gate at the southern tip of the city. They then proceeded north along the eastern flank to the Water Gate directly east across the narrow saddle of the ridge from the Valley Gate. They thus made the circuit of the southern half of the city, the old City of David.

12:38-39. placement of second choir. Another procession followed Nehemiah clockwise from the west to the north and east. They also began around the Valley Gate and did the circuit of the northwest end of the city. The gates and towers are mentioned in Nehemiah 3, while the Ephraim Gate is mentioned in Nehemiah 8:16. The Guard Gate is mentioned only here in Scripture and is generally considered the meeting point of the two groups by the temple complex (the first group arriving from the Water Gate, the second from the Sheep Gate). Each group traveled about two-thirds of a mile on the walls. That distance on the modern ramparts is from the Jaffa Gate to Herod's Gate, which takes about thirty minutes to walk.

13:1-31

Other Reforms

13:1-3. exclusion of foreigners from worship. The law referred to here is Deuteronomy 23:3-6, concerning the exclusion of Ammonites and Moabites from worship. The law was thus interpreted in a wider sense to include any foreigner in the community who did not worship the God of Israel. The Ammonite reference was especially relevant, since Tobiah's Ammonite ancestry was well known (see Neh 2:10).

13:4-5. provisions for Tobiah. For information on Tobiah, see comment on 2:10 (see also 6:17-19). The Persian king, Cambyses, is similarly reported to have purged foreigners from the temple complex at Neith in Egypt.

13:6-7. details of Nehemiah's two terms as governor. Since this section deals with other matters, we are told little of the details of Nehemiah's terms as governor of Judah. Nehemiah was absent from Jerusalem for an undetermined period of time. Since he had to ask permission to return, it probably was not the intention of Artaxerxes I to have him return for a second term of office. The text does not say nor imply that he returned in the same capacity of governor. It is possible he returned specifically because of the aforementioned circumstances concerning Tobiah.

13:16. men from Tyre. The men of Tyre were famous Phoenician merchants (see Ezek 27:12-36; 28:16) who traded throughout the entire Mediterranean world. Ancient economists had concluded that it was not enough to have caravans traveling the cities and towns of the region. They went the next step of establishing merchant colonies in the large trading centers as an ongoing outlet for their merchandise. There was evidently a colony of Tyrians in Jerusalem who had been permitted to operate outside the parameters of Jewish law. See the comment on 10:31.

13:24. language of Ashdod, language of Judah. Though Ashdod had been a Philistine city in preexilic times, it is not known what language was spoken here during this period. They would have spoken either a dialect of Aramaic, the diplomatic and trade language of the Persian empire, or some generic Canaanite dialect. The "language of Judah" refers to biblical Hebrew (see comment on 2 Chron 32:18).

13:28. Sanballat. See comment on Nehemiah 2:10.

ESTHER

1:1-22
Vashti Deposed

1:1. Xerxes. Xerxes, the Greek name for the king the Hebrew text refers to as Ahasuerus, ruled Persia from 486 to 465 B.C. His father was Darius the Great, and his mother was Atossa, the daughter of Cyrus. He inherited an extensive empire from his father but was unable to expand its borders during his reign despite several attempts. His policies toward religious groups changed dramatically from the tolerance that had characterized Cyrus and Darius. His own religion, like that of his father, was Zoroastrianism. He was more sensitive to religion as a basis for rebellion and was known to have destroyed many temples in an effort to curb nationalism. The lack of new conquests also created economic tensions that had not previously existed. The wars with Greece, rather than supplying booty and tribute to the treasuries and expanding trade opportunities, became a drain on the economy. There are over twenty inscriptions associated with Xerxes, the most important known as the Daiva Inscription. For more information see comment on Ezra 4:6.

1:1. 127 provinces. The primary administrative geographical division in the Persian empire was the satrapy. The number of these varied between twenty and thirty-one, so the text is not referring to satrapies. It is likely a reference to smaller administrative districts or to the people groups who constituted the empire.

1:1. India to Cush. The territory of the Persian empire extended from the Indus Valley in northwest India, across the Near East and into northern Africa, including Egypt, Libya and Cush (modern Sudan). In the northwest it included Thrace, the Scythians and all of Asia Minor, and ranged east across Armenia, Urartu and Bactria.

1:2. citadel of Susa. The ten-acre citadel is located on an elevated area on the northern point of the site, the Apadana. The palace was built by Darius and used by several of his successors. Excavation of the palace has identified many of its features, including the audience hall, where the Persian kings held court. It was a square building over 350 feet on each side, featuring seventy-two stone columns each estimated at sixty-five to eighty feet tall. Greater Susa, located about 225 miles east of Babylon, was built on three hills overlooking the Shaur River. It had long been the capital of ancient Elam. The diamond-shaped mound is about two and a quarter miles in circumference, covering nearly 250 acres. An additional twenty acres comprises the merchant quarter across the valley to the east. Susa served as the capital for the Persian kings only in the winter months. Since temperatures soared to as high as 140 degrees in the summer the court moved north to Ecbatana.

1:3. chronology. Xerxes came to the throne upon the death of his father in November of 486. The third year of his reign was therefore March 483 to March 482 B.C. The main events that are known from this period are the two revolts in Babylon, a minor one in 484 and a more significant one in August 482.

1:3. officials on guest list. It was common for kings to sponsor lavish parties. Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal once claimed to have entertained nearly seventy thousand for a ten-day extravaganza. The guest list details people from all over Assyria in addition to foreign dignitaries, people from the capital city (Kalah) and palace dependents. Persian banquets were known to host up to fifteen thousand guests. The guests in Esther include the aristocracy of Media and Persia, the courtiers who were ranking officials in the administration, the military brass and perhaps the provincial governors.

1:4. six-month display. Verse 5 speaks of another banquet, one for the citadel staff. The

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HERODOTUS

Herodotus was a Greek historian who lived in the fifth century B.C. He is best known for his *Histories* (written about 445 B.C.), which document the history of the Persian Wars against the Greeks, including the battles at Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis. As a contemporary of the events, he provides valuable information concerning the history and culture of both Greece and Persia during this period. Though he is considered too willing to accept the validity of rumors, his work is valuable both for its reports on events and its descriptions (for instance, of the city of Babylon). Above all, Herodotus is valued as a great storyteller. Though his stories can at times be contradictory, he is considered an important chronicler of events, places and practices. There are numerous places in the book of Esther where comparison can be made with the information contained in Herodotus. These comparisons sometimes clarify what is found in the book, while at other times they can bring confusion.

citadel was a residence only for the king's household and administration, but the wording here suggests that lower ranking officials who served in the citadel were also included. The six-month display of the treasury stretches between the two banquets. The practice of showing off the royal treasury is also seen in Israel (Is 39:2).

1:5. enclosed garden of king's palace. The enclosed garden is connected to the *bitan* (NIV: "palace"), which is a technical term from the Akkadian, *bitanu,* a separate building in the palace complex. The *bitanu* in Esarhaddon's palace complex measured 150 by 50 feet. It is understood as a gazebo-style pavilion reserved for royal use. This building was often surrounded by a private garden planted with fruit trees and shade trees, with watercourses, pools and paths—more like a park. Its arboretum often contained many exotic trees and plants. Such gardens have been excavated at Pasargadae, Cyrus the Great's capital city.

1:6. garden decor. The main area for the banquet was a large colonnaded courtyard outside the pavilion paved with mosaics. In the classical world mosaics were very popular. The stone was not artificially colored, but rather stones of different shades were imported from wherever they could be found to give color to the mosaic. The earliest mosaic floors were made from colored pebbles laid out in geometric designs. Only later did they begin cutting the stone into cubes (tessellation) and forming them into pictures. The earliest examples of mosaics in the Near East date to the eighth century B.C. (Gordion in Asia Minor), though the art of inlay was known as early as the third millennium (as in the royal standard of Ur). A number of the words used in the description of the garden furnishings are obscure, but the extravagance was clearly spectacular. The fabrics are the best available and colored with the most expensive dyes (see comment on Num 4:6). The variety of vessels used to serve the wine (not goblets for drinking as in the NIV) was typical of Persian elegance.

1:6. marble. Some translations call this alabaster. Marble had to be imported from Greece and is not evident in the ancient world until its introduction into Phoenicia in the Persian period. Marble capitals (the decorative tops of pillars) are not attested archaeologically in the Near East until the first or second century A.D. Oriental alabaster was a calcium carbonate-like marble, unlike European alabaster, which is gypsum. It was used for fine vessels throughout the region during the biblical period, as well as for columns in architecture. In Sennacherib's "palace without rival" mostly white limestone was used, though he had some access to alabaster.

1:7-8. drinking protocol. The alleged protocol for these gala affairs was that when the king drank, everyone drank. In contrast, here the guests were not obliged to follow that guideline. They were not required to follow the king's lead by drinking every time he did, and there was an "open bar" policy that allowed them to drink freely. Examples of beautifully crafted golden drinking cups have been found dating to this period. One famous one features a winged lion whose hindquarters flare up into a goblet shape.

1:9. Vashti. Vashti is never mentioned in Herodotus, nor is she known from contemporary Persian records. Her name is a typical Persian name, but no further information is available. In Herodotus's account, Xerxes' wife is named Amestris. She is the mother of Artaxerxes, the successor of Xerxes, who was born about 483. Ctesias records several examples of the cruel power she exercised as queen mother during the reign of Artaxerxes, as well as her death in 424. Some linguists believe that Vashti and Amestris are the respective Hebrew and Greek attempts at rendering the same Persian name.

1:9. separate banquet for women. It is known that Persian queens had considerable estates and were well provisioned. On the other hand, there is no documentation for the women eating separately from the men or banquets that are just for one group or the other.

1:9. Xerxes' harem. Xerxes followed a policy of monogamy, but that did not eliminate his harem. Though he had only one wife at a time, his harem consisted of over 360 concubines. His many affairs were likewise well documented and were the cause of much court intrigue.

1:10. high in spirits. Herodotus reports that the Persians typically made important decisions while drunk and then validated them once they were sober.

1:10. seven eunuchs. Eunuchs were highly valued in government service in many varied roles. The great demand for eunuchs led to young boys being included in the tribute paid to Persia so that they could be castrated and trained for government service. They had no families to distract them from their service. They were often entrusted with the care and supervision of the royal harem. Having been castrated, they posed no threat to the women of the harem and could not engender children by the harem women who might be mistaken for royal heirs. They would be less likely to become involved in conspiracies, because

they would have no heirs to put on the throne. Assyria, Urartu and Media had all made use of eunuchs in government offices prior to the Persian period. Four of the names in this list have been attested in Elamite documents and can therefore be considered authentic names of the period. Herodotus names the chief eunuch of Xerxes Hermotimus. Herodotus describes the men surrounding Xerxes as cringing, fawning leeches who tell the king only what they think he wants to hear.

1:11. display her beauty. One need not think that Vashti was asked to do anything immodest or morally compromising (as early rabbinic interpretation assumed). In some eastern societies, the harem was carefully sequestered and the law prohibited anyone from looking on the faces of the royal women. Persian women of this period went about in closed carriages so as not to be exposed to the gaze of the general public. If this is the case, as Josephus reported it was, Xerxes would be requesting Vashti to do something beneath her station and demeaning to her royal personage. Exposing her to the gaze of the entire citadel population would be a far greater humiliation than not bowing to an honored official, but would be a similar violation of protocol.

1:13-14. consulting experts in matters of law. Herodotus reports that the Persian kings had a panel of judges with lifetime appointments whom the king relied upon for interpretations of the law. Xenophon likewise confirms this panel of seven principal advisors.

1:19. laws of the Medes and the Persians. No concept of "laws of the Medes and Persians that cannot be changed" has been documented outside the books of Daniel and Esther. Nonetheless, a tradition at least as early as the time of Hammurabi (eighteenth century B.C.) recognized that a judge could not change a decision that had been made. In this sense, we may be dealing with a ruling rather than a law. Greek sources conflict with one another, as Herodotus indicates significant freedom on the part of Persian kings to change their minds, while Diodorus Siculus cites an instance where Darius III could not. Certainly no lower official could countermand the decrees of the Persian king, and the king himself may have thought it humiliating to go back and reconsider something he had already decreed. The royal code of honor would have made it out of the question for the king to rescind an order.

1:19. Vashti's punishment. The punishment decreed for Vashti is not execution or divorce. She was simply demoted within the harem so that she would have no chance of an official presence in Xerxes court. This would effectively strip her of power and prestige, and remove her from a position where she could hope to receive favors from the king.

1:20. circulation of dispatches. The Persian Empire was renowned for its communication system—similar to that used by the Pony Express in the American West over two millennia later. Herodotus describes the system as featuring stations for every day of the journey with a man and a horse for each day. He even comments that neither snow, rain, heat or darkness deters them from their task.

2:1-18

Esther Becomes Queen

2:1. time interval. The gathering referred to in chapter one is generally assumed to involve planning for the Greek campaign. Herodotus mentions such a conference at which Xerxes makes a stirring speech urging action against the Greeks. The campaign was launched in the spring of 481, Xerxes' fifth year. For over two years he was engaged in the west, as the Greeks and Persians fought in the Battles of Thermopylae (August 28, 480), Salamis (Sept 22, 480), Plataea and Mykale (August 479). In the fall of 480 Xerxes left Greece but wintered in Sardis on the west coast of Asia Minor. He did not return to Susa until the fall of 479, about the seventh month of his seventh year. Perhaps it was during his winter in Sardis that he began to miss Vashti and put the plan into action to replace her.

2:3. beauty search. This practice is only documented in the time of the Sasanian king, Chosroes II (about A.D. 600), when each satrap was commanded to seek out beautiful girls to be sent up to the king.

2:3. harem life. Life in the royal harem clearly had its advantages and disadvantages. While the women enjoyed every sort of material comfort and were indulged and pampered in many ways, they had no recourse for intimate relationship with a husband. Their opportunities to be intimate with the king would have been rare and would offer no companionship. Undoubtedly they found companions among the other women of the harem or even occasionally with the eunuchs entrusted with the care of the harem. But the special relationship found with a husband, raising children within a family setting—these pleasures were denied them.

2:5. Benjaminite son of Kish. This is a familiar pedigree—King Saul had also been a Benjaminite son of Kish, and Shimei is known as a relative of Saul's in the time of David (2 Sam

16:5). It is difficult to know whether the Kish and Shimei referred to here are actually the characters from the books of Samuel or just ironically share the same names. Given the extensive use of irony throughout the book of Esther, the latter would not be out of place. For further intriguing connections see the comment on 3:1.

2:6. chronological perspective. Chapter 2 is taking place in 479/478 B.C. The exile of Jehoiachin under Nebuchadnezzar took place in 597 B.C., about 120 years earlier. For this reason it is logical to assume that it was one of the listed ancestors who had been taken captive in 597 rather than Mordecai himself.

2:9. special food. This simply indicates that Esther was put on a regulated diet provided through the palace kitchens.

2:12. nature of beauty treatments. One common suggestion is that a process was used in which the woman was daily exposed to the smoke of burning spices so that both her clothing and her skin would absorb the aroma. Archaeologists have discover many cosmetic burners that they believe were used in this way. While this would suit the details given in the passage, the actual practice is not attested until modern times. Ointments were used to moisturize the skin, which easily became dry in the arid climate of the Near East. Myrrh was imported from southern Arabia (modern Somalia and Yemen), where it was manufactured from the resin collected from *commiphora* bushes when they were tapped.

2:14. concubines. Concubines were girls who came to a marriage without a dowry. They had not been taken into the harem in connection with political alliances with other countries nor for associations to be made between the crown and a wealthy family. As concubines they would continue to be supported as a member of the royal household but would be unlikely to enjoy any of the king's attention in the future (see comment on 2:3).

2:16. chronological placement. Xerxes had returned from his stay in Sardis (in connection with the Greek campaign) by the seventh month of his seventh year (see comment on 2:1). Esther was summoned in the tenth month of that same year. This would be January-February 478. Herodotus gives little information concerning Xerxes after the Greek campaign ends, so there is no detailed record of the events of this period.

2:17. Esther in Persian records. There are no contemporary records from either Persian inscriptions or Greek historians that mention Esther or any of the events in which she was involved.

2:19-23

Mordecai Reports a Conspiracy

2:19. king's gate. Excavations at Susa have identified a monumental gatehouse about one hundred yards east of the main palace. The passageway through the gate was about fifty feet long. Four towers graced the outside of the structure, and four pillars (about forty feet high) decorated the 12,000-square-foot chamber through which the passageway entered the palace complex. An inscription ordered by Xerxes at the gate identifies it as having been built by his father Darius.

2:23. hanged on a gallows. "Gallows" is somewhat interpretive since the Hebrew text vaguely indicates a wooden object. From what is known of Persian practice, this likely does not refer to the actual means of execution. Instead, it is generally agreed that this reflects the practice of impaling the corpse of the executed victim on a pointed stake in public view. This practice is known in Persia, in, for example, Amestris's execution of Inaros (leader of a Libyan revolt) during the reign of her son, Artaxerxes. The victim was thus denied proper burial, as the birds and insects devoured the remains. Hanging is unattested as a form of execution in the ancient world. If a form of execution is intended here, it would most likely be crucifixion (as interpreted by the Septuagint), which is identified by Herodotus as a Persian practice. But it must be noted that for Herodotus even crucifixion could be something done to a corpse.

2:23. royal annals. Royal annals were kept throughout the ancient Near East, with most examples coming from mid-second millennium Hittite kings and from ninth- to sixth-century Assyria and Babylon. The annals could be represented by annalistic royal inscriptions that give detailed accounts of military campaigns. In addition there are court chronicles that give information of important events in each year. As of yet no annals from Achaemenid Persia have been discovered.

3:1-15

Haman's Plot

3:1. Haman the Agagite. Just as Mordecai was identified in such a way as to evoke memories of King Saul (see comment on 2:5), Haman is now introduced in a way that associates him with Saul's ancient protagonist, Agag, king of the Amalekites (see 1 Sam 15:7-9, 32-33).

3:1. Haman's office. Though no title is given to Haman in the text of Esther, those who study the book often title him the vizier. In

Persian reliefs the high-ranking official pictured in the king's presence is designated the *hazarapatish* (often translated "chiliarch") and holds the king's weapons. This officer commanded the royal guard and determined who could or could not get in to see the king. Another important official in the Persian court was designated the "King's Eye." Xenophon reports that this office observed the peoples of the provinces and reported what he saw.

3:2. homage protocol. Herodotus reports that the Persians of equal rank greeted one another with a kiss on the mouth. Someone of slightly lower status would greet a superior with a kiss on the cheeks. If there was a great difference in their status, prostration was the required protocol. Mordecai's refusal is unlikely to concern inhibitions about worship, for there is no suggestion that Mordecai had trouble prostrating himself before the king. The Israelites were known to show deference through this sort of obeisance. Though obeisance could be an act of worship, that was because it was a way of showing reverence and respect. There was no inferred deification here. More likely is that Mordecai was not willing to acknowledge the wide difference in status between himself and Haman that the act would have implied.

3:7. chronology. The twelfth year of Xerxes is 474 B.C., so Esther has been queen for about four years. The month of Nisan begins in our March. The month of Adar was the twelfth month, beginning in February.

3:7. casting of the *pur*. *Pur(u)* is the Babylonian word for lots. Archaeologists have discovered an example of these clay cubes. The lot of Iahali, the vizier of Shalmaneser III (ninth century) measures about one inch per side. Though shaped like dice (which go back at least to the third millennium), this has an inscription (prayers for good luck) rather than dots. The purpose of the casting of lots is to determine which would be a favorable day for the type of action that Haman plans to undertake. One speculation concerning a way the month could be determined would be by casting the *pur* on a board that had each month's name written on it to see in which space it would land. Typically the same answer would have to come three consecutive throws in order to be considered valid.

3:8-9. Persian intolerance. The Persians are often considered by historians to be relatively tolerant. This assessment is supported mainly by the policy of Cyrus allowing exiled peoples to return and rebuild their temples. But it need not be assumed that an attitude of tolerance motivated this decision. There are economic, political and religious factors that would commend such a policy. It had now been sixty years since Cyrus's decree, and it had become obvious that tolerance did not eliminate revolt. In general in the ancient world, religious persecution, where it existed, had political or economic roots (perhaps today is no different). As Haman presents the problem, it is not a religious group or worship practice that needs to be eradicated, but an ethnic group with customs that preserve a nationalism whose fervor has brought it to the brink of revolt.

3:9. amount provided by Haman. Ten thousand talents of silver (according to the standard set by Darius) is about 333 tons. At current market value of roughly five dollars an ounce, this would be the equivalent of about $5.6 million. A more useful understanding, however, can be gained when we compare this amount to contemporary quantities. Herodotus reports the amounts of annual tribute paid by twenty provinces to Darius. The highest paying province, Assyria-Babylonia, paid one thousand talents (thirty-three tons). The total tribute income from these twenty provinces is the equivalent of about thirteen thousand talents of silver (by the standards of Darius). This then is a significant amount that Haman feels is necessary to fund the extent of military activity he has in mind (the last phrase in v. 9 makes it clear that the money is offered for funding purposes). An even more interesting comparison can be made to the contribution offered by the Lydian, Pythius, to finance Xerxes' war effort in Greece. Pythius, reported in Herodotus to be the second wealthiest man in the world (after Xerxes), had a fortune valued at 16,400 talents of silver, which he placed entirely at Xerxes' disposal. For one final comparison, Thucy-dides reports that Athens, in its golden age, had a total reserve of 9,000 talents of silver (= 10,440 by the Persian standard).

3:10. signet ring. Current evidence suggests that the early Persian kings used cylinder seals for empire business and stamp seals or signet rings for personal business, though the latter were growing in usage through this period. A signet ring held the official seal of the king by which he authorized the business of the empire. Only a few of these have been found by archaeologists. The seals were typically made of chalcedony and featured pictures of the king doing heroic acts (like killing beasts) under the protection of the winged sun disk (representing Ahura Mazda). Many of the Persepolis fortification tablets contained stamp seal impressions.

3:11. keep the money. The phrase NIV trans-

lates "keep the money" actually says "the silver is yours" (as several commentaries observe) and suggests that Xerxes thus approved the expenditure (notice that 4:7 assumes the money has been transferred). It is unclear whether Haman is providing the funds from his personal fortune or from funds that he has access to. Each district had its own treasury and staff. If Haman was a provincial official, he may be transferring funds from his provincial treasury into the royal treasury, from which it was disbursed for the military expedition under the auspices of the crown. The Persepolis treasury texts illustrate the role of the treasurer, who assigns work groups and disburses funds for their rations.

3:12. chronology. Passover, that great celebration of deliverance of the Israelites, was celebrated on the fourteenth of Nisan. The edict was written on the thirteenth of Nisan, so it began to be distributed on the fourteenth. Thus, just as the Jews were celebrating deliverance from their great enemy of the past, the Egyptians, they were learning of a new plot from a new enemy.

3:13. nature of the decree. It is clear from verse nine that formal military action was intended (NIV: "for the men who carry out this business"; the same phrase is used in 9:3 for the ones who helped the Jews). Since each of the provinces provided troops for the Persian army, there were garrisons placed in each of the nations that made up the provinces. We do not need to assume that a decree went out to the general public encouraging and allowing anybody who wanted to kill Jews. Rather, all of the troops of every people, in every garrison, in every province were put on alert for concentrated military action on the given day. It is not necessarily confined to a "single" day. The Hebrew expression is best rendered "the same day" meaning that this was a coordinated action--all the provinces were acting at the same time.

4:1-17
Esther's Help Enlisted

4:1. torn clothes, sackcloth and ashes. The practice of putting dirt, dust or ashes on one's head was a typical sign of mourning throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament period. It is a practice also known from Mesopotamia and Canaan. Many mourning rites function as a means for the living to identify with the dead. It is easy to see how dust on the head and torn clothes would be symbolic representations of burial and decay. Sackcloth is made of goat or camel hair and was coarse and uncomfortable. In many cases the sackcloth was only a loin covering. Persian mourning as recorded by Herodotus included tearing clothes, weeping and wailing.

4:2. limitations on going beyond king's gate. Herodotus identifies the king's gate as a place where supplicants stand and wail when they are victims of an injustice created by the system that they desire the king to rectify. It would be logical that there would be restrictions against such supplicants crowding into the palace complex, but no such law is known from ancient sources.

4:4. maids and eunuchs. These are the two categories of personal attendants for the queen. For more information on eunuchs see comment on 1:10.

4:11. limited access to king. It was a common necessity of proper court function that there must be limited access to the king, and Herodotus gives indications that the same was true of the Persian rulers. But the details concerning the death penalty and the gold scepter are not described. Many commentators have wondered why Esther could not have simply gone through proper channels to secure an audience with the king or perhaps even waited longer to see if she would be summoned (the set time was many months away). If, however, Haman holds the office of *hazarapatish* (see comment on 3:1), she would have to make arrangements through him and thereby jeopardize the whole plan.

4:11. gold scepter. Persian reliefs of kings in audience scenes depict them holding long scepters.

4:11. Esther's lack of access. Whereas one might think that the queen and chief wife of the king would have many opportunities to have a passing word with the king, such was not necessarily the case. The queen did not regularly share the king's bed, nor were their meals taken together. She had her own private quarters. While she could be invited to join the king in the audience chamber, she did not have unlimited access.

4:16. fasting. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with making a request before God. The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about their spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and humbling oneself before God (Ps 69:10).

5:1-14
Esther's Request and Haman's Plot

5:1. topography of palace. Since the king is on

his throne, this is undoubtedly the audience chamber. Despite the extensive excavations at Susa and at palaces at other Persian sites, the terminology used here is too vague to attach it to specific areas of the palace complex. See comment on 1:2 for what has been found of the palace complex at Susa.

5:3. Xerxes' granting of requests. Herodotus tells of two occasions when Xerxes made open-ended offers to grant requests and ended up regretting it. On the first occasion his offer was intended to win the favors of his intended mistress, Artaynte. Unfortunately for everyone she requested his beautiful robe that had been handwoven by his wife, Amestris. Amestris therefore discovered Xerxes' affair and sought revenge. She gained it when, on his birthday, she was granted a request and asked for Artaynte's mother (whom she believed to be behind the whole fiasco). She had the woman brutally mutilated, and this led the woman's husband, Xerxes' brother, to instigate a revolt. The offer of half the kingdom is known as early as Neo-Assyrian literature, when it is suggested that the Assyrian king would have given away half the kingdom for someone to cure his son's illness.

5:4. banquets in the Persian world. Banquets were popular among the Persian royalty and were sumptuous affairs. Herodotus describes a typical birthday banquet as featuring a whole cooked animal (ox, horse, ostrich, camel or donkey). Persians were especially fond of desserts and large quantities of wine. Musicians and attendants to care for every detail were present. Their feasts tended to be dignified rather than disorderly, and did not honor or encourage the cycle of gluttony and disgorging.

5:14. gallows. See comment on 2:23.

6:1-14
Haman Honors Mordecai

6:1. circumstance in Esther. In the book of Esther, circumstance is a powerful literary motif. While men such as Haman try to harness circumstance to their advantage through schemes and omens, the Jewish audience would have seen circumstance as being in the hands of God who works behind the scenes. Of interest, then, are the words that Herodotus places in the mouth of Artabanus, an adviser to Xerxes, on the threshold of what will become a disastrous Greek campaign: "Men are at the mercy of circumstance, which never bends to human will." Haman is about to learn the same lesson.

6:1. book of the chronicles. See comment on 2:23.

6:7. royal robe. The Persian king's robe is described by Xenophon as purple with gold embroidery. In Plutarch's *Themistocles*, Demaratus, the exiled king of Sparta (contemporary of Xerxes), requests as his gift to ride through Sardis wearing the crown of the Persian kings. Plutarch also reports that Artaxerxes once honored a request for his royal robe but qualified the gift with the command that it not be worn. Xerxes had a famous robe featured in one of Herodotus's stories as a gift begrudgingly and fatefully given to his lover (see comment on 5:3).

6:8. royal crest on the horse. Persian reliefs at Persepolis depict a horse with a crest perched between its ears.

7:1-10
Haman's Fall

7:7. palace garden. The banquet was probably being held in the same location as the banquet in chapter 1 (see comment on 1:5).

7:8. couch where Esther reclined. Persian style was to recline on couches while eating. Haman, in his desperation, had violated strict protocol about approaching the person of the queen. To be found on the same couch on which any member of the harem was reclining had the direst consequences. In eleventh-century Assyria, no one could approach within seven paces of a member of the harem.

7:8. covered face. Greeks and Romans typically covered the head of criminals condemned to death, but if that were the case here we would expect the word "head" instead of "face." In an Assyrian elegy covering the face is seen as a treatment of the dead. Since the hanging is generally considered to be a treatment of the corpse rather than a means of execution (see comment on 2:23), this face covering can be presumed to indicate Haman has died. The king does not issue a death sentence.

8:1-17
Deliverance for the Jews

8:1. Haman's estate given to Esther. Herodotus gives examples of confiscation of the property of those executed by order of the crown. That Xerxes would have been likely to grant Esther such property is demonstrated by another example from Herodotus. After Artaynte had asked for the cloak that Amestris had woven for Xerxes (see comment on 5:3), the king had offered her whole cities, vast amounts of gold and even her own personal army in an attempt to get the cloak back.

8:1. Mordecai in Persian records. There is a Persian official, Marduka, identified in a tablet from Borsippa, who is sometimes equated with Mordecai by commentators. Marduka is an accountant who lived during the last days of Darius and the early days of Xerxes. The name occurs frequently on the Elamite Persepolis tablets dating between 505 and 499 B.C. and belongs to several different individuals. Whether any of these individuals represents a Mordecai before his elevation cannot be determined. There are no sources that refer to him in the elevated position in which the book places him.
8:2. signet ring. See comment on 3:10.
8:9. chronology. Sivan 23 fell in the month of June 474 B.C., seventy days after the issuing of the edict.
8:9-10. Comments on the provinces and the extent of the empire can be found in 1:1. For comment on the signet ring see 3:10. For the courier service see comment on 1:20.
8:11. strategy of decree. Since the previous edict could not simply be revoked, the strategy was to offset the first by the second. The first had removed the protection of the empire from the Jews and had provided the financing for military action against them. The second edict allowed the Jews to form their own militia groups and, in effect, withdrew the royal protection (though not the funding) from those who had been hired against the Jews. Royal support was neutralized so that action against the enemies of the Jews would not be construed as rebellion against the crown. This puts Haman's crew in the same situation as the Jews, making them targets that could be attacked without fear of reprisals from the government.
8:15. Mordecai's garments. The colors and materials of Mordecai's regalia identified him with nobility and high political station. The royal colors could only be worn by those closely associated with the king. The gold "crown" does not designate rule but favor. So Herodotus reports that Xerxes rewards a ship master whose advice had saved the ship from sinking with a gold crown. It is gold, so it is not just a turban. But since this type of headgear is generally bound on, a coronet worn on the forehead is most likely.
8:17. became Jews. This word occurs only here in the Bible and has been interpreted in a number of different ways. The non-Jewish population could "become Jews" by conversion, by claim ("made themselves out to be Jews" because of the potential benefits) or by association ("sided with the Jews"). The last would explain the upcoming victory of the Jews, as they would have had many willing participants in their militia groups.

9:1-17
Victory for the Jews

9:1. chronology. This is now late February or early March of the year 473 B.C.
9:1-10. enemies of the Jews. The enemies of the Jews are those who are still engaged in Haman's plot against them. They are groups of mercenaries or garrison troops who had been organized by Haman and funded by him for this military action. Verses 7-10 suggest that Haman's sons had carried through with the plot of their father. Herodotus tells how during the reign of Darius a high-ranking official and close associate of the king was judged to be involved in a revolt. As a result most of his family was executed. Additionally Herodotus tells the fascinating story of how two magi attempted to seize the throne after the death of Cambyses and were assassinated by Darius and seven other conspirators. The day turned into a public outrage against all the magi, in which the general populace became involved in killing every magus they could lay hands on. Herodotus even reports that the anniversary of the day became an important holiday in the Persian calendar.

9:18-32
Establishment of Purim

9:18-32. Purim. Though this passage gives account of the origins of the celebration of Purim, the evidence for the celebration's being customary does not come until much later. The apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees (15:36) contains the earliest reference to the festival outside of Esther. There the thirteenth of Adar is identified as the day before Mordecai's day. In the first century A.D. Josephus called the holiday *phrouraious,* and soon after that, the Mishnah uses the term Purim.
9:24-26. *pur.* See comment on 3:7.

10:1-3
Mordecai

10:2. book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia. See comment on 2:23.
10:3. Mordecai's position. Though identified as second to the king, no official position is named for Mordecai. Positions that may be significant enough to designate the official second to the king are discussed in relation to the position of Haman in the comment on 3:1.

POETIC & WISDOM LITERATURE

Introduction

A modern reader acquainted with the book of Psalms would sense some resemblance when reading certain Egyptian or Babylonian material. The attributes that deity is praised for, the issues that induce prayer, the personal and corporate concerns, and even the turn of phrase would ring a chord of familiarity. In any of the ancient Near Eastern societies the gods were considered responsible for maintaining justice and were concerned about justice in the human realm. This was frequently the subject of praise and the basis for petition. Additionally, all peoples shared the plight of humanity and wanted relief from common ills of sickness, oppression, abandonment and life's trials.

Hymns and Prayers

Despite the surface-level similarities, deep-seated differences in the worldviews of Israel and her neighbors can be discerned from this literature. When requests for deliverance and rescue, or mercy and grace, are made, certain assumptions are exposed about how the divine world works and how it interacts with the human world. Both the Israelites and their neighbors believed that they suffered because of deity's inattention. In the ancient world at large it would have been typical to believe that the deity was inattentive because he or she had been offended. Since ethical behavior played a much less significant role in how they understood their responsibilities to deity, the assumption would usually have been that the deity had become offended at not receiving the appropriate attention from the afflicted individual. The worshiper would have little hope of discerning what ritual might

have been omitted or what had caused the offense. The only option was to try to relieve the god's anger rather than specifically redressing the offense. Thus the individual would willingly concede guilt (for who knows what) and direct the prayers, incantations and rituals toward appeasement (soothing the heart of the deity) to try to regain the attentive care and protection of deity.

The Israelites were less convinced that Yahweh's inattention was due to his anger. They readily confessed that they were sometimes mystified as to why he didn't come to their aid. As individuals they were usually not willing to concede guilt but focused their prayers on pleas for vindication. They needed vindication because their suffering would naturally lead others to conclude that God was punishing them for some sin. God's answer to their prayer would demonstrate that he was not angry with them and that they had not committed some grave offense. When they committed offense, it was recognized as concerning ethical failure rather than ritual omission. They expected God's grace to emerge from who he was; they did not expect to be able to induce it by means of gifts and flattery or to conjure it out by magical rites.

Despite these fundamental differences, there is much in the ancient Near Eastern literature that can lend understanding to the biblical psalms. Many biblical metaphors come out of the cultural setting of the time. The imagery of God as, for instance, a shepherd, a rock or a shield will find ready parallels in the literature of Mesopotamia. Phrases such as the "desire of one's heart," being "raised from the pit" or using the winds as messengers have precedents that help explain what Israelites would have meant by them.

There are scores of compositions from all parts of the ancient world that fall into the general category of address to deity. Sumerian, Akkadian and Egyptian literature all have numerous representatives. There is very little hymnic material in Ugaritic or Hittite. In addition to praise hymns, there is an extensive incantation literature in Mesopotamia. These include *ershemmas,* psalms intended to appease an angry deity; *ershaḫungas,* laments concerning sorrow or calamity; *shuillas,* prayers of petition; *shigus* and *dingirshadibbas,* prayer of penitence; and *shurpu,* prayers of purification, just to name a few of the more prominent categories. Egyptian hymns date primarily to the second millennium and are full of descriptive praise. They are grandiose, optimistic and confident, with little trace of lament or petition (with notable exceptions in the Nineteenth-Dynasty texts of Deir el-Medina and Papyrus Anastasi II).

Wisdom Literature

A modern dictionary definition of wisdom would include words such as common sense, prudence, discernment, judgment, insight and understanding. Any reading of the biblical wisdom literature would indicate that these same components would be associated with Israelite wisdom. But we would be mistaken if we thought that wisdom in the ancient world was restricted even to areas such as knowledge, intelligence, education or maturity. Instead, wisdom reflected a much broader concern to understand the place of human beings in the cosmos. It is probably best understood as the ability to bring order out of chaos or to perceive order in the midst of chaos. The wisdom of deity (whether Israelite or otherwise)

was reflected in bringing order out of chaos by organizing, maintaining, sustaining and operating the cosmos. That is why there is such a prominent creation theme in wisdom literature. Wisdom includes understanding the natural world and the human world; society and civilization; the commoner and the king; the world of the gods and the world of nations. Human beings are faced with the challenge of achieving wisdom as they bring order out of chaos in their own world and perceive the order that God has built into the cosmos. This includes ethics and etiquette; philosophy and psychology; and understanding how the world works (science) and how the human heart works (establishing justice).

Egyptian thought is most linked to the order that comes in establishing truth and justice. The term *ma'at* encompasses this aspect of natural, social and political propriety. Mesopotamian literature shows a great concern for understanding the order that can be achieved through the reading of omens, the recitation of incantations and the performance of rituals. This wisdom is the skill that is expressed by the term *nemequ*. Many of the proverbial sayings found in Mesopotamia are connected to omen series and can be classified as omen-wisdom. Omens made observations (often from natural phenomena) and drew conclusions (often about destiny or future happenings). Wisdom likewise makes observations (often about behavior) and draws conclusions (often about inevitable results). Old Testament wisdom literature insists that only the fear of the Lord (as the beginning of wisdom) can bring order out of the chaos of life. Additionally, however, the rituals of the temple were also a means by which order was maintained.

The materials from the ancient Near East include proverbial sayings, admonitions and instructions, and philosophical debate in the form of dialogues, monologues and fables. These deal with many of the same subjects as the Israelite wisdom literature, including, notably, several examples in which a sufferer is exploring the reasons for his suffering.

The problem under discussion that ties all of these "righteous sufferer" works together is theodicy—the justice of deity. Tension is created between divine justice and human suffering based on a belief in what is termed the retribution principle. Simply stated, this principle affirms that the righteous will prosper and the wicked will suffer. If an apparently righteous person is suffering and the retribution principle is accepted, then doubt is cast on God's justice. This tension was not as strongly felt outside of Israel because there was not as strong a belief in the ethical qualities of deity. Furthermore, in a polytheistic setting an individual's behavior might please one deity but offend another. Human suffering for no apparent reason or doubts concerning the existence of divine justice understandably undermined the ability to affirm an ordered world. When life is going wrong, one feels surrounded by chaos rather than order. Mesopotamian wisdom literature typically resolved the problem by objecting that there really was no such thing as a righteous sufferer. They were also willing to accept that the gods were inscrutable.

Instruction literature is most prominent in Egypt, where over a dozen compositions range over more than two thousand years (early third millennium to late first millennium). These compositions demonstrate that Israelite wisdom literature such as that found in Proverbs was part of an international genre (just as the book of Kings claims, 1 Kings 4:30). Ancient Near Eastern instruction literature

includes short, pithy statements like those found in Proverbs 10—29, as well as longer admonitions like Proverbs 1—9. The closest parallel is found in comparing the *Instruction of Amenemope* (about 1200 B.C.) to Proverbs 22:17—24:22, where there are quite a few similar phrases and topics.

The treatise of Ecclesiastes has been related to a subcategory known as "pessimism literature" and exemplified by the Akkadian Dialogue of Pessimism and by the Egyptian Songs of the Harper and *The Dispute Between a Man and His Ba*. These all display a tongue-in-cheek cynicism about life. The Dialogue of Pessimism portrays a conversation between a master and his slave in which the master states his intention to embark on various different enterprises. Each suggestion is met with the slave's affirmation of the benefits of the proposed course of action. In each case the master then changes his mind and decides not to carry out his plans. The slave then replies with an affirmation of this decision as well, citing all the disadvantages the action would have incurred. The topics include going to the palace, eating, hunting, settling down with a family, leading a revolution, loving a woman, offering sacrifice, setting up a creditor business and serving public charity. The piece ends as the master finally asks the slave about a suggested course of action. He responds, "To have my neck and your neck broken and to be thrown into the river is good." The basis of this type of literature is to make the point that it is not simple to find meaning and purpose for life and its pursuits. Drawing order out of chaos is rarely accomplished to one's satisfaction.

The Song of Songs is also often included in the wisdom literature. This categorization can be supported by the realization that the book uses love poetry to illustrate a wisdom teaching (8:6-7). Other examples of the love poetry genre are known in the Sumerian mythological literature concerning Dumuzi in the third millennium, but the closest parallels are found in a group of Egyptian love songs from the period of the Judges (Egyptian Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties, 1300-1150 B.C.). These love songs were typically performed at festivals and share many of the features found in Song of Songs. They lack, however, the wisdom teaching that the biblical book considers crucial: romance, love and sex can also be forces of chaos that need to be brought under the umbrella of order.

It is evident in all of the above that as God included poetic and wisdom genres in his revelation to Israel, he did not design new literary styles to use or new issues to address. Instead he used that which was very familiar to any resident of the ancient Near East. He met his people where they were and communicated in clear and powerful ways. Increasing our knowledge of ancient Near Eastern culture and literature can therefore only enhance our understanding of the Bible.

JOB

1:1—2:13
Trials of Job

1:1. Uz. The location of the land of Uz is not precisely known. It may have been a general term for the Near East. A southern location is implied in Lamentations 4:21, where the daughter of Edom lives in the land of Uz. However, in Jeremiah 25:20-21 Uz is associated with Philistia, Edom and Moab.

1:3. size of herds. The size of Job's herds was enormous. Aristotle claims that the Arabs had as many as three thousand camels, the same number listed here. The numbers can be compared to the three thousand sheep and one thousand goats of Nabal (1 Sam 25:2). Third-millennium texts record temple flocks of about fourteen thousand sheep, but personal flocks were usually much smaller. In the ancient Near East sedentary herds would generally not exceed three hundred animals. Transhumant herds (practicing controlled migration) would range from two to five hundred. Nomadic herds would be the largest, numbering in the tens of thousands. The ratio of small animals to large in Job's herd is fairly typical. Most numbers that are available in ancient sources are connected with Assyrian tribute lists that give little indication of what personal holdings would be.

1:3. people of the East. The "people of the East" (literally, "sons of the east") in Semitic languages usually refers to the inhabitants of the region east of Byblos where seminomadic Semites lived. This is how the term is used in the Egyptian Story of Sinuhe from the early second millennium B.C. In Genesis 29:1 the term refers to Arameans living along the northern Euphrates River, in Isaiah 11:14 to the Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites, and in Judges 6:3 to the Midianites. In sum, the "people of the East" appears to be a general term like "Uz."

1:5. purification after feasts. Purification usually provides for an individual to enter sacred space or to participate in ritual activities. In Israel there were levels of purity required for remaining "in the camp" and for entering the sacred enclosure or temple precinct. Job is ritually fastidious as he seeks to maintain a level of purity for his family at all times. Like Balaam in Numbers 23, Job presided over the sacrifices as the patriarch of his family, without a priest. It is possible that the purification involved washing and changing of clothes (Gen 35:2 and Ex 19:10).

1:5. cursing God in heart. The term for "cursed" is literally "blessed," a euphemism found elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Job 1:11; 2:5, 9; 1 Kings 21:10, 13). The term often means "to despise, esteem lightly." Thus, instead of actually cursing God, Job's children may have neglected or disregarded God. The term can refer to anything from treating with disrespect to outright repudiation.

1:6. angels (sons of God). In the ancient Near East the "sons of the gods" were lesser members of the pantheon. In both Mesopotamian and Ugaritic texts there are glimpses of the meetings of the gods and their divine court. In Israel the sons of God are angels, who, like the sons of the gods, station themselves before God at the divine court. Micaiah ben Imlah had a vision of God holding court with his subordinates (1 Kings 22:19-23). The sons of God are also called "gods" in Psalm 82:1, 6.

1:6. Satan. It is important to note that the term here, *saṭan* (literally, "the accuser"), is preceded in Hebrew by the definite article ("the"). Thus, in the context of Job it appears to describe a function rather than serving as a proper name. Though the individual functioning as an adversary to Job here may well be the one who later bears the name Satan, that cannot be concluded with certainty. The Hebrew word *saṭan* is used to describe an adversary and can be used of human beings or supernatural beings. Even the angel of the Lord can exercise this function (Num 22:22). The term does not clearly take on the role of a personal name until the intertestamental period (specifically the second century B.C.). Those who serve as adversaries are generally in the role of monitoring or challenging God's policies and decisions. It is not clear whether Satan was one of the sons of God (NIV's "angels").

1:6. role of accuser. The term *saṭan* refers to one who acts like a prosecuting attorney. The same term is used for a political foe who attempts to overthrow the king (e.g., 2 Sam 19:22). It also refers to one who brings charges against another in court (Ps 109:6; Zech 3:1-2). In Persia and Assyria similar secret agents toured the empire, attempting to discern the allegiance of particular groups and individuals, and then bringing charges in court.

1:15. Sabeans. There are three groups of Sa-

beans in Scripture. One group is from Sheba, modern Yemen, an area that was highly urbanized and had achieved a complex degree of civilization by this period (1 Kings 10). Many inscriptions have been found from the Sabeans in this area. There are also Sabeans in Ethiopia (Is 43:3). In Job 6:19 the Sabeans are equated with Tema in north Arabia, and are probably identified with the Saba of the Assyrian inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II in the late eighth century B.C. These Sabeans are most likely the ones mentioned here in Job 1.

1:16. fire of God. Lightning is described here as the "fire of God." During the contest between Yahweh and Baal in 1 Kings 18:38, the lightning is called the "fire of the LORD" (also see 2 Kings 1:12; Job 20:26; Num 11:1-3; 16:35; and 26:10). Storm gods are typically pictured with lightning bolts clutched in the hand.

1:17. Chaldeans. The Chaldeans are known from Assyrian annals as early as the time of Ashurnasirpal II (r. 884-859 B.C.). They appear to have been a seminomadic group that had settled in Babylonia and was successful in controlling the area in the late eighth century B.C. Moreover, they succeeded the Assyrians as the great empire builders of the Near East in the late seventh century B.C. The height of their power came during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 605-562 B.C.), the destroyer of Jerusalem.

2:7. painful sores. In Ugaritic this term refers to fever rather than sores. In Hebrew the term has usually denoted a variety of skin diseases (see comment on Lev 13:2). In Ugaritic texts the disease strikes the loins and leaves the victim prostrate. It is not certain which skin disease is depicted here in Job 2. Pathology in the ancient Near East was always considered in the light of supernatural cause and effect. Either hostile demons or gods angry at the violation of some taboo were considered responsible. Categories of disease are classified by symptoms rather than by cause, so diagnosis is often difficult if not impossible.

2:8. broken pottery. Broken pottery (Greek, *ostraca)* has been found in great abundance in archaeological excavations throughout the Near East. Such broken pottery was often "recycled" or put to some use. It is not clear in this context whether the ostraca were used to scratch the skin for relief or to scrape the body as a sign of grief. In most cases in Scripture ostraca are used for the latter purpose. In Mesopotamia and in the Ugaritic tale of Aqhat the "mound of potshards" appears to have been a name for the abode of the dead. In the Baal epic, when El mourns for Baal he puts dirt on his head and scrapes his skin with a stone.

2:8. sitting among the ashes. The ashes mentioned here were most likely found on a "dunghill" or town dump outside the city limits, where dung from the town was periodically burned. Mourners in the Near East went to sit amidst the dung ash heap and lacerate themselves. Priam, the father of Hector in the *Iliad,* rolled himself in the dung of the city ash heap.

2:11. lands of Job's friends. Classical (Pliny the Younger) and early church scholars (Eusebius and Jerome) associate Teman with Nabataean territory near the city of Petra in present day Jordan. Cuneiform sources identify a Suhu as a site along the Middle Euphrates south of the Habur River. However, Shuah was the son of Abraham and Keturah, and an uncle of Sheba and Dedan, thus implying a southern locale for the Shuhite. Nevertheless its location is not certain. The Naamathite is possibly identified with Jebel el Na'amaeh in northwest Arabia, although that is not certain.

2:12. mourning practices. In ancient Israel tearing one's garments and sprinkling dust on one's head were considered signs of mourning. They are also known from Mesopotamia and Canaan. Many mourning rites function as a means for the living to identify with the dead. It is easy to see how dust on the head and torn clothes would be symbolic representations of burial and decay.

3:1-26
Job's Lament

3:3-6. cursed and unlucky days. Day lists in Mesopotamia identify evil days in the month (days 7, 14, 19, 21 and 28). These were inauspicious days in which the person was encouraged not to engage in business activities, to build a house or to marry. It was even forbidden to eat fish and leeks on the seventh day of the seventh month. In addition, Mesopotamian omen lists describe days in which it was improper for a man and woman to engage in sexual relations, for a woman to give birth and for people to engage in a variety of other social activities. Furthermore, certain events that occurred caused a day to be unlucky (e.g., the birth of an anomaly or the death of a king). In the *Myth of Erra and Ishum* the governor of the city that is being destroyed is portrayed as expressing to his mother a wish that he had been stillborn or obstructed in the womb so that he would not have been born to this destiny.

3:8. rousing Leviathan. Leviathan appears in the Bible as a sea monster representing the forces of chaos who is defeated by God (Ps 74:14; Is 27:1). This text requests the services of

a skilled magician who would even be able to rouse a dormant Leviathan by an incantation. The description of Leviathan has similarities with Babylonian and Ugaritic sea monsters who threaten the existence of creation (see comment on 41:1).

3:9. morning stars. The morning stars here are Venus and Mercury, which should have remained "dark." These planets were considered the forerunners of each day.

3:13-19. afterlife concept. The Israelite concept of afterlife was very similar to that of their neighbors in Ugarit and Mesopotamia. However, death is not usually described as a place of rest as it is here in Job. Death (Hebrew, *sheol)* is a precise place where the dead eat dust and drink dirty water. According to the Akkadian epic of the *Descent of Ishtar,* there are bars and gates keeping the dead in. Sheol is also a place of darkness where there is no light, only silence. The dead cannot praise God in their condition. For more information see sidebar in Isaiah 14.

4:1—5:27

First Speech of Eliphaz

4:9. destructive breath of God. Here in Job the breath of God represents the wind of the desert that destroys vegetation (Hos 13:15 and Is 40:7). Normally it refers to God's dynamic activity (see Gen 2:7).

4:13-15. spirit bringing dreams. The theme of God causing a heavy sleep to fall on a person in order for them to receive a dream recurs throughout Scripture. For example, God caused a heavy sleep on Abraham during the covenant ceremony (Gen 15:12-21). This also occurred with deities in Mesopotamia. Dagan (biblical Dagon) often spoke to temple worshipers at Mari and Terqa in northeast Syria through the use of dreams. These worshipers often stayed overnight to sleep in the temple, hoping to receive a dream. In the Gilgamesh Epic a zephyr passes by that brings sleep and gives a dream. In Mesopotamian thinking, Zaqiqu was the god of dreams, and his name is from the word that denotes a spirit. This spirit or breeze passes through the cracks in doors to come to people at night. Both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* attest the same idea.

4:18. charging angels with error. Second Peter also describes the punishment of rebellious angels, but clear evidence of such a belief in the Old Testament is not available. In Ugaritic myths, subordinates to the gods (specifically,

RETRIBUTION PRINCIPLE

Verses seven and eight articulate what is referred to as the retribution principle. In its most basic form it contends that the righteous will prosper and the wicked will suffer. On a national level this principle is built into the covenant, with its potential blessings and threat of curses. On the individual level it had been determined that this was necessary in order for God to maintain justice. Since the Israelites had only the vaguest concept of the afterlife and no revelation concerning judgment or reward in the afterlife, God's justice could only be accomplished in this life. Most Israelites believed that if God were to be considered just, rewards and punishments in this life would have to be proportional to the righteousness or wickedness of the individual. These beliefs had also then led most Israelites to believe that if someone was prospering, it must be a reward for righteousness, and if someone was suffering, it must be a punishment for wickedness. The greater the suffering, the greater the wickedness must be. Babylonian and Assyrian writers of magical texts describe this same principle of retribution. But since they were not completely convinced of the justice of the gods, it was not as big a theological issue in Mesopotamia. In the book of Job this principle is turned on its head, because Job, the apparent epitome of righteousness, is suffering every possible disaster. All of the characters in the book believe in the retribution principle. This is the basis on which Job's friends accuse him, and it is the reasoning by which Job questions the justice of God. It is even the logic by which the satan can feel so confident about his accusation. He uses the retribution principle to create the tension for his accusation against God. If God operates by the retribution principle, the satan argues, then he will prevent the development of true righteousness, because people will behave righteously only to gain the reward. On the other hand, if God does not operate by the retribution principle, then people like Job will conclude that God is unjust. The satan's case can be won if Job relents to the pressure of his friends. They want him to appease God by simply confessing to anything and everything, regardless of whether he considers himself to be faultless or not. In this way he can rejoin the ranks of the righteous and regain his prosperity. This is the integrity that Job refuses to compromise—he is not a righteous man simply for the gain. He is interested in being exonerated, not just in regaining his prosperity. His integrity is a vote of confidence for God, because it insists that to God, righteousness is more important than appeasement. The book resolves the problem by suggesting that the retribution principle does not constitute a guarantee or a promise, but that God delights in rewarding righteousness and takes seriously the need to punish the wicked. God's justice cannot be evaluated, because no one has sufficient information to call him to account. Instead people can believe that he is just because they are convinced that he is wise (the thrust of God's discourses).

divine slave girls) are often found to be disobedient and untrustworthy. To add to the difficulty, the term translated "error" occurs only here in the Old Testament, and its meaning is uncertain.

4:19. houses of clay. "House" is used as a figure for the body in the apocryphal work Wisdom of Solomon 9:15, in 2 Corinthians 5:1 and in 2 Peter 1:14, but the idea of the spirit inhabiting the body is unknown elsewhere in the Old Testament. Clay and dust signify the weakness of the human body and human mortality.

5:1. holy ones. The term "holy ones", which designates servants or angels, occurs elsewhere in Scripture (Hos 11:12; Zech 14:5; Dan 4:10, 14, 20; 7:13; and Ps 89:7). They are holy because of their closeness to God, not because of any inherent purity.

6:1—7:21

First Speech of Job

6:2. anguish and misery on scales. Balance scales were used by merchants to quantify objects by weight. Job desires here that his misfortune be weighed against the largest thing that he knows, the sand of the seas, which often represents an immeasurable amount or massive weight.

6:4. Almighty *(Shaddai).* *Shaddai* ("almighty") is occasionally an epithet of God (Gen 17:1). Here *Shaddai* functions as a reverser of fortunes, similar to Resheph, the god of plague and war in the Canaanite pantheon, who spread diseases by shooting victims with bow and arrow.

6:15-17. wadis. The wadis of Palestine are similar to overflowing rivers in the rainy season. However, they have little or no water during the summer season, precisely the time when water is most needed.

6:19. caravans of Tema. Tema (modern Teima) was an important oasis and trade center in northwestern Arabia, two hundred miles south of Damascus. Tema is also listed as a son of Ishmael (Gen 25:13-15).

6:19. merchants of Sheba. Sheba was an important trade center in southwestern Arabia. See the note on Job 1:15.

7:1. hard service, hired man. The term for "hard service" was used of military service and occasionally corvee labor, such as that which Solomon exacted for laborers to cut down trees in Phoenicia (1 Kings 5:13-14). The hired man also was used both for military service (Jer 46:21) and domestic service (Lev 25:40). They were considered to be poor and were obliged to be paid daily (Lev 19:13). In the Babylonian creation epic, humankind was created specifically to do the menial tasks that the gods were unwilling to do (build the god's houses and provide food for the gods).

7:6. weaver's shuttle. Some of the language needs clarification here. The word NIV translates "weaver's shuttle" is elsewhere always rendered "loom." The adjective they translate "swift" has the basic meaning of "light" or even "insubstantial." Finally, the word translated "hope" also means thread (e.g., Rahab's scarlet thread in Josh 2:18). On the horizontal looms of the day, four stakes were driven into the ground in a rectangular pattern. The threads that would make up the warp of the fabric were tied at regular intervals to sticks on both ends, and the sticks were then used to stretch out the threads between the stakes. When the ends of each stick were braced behind the stakes, the threads would be stretched horizontal to the ground, taut for weaving. A shuttle would then be tied to the thread that was to be woven in as the woof of the fabric, with a bar being used to separate alternating threads of the warp to allow the shuttle with the woof thread to pass through. Once the woof thread was in place, the pin would be used to tighten that row against the previous rows. When the fabric was complete, the warp threads would be cut from the loom, leaving only remnants of threads tied to sticks. The following translation picks up the imagery: "My days are more insubstantial than a loom in that they come to an end with no hope/thread."

7:8. the "eye." In Egyptian mythology the sky god Horus had one eye injured in a battle with Seth. The sun is seen as his good eye and the moon as his injured eye. Thus day and night the eye of Horus looks down on the world of men.

7:9-10. afterlife concept. Here the emphasis is on the finality of death. For more information about concepts of afterlife, see comment on 3:13-19.

7:12. sea monster under guard. In ancient Near Eastern traditions the sea or the monsters that inhabited it represented the forces of chaos that had to be defeated and contained so that order could be brought to the world. Marduk, the divine champion in the Babylonian creation myth, took hold of Tiamat and put her under a vault, where a bar was pulled down and guards were posted. Yamm, the sea monster in Ugaritic mythology, was taken captive by Baal and placed under guard. This sort of imagery is also used in poetic sections of the Old Testament (Ps 74:13; 89:9-10; 104:7-9).

7:14. frightened with dreams. Nightmares

were traditionally seen in the ancient Near East and the classical world as coming from a demonic or malevolent divine agent. There are also references to demonic terrors of the night in the writings of the classical authors Ovid and Plutarch. Here in Job 7:14, however, the agent is God. In the Babylonian story of the man who is suffering without knowing why *(Ludlul bel Nemeqi),* the sufferer also reports being plagued by fearful omens and terrifying dreams.

7:15-16. preference for death in ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. The unique Mesopotamian Dialogue of Pessimism is a satirical discussion between a master and his slave. At the end of the discussion, the master asks what is good, and the slave responds by saying that both he and his master should have their necks broken and then they should be thrown into the river. However, the cynical context for these statements does not allow us to argue that suffering Mesopotamians preferred death to life.

7:20. watcher of men. In ancient Near Eastern usage the divine watcher is usually serving a positive role of protection. Perhaps the closest parallel would be found in the occasional reference to the seven ancient sages as watchers. This is also usually true of Yahweh's protective watching over Israel (Deut 32:10; Ps 12:7; 25:20; 31:23; 40:11; 61:7). In this case, Job sees God as a scrutinizer rather than a preserver of human beings.

8:1-22

First Speech of Bildad

8:6-7. retribution principle. See the sidebar in chapter 3.

8:8-10. importance of traditional instruction from ancient Near East wisdom. Along with other passages in Scripture (Job 15:18; Deut 4:32; and the apocryphal Ecclus 8:9), a great deal of wisdom literature from Mesopotamia (e.g., the Babylonian Theodicy, "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom" and various Sumerian proverbs) contends that wisdom from the ancients is significant. In Mesopotamian tradition the bearers of wisdom are the seven sages of old, known as the *apkallu,* who brought wisdom and the crafts of civilization to humankind. This tradition is represented in the works of Berossus by his statement that the sum total of revealed knowledge was given by the antediluvian sages.

8:11-12. papyrus analogy. Papyrus was not only used in Egypt but also in Palestine. Ugaritic texts describe papyrus coming from the marshlands of Lake Samak. It was used for a variety of things, including baskets, mats and parchment for writing. Papyrus grows to a great height, sometimes over ten feet. But its luxuriance quickly dissipates if the water source dries up.

9:1—10:22

Second Speech of Job

9:2. no one righteous before God. The Sumerian wisdom text titled *Man and His God* states that "never was a sinless child born to his mother." This was no concept of original sin however, as this thought echoes the Sumerian idea that the gods had incorporated evil into human civilization from the outset.

9:5-9. cosmic control by deity in ancient Near East. The last half of verse 4 along with verse 8 make it clear that the context for these comments is the cosmic conflict of the divine warrior. The cosmic conflict motif depicts the principal deity overcoming cosmic forces (usually forces of chaos like death or sea) to bring order to the cosmos. In the ancient Near East these forces are usually personified as gods, but this passage preserves a certain ambiguity on that count. Here Yahweh overcomes mountains (v. 5), terrorizes the netherworld (v. 6; the Hebrew word translated "earth" at times means netherworld, and the verbs here convey shuddering in horror, not earthquake), extinguishes the sun (v. 7; probably by eclipse), locks the stars in their sequence of appearance (v. 7), stretches out the heavens (v. 8; with corpse of defeated enemy as in *Enuma Elish*?), vanquishes the sea (v. 8) and forms the constellations (v. 9).

9:6. pillars of the earth. Pillars are sometimes thought to represent boundaries. Solomon's temple featured two free-standing pillars on the portico, which may have served as a boundary to the holy place. The tabernacle used pillars from which the partitions were hung to create a boundary for the courtyard. Even when the pillars supported something (as in the Philistine temple that Samson tumbled), archaeological information suggests that they stood as boundaries to porticos or courtyards. In Babylon, boundary markers known as *kudurru*s were pillar-shaped, but the connection may be incidental. Ancient Near Eastern literature has no parallel for the earth being supported by pillars. The only other reference in the Old Testament is Psalm 75:3, which could be interpreted as maintaining boundaries of distinction. In Job 26:11 the heavens have pillars, but this comment also occurs in the discussion of boundaries (v. 10). It is more likely that cosmic boundaries of the

earth would be those between the living and the dead. The word translated "earth" in this verse sometimes refers to the netherworld. In Akkadian literature, the boundaries of the netherworld are represented by gates.

9:7. seals the stars. The word "light" (NIV) does not occur in the Hebrew, which says, "He affixes a seal around the stars." This would suggest that Yahweh is the one who dictates the sequence of their appearances and the paths they will follow. In Mesopotamian astronomy (Mul-Apin series) the thirty-six principal stars were divided into three segments known as the paths of Anu, Enlil and Ea. These fixed stellar paths occupied the northern, southern and equatorial bands of the sky. In the omen series known as *Enuma Anu Enlil* the gods Anu, Enlil and Ea established the positions, locations and paths of the stars. In *Enuma Elish* Marduk sets up the stations of the stars. In Mesopotamian understanding the stars were engraved on the Jasper surface of the middle heavens, and the entire surface moved. All of these examples give explanation to the verb "to seal" used here in the text, since that which is fixed or inscribed is sealed.

9:8. treads on waves. The term "waves" is more likely denoting the "back" of something. This is how the same Hebrew word is used in Deuteronomy 33:29, where the backs of the enemy are trampled. In the Baal myths, Yam, "Sea," is one of Baal's main opponents. Since *Yam* is also the Hebrew word for Sea in this verse, treading on its back would be an appropriate image of subjugation. Egyptian iconography pictures the pharaoh using the defeated enemies as his footstool. Just as treading on the back expresses defeat of an enemy, stretching out the heavens evokes the imagery of Marduk using the corpse of the defeated enemy, Tiamat, to form the heavens. Both of these reflect back on verse 4: "Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?"

9:9. constellations. Textual evidence from Babylonia, including the "Venus tablet" of Ammisaduqa (c. 1650 B.C.), indicates that astronomical studies were conducted with skill and precision. Although astrology was also prevalent in late Egyptian periods and in Persian period Mesopotamia, it seems that this divinatory activity, interpreting omens (see Is 47:13), is only an extension of the work of a true science. There are records of the movement of the planets, placement of the major fixed stars and constellations, as well as descriptions of the phases of the moon and solar and lunar eclipses. Given the widespread knowledge of the stars and the planets in both Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures, it would have been necessary for the biblical writers and prophets to attribute these celestial bodies to Yahweh's creation. Mesopotamian constellations included: animal figures such as a goat (=Lyra) and snake (=Hydra); objects such as an arrow (=Sirius) and a wagon (=Big Dipper); and characters such as Anu (=Orion). The most popular of the constellations was Pleiades, often portrayed on seals even in Palestine and Syria. Neo-Assyrian texts preserve sketches of stars in constellations. A prayer to the gods of the night from about 1700 B.C. invokes the constellations by name calling on them to give answers to the diviner seeking an omen. The first constellation mentioned in this verse is uncertain. Leo and Ursa Major are the two prime candidates.

9:9. constellations of the south. In Mesopotamian literature the southern band of the sky is referred to as the path of Ea. But the text here refers to the "chambers" of the south, which may or may not refer to constellations.

9:13. Rahab and cohorts. Rahab is described as one of the sea monsters slain by God (Job 26:12, Ps 89:11, Is 51:9). In both the Babylonian and Ugaritic myths of creation, the champion deity (Marduk in Babylon and Baal in Ugarit) fights and slays a sea monster and its cohorts in a manner similar to that of Yahweh. In other contexts, Rahab is symbolically used as a designation for Egypt (Is 30:7; Ps 87:4). The name Rahab has not yet been found in extra-biblical sources.

9:17. crush with storm. Some interpreters have argued (with support of an ancient version) that the Hebrew word for "storm" is actually "hair" since one is not necessarily "crushed" with a storm. It would thus read "for a hair, He crushes me," meaning, that God crushes Job for a hair (or for little or no reason). Against this is the fact that the verb need not be so specific as "crushed," but refers to dealing someone a potentially mortal blow (same verb as that used twice in Gen 3:15). The reference to storm would also fit better in the cosmic context.

9:26. boats of papyrus. There are artistic representations from Egypt showing that they used papyrus reeds for the construction of some of their boats. This is stated explicitly by the classical author Pliny in his *Natural History.* Isaiah 18:1-2 refers to these reed vessels which were considered to be very light and swift but very fragile.

9:30. soap, washing soda. The terms used here are soapwort, derived from the plant Leontopetalon, and lye, and alkaline solution, two of the strongest cleaners known to the Israelites.

Since the cleaning of the body was normally done by covering the skin with oil which was then rubbed off, the use of these powerful detergents was an extreme measure.

9:31. slime pit. Although the term for slime pit usually designates the abode of the dead in Israel (Job 17:14, 23:22; 28) and the ancient Near East, here the term refers to a cesspool.

9:33. arbitrator in the ancient Near East judicial system. Sumerian texts often describe an individual's personal god who pleaded the person's cause before the high council of the gods. He was in fact his advocate. Moreover, the judicial system in Mesopotamia was very sophisticated. A judge often arbitrated between two parties that were contesting movable and immovable property (e.g., inheritance, location and dimensions of land, and the sale price of property). The Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope* advises "Do not say, 'Find me a protector, for one who hates me has injured me.' Indeed, you do not know the plans of god" (translation of M. Lichtheim).

10:15. full of shame. Given the belief in the retribution principle (see sidebar in chap. 3), shame would be the natural result of suffering. Suffering would proclaim to all around that the victim was being punished by God. The more dramatic the change of fortunes and the more serious the suffering, the greater the sin was supposed to be. Job therefore would have been judged a vile person based on the circumstantial evidence, thus leading to public humiliation.

10:18. wish to have never been born. In the *Myth of Erra and Ishum* the governor of the city that is being destroyed is portrayed as expressing to his mother a wish that he had been stillborn or obstructed in the womb so that he would not have been born to this destiny.

10:21-22. land of deepest night. Five Hebrew words are used here to describe darkness in the land of "deepest night," Sheol, the abode of the dead. This place was considered darker than the dead of night on earth. The netherworld in the ancient Near East is typically considered a place of darkness (Akkadian "house of darkness") where there is no light.

11:1-20

First Speech of Zophar

11:13. stretch out hands. Stretching out one's hands as a common gesture of prayer was a typical form in ancient Near Eastern iconography. The individual raised the hands with the palms outwards but close together and at face level. It was considered a gesture of humility.

12:1—14:22

Third Speech of Job

12:24. leaders deprived of reason. There were many examples in the ancient world of kings who became victims of their own quests for glory. Whether individual quests such as Gilgamesh's search for immortality that took him to the ends of the earth; religious (economic?) quests such as Nabonidus' thirteen-year self-imposed exile in Teima; or military quests such as Persia's disastrous attempt to expand into the western Mediterranean, these were fed by colossal megalomania and characterized by insatiable self-indulgence.

13:4. physicians methods in the ancient Near East. There were two types of medical technicians in Mesopotamia: a magician who cured the patient by means of incantations (usually to expel evil demons), and a doctor who usually used herbs and drugs. The doctor was normally subservient to the magician, who directed the former by means of the incantations. The functions of the two were not exactly distinct; the magician often used drugs in his cures, and the doctor often used incantations.

13:12. proverbs of ashes. Ashes were mixed with water to form soot that was used for a writing substance. It was used only in the most informal and temporary situations. Much like chalk today, it was easily erased or obliterated. One would certainly not want to record memorable truths for all time using ashes. Job suggests that the legacy of his friends' wisdom is nothing but chalk graffiti.

13:12. defenses of clay. The uncertain meaning of the word translated "defenses" creates several possibilities here. If "defenses" is part of the metaphor, and a city's defenses are referred to, then the clay is that used to make mud brick. In Mesopotamia the clay bricks were baked resulting in a very durable material. In other regions, including Israel, sun-dried brick was a significantly inferior building material, and city walls of mud brick would not withstand attack. A second possibility is that "defenses" refers to verbal defenses, that is, the rhetoric of the friends. In this case the clay might refer to a clay tablet that could be written on but then wiped clean, continuing the theme of how vacuous their arguments were.

13:27. marks on the soles of feet. The exact symbolism of this phrase has escaped commentators. Some suggest the prisoner's feet were marked or branded in some way so that he would be successfully tracked, but there is no evidence of such a practice.

14:5. number of man's days decreed. The idea

that man's days were numbered is known elsewhere in Scripture (Ps 39:4). However, the idea here is probably not that any particular lifespan was predetermined but that any lifespan was a comparatively insignificant period of time. In the Gilgamesh Epic Gilgamesh tells Enkidu that the gods live forever, but man's days are numbered and nothing they achieve is of any substance.

14:10-13. afterlife concept/Sheol. See comment on 3:13-19.

14:13-14. resurrection in ancient Near East. There are several different concepts of afterlife that are evidenced in the ancient Near East. The most fundamental concept is continued existence in a gravelike netherworld where there is no differentiation in the treatment of the righteous and wicked. The Israelites called this place Sheol, and they believed that it allowed for no interaction with God. In Canaan and Mesopotamia there were netherworld deities who governed this realm. In Egypt the netherworld existence was more congenial for those who passed the judgment and entered its confines. Those who were not approved were devoured. None of these concepts include the idea of resurrection out of the netherworld. In general, the only awakening that took place in the ancient worldview was the calling up of spirits of the dead (which was not permanent and not a bodily presence) or the awakening of the fertility gods of nature cycles. These died annually when the agricultural cycle came to an end, and "wintered" in the netherworld. Then they were ritually awakened in the spring. None of this bears any resemblance to a theological doctrine of resurrection. Likewise not comparable are the occasional revivifications (when an individual is restored to life) or the indications of national return to life (Ezekiel's dry bones). A fully developed doctrine of resurrection in the modern sense includes six elements: (1) individual, not national; (2) material, not spiritual; (3) universal, not isolated; (4) outside of the netherworld; (5) permanent immortality; and (6) distinctions drawn between righteous and wicked. Zoroastrianism appears to have all of these elements, but the nature of the sources makes it difficult to determine how early the Persians developed these concepts (For further discussion see comment on Is 26:19).

14:17. sealed in a bag. Important items (such as papyrus documents) were often put in a bag and sealed, usually with clay, and thus were made inaccessible to unauthorized persons. Thousands of clay sealings have been found throughout Mesopotamia and elsewhere in the Near East. In Mesopotamia, however, clay sealings and bags (or jars) were not used for documents. Important clay tablets were sealed by a clay envelope that actually summarized the contents of the document inside.

15:1-35

Second Speech of Eliphaz

15:7. first man equated with wise man. In Israelite tradition the first man, Adam, was made, not born, and was never equated with a tradition of wisdom. In the Mesopotamian tradition, Adapa, sometimes considered the first man, was given as a model for mankind by Ea, the god of wisdom. Adapa was given wisdom but not, however, eternal life. When offered eternal life by Anu, the king of the gods, Adapa was tricked into refusing it. Thus, all of mankind was now resigned to a fate without eternal life and that instead now included death and disease. Adapa was considered first in a line of seven sages who passed the arts of civilization on to mankind. It is unlikely, however, that a specific tradition is being referred to in this verse.

15:27-28. connection between fat and prosperity. Fat was equated with health and wealth in Israel because only those who were wealthy and prosperous had the resources to overeat and the leisure to grow fat. Thus obesity was a sign of God's blessing and favor.

15:33. vine stripped of unripe grapes. This is speaking not of an unhealthy vine but of one that has its young (sour) grapes stripped off before they can ripen.

15:33. olive tree shedding blossoms. Although the olive tree brings forth a great amount of blossoms, most of them are shed and do not come to full maturity. Thus, the wicked's designs, like the sour grapes and olive tree blossoms, will not come to full maturity.

16:1-16

Fourth Speech of Job

16:9. ruthless gods. Belligerent deities would not have been unusual in the religious worldview of the ancient Near East. In a polytheistic system the gods were not considered to be friendly, forthright or predictable. Examples would include the Mesopotamian god Ea telling his "favorite" Adapa that the food he would be offered was "bread of death" when in reality it would have procured eternal life for him. In the Gilgamesh Epic, Ea advises deceiving the people into thinking that blessings cannot rain down on them unless Utnapishtim leaves in his boat. After they send him off

they are rained on in a totally unexpected way as the flood comes and destroys them. Around 1200 the Libyans complain that the gods gave them initial success against Egypt with the intent to eventually destroy them. In Egypt the mortuary texts (Pyramid texts and Coffin texts) are targeted against hostile deities. Many examples exist of both of the gods as well as practitioners of magic casting an evil eye on someone.

16:15. sackcloth. Sackcloth was worn by those in sorrow over a catastrophe or the death of a loved one. It was the most conventional sign of mourning in the ancient Near East. The clothing itself was most likely a large piece of cloth, probably in the shape of a sack of grain, or a smaller cloth worn around the midsection. The reference here in Job is the only occasion in Scripture where sackcloth is stitched, although this is probably a metaphorical reference to Job stitching it permanently to his skin (i.e., he will be in mourning for the remainder of his life).

17:3. pledge/security. The making and receiving of pledges was common in Scripture (see comments on Ex 21:2-6; 22:6-7, Deut 24:10-15) and in the ancient Near East. However there are proverbs warning people not to make pledges without collateral (Prov 6:1; 11:15; 17:18; 22:26). The pledge was a piece of property (garment, ring or even a child) which the individual gave to his creditor as a guarantee that he would repay his debt.

17:16. gates of death. Sheol was believed to be like an earthly city in that it contained houses and even a city wall (primarily to keep its inhabitants in Sheol). In the *Descent of Ishtar* the netherworld has a gate complex with seven gates and gatekeepers at each one to control access.

18:1-21

Second Speech of Bildad

18:13. death's firstborn. The prevailing opinion is that Job is describing a deadly disease. Ugaritic texts describe a deity named Death (Mot), who was the ruler of the underworld, although there is no mention of his first-born. A logical choice would be Resheph, the god of plague, sometimes equated with the Mesopotamian ruler of the netherworld, Nergal. Unfortunately no indication is given of Resheph's ancestry.

18:14. king of terrors. Mot was the king of terrors in Ugaritic mythology. Terrors were most likely the demonic host commissioned by Mot to inflict the living. Demonic hosts in both Mesopotamia and Greece were considered to be terrors to the living.

18:15. burning sulfur. Burning sulfur (brimstone) is found in regions with volcanic activity (e.g., the Dead Sea area). When it burns it forms the noxious sulfur dioxide gas. The term is often associated with God's wrath (see comments on Is 30:33 and Ezek 38:22). The land affected by burning sulfur was infertile (see comment on Deut 29:23).

19:1-29

Fifth Speech of Job

19:20. skin of my teeth. Some have thought there is an irony here, in that the teeth, like the nails, are a part of the body that is not covered by skin. Alternatively, others have considered it a reference to the gums, meaning that all his teeth have fallen out.

19:24. iron tool on lead. It has been assumed that this is describing an iron stylus that incised letters, which were filled in by lead. The Behistun inscription of Darius I of Persia in Iran appears to have been inlaid with lead. Moreover, lead tablets were used by the Hittites, as well as the Greeks and Romans.

20:1-29

Second Speech of Zophar

20:8. dream flies away. "Flying away" can be used for death (Ps 90:10). Other texts describe enemies as phantoms in dreams (Ps 73:20 and Is 29:7). In Mesopotamian thinking, dreams were brought from the gods by the deity Zaqiqu, whose name is derived from a word meaning spirit or breath.

20:24. iron weapon/bronze tipped arrow. Iron and bronze together were considered symbols of strength (Job 40:18). The word for weapon is a general term referring to anything that would be found in an armory (both defensive and offensive; see representative list in Ezek 39:9). An iron weapon would therefore refer to a lethal weapon. It may be significant, however, that the Ugaritic cognate refers more specifically to a dart. "Bronze tipped arrow" is the NIV's interpretation of "bronzed bow." The effectiveness of a bow depends on its flexibility. One would not therefore expect a bow to be made of bronze. Bronze models of bows have been found that have been dedicated display pieces, but no operational bows with bronze ornamentation have been discovered.

21:1-34

Sixth Speech of Job

21:12. tambourine, harp and flute. These are

all typical musical instruments of the time and are attested in ancient Near Eastern texts, reliefs and paintings as early as the third millennium B.C. The "harp" is hand held and consists of a few strings with a frame made of wood. The tambourine has been identified in archaeological reliefs as the tambour, a small drum (leather stretched over a hoop) that would not have the tinny rattle sound of modern tambourines. The instrument translated as flute is likely a double pipe made of either bronze or reed.

22:1-30

Third Speech of Eliphaz

22:2. man's benefit to God. In Mesopotamia mankind was considered to have been created for the express purpose of serving the gods and doing the menial tasks that they were unwilling to do. Thus, the gods were dependent on mankind for the upkeep of their houses (i.e., temples), for their daily nourishment and for their clothing needs. The statues of the gods were literally dressed daily, and food offerings were presented on a daily basis.

22:6. security. A creditor was allowed to accept something for security that the debtor selected, except for a tool that he used in his work (see Deut 24:6, 10-11). If it was a cloak, it had to be returned to the debtor at evening, as protection from the cold (Ex 22:26-27, Deut 24:12-13).

22:14. vaulted heavens. A Babylonian hymn to the sun god, Shamash, extols him as the one in the circle of heaven who is the director of people. The Hebrew word NIV translates as "vaulted" is the same word that is translated "circle" in Isaiah 40:22 (see comment there). The Akkadian term used in this and similar contexts suggests a circular but flat shape, a disk rather than a sphere for the shape of both the heavens and the earth. There is some textual evidence that suggests the heavens were viewed as a dome, but more information would be needed to arrive at that conclusion. Israel, having no revelation otherwise, shares this ancient view.

22:24. gold from Ophir. Gold from Ophir is mentioned in an eighth century inscription from Tell Qasile. The precise location of Ophir is unknown. The fact that it was shipped in at Ezion Geber suggests an Arabian location, though sites in India and East Africa have been considered.

23:1—24:25

Seventh Speech of Job

23:10. come forth as gold. The analogy here is that of the process of the purification of gold. Gold is refined or purified by means of a process called cupellation. The gold is placed in a crucible with lead and melted. As air is blown across the surface of the molten mixture, the impurities are absorbed as dross and the purified metal remains. Like the gold that comes forth from the purifying process, Job will have his honor restored after his own "purifying process" (i.e., his troubles).

24:2. moving boundary stones. Unlawfully moving a boundary stone (i.e., property marker) was considered a terrible crime (Deut 19:14; Prov 23:10). The purpose of the stones was to protect family property (usually land). In Mesopotamia the boundary stones were inscribed with a description of the property lines and a terrific curse that was leveled against the criminal who transgressed the stone. These curses were usually a description of diseases directed toward the offender's body. Ironically, they have taught us much about the Mesopotamian understanding of disease.

24:9. infant seized for debt. In Mesopotamia infants were sometimes given as surety for a debt or simply seized by the creditors when the debtor could not repay their debt. However, the creditors are considered to have been unlawful in this case. Also see the comment on Job 17:3.

24:11. olives among the terraces. It is possible that the term used here *(shur)* refers to terrace walls that allowed the olive trees to grow on hillsides. Other interpreters believe the term refers to the equipment used for processing olive oil. The twenty-two olive oil factories in the caves of Maresha provide details of the process by which olive oil was made. The initial crushing of the fruit was done in a stone basin by means of a lens-shaped rock on its edge that was rolled over the olives. In the second stage reed baskets full of pulp were put into presses hollowed out of the rock where weights suspended from beams would be used to extract the remaining oil. One of the Akkadian words for reed basket is *shuru*.

24:11. winepresses. The final stage of wine-making is mentioned here, as the grapes were tread by foot into the winepress, which emptied the juice into vats. Winepresses have been found by archaeologists in Palestine. They were usually square or circular pits cut out of rock or dug out of the ground, sealed with plaster or lined with rocks. The grapes were placed in the pit and then trampled on. The juice then flowed from a channel into a lower vessel (wine vat) which collected the grape juice and functioned as a fermenting container.

24:17. terrors of darkness. The use of "king of terrors" in 18:14 and the context of the term in Ezek 27:36 and 28:19 suggest that "terrors" can be used as a reference to the spirits of the dead, those who have been consigned to the netherworld.

25:1-6

Third Speech of Bildad

25:2. order in the heavens. The literal phrase is "He makes peace in His heights," that is, in the heavens. Most have argued that the writer is alluding to the primordial conflict (Job 9:13; 26:12-13) where God defeated Leviathan and other monsters. Both Baal (Ugarit) and Marduk (Babylon) made peace in the heavens after the defeat of their enemies. The NIV translation is not unrelated since the defeat of the chaos monsters is the means by which order was established in the cosmos.

25:5. stars not pure. There is no known tradition of personified or deified stars being guilty of some trespass or sin. The word "pure" can also carry the connotation of clear or clean, and probably here refers to the fact that the stars do not always shine clear and bright in the night sky but can be obscured or dimmed.

26:1—27:23

Eighth Speech of Job

26:6-11. cosmology. There was a triparite division of the cosmos: the heavens, the earth and the realm of the dead below the earth (Sheol and Abaddon in v. 6). This threefold cosmology was roughly similar to that known from Mesopotamia and somewhat like that in the texts from Ugarit. The picture of the universe described here was the common cosmological view of the ancient Near East. The sky was a circle (dome? See comment on 22:14) that arched over the disk of the earth, which sat on top of a primordial ocean. Under the primordial ocean was the netherworld, virtually a mirror image of the space above the earth. Thus, the entire universe was an enormous sphere, cut in the center by the earth.

26:6. Abaddon. The parallel to Sheol (NIV: death) suggests that this refers to a place rather than a person. The Hebrew root from which it is built confirms that it is a place of destruction. In 28:22 it is personified along with Death (Hebrew, *mot*), a well-known name for the Canaanite god of the netherworld. The Hebrew is adopted as a personal name in Revelation 9:11 where it is equated with the Greek Apollyon. In Greek mythology, Apollo is a god of plague and destruction. In Akkadian the netherworld is referred to as the house of darkness but not as the place of destruction.

26:7. north. The Hebrew word *Zaphon* only comes to mean north because it refers to a mountain that was in the north (commonly identified with Mt. Casius, Jebel al'Aqra, in Syria, elev. 5807 ft.). Its function here is not as a direction but as the "sacred mountain" (Ps 48:1), the high heavens where the gods meet in assembly and, in Ugaritic literature, where Baal's house is.

26:7. spread out on nothing. It is the vast trackless waste of primordial waters that is described as the "nothing" on which the earth sits. Evidence for this is that the word describing what the north is spread out on (NIV: "empty space") is the same word that describes the watery cosmic chaos of Genesis 1:2 (NIV: "formless"). In Babylonian literature, Shamash is praised as the one who suspends from the heavens the circle of the lands. This was part of ancient perception of the cosmos rather than a covert allusion to modern scientific understanding. See comment on Psalm 24:2.

26:10. horizon as boundary. In the ancient Near Eastern worldview, the sun, moon, stars and clouds enter the sky through gates, and the horizon serves as the boundary where the gates are. So when the sun rose or set, it was passing through the gate on the horizon that passed into the netherworld. They believed that during the night the sun passed through the netherworld to arrive at the other side. Here this is described as the boundary between light and darkness.

26:11. pillars of heaven. See comment on 9:6.

26:12. churning sea. This description indicates a typical mythical scene in which the churning of the cosmic ocean disturbs the creatures (often sea monsters) who represent the forces of chaos and disorder. In *Enuma Elish* the sky god, Anu, creates the four winds that stir up the deep and its goddess, Tiamat. It is also reminiscent of Baal's defeat of Yam in Ugaritic mythology.

26:12. Rahab. Rahab is described as one of the sea monsters slain by God. In both the Babylonian and Ugaritic myths of creation the champion deity (Marduk in Babylon and Baal in Ugarit) fights and slays a sea monster and its cohorts in a manner similar to that of Yahweh. In other contexts Rahab is symbolically used as a designation for Egypt (Ps 87:4 and Is 30:7). The name Rahab has not yet been found in extrabiblical sources.

26:13. gliding serpent. This is most likely another allusion to the defeat of the sea monster and its allies. Marduk defeated Tiamat by means of a mighty wind and the use of a net

to capture her. The fleeing or gliding serpent also appears in Isaiah 27:1 (see comment there).

27:18. watchman's hut. The hut built by a watchman was by nature flimsy, as it was used only on a temporary basis. Farmers put up temporary booths in the middle of their fields in order to guard the crops during harvest.

27:23. claps hand in derision. Gestures and body language take on different meanings in different cultures. In current Western society clapping hands can be used to show appreciation, to summon subordinates or children, to get someone's attention, to accompany music or to express frustration (one clap). There were also several functions in the ancient world. Clapping could be used in praise (Ps 47:1) or applause (2 Kings 11:12), or as a gesture of anger or derision (Num 24:10). Variations may exist in the precise movement involved: compare the different significations in Western culture of (1) striking the palms together parallel to the body on a horizontal plain (applause); (2) slapping the palms together in a roughly vertical movement (frustration); and (3) striking the palms together perpendicular to the body while alternating which hand is on top and which is on bottom (as if knocking the dust off).

28:1-28
Wisdom Hymn

28:1-11. mining in ancient Near East. Palestine, like Mesopotamia, was generally poor in mineral resources. There are numerous deposits of a poor quality of iron ore in Palestine, but few of high quality ore. The only major deposits of iron ore known in Palestine today are at Mugharat el-Wardeh in the Ajlun hills by the Jabbok River. Copper mining sites are mostly in Transjordan. While iron can be mined on the surface, copper mining requires shafts. Gold was mined in Nubia and South Arabia, while Turkey was mined for its silver. Evidence for the mining of ores comes from Egypt as early as the First Dynasty (c. 3000 B.C.). The method of metallurgy described here in Job can be seen on a number of Egyptian funerary wall reliefs from the New Kingdom (c. 1550-1050 B.C.). The underground mining that is described here (commonly called *pitting)* begins about 2000 B.C. in the ancient Near East. It involved digging vertical shafts at intervals in order to reach the horizontal ore-bearing strata. In Egypt they preferred open cut mining and sometimes dug horizontal shafts into the sides of mountains or cliffs. By the middle of the second millennium they were doing more shaft mining. The copper and turquoise mines of Egypt in the Sinai have yielded much information of mining techniques and the profession.

28:5. fire. In ancient mines rock was broken up by a process called fire-setting in which the rock was heated by large fires and then doused with cold water mixed with vinegar (believed to enhance the cold).

28:6. sapphires (lapis lazuli). Sapphire (lapis lazuli) was a deep, dark blue stone found primarily in Iran. It has often been found in archaeological excavations in the Tigris-Euphrates region, especially in Mesopotamian royal graves. Lapis deposits were often veined with pyrites, perhaps the gold referred to here.

28:16-19. gems. The various gems were all of great value. The term for gold comes from an Egyptian word from where it was obtained, probably Nubia. The identity of the precious stone in verse 16 is not certain, some have suggested either onyx or carnelian. Glass was made in Egypt as early as the fourth millennium B.C., primarily for ornamentation (although glass vessels were not common in Palestine until the first century B.C.). The first gem in verse 18 has been considered coral, a red gem used for ornamentation. The word for crystal *(gabish)* is the origin of the term gypsum, and is used only here in Scripture. The gem in verse 18 is a type of ruby, while topaz designates yellow chrysolite.

28:20-28. source of wisdom in ancient Near East thinking. Wisdom in Mesopotamia was not considered an intellectual ability or as having moral content, but a specific skill, usually in cultic and magical rituals. The primary deity associated with wisdom was Enki (or Ea), who bestowed the cultic and ritual arts on mankind. Thus, the source of wisdom was Enki himself, though he is simply the most informed repository rather than the originator. Likewise Yahweh, in verses 23-27, is portrayed as one who knows where to find wisdom rather than as its originator or creator. If, however, wisdom is viewed as the ability to discern the inherent order in the created world, it can only be achieved through the one who established the order. Likewise, then, the sovereignty attributed to Marduk by the Babylonians allowed him to be addressed as the Lord of Wisdom.

29:1—31:40
Job's Discourse

29:6. path drenched with cream. The imagery here emphasizes the wealthy nature of Job.

His flocks produced such an abundance of curds (cream) that Job was able to wash his feet in them.

29:6. olive oil from rock. Olive trees, which were the main source of oil, were able to grow in rocky soil because they could thrive with minimal amounts of water. This meaning of the verse is affirmed through comparison with Deuteronomy 32:13.

29:7. seat of respect at the gate. The city gate in ancient Near Eastern cities was a broad, open area that also housed the town square, or marketplace. It was also where business was transacted and where judicial and other governmental proceedings took place. Thus, it was the most visible area in the town. As Job was a family head (i.e., elder), he took his "seat" (residence) at the city gate, emphasizing his distinct importance.

29:12. help for orphan and widow. See comments on Exodus 22:22-24.

29:20. glory fresh, born new. One's glory (literally liver) signified his innermost feelings. Job's fresh "liver" meant that he had a strong emotional stability, and felt content and happy. A bow could dry out and become brittle or could be overused and lose resilience. The bow often signified one's virility and physical vigor. Thus, Job was a "new man" with youthful strength.

30:4. salt herbs. Salt herbs, or saltwort, has been identified as *artiplex halimus,* an edible plant with a very sour taste. The Talmud says this plant was for the poor and those who were in danger of starving.

30:4. broom tree. The roots of the broom tree *(retana roetam)* were not edible, but were used for making charcoal (see Ps 120:4). It grows primarily in the desert regions of the Sinai and Dead Sea.

30:11. imagery of unstrung bow. An unstrung bow appears to signify Job's loss of strength. The term for bow here, however, is obscure and has been interpreted in different manners. It may also denote a tent cord, which if loosened would cause the entire tent to collapse. The imagery is clear; Job's body is frail and near death.

30:28. blackened. The term "blackened" appears to refer to Job's skin (although some argue it may refer to his garments). The term translated "blackened" is usually used for mourning, and that would make the best sense here. The same phrase is used in Psalm 38:6 where the NIV translates "mourning." Though it could refer to the black (goatskin) sackcloth, perhaps more likely is the black soot from the ashes that a mourner puts on their head. In verse 30 the blackened (different word) skin is related to Job's disease.

31:1-40. legal parallels to Job. Job's renunciation of evil is similar in many respects to the negative confession from the Egyptian Book of the Dead. In this work an individual after death is presented before the judgment seat of Osiris where he recites a lengthy list of forty-two sins that he did not commit. The list includes lying, theft, murder, killing the sacred bull, eavesdropping, homosexuality, being disruptive, talking loud, being impatient and conjuring against a god, just to give a range of examples. Even more to the point, in a Hittite prayer to the Storm-god for relief from suffering, Kantuzilis declares his innocence of a list of items (breaking oaths, eating forbidden things, withholding sacrifices). This oath has clearly put Job in the position of defendant. A declaration of innocence was a common element in legal proceedings that were being appealed to a judge for a public hearing. Since it was often impossible to gather sufficient evidence in this type of court case, the swearing of an oath took on great significance. Up until this point Job has been distressed that God has been silent. By swearing to this oath of innocence, Job hopes to turn any continued silence to his advantage. If God ignores his oath it will be tacit admission of Job's innocence.

31:12. Abaddon/destruction. Along with Sheol, Abaddon is a name for the abode of the dead (see comment on 26:6), and is paralleled with the grave. The term literally means destruction. The term appears as Apollyon in Revelation 9:11, where it refers to the angel of the bottomless pit.

31:36. wearing indictment on shoulder. Wearing or carrying something on the shoulder caused the item to be considered important, and the bearer displayed it proudly (see Is 9:6; 22:22). Moreover, an item inscribed or bound on the hand, neck or forehead became a constant reminder for the wearer, and an advertisement to spectators (Prov 6:21; Ex 8:16; Deut 6:8; 11:18).

32:1—37:24
Elihu's Discourses

32:2. Buzite. Buz was the nephew of Abraham (Gen 22:20-21) and presumably the ancestor of this Aramean clan (Ram). Jeremiah mentions Buz along with Sheba and Dedan (Jer 9:25; 49:32). The annals of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon mention the geographic name Bazu, which has been identified on the island of Bahrein in the Persian Gulf.

32:19. bottled up wine/new wineskins. New wineskins are able to endure fermenting wine, since the skins expand along with the wine. If the wineskins are bottled up in this process, they are in danger of exploding, unless they are vented (Jer 20:9).

33:15-16. God speaking in dreams. See the comment on Job 4:13-15.

33:22. pit/messengers of death. Akkadian also has a word for the netherworld that is translated "pit" *(ḫashtu).* The terminology is drawn from the hole dug to serve as the grave. The identity of the messengers of death is not certain. In Mesopotamian literature there are several gods that are called the "death bringers." But the word "messengers" is not in the text here, and some interpreters have plausibly suggested "place of the dead" as a parallel to the pit.

35:10. songs in the night. Since troubles were associated with the night, songs in the night would be a welcome change whether individuals sang about their disappointments or expressed their confidence in God's presence. Alternatively, there are some Semitic cognates of the term translated "song" that mean strength or protection, and that would fit with some of the parallels in Hebrew (for instance, in Ex 15:2, where it would be "The LORD is my strength and protection").

36:14. male prostitutes. The male prostitutes described here are probably referring to a Canaanite fertility cult. For more information concerning cultic prostitution in general, see the comment on Deuteronomy 23:17-18. The term used here occurs in both feminine and masculine forms and refers, perhaps euphemistically, to ones who have been set apart for particular functions. This same term is used in Akkadian literature to refer to those who have been consecrated as functionaries serving at the shrines or temples. The prostitute was among those functionaries, as was the wet nurse and the midwife. It is unclear what other functions the males might have served. For more information see comment on 2 Kings 23:7.

36:27. water cycle. Though some modern interpreters have attempted to read this verse as a scientific description of the condensation-evaporation cycle, the context is clearly operating from a different perspective (see v. 32, where God fills his hands with lightning bolts that he throws like spears). The two verbs in this verse speak of a process of drawing out or refining (as precious metals would be drawn out in the refining process). It was believed in the ancient Near East that raindrops came from a heavenly stream or ocean, a great body of water that enveloped the earth, and from subterranean waters. Thus there were waters above and below the earth. It was these waters from which God is seen as drawing out raindrops.

37:2-4. storm gods. In Ugaritic myths the storm god Baal-Hadad struck terror in his enemies and caused them to flee by the power of his voice (also see Ps 29). The Akkadian equivalent, Adad, also thundered with his voice. Storm gods typically were pictured with lightning bolts clutched in the hand.

37:9. chamber of the tempest. It was believed that winds were stored in chambers in the heavens. The chambers were periodically emptied by God. The Canaanites and Babylonians attributed manifestations of storms to Adad, the storm and wind god. Similar (and more frequent) imagery describes Yahweh having storehouses of rain, hail and snow, which are set in motion by the wind, presumably instigated by his breath. The word translated storehouses can be used to refer to treasuries that would store precious objects, as well as royal weapons. Hail, snow, wind, thunder and lightning are often seen as the weapons that God uses to defeat his enemies. Likewise storehouses could serve for the storage of raw materials such as barley, dates, grain or tithes in general. In the same way God rations out the products from his storehouses as necessary. Cosmic storehouses are not common imagery in the ancient Near East.

37:13. rain as judgment of God. Storms were used by God for both blessing and judgment, depending on the situation. It brought much needed water for the crops to grow but could also come in destructive storms. In the ancient world the people believed that the weather was under total control of deity and was used to reward or punish. They did not view the world as operating by natural laws.

37:18. bronze mirror. Mirrors in antiquity were made out of bronze and were very hard and difficult to break. The imagery was appropriate to the sky on those dry, hot summer days when the heat of the sun reflected on the rock and dirt through the still, golden haze. Additionally in the ancient world it was believed that the sky was a solid dome or disk.

38:1—41:34

God's Discourses

38:1. God speaking out of storm. God often presented himself by means of a storm (2 Kings 2:11, Ezek 1:4) and he came in tempest to judge the nations. Storm gods in the ancient Near East (Baal-Hadad at Ugarit, Adad

in Mesopotamia) also manifested themselves in this way. Yahweh is portrayed as master of the storm and controller of the winds, which can bring life as well as destruction. This type of figurative language demonstrating God's majesty is a common feature in ancient Near Eastern epic poetry. For example, in the Ugaritic epic of Baal and Anath, the god Baal is described as the "Rider of the Clouds" and his "voice" is the sound and fury of thunder and lightening. Similarly, in the Babylonian story of creation, *Enuma Elish,* the storm god Marduk defeats the primordial goddess of watery chaos, Tiamat, through his control of the winds and his use of the lightning. See comment on Zechariah 9:14.

38:4. God responding to challenge using rhetorical questions. In the *Erra Epic* Erra (=Nergal) challenges Marduk concerning his loss of divine dignity. Marduk's long answer gives explanation for his condition but then defends his sovereignty by posing a series of unanswerable "where" and "who" questions to Erra in order to demonstrate his wisdom and control.

38:4-6. earth's foundation, footings, cornerstone. In the ancient world the cosmos was viewed in terms of a temple, and the temple was understood to represent a microcosmos. Here the most important elements in building the temple are referred to in God's setting up of the cosmos. The foundation determined the size and orientation of the temple and so was laid out very carefully. It involved survey of the site but, more importantly, communication from the deity because of the importance of the orientation. The word translated "footings" is most often used for the sockets that held the pillars used in the tabernacle. The cornerstone or, better, the foundation brick is always significant in temple building and restoration. One of the most detailed temple building accounts in ancient Near Eastern literature describes Gudea's construction of a temple for Ningirsu around 2000 B.C. The ceremony concerning the premier brick shows its centrality to the building procedure.

38:5. measuring line in creation. The placement and orientation of a temple was considered extremely important (see the comment on Ex 26:1-36). This is also evidenced in temple building texts both mythological and historical in Mesopotamia. When Marduk is preparing to build his cosmic temple in *Enuma Elish,* he measures the Apsu (the area where the foundation of the temple will be laid). From Sumerian times through Assyrian and Babylonian periods, the possession of the measuring equipment is a sign of the divine commission for the rebuilding project. It is through this equipment that the leader is given divine direction.

38:7. morning stars/angels. It was typical that the bringing in of the "premier brick" was accompanied by great celebration. The morning stars (usually planets such as Mars and Venus) were worshiped as divine beings in the ancient Near East, and were personified as part of the heavenly hosts in Israel. In the context of Job 38, these "stars" are parallel to the created angelic beings. A Ugaritic poem describes the birth of a number of astral deities.

38:8. sea from womb. In Mesopotamian thinking, the cosmic region from which the subterranean waters emerge is called the Apsu, and is located between the earth and the netherworld. In one incantation the mother of Apsu is the river goddess. The Babylonian creation myth recounts how Tiamat, the sea goddess, was the mother of all creation who was defeated by Marduk. Similarly, Baal in the Ugaritic creation myth defeated Yam, the sea god. The motif here in Job concerning the birth of the sea god is not known elsewhere. Some have concluded that Yahweh's restriction of the sea from the womb suggests that he did not have to defeat a rebellious sea threatening with chaos (as Marduk and Baal had done) but that it had always been under his control.

38:10. doors and bars of sea. Marduk, after having defeated Tiamat, created the seas and placed guards to keep back the waters. The Babylonian *Atrahasis Epic* refers to a bolt of the Sea in the possession of the god Ea (=Enki). Other texts speak of locks of the sea. One of the main tasks of the head of the pantheon was to keep the sea in check so that chaos would be restrained and order would prevail.

38:14. clay under seal. Stamp seals and cylinder seals were produced by engraving a pattern into clay or rock (see sidebar at Jer 32). A stamp seal pressed into wet clay brings shape, contour, design and meaning to that which has had no distinct or distinguishable features. The light of sunrise likewise brings topographical features into sharp relief.

38:17. gates of death. In the Mesopotamian epic of the Descent of Ishtar the goddess Ishtar had to traverse seven gates to arrive in the netherworld and then to return back to the land of the living. The Israelites also believed that death (Sheol) was held by gates.

38:19. abode of light. The question most likely concerns where each one goes when the other is present. In the ancient Near East the sun passed through the netherworld during the night or resided in sequestered chambers. The

Gilgamesh Epic refers to a place called the region of darkness. This is an area that is constantly in darkness along what is called the Path of the Sun.

38:22. storehouses of snow and hail. The Israelites believed that snow and hail, like rain, were collected in storehouses to be used when necessary (see comment on 37:9).

38:28-29. birth of nature. In the ancient Near East and Greece there is a strong tradition of theogony (birth of the gods as natural elements of the universe). The Babylonian epic of creation commences with the divine natural elements all generated from a watery mist (Tiamat). These natural elements in turn generated other divine natural forms. Similar imagery is found in Greece in Hesiod's *Theogony.* It is difficult to determine whether the verse here discounts this view or is just indicating Job's ignorance of the answer. Canaanite literature knew of Pidrya, daughter of mist, and Taliya, daughter of showers in the Ugaritic Epic of Baal. In Mesopotamian literature, dew is sometimes seen as coming from the stars. Shamash, the sun god, is seen as the one who provides dew, mist and ice.

38:31-32. constellations. The three constellations mentioned here (Pleiades, Orion and the Bear) are the same as mentioned in Job 9:9 (see comment there). The fourth constellation is not certain, but may be a term for the planets. The Babylonians were quite adept at charting the stars (cf. Is 47:13) and believed that the movements of the heavenly bodies influenced earthly affairs. Moreover, by charting their movements one was able to forecast the weather.

39:13-18. behavior of the ostrich. Engraved art from Israel starting about 1000 B.C. and continuing for several centuries portrays a deity flanked by ostriches. O. Keel believes these represent the numinous powers that survive in the wilderness under the control of a deity. It is not difficult to see why the peculiar habits of the ostrich have become the core of proverbs. They appear to be indifferent to their young in that when predators attack, the ostriches attempt to draw them away from the young by running off and leaving them reasonably camouflaged, lying flat on the ground. The eggs of an ostrich are indeed laid in the sand, but the danger of crushing them is not as great as it may seem. The shell is six times thicker than that of a chicken egg. The male shares the incubation responsibilities and undertakes the greater part of the chick's care after it is hatched. An adult ostrich can maintain a speed of fifty miles per hour for a half-mile or so. Ostriches were hunted by pharaohs (portrayed as the prey of Tutankhamun) who prized the plumes for fans. They became extinct in western Asia only in the twentieth century.

40:15-24. Behemoth. Since about the seventeenth century Behemoth has traditionally been identified with the hippopotamus, which flourished in Egypt and much of Africa. The monarchs of Egypt hunted this animal, as depicted on numerous wall reliefs. The hippopotamus plays a role in many Egyptian myths, where it often symbolized enemy powers against the throne. There was even an Egyptian festival where a hippopotamus was ritually slain, symbolic of pharaoh's enemies. The difficulty with this identification is that the description in the text is not particularly suitable to a hippopotamus (especially v. 17). Early intertestamental interpretation favors a mythical/supernatural identification (for instance, many would equate the beast and the dragon of Revelation to Behemoth and Leviathan). In Ugaritic literature the seven-headed dragon (see comment on 41:1 below) is paired with a creature identified as Arshu, also known as El's calf, Atik.

40:24. means of capture. The hippopotamus was considered in antiquity very difficult to capture. One tactic was to pierce the nose of the creature so that it was obliged to breathe through its mouth. It could then be killed by shooting a harpoon in the mouth's opening.

41:1. Leviathan. Leviathan has often been identified as a crocodile, which were found mostly in Egypt (where it symbolized kingly power and greatness) but also sparsely in Palestine. However, the multiple heads in Psalm 74:14 and the fiery breath here in verses 19-21 make the crocodile identification difficult. Alternatively Leviathan has been depicted as a sea monster (see Ps 74:14; Is 27:1). Support for this is found in Ugaritic texts which contain detailed descriptions of a chaos beast, representing the seas or watery anarchy, in the form of a many-headed, twisting sea serpent who is defeated by Baal. There is a close affinity between the description of Leviathan in Isaiah as a "coiling serpent" and the Ugaritic Baal epic, which speaks of how the storm god "smote Litan the twisting serpent." In both cases there is a sense of the god of order and fertility vanquishing a chaos monster. Several other passages in the Old Testament mention Leviathan, but most of them, like Psalm 74:14, speak in terms of God's creative act that establishes control over watery chaos (personified by the sea serpent). In Isaiah 27:1, however, that struggle between order and chaos occurs

at the end of time. It may be that the fall of Satan, portrayed as a seven-headed dragon in Revelation 12:3-9, also echoes the Ugaritic image of Litan as "the tyrant with seven heads." Biblically, Leviathan would therefore most easily fit into the category of "supernatural" creature (like cherubim) as opposed to natural or purely mythological. As such it may appear in extrabiblical mythology, as well as being symbolized by something like a crocodile (as in Ezek 29:3, though Leviathan is not specifically referred to in that context).

41:18-21. flame-emitting creatures. Flame-emitting creatures were known from Ugaritic myth of Baal against the sea (Yam). Yam's terrible messengers terrorized the divine assembly by their fiery appearance. In the Gilgamesh Epic the guardian Huwawa is described by the phrase "his mouth is fire itself."

42:1-17

Job's Restoration

42:11. gifts. The Hebrew term here for "piece of silver" *(qesita)* was an ancient unit used primarily in the Patriarchal age (Gen 33:19). One hundred *qesita*s were required to buy a sizable piece of real estate (see Josh 24:32), and thus one *qesita* was a substantial gift. The gold ring may have been a nose ring or earring worn usually by the wealthy.

42:12. size of herds. Job now has double the size of herds that he had at the beginning of the story (see Job 1:3).

42:15. daughters inheriting along with sons. Daughters normally inherited in ancient Israel only when there was no son (see Num 26:33). Thus the daughters inheriting along with sons is unique in the Old Testament, although there are parallels from the Aegean in the early first millennium B.C. and from Ugarit.

PSALMS

COMMON CONCEPTS

Acrostics. "Acrostic" is a literary form in which the first letters of consecutive lines form a pattern. In alphabetic acrostics the pattern is the alphabet (the first line begins with the first letter of the alphabet, the second line with the second letter, etc.). Other forms of acrostic might spell out a message or a name (for instance, the scribe who composed the work or the deity being honored). There are a number of acrostics in the book of Psalms (9—10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145). Psalm 119 is the most complex in that each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is represented by eight consecutive lines. All Hebrew acrostics in the Bible are alphabetic acrostics. The seven examples of acrostics in Mesopotamian literature are name/sentence acrostics (since Akkadian was syllabic, there was no alphabet and, therefore, no alphabetic acrostics) and generally date to the first half of the first millennium. Egyptian examples offer numerical sequences or complex messages that involve both horizontal and vertical patterns. They are more dependent on puns to accomplish their stylistic objective. Acrostics depend on writing and therefore would not be composed orally. They are intended to be read, not just heard, because of the importance of the visual element. This is especially clear in the Babylonian examples, where a variable sign needs to be read with one value in the poem but a different value in the acrostic. Some of the Babylonian examples also contain a pattern in the last sign of each line. Another variation is found in those examples where the acrostic is repeated each stanza.

Afterlife. *Sheol* is the Hebrew word for the netherworld. Though it may be considered an act of judgment for a person to be consigned to Sheol from life, it is not in itself a place of judgment to be contrasted with a heavenly destiny of rewards. The word is sometimes used as a synonym for grave because the grave was the portal through which one entered the netherworld. Besides "Sheol" the Psalms also frequently refer to "the pit." This type of terminology occurs as a variant term for the netherworld as early as the Sumerian period. This is entirely logical given the understanding of the grave (a pit dug in the earth) as the entry to the netherworld. The Israelites believed that the spirits of the dead continued to exist in this shadowy world. It was not a pleasant existence, but it is never associated with the torment of hellfire in the Old Testament (the imagery seen in Is 66:24 is not associated with Sheol). It is not clear that in Israelite thinking there were any alternatives to Sheol. People who were spared from Sheol were spared from it by being kept alive rather than by going somewhere else. There was at least a vague idea of somewhere else to go seen in the examples of Enoch and Elijah, who avoided the grave and presumably did not go to Sheol.

But those texts are very unclear about what the other alternative was. Lacking specific revelation to the contrary, Israelite beliefs conformed generally to many of those current among their Canaanite and Mesopotamian neighbors.

A composite sketch of Mesopotamian beliefs would suggest that the dead needed to cross a desert, mountains and a river, and then descend through the seven gates of the netherworld. Though described in Mesopotamian literature as a place of darkness where the inhabitants were clothed in bird feathers and ate dust, kinder accounts were also current. The denizens of this shadow world also were sustained by the offerings presented by those who were still alive, and they enjoyed some light as the sun god passed through the netherworld when it was night in the land of the living so he could rise in the east again the next morning. The rulers of the netherworld, Nergal and Ereshkigal, were assisted by a group called the Anunnaki. Despite the depressing descriptions, no one wanted to be turned away from the gates because the alternative was to be a wandering spirit with no access to funerary offerings.

There are some expressions in Psalms that have often been interpreted as a reference to an afterlife in God's presence, though other explanations are possible. Some psalms speak in terms of awakening and seeing God's face (11:7; 17:15). In the context of Psalms this is an anticipation not of heaven but of an experience in the temple, as 27:4 and 63:3 make clear. This phrase occurs with the same meaning in Akkadian, where, for instance, Ashurbanipal longs to look at his god Ashur's face (in the temple) and bow before him. In a hymn to Ishtar it is said that the sick man who sees her face revives. In more general terms the Babylonian sufferer in *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi* says that he calls to his god, who does not show his face, yet he hopes that the morning will bring him good things. The psalmist also expects his deliverance to come when he awakes in the morning (139:18). A second expression concerns being redeemed from Sheol (49:15). This only means that the psalmist has been spared from death for the moment, not that he will go to heaven instead of Sheol (compare the wording and contexts in 18:16-19; 30:2-3). Again, comparable wording occurs in Mesopotamian literature, where Marduk is considered one who restores life from the grave (see comment on 30:3) or gives life to the dead. Gula, the goddess of healing, states that she can return the dead from the netherworld. These are expressions not of resurrection but of healing. For discussion of resurrection, see comment on Daniel 12:2.

Creation in Psalms. The praise of Yahweh as the Creator in Psalms is focused mainly on his ordering and maintenance of the cosmos. His control and his sovereignty are indicated as he shows his mastery of the heavens, clouds, sun, moon, stars, earth, seas, thunder and lightning. As in the rest of the ancient world, in Israel it is more important who is in charge than where things ultimately come from. Nevertheless, Yahweh is also seen as the originator of every part of the cosmos. This also extends to the inhabitants of the cosmos from people and down through the various species of animal life, no matter how obscure. The poetic language of the Psalms does not hesitate to adopt the imagery of the cosmos that is common to the worldview contained in the mythology and old-world science of the ancient Near East. Though today in our scientifically enlightened world, some would desire to find in the Psalms a scientific accuracy garbed (disguised) in poetic language, such an approach poses a methodological dilemma. The Israelite audience was familiar only with its own cultural perspectives. Since these were not informed by revelation (e.g., God had not told them that a round earth revolved around the sun and was held in orbit by gravity), they would have closely resembled those common in the ancient world. If this is so, then the words, images and ideas used in the text communicated to them what to them was reality, not just poetic language. Nevertheless, God's sovereign control of nature is the point.

Whether his control of the storm is depicted in the imagery of God armed with lightning bolts and riding on clouds or is understood in his control of high and low pressure systems and the jet stream, the point of his sovereignty remains unchanged. God did not inform them concerning the science of meteorology so that he could give them an "accurate" idea of his control of the weather. He used the understanding that they had. In the same way God did not inform them that the organ they actually used for thinking was the brain, not the heart or the kidneys, as the ancient world believed. Instead he affirmed his interest in their minds, using the understanding that they had of physiology. The ancient worldview concerning the cosmos is evident in many passages of the Old Testament. For a sampling see the comments in Genesis 1:6-8; Deuteronomy 32:22; Job 9:6, 7; 22:14; 26:7, 10; 36:27; 38:1-31; Psalms 8:3; 24:2; 104:1-35; Proverbs 3:19-20; and Isaiah 40:22. There is no instance in which the text supersedes the science of the day or assumes a more sophisticated view of science.

Lament. Laments may be personal statements of despair, such as that found in Psalm 22:1-21, dirges following the death of an important person (David's elegy for Saul in 2 Sam 1:17-27) or

communal cries in times of crisis, such as Psalm 137. The most famous lament from ancient Mesopotamia is the *Lament over the Destruction of Ur,* which commemorates the capture of the city in 2004 B.C. by the Elamite king Kindattu. For more information on this latter category see the sidebar in the book of Lamentations. In the book of Psalms more than a third of the psalms are laments, mostly of an individual. The most common complaints concern sickness and oppression by enemies. There are a number of technical terms that describe the lament literature in Mesopotamia, and many of them are connected to incantations (that is, magical rites are being performed to try to rid the person of the problem). The petitions that accompany lament are very similar to those found in prayers from the ancient Near East. They include requests for guidance, protection, favor, attention from the deity, deliverance from crisis, intervention, reconciliation, healing and long life.

Praise. Praise psalms can be either individual or corporate. Over a third of the psalms in the book are praise psalms. Corporate psalms typically begin with an imperative call to praise (e.g., "shout to the LORD") and describe all the good things the Lord has done. Individual praise often begins with a proclamation of intent to praise (e.g., "I will praise you, O LORD") and declare what God has done in a particular situation in the psalmist's life. Mesopotamian and Egyptian hymns generally focus on descriptive praise, often moving from praise to petition. Examples of the proclamation format can be seen in the Mesopotamian wisdom composition *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi.* The title is the first line of the piece that is translated "I Will Praise the God of Wisdom." As in the individual praise psalms, this Mesopotamian worshiper of Marduk reports a problem that he had had and how his god brought him deliverance.

Private worship. How much of the worship connected to Psalms was associated with the annual festivals at the temple and the pilgrimages made to those festivals? How much of it was associated with sacrifices that were being made? A large percentage of the people who lived in Israel lived many miles from the temple. Only those who lived in close proximity to Jerusalem could visit there regularly (though there would be no reason to if one had no sacrifice that needed offering). The observant Israelite male might have traveled there three times each year as the law required (see comments on Ex 23:15-17), but there is little evidence in the text that such observance ever became commonplace in the Old Testament period. As a result many Israelites would perhaps only see the temple a few times in their life. Certainly, then, there must have been other contexts in which worship could take place. The synagogue is generally thought to be a postexilic invention at the earliest, and the high places throughout Israel were disapproved in the ideal world of biblical religious practice. Sabbath was not clearly designated as a day set aside for worship, though at the temple in Jerusalem, at least, there were worship activities that took place on that day. We know that Israel's worship centered around sacred space (the temple), sacred times (Sabbath, festivals), sacred rituals (sacrifice) and sacred words (prayers). Additionally we know that the focus of worship was preserving the holiness of God's presence, preserving the Law and the covenant, and recognition of who God was and what he had done. Nevertheless, we have very little idea of the routine of worship in the individual's life.

Retribution principle. In its most basic form the retribution principle contends that the righteous will prosper and the wicked will suffer. On a national level this principle is built into the covenant, with its potential blessings and threat of curses. On the individual level it had been inferred that this was necessary in order for God to maintain justice. Since the Israelites had only the vaguest concept of the afterlife, and no clear idea of judgment or reward in the afterlife, God's justice could only be accomplished in this life. The Israelites believed that if God were to be considered just, rewards and punishments in this life would be proportional to the righteousness or wickedness of the individual. These beliefs had also then led Israelites to believe that if someone was prospering, it must be a reward for righteousness; and if someone was suffering, it must be a punishment for wickedness. The greater the suffering, the greater the wickedness must be. Because of the retribution principle, suffering had become a source of shame. The authors of Babylonian and Assyrian magical texts describe this same principle of retribution, but since they were not completely convinced of the justice of the gods, it was not as big a theological issue in Mesopotamia.

Temple worship. The temple was not a structure designed for corporate worship. It was a structure to provide a place for God to dwell in the midst of his people. It had to be maintained in holiness and purity so that God's continuing presence could be vouchsafed. The priests existed to maintain that purity and to control access. The temple idea was not invented so that there would be a place to offer sacrifices. Rather, several of the sacrifices existed as a means of maintaining the temple. God's presence was the most important element to preserve. The most important acts of worship were those which recognized his holiness and worked to maintain the holiness of his sacred space. For this reason, words of worship often included acts of worship. Though corporate

worship at times took place at the temple, it was not a place that was set up for worship to take place. It was designed to adequately house God, and consequently worship there was inevitable. The word most often used for worship in the Old Testament also means "service." In the ancient Near East most people saw worship as serving the needs of the gods by providing them with food (sacrifice), clothing (placed on the idols) and shelter (luxurious and ornate temples). The God of Israel did not have needs, but it was still appropriate to serve him, as, for instance, the priests and Levites did.

Festivals in the ancient world centered around cycles of nature (New Year's or fertility festivals), mythological events (enthronement of deity conquering chaos), agricultural events (harvest) or historical memorials (dedications or deliverances). They celebrated what deity had done and sought to perpetuate deity's action on their behalf. Often these elements were combined. They usually were celebrated at a holy place and therefore often required pilgrimage. The major religious festivals and holy days celebrated throughout the ancient Near East were for the most part agriculturally based. While daily offerings were made to the gods, there were "patron days" in specific towns and villages for locally honored deities as well as occasions when the national god(s) were processed from one town to another, "visiting" shrines and promoting the general fertility and well-being of the land. The single most important of the Mesopotamian festivals was the *Akitu* or New Year's celebration. The monarch assumed the role of the chief god, while the high priestess served as his consort and represented the chief goddess. Their performance of a series of intricate sacred rituals and sacrifices were designed to please the gods and thus insure a prosperous and fertile year ahead. During the year, based on a lunar calendar, New Moon festivals were celebrated, as were the events of the agricultural calendar (the coming of the rains or annual flood waters, plowing and harvesting). Some rituals grew out of the changing of the seasons, such as the mourning for the "dying god" Tammuz (or Dumuzi), who could only be released from the underworld through the tears of devotees (see Ezek 8:14). At these corporate festivals individuals were generally little more than spectators. It was not unusual for there to be festivals of one kind or another six or eight times during a month.

COMMON METAPHORS FOR GOD

In the ancient Near East it was a common practice to multiply names and titles for deity, sometimes using metaphors, other times just descriptive phrases. At the end of *Enuma Elish* the champion and new head of the pantheon, Marduk, is praised by having his fifty names declared. Some of the most intriguing, along with part of the description connected to them, include Namtilla, the one who gives life; Namru, the pure god who purifies the path; Agaku, who created human beings to set them free; Shazu, director of justice; and Agilima, who built the earth above the water. Below are a few of the common metaphors used as titles for Yahweh in Psalms.

Horn (18:2; 75:10; 89:17; 92:10; 112:9; 132:17; 148:14). This metaphor is only used for God in one place in the Psalms (18:2). In ancient Near Eastern iconography, rays or horns on the crowns of deities symbolize power. These are related to the divine glory (Akkadian, *melammu)* that emanated from the gods and especially from their heads or crowns. So, for instance, one text makes reference to the god Enlil "whose horns gleam like the rays of the sun." It was common in Mesopotamia for kings and gods to wear crowns featuring protruding or embossed horns. Sometimes the sets of horns were stacked one on another in tiers. The winged lion from Ashurnasirpal's palace has a conical crown on its human head with three pairs of tiered horns embossed on it. Both in the Bible and the ancient Near East, then, the awe-inspiring power of the deity could be invested in humans, particularly the king.

Judge. The judge had the responsibility of making decisions concerning legal cases that were brought before him. In the cultures of the ancient Near East the king represented the highest court of appeals from a human standpoint. In many cases, however, there was simply insufficient evidence to allow a human being to arrive at a confident decision. As a result, cases were often settled by deity, thus giving rise to the concept of deity as the judge who sees all the evidence and gives an informed and just decision. There were three significant mechanisms by which this system worked. First was the oath. An oath was taken in cases where physical evidence was unavailable or responsibility for loss was uncertain (Ex 22:10-13; Hammurabi). In this way God was solicited as a witness, and the person taking the oath laid himself open to divine justice. Second was the oracle. In this situation a priest would oversee a process by which the deity would be questioned concerning the innocence or guilt of the accused party. In the ancient Near East omens were generally used in oracular cases. An animal would be sacrificed and the entrails examined to determine

what the deity's verdict was (favorable meant innocent; unfavorable meant guilty). In Israel the Urim and Thummim were used for this purpose. The third mechanism by which deity was involved was trial by ordeal. "Ordeal" describes a judicial situation in which the accused is placed in the hand of God using some mechanism, generally one that will put the accused in jeopardy. If the deity intervenes to protect the accused from harm, the verdict is innocent. Most trials by ordeal in the ancient Near East involved dangers such as water, fire or poison. When the accused was exposed to these threats they were in effect being assumed guilty until the deity declared otherwise by action on their behalf. In each of these situations, God was understood to be the judge who was rendering verdicts. Beyond these more formal contexts, deity was also understood as the judge in the sense that he maintained justice in society. This meant taking up the cause of the unfortunate, the poor, the vulnerable and the oppressed. In Ugaritic literature, Baal is sometimes given the title "Judge," but more frequently it is associated with Yamm ("sea"), who is regularly called "Judge River" (perhaps alluding to the river ordeal by which judgments were passed). In Akkadian literature the sun god Shamash is the god of justice and therefore frequently cast in the role of divine judge. In Egypt, Amon-Re, also the sun god, was seen as responsible for justice.

King. In the ancient Near East the role of king was attributed to the chief national god, the head of the pantheon. During the Old Testament period this included El or Baal for Canaanites, Marduk for Babylon, Chemosh for Moab, Milcom for Ammon, Ashur for Assyria, Dagon for Philistia, Ra for Egypt, Qos for Edom and Hadad for Aram. The rule of these gods in the divine realm was exercised over the other locally worshiped gods (as head of the divine assembly). In the human realm these gods would be closely identified with the human king as they were involved together in military exploits, building projects (especially temples) and maintaining justice in society. All of the areas that the human king was seen as responsible for, the divine king was ultimately responsible for. Military success meant that the rule of the deity was extended over other national deities whom he had conquered. Thus Sennacherib tried to intimidate Hezekiah by listing the gods that had fallen before him (see comment on 2 Chron 32:11). In the days of Ahab, Yahweh had to compete with Baal for kingship of Israel (see comment on 1 Kings 17:1). In the days of Samuel the people had lost faith in Yahweh's kingship and sought to replace him with a human king (see comment on 1 Sam 8:7). In Psalms, Yahweh is repeatedly proclaimed as king. Whether or not this is associated with a formal enthronement festival in Israel (see comment on Day of Yahweh in the sidebar in Joel), Yahweh's position as king recognizes his sovereignty over individual crises and the events that drive them, over national disasters, over the nations and their gods, and over the cosmos and its operation.

Redeemer. In Israelite society the redeemer's *(go'el)* role was fulfilled by a kinsman who helped recover the tribe's losses, whether those losses were human (in which case he hunted down the killer), judicial (in which case he assisted in lawsuits) or economic (in which case he recovered the property of a family member). He was a family member who protected the interests of the family when there had been some intrusion on the rights or holdings of the family. This is the term most frequently used in Psalms. A second term *(pdh)* refers in the legal sphere to freeing someone from standing claims against them or from obligations they have incurred. So redeeming the firstborn involved freeing him from obligation by paying an agreed price. In the Old Testament neither these words nor any of their synonyms refer to redeeming or saving someone eternally from their sins. Psalm 130:8 is the closest, but even that refers only to freeing from the obligations of punishment the nation had brought on itself. In both Ugaritic and Akkadian this verb is used with deity as the subject.

Rock (18:2, 31; 19:14; 28:1; 31:2; 42:9; 62:2; 71:3; 78:35; 89:26; 92:15; 94:22; 95:1; 144:1). There are two different Hebrew words that are used for this divine title, with no discernable difference in their usage. The title does not occur as such in the literature of the cultures surrounding Israel, but we know that it was used because it can be found as the theophoric element in Aramaic and Amorite personal names. A rock could be a foundation for a building, it could provide protection (to hide behind) or shade (to sit beside), and it could be impervious and unmovable. All of these qualities made it an apt metaphor for describing God.

Shepherd. In the ancient Near East both kings and gods were often portrayed as shepherds of their people. Just as the sheep were totally dependent on the shepherd for their care and protection, people depended on the king and the gods. Shamash, the Mesopotamian sun god and the god of justice, is praised as being the shepherd of all that is below. The Egyptian sun god, Amon, is described as a shepherd who brings his herds to pasture, thus providing food for his suffering people.

Shield (3:3; 5:12; 7:10; 18:2, 30; 28:7; 59:11; 84:11; 144:2). In battle the type of shield would be chosen

to suit the type of combat one expected to encounter. If siege was being laid to defend city walls, one would want a body-length shield that would provide protection from arrows and sling stones raining down from the walls. In contrast, hand-to-hand combat in the open field would favor a small maneuverable shield that could be used to ward off thrusts by sword or spear. Nearly all of the examples in Psalms refer to the latter (all of the above except 5:12). The metaphor of deity as a shield is familiar from the ancient Near East in, for instance, a prophetic oracle given to the Assyrian king Esarhaddon, who is assured by the goddess Ishtar that she will be a shield for him. Ishtar, as the goddess of war, is referred to as "lady of the shield," and her planet, Venus, takes the Akkadian word for shield, *aritu,* as one of its names.

Stronghold/fortress (9:9; 18:2; 27:1; 31:2; 37:39; 43:2; 46:7; 48:3; 52:7; 59:9,16,17; 62:2, 6-8; 71:3; 91:2; 94:22; 144:2). There are three different Hebrew terms that are used in conveying this metaphor, with the occurrences divided fairly evenly. The range of meaning that they cover extends from naturally defensible locations like a rocky outcrop or a cave, to garrison forts, to fortified cities and even to fortified citadels within cities. In an Assyrian text the king is identified as a fortress to the people. There is no sign of this metaphor for deity in Egyptian or Akkadian literature.

Warrior. In the divine warrior motif, the deity is fighting the battles and defeating the deities of the enemy. In Assyria, Nergal is the king of battle, and Ishtar is viewed as a war goddess. The Canaanite Baal and the Babylonian Marduk are divine warriors. In this worldview human warfare is viewed simply as a representation of warfare among the gods. The stronger god would be victorious regardless of the strengths or weaknesses of the human combatants. Thunder and lightning were considered to regularly accompany the presence of a deity, often in a battle setting. From the Sumerian *Exaltation of Inanna,* to the Hittite myths about the storm god, to the Akkadian and Ugaritic mythologies, the gods are viewed as thundering in judgment against their enemies. Baal is depicted as grasping a handful of thunderbolts. In Psalms, Yahweh is sometimes portrayed as the divine warrior coming to the aid of the psalmist against his enemies. Additionally, however, he is depicted as doing battle against the forces of cosmic chaos. Ancient mythologies often portrayed gods in battle against chaos, resulting in the harnessing and organizing of the cosmos. Both Marduk (Babylonian) and Baal (Canaanite) subdue the sea, which is personified in their divine foe (Tiamat and Yamm respectively). The cosmic conflict motif depicts the principal deity overcoming cosmic forces (usually forces of chaos like Death or Sea) to bring order to the cosmos. In the ancient Near East these forces are usually personified as gods, but Psalms preserves a certain ambiguity on that count.

MUSICAL TERMS

As would be the case with any hymnal, the text of the book of Psalms also contains instructions on orchestration, which tune to use to perform a psalm, the appropriate tempo, as well as performance markings or rubrics such as pauses, breath marks and the use of crescendo and decrescendo modulations. In modern music much of this information is written in Italian or Latin. A musician or singer must learn these technical terms in order to perform the music properly. However, two thousand years from now the meaning of many of these terms may well be lost to memory. It is not surprising therefore to discover that we cannot translate and do not fully understand some of the technical terms that appear in the superscriptions of the Psalms.

Alamoth. Title of Psalm 46. This term only appears in Psalm 46, but it is also mentioned in 1 Chronicles 15:20, where temple musicians are to play their harps "according to Alamoth." By comparison with the Greek word *élumos,* which means small flute, this may refer either to a high-pitched voice or to playing on the upper register of the instrument.

Death of the Son. Title of Psalm 9. This is an incipit or set of cue words for a tune now lost. There is some difficulty translating *'alumot.* The LXX renders it "the strength of youth." The translation in the NIV is apparently based on connection with the Ugaritic god Mot, "death" (see Ps 48:14).

Do Not Destroy. Title of Psalms 57—59; 75. This is likely an incipit, the opening words of a text or song title (possibly based on Is 65:8). Accompanied by *miktam,* it may also serve as a shorthand means of forbidding the destruction or removal of an inscription or text.

Doe of the Morning. Title of Psalm 22. This short phrase is a cue given to the director of the psalm to perform it according to a popular tune, "The Doe of the Morning." It would be a common practice to set new words to an old, familiar tune. Some have suggested a tie to the Ugaritic god *šḥr* and thus an ancient origin for the song.

Dove on Distant Oaks. Title of Psalm 56. The phrase is a cue for a song title and tune for the performance of this psalm. There is some uncertainty in whether to translate *'elim* as "doves" or "gods."

Flutes. Title of Psalm 5. It is suggested that the term translated "flutes" here (neḥilot) refers to "lamentation-pipes" such as those that are depicted in Egyptian art of professional mourners. Note also the instruments used by the ecstatic prophets in 1 Samuel 10:5, which may have been flutes. The phrase "to the flutes" may also be a cue for the tune of the psalm.

Gittith. Title of Psalms 8; 81; 84. Some interpreters tie this term to a musical instrument, possibly associated with the Philistine city of Gath. It is also possible that it is a cue word signifying a rhythm, a song or a dance patterned after the work of grape treaders in the winepress (Hebrew *gat;* see Is 16:10; Jer 25:30).

Higgaion. 9:16. This term may be an orchestration cue to the musicians. It has the meaning "utterance" or "musings" (see Is 16:7 for its use as "mourn") and thus may indicate a type of glissando or fluttering sound, perhaps by string accompaniment.

Jeduthun. Title of Psalms 39; 62; 77. Since this is the personal name of one of David's temple singers (1 Chron 25:1-6), it is possible that its appearance in three superscriptions is simply a reference to that person or possibly to a style of performance attributed to him. It may also be a cue to a tune associated with Jeduthun.

Lily of the Covenant. Title of Psalms 60; 80. This is a set of cue words or an incipit for a song title whose tune is now unknown. See also Psalms 45 and 69 and 2 Chronicles 4:5 for the use of this word for "lily."

Mahalath. Title of Psalm 53. Based on 1 Kings 1:40 this term probably refers to a type of flute or pipe used in celebratory processions. Since it can also be translated as "sickness" (1 Kings 8:37), it is possible that the instrument was used in healing rituals.

Mahalath Leannoth. Title of Psalm 88. The word *le'annoth* means "to afflict" and therefore may be added here to coincide with the theme of penitence in Psalm 88. Since this term may be a form of the Hebrew word *'anah,* "to chant" (Ex 15:21), its use along with Mahalath, "flute," could therefore be a reference to an antiphonal line of music for more than one instrument or alternating chanted and instrumental lines.

Maskil. Title of Psalms 32; 42; 44; 45; 47; 52—55; 74; 78; 88; 89; 142. Since it appears in so many psalms and has the meaning "to comprehend" (from Hebrew *sakal*), this may have been a general label for a set of didactic or penitential songs (see the possible connection to mourning in Amos 5:16-17). It may also refer to an "artfully crafted" song or argument, with uplifting words, exhorting the people to praise God (see 2 Chron 30:22).

Miktam. Title of Psalms 16; 56—60. This term always appears accompanied by "of David." The LXX translates the word *miktam* as *stelographia,* "inscription carved on a monument," and thus the word may represent formal declarations or an official song or ritual performance. It may also refer to a song or declaration that was both inscribed on stone and recited publicly in the temple.

Petition *(Hazkir)*. Title of Psalms 38; 70. The root verb, *zakar,* appears in Leviticus 2:2 and Numbers 5:15 in reference to a cereal offering accompanied by frankincense. Similarly, in Isaiah 66:3 it refers to an offering of frankincense. Elsewhere it is used to refer to invoking God's name (Ex 20:21; Amos 6:10). Thus it may refer to a public ritual including both an offering and a petition for God's aid.

Prayer *(Tephillah)*. Title of Psalms 17; 86; 90; 102; 142. This is a term for a psalm designed to call on the people or on a sinner to pray to God for forgiveness (see 1 Kings 8:38). The song takes the form of a lament, recognizing the right of God to chastise the people, and bids them to pray while wearing mourning clothes and engaging in fasting (Ps 35:13).

Psalm *(Mizmor)*. Title of Psalms 47—51; 62—68; 76; 77; 80; 82—85; 87; 88; 91; 98; 100; 101; 108—110; 139—141; 143; 145. This technical term appears fifty-seven times in the superscriptions of Psalms and is accompanied by "of David" thirty-five times. Because of its relation to the Hebrew verb "to prune a grapevine" (Is 5:6), some commentators suggest it refers to a stringed instrument whose strings would be plucked in much the same manner as a vine is snipped by the thumbnail of a vinedresser. However, comparison with the Akkadian *zamaru,* "to sing," may point to *mizmor* simply being a generic term for a song or for a song accompanied by stringed instruments.

Selah. Psalms 3; 4; 7; 9; 20; 21; 24; 32; 39; 44; 46—50; 52; 54; 55; 57; 59—62; 66—68; 75—77; 81—85; 87—89; 140; 143. This is the most ubiquitous of the technical terms in Psalms. It appears seventy-one times in thirty-nine psalms and three times in Habakkuk 3, but never in a superscription. Since it is impossible to determine if the word's placement is original or is the result of editors or copyists, its exact purpose remains uncertain. Among the suggestions for its meaning is "interlude," indicating a break in the text or performance. It is also possible that it is a cue for the choir to repeat a litany or affirmation of a statement in the psalm or for

a particular instrument, possibly a drum, to be beaten to keep the rhythm or emphasize a word.

Sheminith. Title of Psalms 6; 12. It is possible that this technical term can be translated as "eight-stringed instrument" and that the reference here is either to the use of this device or possibly to the use of the eighth string. This upper register would provide a high pitched sound, imitating the voices of female singers (see 1 Chron 15:21).

Shiggaion. Title of Psalm 7. Based on comparison with the Akkadian *šegu,* "to howl or lament," it is likely that this term (also found in Hab 3:1) is a label or indicator of a psalm of lament. The word in Hebrew means "to go astray" and in this context may refer either to the subject of the song or poem or perhaps to an exaggerated rhythm or enthusiastic chant.

Song *(Shir)*. Titles of Psalms 46; 48; 65—68; 75; 76; 83; 87; 88; 91; 108. This is simply a generic term for "song," appearing many times in the Psalms and elsewhere (Ex 15:1; Num 21:17; Deut 31:19). It is placed both in the superscriptions and in the body of some psalms (69:30; 78:63) and is sometimes accompanied by *mizmor.* As such it must have had both a general as well as a technical meaning within the body of religious music, for instance in the title "Songs of Ascent" (Ps 120—134).

Songs of Ascent. Title of Psalms 120—134. Medieval and rabbinic tradition held that these fifteen psalms were to be sung on the fifteen steps leading up from the court of the women to the court of the Israelites in Jerusalem's postexilic temple. More likely, however, is the explanation that they were chanted or sung by religious pilgrims as they made their way up to Jerusalem or "Zion" during the three major religious festivals each year (see the comment on Ex 23:17).

Stringed Instruments. Title of Psalms 4; 6; 54; 55; 61; 67; 76. It is unclear whether a specific type of stringed instrument is indicated by this term, *neginot,* "to run over the strings." However, refer ence to the lyre played by David in 1 Samuel 16:16 and the string player in 2 Kings 3:15 and in the Egyptian Tale of Wenamon suggest this is a hand-held instrument (see also Is 23:16).

Tune of Lilies. Title of Psalms 45; 69. This is an incipit or set of cue words for a tune now unknown. It may also be an instruction to accompany the song with a lily-shaped instrument played with either six strings or six bells. It is possible the term for "lily" derives from the Akkadian *šuššu,* "a shock of," but that cannot be confirmed.

Wedding Song. Title of 45. Psalm 45 contains the celebration of an Israelite king's marriage to a princess from Tyre, possibly Ahab to Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31). It only appears here but may have been applied to documents solemnizing the marriage.

Psalms 1—41

Book One

1:5. standing in judgment. One who stands (arises up) in judgment or in the assembly is one who is given the floor or provided a forum in which to speak his or her piece. Usually the action applies to a witness (as in Deut 19:15 and Ps 27:12), but in Job 30:28 it describes Job as the plaintiff. In the Ugaritic Baal Cycle an accuser of some sort stands up and spits on Baal in the assembly of the gods (sons of El).

1:5. assembly of the righteous. The assembly is a formal judicial body, just as the assembly of the sons of El was in the previous entry. This phrase is similar to an idea in Psalm 82:1, where God functions in relation to a judicial council as cases are decided. In the heavenly realm there was a divine council that served this function (see comment on Is 40:13-14), but human courts also operated by means of an assembly (Josh 20:9).

2:6. deity installing king. The term to anoint or install has been found as a Ugaritic root in a mythological text. The office of king was a divine appointment in ancient Israel and other areas of the Near East. Sargon of Akkad (c. 2300 B.C.) claims to have been installed by Ishtar, while the Sumerian King List (compiled sometime after 2000 B.C.) claims that towns received their monarchs by divine appointment. This ideology continued into the Israelite period. Kings of Assyria and Babylon celebrated yearly enthronement festivals in which the chief deity was celebrated as king and the whole enthronement process for both god and king was reenacted. Mesopotamian kings saw themselves as established on the throne by means of a divine decree. In Egypt Horus installed the kings in a coronation ceremony that involved consecration and purification rites.

2:7. king as son of deity. In the ancient Near East kings were commonly understood as having a filial relationship to deity and were often considered to have been engendered by deity. Egyptian kingship was particularly strong on this point, since the kingship of the pharaoh was seen as derived from the divine

realm. More particularly he was conceived as the son of Re, the sun god. In Ugaritic literature, Keret, king of Khubur, is identified as the son of El, the chief god of the Canaanites. Furthermore, iconographic evidence shows two princes suckling the breasts of the goddess Anat. Among the Aramean kings the designation was even included in their throne names (Ben-Hadad means son of Hadad). In Mesopotamia, from Gilgamesh in the mid-third millennium through kings such as Gudea, Hammurabi, Tukulti-Ninurta and Ashurbanipal, just to name a few, it was part of the royal prerogative to claim divine heritage. The Israelite kings, however, were sons of the deity on the basis of a covenant and not sons by nature (see Ps 89:26; 2 Sam 7:14).

2:9. iron scepter. The scepter was representative of kingship, and iron was symbolic of strength. Egyptian rulers as early as the Narmer palette are portrayed as striking enemies with a rod/scepter. Of particular interest is the fact that the evidence from the execration texts (see next entry) suggests that the pots were smashed with a mace.

2:9. dashed to pieces like pottery. Egyptian kings celebrated their rule by writing the names of their enemies on pots and symbolically smashing them. These are referred to as the execration texts. Assyrian kings likewise used the metaphor of smashed pottery to assert their supremacy over enemies.

4:6. light of God's face. The metaphor "light of God's face" is found in royal letters from the Egyptian city of Amarna and in Ugaritic correspondence. For example, "the face of the Sun (i.e., Pharaoh) shone brightly upon me" is a statement made by one of the Egyptian king's subordinates. Two small silver scrolls (about one inch long) have been found in the area known as Keteph Hinnom in Jerusalem. They were amulets in a burial cave from the sixth or seventh century B.C., and they contained the benediction from Numbers 6:25, which includes the request that the Lord "make his face shine upon you." At present they represent the oldest example of any text of Scripture. The concept of the shining face of the deity resulting in mercy is found in Mesopotamian documents and inscriptions from as early as the twelfth century B.C.

6:6. Israelite beds. The poetical metaphor of crying on one's bed is also found in Ugaritic literature: "His tears are poured forth like shekels upon the ground, like pieces-of-five upon the bed." Beds in ancient Israel were most likely like those represented iconographically in the Near East. They were in essence reclining couches and high beds. The poor probably slept on flat mats on the floor, while the average person used a cot.

7:13. flaming arrows. The Old Testament never uses the word for arrows to describe the flaming arrows used by human armies ("firebrands" of Prov 26:18). In Akkadian there are a few references to the use of flaming arrows that kings rain down on the enemy. These arrows were presumably dipped in a type of oil or pitch and set on fire. The arrows shot by Yahweh are usually considered to be bolts of lightning (see 2 Sam 22:15; Ps 77:17-18 for the two in parallel). Lightning would fit well with the concept of flaming arrows in that it is sometimes just called fire. In the divine warrior motif the deity is fighting the battles and defeating the deities of the enemy. In Assyria Nergal is the king of battle, and Ishtar is viewed as a war goddess raining down flames in war. The Canaanite Baal and the Babylonian Marduk are divine warriors. Thunder and lightning were considered to regularly accompany the presence of a deity, often in a battle setting. From the Sumerian *Exaltation of Inanna,* to the Hittite myths about the storm god, to the Akkadian and Ugaritic mythologies, the gods are viewed as thundering in judgment against their enemies. Baal is depicted as grasping a handful of thunderbolts. Thundering terminology is picked up in royal rhetoric as Hittite or Assyrian kings portray themselves as the instruments of the gods, thundering against those who have violated treaties or stood in the way of empire expansion.

8:3. heavens as work of fingers. In Akkadian literature the various levels of heaven are said to be made of various types of stone. The lower heavens were made of jasper, and Marduk, the chief god of Babylon, was reported to have drawn (etched) the constellations on them. This verb is used when pictures or reliefs are being made. In *Enuma Elish* Marduk draws the boundary lines for the year in the heavens. This refers to his setting the courses of the stars. The second half of verse three indicates that this psalm also has the heavenly bodies in mind. God elsewhere inscribes with his finger (Ex 31:18; Deut 9:10), but fingers can also be used parallel to hands with regard to handiwork (Is 2:8).

8:4-6. dignity of humankind. The status of the human race in Israelite thinking was very high when contrasted with the status people were given in Mesopotamian thinking (as seen in the Babylonian epic of creation). In the Mesopotamian view the gods had no plan to create people as an integral part of the world that they had set up for themselves. People

were only brought into existence as a consequence of the gods becoming tired of working so hard to provide for themselves. Humans were made to be servants to deities, who had no interest in hard labor. In this way of thinking human dignity was achieved through the idea that the gods needed them. Here, instead, people rule over all other creatures.

9:12. avenger of blood. See the comment on Numbers 35:9-34 for a discussion of the responsibility of the family to avenge a death. It is possible that the title "avenger of blood" evolved out of the family obligation to engage in blood revenge when one of their clan members was slain. Such a process, while typical of tribal society, is extremely disruptive to the maintenance of order within an organized state. As a result the "avenger of blood" may have been appointed by the government to serve both the needs of the family and the state by apprehending the accused and then carrying out sentence if the verdict was murder. It is possible that a more general function is intended in this psalm, since it does not use the same technical term used in the Numbers passage. See the comments on Genesis 4:14-15 and 9:5-6.

9:13. gates of death. The netherworld, Sheol, was believed to be like an earthly city in that it contained houses and even a city wall (primarily to keep in its inhabitants). In the *Descent of Ishtar* the netherworld has a gate complex with seven gates and gatekeepers at each one to control access. In Egyptian iconography the gates of death are portrayed as gateways into the necropolis.

9:20. striking with terror. The dread of a deity as a divine warrior was often believed to precede a powerful, successful army into battle. Egyptian and Assyrian texts and reliefs portray the god as a winged disk terrifying the enemy before the arrival of their own armies. In the inscriptions of Thutmose III this terror is attributed to Amun-Re, and Hittite, Assyrian and Babylonian texts all have their divine warriors who strike terror into the hearts of the enemy. The concept of deity having an awesome, unapproachable appearance was not limited to Israelite theology, for in Mesopotamia the gods displayed their power through their *melammu,* their divine brilliance. The splendor or "glory" of God overwhelms the enemy. In the face of such divine magnificence, both the gods and the forces of other nations are utterly defeated and forced to submit to the supreme deity.

11:6. fiery coals and burning sulfur on the wicked. In Akkadian texts sulfur burnt on coals is a fumigating agent. The gods Ea and Enlil send down sulfur as a purifier that counteracts witchcraft. But it is not part of the divine warrior's arsenal for the judging of enemies. The terms here are reminiscent of, though not identical to, those used in the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (see also Ezek 38:22).

11:7. seeing face of judge. Seeing the face of a judge or god was a metaphor in Mesopotamia and was equivalent to being on their "good side," because it referred to gaining access to their presence. It usually refers to a supplicant or plaintiff gaining an audience with a judge. If a judge or god turned his face toward you, you were looked on with favor.

12:6. clay furnace. The Hebrew term used for furnace is found only once in the Bible. Because of the mention of silver, the context implies that a clay crucible used for smelting purposes is being described. Crucibles appear in Egyptian wall paintings, and clay exemplars have been found by archaeologists.

12:6. seven purifications. Usually silver went through the refining process a few times to remove all of the dross. The imagery here is that if one is purified seven times (the number of completion in Hebrew), one is completely purified.

13:2. how long? This question occurs nearly twenty times in Psalms, usually in connection with a lament psalm. It is found also in Mesopotamia as the Sumerian *Lament over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* asks, "How long will the enemy eye be cast upon my account?"

16:4. blood libations. Most libations in the ancient Near East were of beer, wine or water, though honey, oil and milk are also found. No evidence of blood libations has yet been found.

16:6. boundary lines. The imagery of God determining boundaries is also found in Deuteronomy 32:8, where God made boundaries for the nations. In Mesopotamian land-sale contracts the boundary lines were usually clearly delineated. Furthermore, the Kassites of Late Bronze Age Babylonia used boundary stones (Akkadian, *kudurru)* to mark property divisions. They had texts on them that included detailed curses for those who violated the boundaries. In an inheritance the property was divided among the heirs, and obviously certain portions of land would be more desirable and productive than others.

For common concepts, metaphors for God and musical terms, see pages 511-18.

16:8. positioned at the right hand. A fully armed warrior would hold his weapon in his right hand and his shield in his left. The person to the right of a king would have the privilege of defending him. For a king to put someone there would be an affirmation of trust and therefore an honor. In contrast, when the Lord takes up his position at someone's right hand, as here, he is in a position to offer defense with his shield (see Ps 109:31). The metaphor transitions easily from the battlefield to the courtroom. Akkadian usually juxtaposes right and left in parallel lines, but there are occasions where deity is said to walk at the right side of a person in battle.

16:10. not abandoned to the grave. In the context this refers to not allowing someone to be put to death at the hand of malicious enemies. The psalmist will not be consigned to Sheol; he will not see decay because his life will be spared (see Ps 30:2-3). An early Sumerian text recounts the tale of an individual who is facing capital punishment for the crimes of which he is accused. Instead, however, he finds himself snatched from the jaws of destruction and praises the goddess Nungal for his deliverance.

17:8. apple of eye. Literally the term is "the little one of the daughter of your eye." This idiomatic expression is also found in Deuteronomy 32:10. The pupil or apple of the eye is the most sensitive part of the body and thus the part needing the most protection.

17:8. shadow of wings. The metaphor of taking refuge under the wings of deity is found also in other psalms (36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 91:4) and is consistently related to issues of care and protection connected with the covenant. The metaphor is also known from other ancient Near Eastern cultures, particularly Egyptian, where even disembodied wings represent protection. Deities with wings are often portrayed overshadowing the king. Likewise an ivory from Arslan Tash dated to the eighth century shows characters in human form with wings protecting a figure in the center.

18:4. cords of death/grave. Noose snares were commonly used by hunters in the ancient Near East. In this metaphor, death or Sheol is the hunter. For many cultures in the ancient Near East, Sheol, the abode of the grave (i.e., underworld) was a very real place where individuals led an amorphous existence, eating clay and dust, and hoping that their descendants would take care of their needs. There were gates and gatekeepers to keep the dead inside, and thus it was called "the land of no return." This description can be found in the second-millennium B.C. Akkadian epic *The Descent of Ishtar.* Apparently the Hebrew view of the grave was not unlike this, although there is no elaborate description of it in the Old Testament.

18:8 smoke from nostrils, fire from mouth. This imagery is not found elsewhere in the ancient Near East. The closest example is in *Enuma Elish*, where it is said of Marduk that when his lips moved, fire blazed forth. Though Yahweh could not be portrayed in any form (animal or otherwise), poetic description of Yahweh by means of animal imagery in order to highlight certain attributes was legitimate (lion/leopard in Hos 13:7; flying birds in Is 31:5; bear in Lam 3:10; wild ox in Num 24:8 [all translations but NIV]).

18:9. dark clouds under feet. The term for "dark clouds" has been found in the Ugaritic epic of Baal and Anath, where the god Baal is described as the "rider of the clouds" and his "voice" as the sound and fury of thunder and lightning.

18:10. mounted cherubim and flew. In Syro-Palestine iconography deities are often portrayed standing on the backs of wild creatures (usually bulls). An Assyrian relief from Maltaya pictures seven gods, each standing on the back of a different animal. Most intriguing is an Assyrian relief that pictures a storm god replete with weapons, riding the back of a composite creature with a lion's body, an eagle's wings and a bull's head. In the Old Testament Yahweh is described as enthroned on the cherubim in the Holy of Holies in the temple (see comment on 1 Sam 4:3-4), and in Ezekiel's throne vision (chaps. 1, 10) Yahweh is transported on a mobile chariot-throne borne by composite creatures.

18:12-15. weapons of divine warrior. Yahweh's arrows are usually considered to be bolts of lightning. In the divine warrior motif, the deity fights the battles and defeats the deities of the enemy. In Assyria, Nergal is the King of Battle, and Ishtar is viewed as a war goddess. The latter rains down flames in war. The Canaanite Baal and the Babylonian Marduk are divine warriors.

Thunder and lightning were considered to regularly accompany the presence of a deity in the ancient Near East, particularly in a battle setting. From the Sumerian *Exaltation of Inanna* to the Hittite myths about the Storm God to the Akkadian and Ugaritic mythologies, the gods are viewed as thundering in judgment against their enemies. Baal is depicted as grasping a handful of thunderbolts. Thundering terminology is also picked up in royal rhetoric as Hittite or Assyrian kings portray themselves as the instruments

of the gods, thundering against those who have violated treaties or stood in the way of empire expansion.

18:16. deep waters. When the Babylonian god Marduk brings restoration he is praised for taking hold of the individual and drawing him out of the waters of the Hubur River. This is the river that flows at the gates of the netherworld, and being drawn from its waters indicates being saved from death at the last moment. This imagery continues into Greek mythology with the famous River Styx and even finds its way into Christian literature as indicated by the river of death that flows in front of the golden city in *Pilgrim's Progress.*

18:28. keeping lamp burning. Lamps were often used metaphorically in Israel to symbolize life and prosperity. They were often placed in tombs for this reason. The expression "his lamp" is used often in Scripture to symbolize life. As an eternal flame is a symbol of endurance and remembrance, the reign of a descendant of David in Jerusalem provides a link to God's promise to David's dynasty (2 Sam 7:8-16). Similar uses of the word in Ugaritic and Akkadian are tied to perpetuation of rule or divine presence. Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III is referred to as the light of all humankind. An Old Babylonian idiom expresses a family having no descendants by the image of its brazier going out. Alternatively, in the superstitious world of the ancient Near East there were demons lurking everywhere who especially favored the dark. One of the ways that gods were figuratively seen as providing protection was by imparting continuous light, suggested by phrases such as "the lamp of the gods" in texts from Ugarit. The Canaanite god Sapash was given the attribute of "divine lamp." In Mesopotamia, Lamashtu was a particularly feared demon. The god Nushku was represented by fire, and his lit lamp held the feared demons at bay. Here the psalmist may be referring to the lamp lit on his behalf. Yahweh is the lamp by the side of the psalmist warding off danger.

18:33. feet of deer. The term used here refers to one of the species of deer known throughout the ancient Near East. It is often discussed with other caprids such as the Nubian ibex, mountain sheep and gazelles. All of these caprids are known for their sure-footedness on treacherous paths. As early as Sumerian literature (e.g., *Dumuzi's Dream)* this type of metaphor is used for swift sure-footedness.

18:34. bow of bronze. If this expression reflects an actual weapon, it may either indicate a wooden bow decorated with bronze or bronze-tipped arrows. On the other hand, it may simply be a poetic way of denoting the strength of the warrior's bow. The bow was a symbol of royal strength in both Assyria and Egypt, as well as one of the weapons of the gods. In the latter regard the sun disk is portrayed as drawing a bow that, as the weapon of the sun god, could be understood to be bronze. An Assyrian relief from about the time of David portrays the sun god, Ashur, delivering what the connected inscription calls a magnificent bow into the hands of the king.

19:1-4. nature revealing God. In the Egyptian *Papyrus Insinger* (a composition from the intertestamental period), it is observed that the hidden work of a god is made known on earth day by day. For the next twenty lines he describes many of the aspects of the operation of nature that have been created by the god and presumably are involved in this revelation. These works of creation included light and darkness; day, month and year; summer and winter; constellations; the birth process; sleep; and the succession of generations.

19:5. bridegroom pavilion. The chamber of a bridegroom was the specially prepared room in which the marriage was consummated. The use in Joel 2:16 suggests this in its parallelism. It has this meaning in early rabbinic Judaism, but after the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. it takes on a reference to the pavilion in which the formal wedding ceremony was conducted.

19:6. ancient perceptions of sun's journey. In many ancient Near Eastern cultures it was assumed that the sun ran a daily course through the heavens. Mesopotamian texts refer to the gates of the heavens where the sun enters and exits. In these texts all of the heavenly bodies have paths or courses that they follow, represented as bands across the sky. Egyptian materials also offer these concepts in both text and iconography. The sun god is portrayed as riding in his barque across the skies between entry and exit spots on either horizon.

19:7. Law and sun. In the ancient world the sun god was usually the god of justice. For the psalmist, then, it is natural to move from the relationship of Yahweh and the sun to Yahweh's provision for justice through the law. Much of the imagery used to describe the law can also be found related to sun gods in the ancient world.

19:8. light to the eyes. Light to the eyes refers

to life and therefore, in one sense, is given to all (Prov 29:13). The law, however, is able to bring extended life to those who follow its commands. When the light goes from the eyes, death is near (13:3; 38:10).

19:10. pure gold. The imagery of "pure gold" is known from other ancient Near Eastern cultures. For example, a number of inscriptions on doors at a Ptolemaic period Egyptian temple at Edfu read, "Everyone who enters by this door, beware of entering in impurity, for God loves purity more than millions of possessions, more than hundreds of thousands of fine gold." The word translated "pure gold" is somewhat obscure (it is a single word, not a noun with an adjective). It could refer to a particular grade or to a particular variety, for instance, red gold or white gold.

19:10. date honey compared to bee honey. Honey represents a natural resource, in most occurrences the syrup of the date rather than bees' honey. Since sugar was not available, honey was the most commonly used sweetener. There is no evidence of bee domestication in Israel, though the Hittites had accomplished that and used bee honey in their sacrifices (as did the Canaanites). In the Bible honey occurs in lists with other agricultural products (see 2 Chron 31:5). It is possible that the reference to honey in the third line of the verse is date honey, but the last line of the verse is clearly referring to bee honey since the honeycomb is mentioned.

19:12. unwitting sin. The belief in the ancient world was that the gods had many more regulations, requirements and restrictions than were known to people. In a "Prayer to Every God" an Assyrian worshiper goes through an elaborate listing of possible offenses (the forbidden thing I have eaten, I do not know; the prohibited place on which I have set foot, I do not know) asking that his unwitting sins be pardoned, claiming the offense was committed in ignorance. Additionally the penitential prayers from Mesopotamia known as *shigu* prayers contain frequent reference to being absolved of unknown sins. Egyptians were also concerned as reflected in a late demotic wisdom piece *(Papyrus Insinger),* where the author begs forgiveness for unwitting sin.

20:5. banners. Banners were used by the Israelites and others, including the Assyrians, as standards of warfare (Song 6:4) and as an assembly of tribes (Num 2:2). In the Egyptian army the divisions were named for various gods (e.g., the division of Amun, division of Seth), and the standards would identify the division by means of some representation of the god. Holding high the banners was evidently a sign of victory. Banners are described in significant detail in the texts from Qumran.

21:8. right hand seizing foes. In its attempt to be colorful, the NIV has unfortunately distorted the picture of this verse. The verb ("to find") used in both lines of the verse describes attacking the enemy with a weapon, not apprehending him. Most soldiers were right-handed, so one would not seize the foe with the right hand—that is where the weapon would be held. The right hand, then, is used for offense, and it will "find" its mark. A hymn to Shamash says that the god's weapon will make straight for the wicked man and there will be none to save him. In Egyptian reliefs and paintings (also Ugarit) the king often strikes a pose with his weapon upraised in his right hand, while his left hand lays hold of the enemy. This verse is only describing part of that picture because the lines are parallel, not contrasting. Both lines describe what the right hand does.

21:9. fiery furnace. God is pictured as a fiery furnace that destroys everything that is put into it. The writer is probably referring to the large ovens used to bake bricks and to smelt metals. For more information about furnaces see comment on Daniel 3:6.

22:12. bulls of Bashan. Bashan was a very fertile region east of the Jordan River, well known for its sheep and plump cattle. In this prime cattle-grazing area, one could find pampered cattle being raised for the market, as well as a breed of ferocious undomesticated cattle that roamed free. Legal texts demonstrate that goring oxen were a danger, and that they could even occasionally be found wandering the streets.

22:13. lions. It is known that lions were captured and kept in cages so that they could be released for hunting. In Assyrian texts oath-breakers were put into cages of wild animals set up in the city square to be publicly devoured. More relevant to this passage, in seventh-century Assyrian literature the lions' pit occurs as a metaphor for vicious and antagonistic courtiers of the king. In one piece of Babylonian wisdom literature Marduk metaphorically closes (muzzles) the mouth of the lion (the oppressor) to put an end to his devouring tactics.

22:14. bones "out of joint." "Out of joint" is somewhat interpretive here; the Hebrew reads "scattered about" (comparable verb form only occurs in three places: Job 4:11; 41:17; Ps 92:9), as when a predatory pack has devoured a victim and each member of the pack carries off its share. Some of the cultures of the ancient Near East practiced secondary burial: the

body would be laid out (in a cave, for instance) until the flesh decomposed, and then the bones would be buried in the final resting place. Even if a body was devoured, proper burial could be carried out if the bones could be retrieved. So Ashurbanipal speaks of punishing his enemies by taking their bones out of Babylon and scattering them around outside the city. He also boasts of opening the graves of past kings of his enemies and carting off their bones "to inflict unrest upon their ghosts." For more information see comment on 53:5.

22:16. dogs. Dogs are equated with evildoers in this passage. Though in the Near East they were domesticated at a very early date in the Neolithic period, they still lived as scavengers, often roaming in packs on the outskirts of town (Ps 59:6, 14) and scavenging in town itself (1 Kings 14:11). For these reasons the term *dog* is often one of derision and contempt in the Bible. However, this may not have been the case throughout the entire Near East. A large Persian period dog cemetery (in an apparent noncultic context) of over seven hundred burial pits has been uncovered at Ashkelon. Dogs were revered in Zoroastrian Persia but were not, however, buried in cemeteries. Dogs (and puppies in particular) played a major role in elimination and purification rituals in Anatolia and Mesopotamia. Many cult functionaries in Hittite Anatolia and Phoenicia (who were condemned in Israel) were called "dogs." Finally, canines in Mesopotamia were considered to have healing qualities. In fact, Ninkarrak, the goddess of healing in Mesopotamia, was often represented by a dog figurine. See comment on 1 Kings 21:19.

22:16. description of hands and feet. The understanding of the description of the hands and feet here has been problematic. The Hebrew verb, traditionally translated as "pierced," occurs only here and can only be translated that way if it is emended. As it stands it indicates that the psalmist's hands and feet are "like a lion," which some commentators have interpreted to mean that the psalmist's hands and feet were trussed up on a stick as a captured lion would be. Unfortunately, despite all the lion-hunting scenes that are preserved and described, no lion is shown being transported this way. If a verb is desirable here, a suitable candidate must be found among the related Semitic languages. The most likely one is similar to Akkadian and Syriac cognates that have the meaning "shrink or shrivel." Akkadian medical texts speak of a symptom in which the hands and feet are shrunken. Matthew 27 is of no help because it does not refer to this line.

22:18. casting lots for clothing. Although the Roman soldiers had the right to the clothes of the convicted criminal (as the soldiers gambling by means of lots for Jesus' tunic), there is no evidence of this for soldiers supervising an execution in the Old Testament period. Nevertheless, in this period we do know that booty was sometimes divided by lot, so it is not difficult to understand a person's clothing being divided that way on his demise. It should be noted, however, that the psalm does not indicate that those casting lots for the clothing were the executioners. Inheritance procedures often used lots to divide the property among the heirs. A Mesopotamian lament indicates this as the person on his deathbed bemoans the fact that his valuables are already being divided up before he is dead.

23:2. needs of sheep. Sheep in the Levant grazed on the fertile grass produced by rain. In the summer and autumn they fed on weeds and stubble left over from harvest. Like camels sheep can go long periods of time without water and then drink as much as nine liters. In contrast to goats, who are quite independent, sheep depend on the shepherd to find pasture and water for them. Shepherds also provide shelter, medication and aid in birthing. In sum, they are virtually helpless without the shepherd. In an Old Babylonian text King Ammiditana claims that the god Ea gave him the wisdom to shepherd his people. He continues the metaphor by saying that he provides them with fine pastures and watering places, and makes them lie down in safe pastures.

23:4 use of rod and staff. The rod was a club worn at the belt, while the staff was a walking implement that doubled as a weapon in time of need (1 Sam 17:35) and guided and controlled the sheep. These were traditional tools of the shepherd, as is shown already in a cylinder seal inscription of the third millennium.

23:5. anointing with oil. Banqueters in the ancient world were often treated by a generous host to fine oils that would be used to anoint their foreheads. This provided not only a glistening sheen to their countenance but also would have added a fragrance to their persons and the room. For example, an Assyrian text from Esarhaddon's reign describes how

he "drenched the foreheads" of his guests at a royal banquet with "choicest oils." Oil preserved the complexion in the hot Middle Eastern climate. Both the Egyptian Song of the Harper and the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh describe individuals clothed in fine linen and with myrrh on their head.

23:6. dwelling in house of the Lord. The house of the Lord is used as a term for the temple but never for the heavenly dwelling place of God (very clear in 27:4). The term "forever" could be confusing in this regard, but the Hebrew says only "for length of days," that is, for extended periods (Lam 5:20). If the translation "dwell" (following the Septuagint) is correct, then it would suggest a priestly office for the psalmist, for priests were the only inhabitants of the temple precinct. If instead we should follow the Hebrew text by translating "I will return to the house of the Lord," we would find here the anticipation of enjoying many future opportunities to worship at the temple ("time and again"). The Babylonian king Neriglissar expresses to his god that he wants to be where he is forever. Another text requests, "May I stand before you forever in worship and devotion." A Hymn to Marduk requests that the worshiper may stand before the deity forever in prayer, supplication and entreaty. In the third millennium B.C. Sumerian worshipers tried to accomplish this objective by placing statuettes of themselves in the posture of prayer in the temple. In this way they would be continuously represented in the temple.

24:2. earth founded on seas. In the Babylonian perception of the cosmos the earth's foundation is on what is called the *apsu.* This is a primordial watery region that is under the jurisdiction of the very important deity Enki/Ea. From the standpoint of physical geography it represents the water table that surfaces, for example, in marshes and springs as well as being associated with the sweet water cosmic seas and rivers. In *Enuma Elish* one of Marduk's names, Agilima, identifies him as the one who built the earth above the water and established the upper regions.

24:4. lifting up soul to idol. This expression means to "nurse an appetite" for something. The word translated "soul" here refers, physiologically, to the throat, and thereby the meaning arrives at appetite or desire. In a number of contexts the same expression is used with God as the object (Ps 25:1; 86:4; 143:8). The term for idol here is related to the word for emptiness or vanity. Other writers use the term "no-gods" for idols (e.g., Jer 5:7).

24:7. gates and ancient doors. In a Hymn to Shamash, the Babylonian sun god, various parts of the temple are said to rejoice over Shamash, including the gateways and entrances. A Nabonidus text refers to the gates of the temple being open wide for Shamash to enter. These would occur in the context of regular processions of the statue of the deity into his temple. If the "head" of the gates refers to an architectural feature, it would most likely be the beam or projection across the top of the gates that served as a cornice. This was a common feature in Egyptian and Mesopotamian architecture, and the Akkadian word for it, *kululu,* also refers to a headdress or turban. The idea that these would be lifted off the posts of the gates to allow something large to pass through is ingenious but not persuasive in that the usual design of gates would not have unencumbered cornices that could be so easily moved. The alternative, that the lifting of the heads is metaphorical, seems more likely. In Ugaritic literature the gods lower their heads when they are being humbled, and they raise up their heads when they have reason to rejoice.

27:4. dwelling in the house of the Lord. See comment on 23:6.

29:1. comparison to Ugaritic hymn. This psalm has more connections to Ugaritic literature than any other psalm. A commonly cited scholarly view goes so far as to claim that this psalm was originally a Phoenician/Canaanite hymn that was modified and adapted into the Hebrew religious corpus. It is claimed that all three of the places named are in Syria (vv. 6-8) and that the psalm features terms, concepts and even grammatical structures that are more familiar from Ugaritic than from the Old Testament. However, though there are sufficient parallels and similarities to identify Canaanite-like elements in the psalm, there is as yet no evidence of a Canaanite original. All of the elements that have been identified as Canaanite in nature also occur in other clearly Israelite settings, so they only show the general similarities that existed between Israelite and Canaanite language and culture. It is possible that the psalmist is using this psalm to attach to Yahweh many of the Baal functions but not to argue against Baal so much as to elevate Yahweh and proclaim his glory. On the other hand, it would present no problem if the psalmist did choose to pattern his composition after a Canaanite original so that praise was transferred from Baal to Yahweh.

29:1. mighty ones. In Canaanite mythology the "mighty ones" or "sons of god" were lesser gods who were subordinate to El, the king of the gods. In the Old Testament the phrase

refers to angels who gathered in Yahweh's heavenly court (see Ps 89:7; 103:20; 1 Kings 22:19; Is 6:2; Job 1:6; 2:1).

29:3. thundering voice. Ancient Near Eastern literature is full of references to storm gods whose voices are heard in thunder. These include Baal in Ugaritic and Amarna texts and Adad in Akkadian texts. It is also common in descriptions of Yahweh (see comment on 7:13).

29:5-6. cedars break, mountains skip. In the Ugaritic tale concerning the building of Baal's palace his enthronement is preceded by his voice thundering forth with the result that the high places of the earth leap or quake. A few lines later he is described holding a cedar in his right hand as a weapon. Similarly, in a hymn to Marduk his thundering voice is said to make the earth quake. His word is a deluge that sweeps away lotus trees. The Hebrew verb translated "skip" is often thought to describe a frolicking or gamboling type of motion but is more likely the undulating appearance of a flock of sheep or goats moving along a path (see comment on 2 Sam 6:14-21). This would be an appropriate image to describe the heaving of the earth in an earthquake.

29:6. Sirion. Sirion is equated with Mount Hermon (see comment on Deut 3:9) and is poetically synonymous with Lebanon. Sirion may appear in parallelism with Lebanon in Ugaritic texts, but this is not clear. They are clearly used in parallel in the Gilgamesh Epic as they are broken up during the battle waged against Huwawa by Gilgamesh and Enkidu. They occur as well in other Akkadian literature, showing that they are used not exclusively in Canaanite literature but throughout the ancient Near East.

29:8. desert of Kadesh. The desert or steppe of Kadesh is also mentioned in a Ugaritic text and is presumably in Lebanon in the vicinity of the city of Kadesh near the Orontes River. Alternatively, it could be a reference to Kadesh Barnea in the south, where the Israelites spent much of their time during the forty-year wilderness period.

29:10. enthroned on the flood. A sculptured scene from the temple of Shamash on a tablet from the Neo-Babylonian king Nabu-Apla-Idinna shows Shamash, the sun god, residing on a throne under a cosmic mountain and a number of wavy lines that are considered to represent the cosmic ocean. The scene is remarkably like Yahweh sitting enthroned over the flood (or better, the celestial sea, see comment on 104:3) in this verse. In this regard, it may be of interest that in Akkadian the word for deluge can also refer to a chaos monster. More prominently in Akkadian literature, the deluge is seen as a weapon of the gods and is sometimes even used in descriptive titles of kings and gods. The deluge can precede the warrior and can be put on by the god going into battle. Shamshi-Adad V refers to the god Ninurta as the exalted lord who rides on the deluge. In contrast to the Hebrew *tehom,* which represents the cosmic waters on the earth, this word, *mabbul,* represents the cosmic waters in the heavens where rain comes from. In Genesis 6—8 it is the *mabbul* that comes on the earth in Noah's time.

30:3. brought up from Sheol, spared from pit. In the Babylonian composition titled *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi* the god Marduk is reported as bringing restoration to one of his followers who has been suffering for unknown reasons: "The Lord took hold of me, the Lord set me on my feet, the Lord gave me life, he rescued me [from the pit,] he summoned me from destruction, […] he pulled me from the *Hubur* river, […]. He took my hand" (from W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature,* 59).

33:2. harp, lyre. These are both typical musical instruments of the time and are attested in ancient Near Eastern texts, reliefs and paintings as early as the third millennium B.C. There is still some disagreement among authorities as to which of the Hebrew words in this passage ought to be translated "harp" and which one as "lyre." The one the NIV translates "lyre" is here identified as a ten-stringed instrument, while the one translated "harp" is thought to have had fewer strings. Both are hand-held with frames made of wood. A musical text has been discovered at Ugarit that sheds light on Late Bronze Age music. This text has the chords to be played on a lyre accompanying a Hurrian cult hymn.

35:2. shield and buckler. The "shield and buckler" represent the two extremes in personal defensive equipment. Respectively they refer to a small, round shield and a large, full-length body shield; the latter most likely carried by an aide. In the same way spear and javelin (v. 3) represent the full range of offensive weaponry. The Hebrew root *(sgr)* translated "javelin" occurs nowhere else as a weapon in the Old Testament. Herodotus refers to a Scythian double axe *(sagaris),* and the Dead Sea Scrolls use the root for the handle of a

lance. In the latter case the text simply speaks of two uses for the same piece of equipment. The long wooden handle can be used to parry and deliver blows as a staff, while the pointed end is used for the finishing blow. There are numerous depictions of these and other Iron Age I-II pieces of military equipment on wall reliefs at the Assyrian cities of Nineveh and Kalah (Nimrud).

36:7. shadow of wings. See the comment on Psalm 17:8. The Canaanite goddess Anat is shown with outstretched wings on an ivory footboard from Ugarit.

36:8. river of delights. Since the word translated "delights" has the same root letters as Eden, there is possibly a reference to the waters flowing out of paradise in this phrase. The association between ancient Near Eastern temples and spring waters is well attested. In fact some temples in Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Ugaritic myth of Baal were considered to have been founded on springs (likened to the primeval waters), which sometimes flowed from the building itself. This would explain the parallel between God's house in the first part of the verse and these rivers (see Ezek 47).

36:9. fountain of life. In many other places the fuller expression "spring of living waters" is used (as in Jer 2:13). Living water refers to flowing spring water (in contrast to collected runoff or rainwater). This is most likely the divine source of life in this world (also see Prov 10:11; 13:14). Certainly in the ancient Near East the gods are considered to be the source of life, but the metaphor of a fountain is not attested.

37:4. desires of heart. In Akkadian texts this phrase is used to refer to the reception of a favorable omen concerning either intended activities or needs such as illness or oppression from which one seeks deliverance. One text reports that when the individual prayed to the gods, he was granted his desire. If the Israelite concept has any similarity, the desire referred to here is not just any desire but particularly the desire that concerns the psalmist in this prayer (which is articulated in v. 6; see Ps 20:4, where the context is a request for one's plans for relieving distress to succeed).

Psalms 42—72

Book Two

42:title. sons of Korah. The superscriptions of Psalms 42; 44—49; 84—85; and 87—88 contain the phrase "sons of Korah." The Korahites are first listed in Numbers 26:58 among the chief Levitical families. In the description of the temple bureaucracy in 1 Chronicles 24—26 the Korahites are listed as "gatekeepers" (1 Chron 26:1). Their association with praising the Lord in 2 Chronicles 20:19 may also be the basis for their mention in the Psalms and as a part of cultic psalmody.

42:1. deer/soul. A number of engraved seals from Judah during the eighth and seventh centuries feature a doe wandering around (seeking water?). O. Keel suggests that this artistic motif's popularity is connected to the metaphor used in this psalm.

42:2. soul. Within the Hebrew Old Testament the word translated as "soul" is *nephesh.* It refers to the "self" or to "a living being" (see Gen 2:7) but not to the "immortal soul" of the New Testament writings. So there is no intimation of the *nephesh* surviving after one's death. The word is related to Akkadian *napašu,* which refers to the neck or throat and by extension to breath. There is no differentiation in the Hebrew usage between the body and the life principle, and therefore in passages like 1 Kings 19:4 *nephesh* is used to mean "life." The body's energy or life force can be drained by a "pouring out of the soul" (1 Sam 1:15; Ps 42:4), as it is in this lament. In Egyptian thinking the *ba* is the animate vital force and is portrayed as a human-headed bird. It is separated from the body at death and is considered immortal. Its place is in heaven rather than in the netherworld to which the body is consigned. Egyptian literature preserves a composition entitled *Dispute Between a Man and His Ba,* which is a discussion of the feasibility of suicide. In contrast, the *ka* is more like the shadow of what is left of the person after he has died. It inhabits the funerary statue and receives the offerings to the dead, and is therefore more like the spirit of the dead. In Mesopotamia this spirit is called the *eṭemmu;* it receives offerings and must be appeased. It is often associated with a ghost. The other element of one's being in Mesopotamia is called a *zaqiqu* and appears to be closest to the soul. Like the *eṭemmu* it also survives death, but little else is written about it. In Israelite terminology the spirit of the dead was called *elohim,* as shown when the term is used to refer to Samuel's spirit (1 Sam 28:13).

42:4. festival processions. Although such processions are seldom mentioned, this probably refers to the festal celebration described in Psalm 68:24 in which a procession led by priests and accompanied by singers, string players and other musicians makes its way to the entrance of the Jerusalem temple. Psalm 118:27 also refers to a festal procession in which the participants carry branches in hand,

dancing up "to the horns of the altar" (see comment there).

42:6. Hermon. The geographical perspective of the psalmist seems to begin with a very general term, "the land of Jordan," and then gradually becomes more specific with reference to "the heights of Hermon." The Anti-Lebanon range is usually considered the northern border of Israelite control (Josh 11:17), and Mount Hermon, the highest peak, is over nine thousand feet above sea level. Archaeologists have uncovered the remains of more than twenty temples on the slopes of Hermon. This may be due to its prominence and the association of high places with the worship of gods in the ancient world.

42:6. Mount Mizar. The exact location of this place is unknown. The name means "the little hill," and therefore it may refer to a specific peak in the Hermon range. However, this would depend on the geographical perspective and poetic intent of the writer. It is quite possible that the psalmist is referring to Mount Hermon as "little" in terms of its sacredness in comparison to Yahweh's holy hill, Zion (Ps 43:3).

44:title. sons of Korah. See the comment on Psalm 42:title.

44:2-8. divine warrior. See the comment in the sidebar on common concepts in Psalms for more information.

44:20. forgetting the name. A deity's name is often associated with that god's power and essential being (see Ex 3:13-14; Is 9:6). In Jeremiah 23:27 the false prophets plan to remove God's name from the people's memory so they will be enticed to follow Baal. For more information see comment on Deuteronomy 12:5. Failure to invoke the name of Yahweh as their God is a violation of the covenant and cause for God to punish the people (1 Sam 12:9).

44:20. spread hands. The position described here is one of prayer or supplication. It is also mentioned in Ezra 9:5 and in Psalm 88:9. For a full discussion see comment on 2 Chronicles 6:13.

45:title. sons of Korah. See comment on Psalm 42:title.

45:1. verses for king. Psalms directed to the king rather than to the deity are common in the ancient Near East, but this is one of the few examples in the book of Psalms. Like the Egyptian marriage stele of Rameses II, the marriage portrayed in this psalm is the result of military strength—it represents a political alliance that is desirable because of the king's military victories.

45:1. bards. Scribes and sages were the official storytellers of the kings of the ancient Near East. Their command of the traditions and their association with the royal bureaucracy made it appropriate that they perform songs and stories that remind the people of the king's role to feed and protect the land as God's political agent. Thus during the New Year's festival in Babylon, the *Enuma Elish* creation epic was recounted, representatives from other cities came to give their homage to the king, and sacred procession wound their way through the streets of the city to the great temple of Marduk, the patron god of Babylon. When Ezra the scribe performs a covenant renewal ceremony, he reads the people the Law, reminding them of their sacred story (Neh 8:1-13).

45:7. anointing with oil of joy. Middle Assyrian Laws feature the bride being anointed by the father of the bridegroom as part of the wedding ceremony, but in this psalm the anointing is part of the kingship (rather than the wedding) section and represents God anointing the king to his position (for more information see comment on 1 Sam 10:1).

45:8. fragrant robes. This psalm contains language and detail suitable for a marriage anthem or the anointing of a king (Ps 133:2). In the ancient Near East these two were combined in the sacred marriage ritual described in Ur III, which involved a magnificently robed king processing to the temple, portraying himself as the god as he participated in a marriage/fertility ritual. It seems likely that the robes of the participants would be oiled and dusted with fragrant herbs and perfumes. For discussion of these substances see the comments on Song of Songs 1:3 and Proverbs 7:17.

45:8. ivory palaces. For the lavish use of ivory to decorate furniture and wall panels see comments on 1 Kings 22:39 and Amos 3:15; 6:4. The wealth of a nation might well be displayed in the king's palace—a sign of power and prestige for the state.

45:8. string music. This translation is based on an emendation of the Hebrew text from *minni* to a plural noun *minnim,* based on a similar usage of the word in Psalm 150:4. It is not clear what sort of instrument this refers to except as a generic term for strings.

45:9. gold of Ophir. See the comments on 1 Kings 22:48 and Isaiah 13:12 for this choicest quality gold.

45:12. gift. Letters from Mari record how the king of Mari sought to contract a marriage with the daughter of the king of Aleppo. From this correspondence it is clear that the year-long negotiations were considered as finalized when the wedding gift arrived at the palace of Mari and was deemed acceptable by the king.

45:12. daughter of Tyre. While it is possible that a particular daughter of the king of Tyre is mentioned here, it is more likely that the expression is a euphemism for the inhabitants of this Phoenician port city. Similar expressions exist, such as "daughter of Zion" (Ps 9:14) and "daughter of Babylon" (Ps 137:8). Since the Phoenicians had become quite wealthy as a result of their control over the carrying trade in the Mediterranean Sea, gifts from Tyre were expected to be lavish, exotic and expensive. Note here the parallel with "men of wealth."

45:13. gold threads. Clothing was a status marker in the ancient world. The princess-bride in this psalm is dressed in the richest garments. Like the young bride in Ezekiel 16:10-13, she wears elaborately embroidered robes, probably dyed with Phoenician purple. Adding to the majesty of her ensemble is gold stitching. It would have been impossible to create a durable thread made from gold, but gold dust could have been encrusted into the thread and the garment to give it this added touch of wealth. Exodus 39:3 explains the process by which gold was worked into each thread used to weave the garment.

46:title. sons of Korah. See comment on 42:title.

46:9. wars cease. Just as Yahweh functions as the divine warrior to aid the Israelites in battle (see the comment on Josh 3:17), the God of the covenant is also the source of peace and prosperity. This theme of world peace is one of the hoped for aspects of the restoration of the nation in prophetic and apocalyptic literature. As Isaiah 2:4 notes, God will settle all disputes between nations, and "they will beat their . . . spears into pruning hooks." Similarly, Ezekiel states that one of the means Yahweh will use to insure that "the nations know that I am the Lord" will be to create an age when weapons of war can be used for fuel (Ezek 39:7-9).

47:title. sons of Korah. See comment on 42:title.

47:5-8. enthronement in ancient Near East. One of the most important ceremonies in the ancient Near East was the ritual of enthronement of a king and the investiture of that person with his symbols of office. This can be seen in the investment of Marduk with his royal insignia in the *Enuma Elish* creation epic. He was named king and then given his scepter, throne, robes and weapons by the other gods. This ritual was mirrored in the coronation practice in Assyria in which all court officials surrendered the symbols of office, resigning so that the king could decide whether to reappoint them to their duties. In Mesopotamia enthronement was also tied into the majesty and power of the gods since it was believed that "kingship descended from on high." For instance, in the prologue to Hammurabi's code of laws the king of Babylon states that the gods called him by name and installed him to carry out their commands on earth, including the restoration of cities, purification of sacred rites, and to "establish truth and justice as the declaration of the land." During the Babylonian New Year's festival *(Akitu)*, the grant of power to the king had to be reinvested in his person, so an enthronement ritual was reenacted. Many scholars assume that Israel used psalms like this one in their own enthronement festival (for Yahweh and his king), but no positive proof has yet come forth to confirm that hypothesis.

48:title. sons of Korah. See comment on 42:title.

48:1. holy mountain. The book of Psalms repeatedly refers to Mount Zion as Yahweh's "holy hill" or holy mountain (Ps 2:6; 3:4; 15:1; 43:3; 99:9). However, it should be understood that this place ascribes its importance and sanctity entirely from God's presence there. Other sacred mountains are associated with the gods: Baal with Mount Zaphon, and Marduk and others with the artificial mountains, the ziggurat temples of Mesopotamia.

48:2. heights of Zaphon. This refers to Mount Casius (Jebel el-Aqra, elev. 5807 feet), twenty-five or thirty miles northeast of Ugarit, the mountain associated with the dwelling place of Baal (see the comment on Is 14:13). In Ugaritic literature Mount Zaphon is considered to be the mountain of the gods where the divine assembly meets. In the announcements of Baal's messengers Mount Zaphon is praised as beautiful and a hill of victory. In the context of this psalm it may be serving either as a direction, north, or as a reference to the temple at Dan, technically on Mount Hermon at the northern boundary of Israel. However, it is also possible that in this psalm Yahweh is seen as a universal God who will replace all other gods in their sacred locales, with Zion becoming what Zaphon had once been considered, the seat of God.

48:7. ships of Tarshish. See the comments on 2 Chronicles 9:21 and Isaiah 23:1.

48:9. worship within temple. Unlike the kings

who fled away at the sight of God's power (48:4-7), the Israelite pilgrims gain great comfort from the majesty of God's presence at Zion because that is where their deliverance comes from. The use of *ḥesed* (NIV: "unfailing love"), the legal term employed in connection with the covenant, indicates a sense of fulfillment on their part and is the basis for their fervent worship. "Within" in this case may be simply entrance into Jerusalem (Mount Zion) or into the Temple Mount complex, since pilgrims would not be allowed access to the inner precincts of the temple itself.

48:12-13. towers, ramparts and citadels in a fortified city. The basic architecture of a fortified city functioned as its defense system and also served as a form of monumental display of the physical power of the state. Towers were placed at regular intervals within the wall system and dominated each gate. The ramparts, ranging as high as forty feet (as at Tell Dan) were set between the towers, often in an offset-inset pattern that provided more angles for archery and other missiles dropped or thrown by the defenders. Within the city a citadel would be constructed as the strong point in case the city walls were breached. Since it was usually constructed at a high elevation, the citadel tower could also serve as a link in the signal fire system used to communicate between cities (see the comments on Is 32:14 and Neh 3:26 for the Hill of Ophel in Jerusalem). For further discussion of towers and wall systems as city defenses, see the comment on Isaiah 2:15. For discussion of fortified gateways, see the comment on Isaiah 54:12.

49:title. sons of Korah. See comment on 42:title.

49:4. proverb. The term translated here as "proverb" is *mashal.* It has a wide range of meanings: "allegory" (Ezek 17:2), "poem" (Num 21:27), "oracle" (Num 23:7). In this case, as in Proverbs 10:1, it refers to an "instruction" from God to the people, warning the Israelites specifically but relying on the universality of a wisdom theme so that "all peoples" can be addressed, not just the Israelites. It may also be compared to the "dark saying" in Habakkuk 2:6 in which the Chaldean aggressors are taunted with the loss of their ill-gotten wealth.

49:4. wisdom accompanied by harp. The measured parallelism of the verse would be aided in its rhythm by the strumming of a harp or zither. This might be compared to the musician employed by Elisha when he spoke an oracle (2 Kings 3:15). A similar occurrence also appears in the Egyptian *Tale of Wenamon* where a musician and a prophet are paired. Certainly words of praise were chanted or sung to the sound of lyre and harp (Ps 92:1-3). It would be natural for minstrels and story tellers to recite the mighty acts of God and of Israel's heroes to the sound of music (Judg 5:11).

49:14. death will feed on them. In the Ugaritic Baal epic the image of death, the god Mot, is of a ravening monster whose open mouth consumes the living: "The dust of the grave devours its pray. Death eats whatever it wants with both hands." Job (24:19) describes a similar picture of Sheol, the underworld, which "snatches away those who have sinned." Job 18:2-13 also contains this description of death devouring the limbs of the wicked. Proverbs 1:12 describes the grave as a mouth that swallows its victims, and this same concept is echoed in the epic of Baal and Anath where the god of death, Mot, is said to "devour its prey," eating them "with both hands."

49:15. Israelite hope. Like the people of Mesopotamia, with whom they shared a number of religious and social ideas, the Israelites did not have a widespread understanding of resurrection from the dead, a last judgment or an afterlife of reward or punishment. This only becomes evident in Judaism in the postexilic period, as exemplified by Daniel 12:2. Thus in this context the psalmist is contrasting the fate of the psalmist's enemies, for whom there will be no escape from the grave, and the psalmist's own hope of redemption by Yahweh. It is unlikely that the writer is referring, as some have suggested, to escape from death altogether in the manner of Enoch (Gen 5:24) or Elijah (2 Kings 2:11). The NIV's inclusion of the phrase "to himself" is totally interpretive, not being found in the Hebrew text. The concept of God "taking" a person as a reference to saving his life can be seen clearly in Psalm 18:16-17, where the NIV translates the same phrase as "took hold of me." See the comments on afterlife in the sidebar on common concepts in Psalms.

50:title. Asaph. This may be an abbreviation for the "sons of Asaph" and thus a reference to one of the temple choirs or their repertoire of music. In Ezra 2:41 the singers who returned to Palestine with Ezra were "descendants of Asaph." According to the list of temple musicians in 1 Chronicles 6:39, Asaph was appointed by David to serve in the Jeru-

salem temple as Heman's associate.

50:1-4. sun god as judge imagery. There is a drawing at the top of the seven-foot-high diorite pillar containing a copy of Hammurabi's law code. It depicts the Babylonian sun god Shamash seated on his throne with Hammurabi standing before him. In the prologue that follows, the king accepts the responsibility "to make justice prevail in the land" and "to rise like Shamash over all humankind." He becomes the god's judicial representative for the Babylonian empire. Shamash's role as divine judge is also found in Akkadian prayers for forgiveness. The Egyptian *Hymn to the Aten,* composed for the court of Pharaoh Akhenaten in the fourteenth century B.C., contains creation imagery very similar to that in this psalm. This is especially the case with regard to a sense of order and universality: "Your glory shines high above the land; your rays enrich the land you have created." See the comment on God as judge in the sidebar on common concepts in Psalms.

50:8-15. ideology of sacrifice. A proper understanding of the purpose of sacrifice is outlined in this psalm. This is intended to serve as a contrasting ideology to the sacrificial practices of Israel's neighbors. Two points are emphasized here. First, God does not need to be sustained with food like the gods of Mesopotamia and Egypt (as in the Gilgamesh flood epic, where the gods flock like starving flies to Utnapishtim's sacrifice). Second, and perhaps more important, is that the Israelites have an obligation to God to make "thank offerings" as a sign of their acknowledgment of the covenant. It is the failure of the people to differentiate between ritual and the knowledge of God that is so often condemned by the prophets (1 Sam 15:22; Hos 6:6). Micah in particular parodies these ineffectual offerings and notes that all God requires of Israel is "to act justly and love mercy" (Mic 6:8).

50:21. god like people. God accuses the people of forgetting that the deity is not "just like them," willing to look the other way when evil occurs or even able to approve of their sinful actions. This ultimate form of anthropomorphizing God is a terrible crime deserving of rebuke and punishment. Divine silence is not to be considered a sign of weakness or of disinterest. Jeremiah in his "temple sermon" (Jer 7:9-11) makes similar accusations, noting that the people of Judah seem to believe they can commit any sin and then come to the temple and proclaim, "We are safe." He declares that God is watching them and is not blind to their deeds. The Old Testament begins its story by relating how people wanted to become like God and thereby fell into sin. Having failed in their attempt, human history becomes the story of people remolding God in their own image. The gods of Mesopotamia and Egypt are described as acting much like humans—engaging in unthinking acts of violence (the Gilgamesh and Atrahasis flood stories) or tricking humans out of a potential reward (Adapa)—but they still have superhuman powers and must be treated with official respect. The psalmist and wisdom writers raise Yahweh above the level of any other god to an ideal of moral and just behavior far beyond anything attainable by god or human (see Job 42:2-6).

51:1-2. mechanism for removing sins. In the ancient Near East it was not sins that were removed but the deity who was appeased. The individual only became aware of sin when he or she experienced circumstances considered the punishment of deity. The goal then became to relieve the anger of the deity (whether such anger was believed to be justified or not). When they asked for sins to be removed ("strip off my misdeeds like a garment"), they meant that the deity should be willing to overlook their sin, put away wrath and restore his favor. The rituals that accompanied this sort of approach to deity were meant to purify the individual and pacify the deity. The ritual did not remove sin; it only enabled the individual to hope that the deity would offer absolution from the sin. In Israel we should think in terms not of sins being eternally removed but of the sacrifices cleansing away the desecration of God's presence caused by sin (see comment on Lev 1:4, "atonement"). The rituals paved the way for forgiveness (see comment on Lev 4:13-32). This psalm is not talking about that process (v. 16). Only God's gracious act would remove a sin from the record books. It is understood that the penitent can only ask, not demand, absolution of sins (see Ps 32:10). What is asked for is a display of God's compassionate mercy based on the supplicant's trust and the covenantal promise to Israel. God's favor may then "blot out" sin in much the same way that a parchment scroll is scraped clean or a clay tablet is either washed clean (see Num 5:23) or broken. This metaphor is mentioned in a Babylonian ritual text, where it states that a king may order that "the tablet of my sins be broken," thereby canceling or commuting debt or criminal charges. Similarly, in Hammurabi's Code an illegal contract for the purchase of a soldier's land may be cancelled by breaking the cuneiform tablet. Mesopotamian literature contains references both to tablets recording evil deeds (in

the *Shurpu* texts) and those recording good deeds.

51:3. knowledge of offense. In the ancient Near East individuals typically claimed that they were mystified concerning what they could possibly have done to offend deity. There were several factors that contributed to this ignorance. First, the gods of the ancient Near East had offered no permanent revelation of themselves that might be used as a guide. Second, polytheism posed a problem in that a deed that pleased one god might potentially offend another. Third, the gods were not characterized as acting consistently from one day to the next, thus making it difficult to assess one's standing. Finally, offenses often took the form of neglecting rituals that the individual was not even aware of. As a result, in Babylonian penitential literature *(shigus)* for instance, the offender sometimes simply accepts blame for all sorts of sin, hoping in the process to confess to whatever has offended the deity. Yet at other times he lists offenses and asserts that he is well aware of his sins. In the Hittite *Prayers of Mursilis* confession of one's guilt is the step toward reconciliation with his lord. In Israel the Law was clear enough and offenses could be clearly identified.

51:4. against deity only. If David is identifying Yahweh alone as the one sinned against, whom is he ruling out? Certainly he has wronged Bathsheba and Uriah. It is important to notice that in the context the issue concerns who has a right to pass judgment and carry out sentence (second half of v. 4). In Israel the family of the murder victim had a right to blood vengeance, and there were always political enemies who would be happy to stylize themselves as the arm of God's justice against a wayward king. Perhaps by this statement David is limiting his acknowledgment of culpability, so that only Yahweh has the right of punishment.

51:5. conceived and born in sin. As is so often the case when speaking to God, the penitent draws the contrast between divine perfection and inherent human weakness (see Job 4:17; Ps 130:3; Jer 17:9). The same point is made in a nineteenth-dynasty Egyptian prayer to Amon that confesses that it is "normal" for humans to do wrong just as it is "normal" for the god to be merciful. It should be emphasized in this context that the act of conception was not considered sinful. Sexual activity, including intercourse, pregnancy and childbirth, all rendered the participants ritually unclean (see Lev 15:16-33), but within marriage this was never declared to be sinful. Statements such as those in Job 15:14 and Isaiah 6:5 simply define humans as unclean by nature in relation to God's absolute purity. Although this psalm has been used by some commentators to bolster the doctrine of "original sin," it seems a more appropriate interpretation to see it as part of the general confession of the penitent. In Mesopotamian incantations the sentiment is expressed that there is no one who has not sinned—everyone who exists is sinful. An admonition to confess the sinfulness of the human state appears in the Egyptian teachings of Amenemope, "Say not: 'I have no wrongdoing.'" The Israelites would have agreed with that theology in that they would have acknowledged a general inclination to sin that was characteristic of all people. They did not go the next step of Christian theology by seeing Adam's sin imputed to people.

51:6. internalization as divine expectation. Based on the birth image in the previous verse and a similar phrase in Job 38:36, it is likely that E. Dalglish is correct in his interpretation of this verse as referring to obtaining knowledge while still within the womb (the mother's "innermost part"). The penitent is acknowledging that his sin is not to be excused for lack of knowledge. He is aware, even from the womb, of what is right behavior, and he has failed to obey what he knows to be lawful (see v. 3). A similar image of prenatal learning is found in the Egyptian *Hymn to the Aten.* The writer repeatedly praises the god for supplying all that is necessary for human survival, even within the womb. To counter human nature's tendency to disobey, Egyptian religious thought is filled with the need to internalize *ma'at,* "truth." It is described as the bread that sustains humans (as in the royal annals of Queen Hatshepsut).

51:7. hyssop. This dwarf bush, *Origanum syriacum* (majoram), grows wild among the rocks in Palestine. The aromatic fragrance emitted by its blue or reddish flowers and leaves may be the origin of its presumed medicinal value. In the biblical text, however, it is associated with rituals of purification, as in the ceremony associated with the cleansing of a leper in Leviticus 14:4-6. They also are employed in the ritual sacrifice of the red heifer (Num 19:6) and in the marking of Israelite doorframes during the Passover (Ex 12:22).

51:7. white = purity. As noted in Isaiah 1:18,

in the biblical tradition white is identified with purity or joy. Dark colors, especially black, are used to signify mourning or lamentation—both of which are associated with states of impurity (see Ps 35:13; Zech 3:3-5). In an Assyrian prayer the king calls on his god to "whiten" and thus free his heart from his sin of blasphemy. In Akkadian the verb "to brighten" overlaps with the verb "to make white." In one Babylonian magical text the petitioner requests that he might "become as pure as heaven, as cleansed as the earth, and as bright as the center of heaven."

51:10. pure heart. Having acknowledged his sinful condition from his birth, the penitent now asks God, the only power able to grant his request, to purify his "heart" (the seat of the intellect in Hebrew tradition). A Sumerian prayer of repentance also pleads for divine mercy from the gods and transformation of "the sin I have done . . . into goodness." This is similar to the petition in the *Lament over the Destruction of Ur,* which calls on the goddess Inanna to insure that "every evil heart of its people be pure before thee!" The concept of regeneration or redirection is also found in Ezekiel's oracle of a restored nation, in which God promises to "give you a new heart" (Ezek 36:26).

51:11. removing holy spirit. While God's spirit occurs many times in the text, only in Isaiah 63:10-14 is the expression "holy spirit" used synonymously with Yahweh's presence. To have that presence removed or to be excluded from communion with God is the ultimate punishment imaginable. On a national scale it would be the end of the covenant relationship and the total destruction of the people (Jer 23:39; compare Hosea's third child "Not My People" in Hos 1:9). For a reigning monarch, who is God's representative, being cut off from Yahweh's voice or presence would be the signal that his dynasty has been rejected and will come to an end (see the comments concerning Saul's plight in 1 Sam 16:14; 28:6). The petitioner in the Sumerian "Prayer to Every God" also pleads that the god "not cast thy servant down," presumably away from divine favor, because of his transgressions.

51:16. no delight in sacrifice. Like Jeremiah's direct attacks on what he considered a totally corrupt cultic system in Jerusalem (Jer 6:20; 7:4; 31:31-35), the psalmist denies the value of animal sacrifice without an ethical dimension to sustain it. The Egyptian *Instruction of Merikare* contains this same sentiment: "More acceptable is the character of one upright of heart than the ox of the evildoer." They share Samuel's (1 Sam 15:22) and Hosea's (Hos 6:6) argument that God prefers a devout worshipper's heart and prayers, not his or her ritual pantomime (see comments on 1 Sam 15:22; Is 1:16-17; and Jer 7:9). This is also noted in Babylonian wisdom literature, where the pious are encouraged to pay daily homage "with sacrifice, prayer and appropriate incense-offering." But most important is to "feel solicitude of heart" toward their god.

52:2-4. evil tongue. The tongue in this expression is synonymous with the person. Similar examples of this metaphor can be found in the Assyrian *Words of Ahiqar,* where the "tongue of the ruler" is equated with his sovereign power. The charge made in this psalm is that the deceitful choose to speak and do evil (compare Prov 12:17), a complaint also registered in the Middle Egyptian *Dispute over Suicide.*

53:5. scattering bones. One common image of utter defeat and hopelessness is the battlefield covered with the scattered, bleached bones of the slain. The Assyrian annals of Shalmaneser III report the destruction of their foes, with "pillars of skulls" erected and battle sites covered with corpses. Ezekiel 37 uses this as the basis of his oracle of restoration. Jeremiah 8:1-2 prophesies the violation of the tombs of false priests and unfaithful kings, with their bones scattered about "like refuse lying on the ground." See also the comment on 22:14.

54:1. plea for vindication. Based on the premise of the retribution principle (see comment in the sidebar on common concepts in Psalms), a person who was suffering was believed to be receiving punishment from God. Since God was considered to be just, then the punishment would have been deserved. The psalmist's troubles would therefore be taken as evidence of his sinfulness. Vindication of the psalmist would then come when God intervened to turn the tables and punish his enemies. Such action from God would proclaim his innocence and show that he had not lost God's favor. In this sense God is his only hope. The eloquent peasant of Egyptian wisdom literature also calls on his god-king, Pharaoh, as his "last hope" and "only judge."

54:6. freewill offering. See the comment on Numbers 15:1-31 for the general elements of the Israelite sacrificial system. A "freewill" offering is a nonobligatory sacrifice, made in thanks or to fulfill a vow (see the comment on Lev 22:17-30). It may be offered at the altar with the intention of partaking in a communal meal with God or as a whole burnt offering. For the role of this offering in Psalms see comment on 50:8-15.

55:14. throng at house of God. Israelites were

instructed to attend the annual pilgrimage festivals and bring their sacrifices to the temple in Jerusalem (see the comments on Ex 23:17 and Deut 16:16). A sense of fellowship was created as large groups of people and close friends joined in this unified (LXX uses *en homonoia,* "in unity," in translating this verse) religious journey, physically demonstrating their commitment to the covenant. The psalmist here seems extremely distressed that someone who had shared this pilgrimage could betray him.

55:15. alive to the grave. The judgment sought by the psalmist on his enemies is an untimely death. Like the rebellious Levite Korah and his followers (Num 16:31-35), they are to be swallowed up by the earth without any further opportunity to commit mischief. The parallel here to "by surprise" clarifies that going alive to the grave does not mean they will not die. Rather a sudden death is requested. The image of death as an open mouth swallowing the unaware is found in the Ugaritic Baal epic, where the god of the underworld, Mot, is described as a "pool luring the wild oxen," which "eats whatever it wants with both hands."

55:21. speech/heart. An Akkadian proverb draws the same distinction, observing that a man may speak friendly words with his lips but have a heart full of murder. The incantation series *Shurpu* speaks of one whose speech is straightforward but whose heart is devious.

56:8. scroll/record. Like the journal of remembrance kept for future justice's sake in Daniel 7:10 and Malachi 3:16 (see comments on both), the psalmist refers to a record that God has kept of his misery during his life's wanderings. This written repository is compared to saving the sufferer's tears in a bottle or skin bag. In both cases the imperative form is used to show how important this record is so that only the deserving remain in God's "book of life" (see Ps 69:28).

57:1. shadow of your wings. It is possible that the psalmist is playing off the metaphor of God as a protective eagle sheltering its young with outstretched wings found in the "Song of Moses" in Deuteronomy 32:10-11. This image of eagles' wings is a common metaphor for God's covenantal saving acts (see Ex 19:4). This reference may also be a reflection of the wings of the cherubim on the ark of the covenant (1 Sam 4:4; 1 Kings 6:23-28) or the winged seraphs said to surround Yahweh in Isaiah's call narrative (Is 6:2). The metaphor of taking refuge under the wings of deity is found also in other psalms (36:7; 61:4; 91:4) and is consistently related to issues of care and protection connected to the covenant. The metaphor is also known from other ancient Near Eastern cultures, particularly Egyptian, where even disembodied wings represent protection. Deities with wings are often portrayed overshadowing the king. Likewise an ivory from Arslan Tash dated to the eighth century shows characters in human form with wings protecting a figure in the center.

57:4. enemies as lions. Though in seventh-century Assyrian literature the lions' pit occurs as a metaphor for vicious and antagonistic courtiers of the king, the combination with weapons here opens up another possibility. Ugaritic sources refer to an archery division that marches under the standard of the lion-goddess. The psalmist could also be alluding to a group of mercenaries going by that standard.

57:8. harp and lyre. Praise accompanied by both harp and "ten-stringed lyre" is also found in Psalm 33:2 (see comment there). In Psalm 98:5-6 the harp is paired with trumpets and the ram's horn to sharpen the enthusiasm of the psalmist's celebration and possibly to engender a prophetic utterance (see Elisha in 2 Kings 3:15). A similar joyous anticipation of the dawn is found in the Egyptian *Hymn to the Aten,* in which "the two lands of Egypt rejoice" at daybreak when the sun disk rises over the horizon.

58:4. cobra with stopped ears. The metaphor is an attempt to equate the fool/wicked, who will not listen, with a cobra (a term found in both Egyptian and Ugaritic) who pays no attention to the snake charmer. Both cause pain and suffering by their unreasonable behavior. Although snakes do not have hands to cover their ears (an internal organ), the issue here has to do with unnatural, perverse actions. Along this line, the Egyptian *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy* notes that there is no point in trying to instruct a fool, who will not listen and will hate you for attempting to teach him something. Similarly, the *Instruction of Amenemope* cautions that the words of fools are more dangerous than storm winds.

58:5. snake charmer. The profession of snake charmer must have involved an intimate knowledge of the serpent's behavior pattern. One admonition that could well have come from this stock in trade is found in the *Instruc-*

tion of Ankhsheshonqy, stating that a well-fed snake will not strike. The charmer may have also used magical incantations in addition to music or some physical props to control the serpents in their act. Snakes were greatly feared in the ancient world as magical beings as well as for their venom. Both Egyptian and Mesopotamian literatures contain examples of incantations against serpents and their bites. The word translated "charmed" here should not evoke cartoonlike images of swaying serpents hypnotized by pipe-playing swamis. Alternatively it may refer to snakes against which the incantations are ineffective. Akkadian texts also speak of snakes that are "unconjurable."

58:6-11. imprecations compared to incantations. This psalm is known as an "imprecatory" psalm because it calls down curses (imprecations) on the enemy. In the ancient Near East such curses were enhanced or activated by magical rituals and spells, but this sort of practice would have been unacceptable in the biblical system. Imprecatory psalms can be best understood against the background of the retribution principle (see discussion in the sidebar on common concepts in Psalms). Since God's justice was seen as requiring punishment proportional to the seriousness of the sin, the psalmist is calling down the curses that would be appropriate if justice were to be maintained. These are the same magnitude of curses that God pronounces on his enemies (see Is 13:15-16). The forceful language of this passage contains aspects of an East Semitic curse formula that relies on the deity to carry out vengeance on the enemy nations. An example of this type of indirect curse is found in the vassal treaties of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon as he calls on a host of gods to do the treaty-breaker harm. It is also employed, with the addition of ritual acts of execration, in the Aramaic Sefire inscription: "Just as this bow and these arrows are broken, so may Inurta and Hadad break the bow of Mati'el and the bow of his nobles." The psalmist indirectly curses by imprecation, calling on God to "laugh at them" in their puny efforts to menace Israel. He does not employ magical incantations or execration rituals against them but instead relies on God to render these peoples impotent—breaking their power and their weapons of destruction (see Jer 49:35; 51:56; Ezek 39:3).

59:title. incident. It seems most likely that the event mentioned in the superscription comes from the time prior to David's accession to the throne, when he was an outlaw and continually harassed by Saul's men. For examples of this type of continuous surveillance and pursuit see 1 Samuel 19:11 and the narrative in 1 Samuel 24.

60:title. incident. The editors of the book of Psalms sometimes attempt to link historical events from the life of David with the subject of a psalm. In this case the reference is to David's campaign against the Arameans and Edomites (see the comments on 2 Sam 8:3-14).

60:3. wine that makes one stagger. The power of God's wrath against the people is compared to a potent cup of wine, which makes them stagger in a drunken/impotent manner (see Is 51:17, 22 and the comment on Is 28:7). This cup may be compared with the cup of bitterness drunk by the suspected adulteress in Numbers 5:16-22 and with the cup of salvation in Psalm 116:13. See comment on 75:8.

60:4. banner. Battle flags and standards were used by the military as signaling devices and rallying points for the army or were hung from city walls (see Jer 4:6). Their colors and insignia designated their allegiance and would in many cases have included a symbol of the god(s) who were expected to participate in the battle along with the human forces (see Jer 50:2). The Assyrian army of Shalmaneser III traveled with its "standards" attached to the royal chariot. When camp was made, they were erected near the royal pavilion and became the focal point for sacrifice and acts of devotion to the gods.

60:6. parceling Shechem. Since the covenant promise had always included God's grant of land to the Israelites, it would be within Yahweh's right to parcel out Shechem (Tell Balata, forty miles north of Jerusalem) as a prize of war to those who were true to the covenant. Perhaps because of its proximity to two nearby peaks, Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, it has had a long history as a sacred site. Shechem is known from many ancient sources, including the Egyptian records of Sen-Usert III (nineteenth century B.C.) and the El Amarna tablets (fourteenth century B.C.). Nearly continuous occupation is evidenced through the second and first millennia, demonstrating the importance of this strategic city on the highway network running north from Egypt through Beersheba and Jerusalem and on to Damascus. It was Abram's first stop in Canaan. Jacob purchased land near the city in Genesis 33:18-20, and thus it is connected to the origins of granting the Promised Land to the Israelites. The fertile soil in this area promoted agriculture as well as good grazing.

60:6. Valley of Succoth. The city of Succoth is located east of the Jordan River near the point where it connects with the Jabbok River, an

area known as the Ghor Abu Obeideh. This is a fertile region which like Shechem has a connection with the Jacob narrative (Gen 33:17) and could thus represent the total area of the Promised Land within the covenant agreement. A number of archaeologists have identified it with the site of Tell Deir 'Alla, based on Egyptian records (the Stele of Shishak) and cultural remains dating from the Chalcolithic to Iron Age II. The name, which means "booths," would be appropriate for the temporary housing of this region's mixed population of pastoral nomads and miners (evidence of smelting has been found in Iron I levels). It is located in the valley just west of the highlands of Gilead as the land comes down to the Jordan.

60:7. Gilead, Manasseh. The Transjordanian region of Gilead, roughly lying between the Yarmuk River in the north and the Arnon River in the south, was given in the distribution after the conquest to the tribes of Gad (see the comment on Josh 13:24-29) and to Manasseh (see the comment on Josh 13:30-31). For the general distribution of the tribal settlements in this region, see the comment on Numbers 32:34-42.

60:7. Ephraim, Judah as helmet and scepter. In this metaphorical portrayal of Yahweh as the divine warrior, the two kingdoms of Israel (Ephraim) and Judah serve as helmet and staff of office respectively. A similar image is found in Zechariah 9:13, where Judah is God's bow and Ephraim his arrow. The term translated "helmet" is not used elsewhere as a reference to armor or headgear. The Hebrew text refers to "a fortress for my head" or perhaps "my chief fortress." The scepter is now often identified as a ceremonial engraved mace, which kings are sometimes portrayed holding in their hands as a symbol of office. It is referred to elsewhere in Genesis 49:10 and Numbers 21:18.

60:8. Moab as washbasin. This may be a reference to Moab's proximity to the Dead Sea, but it certainly denotes the subjugation of that nation by Yahweh (repeated in Ps 108:9). They are forced into servanthood, being placed in a position where they must wash the feet of their master (compare Jn 13:5). The container referred to here is usually used for cooking but is a multipurpose pot/basin that comes in various sizes. Washbasins were typically used for ritual washing or ritual bathing, and occur in lists of fine gifts in the Amarna tablets. The imagery here is obscure.

60:8. sandal to Edom. Sandals were the ordinary footwear in the ancient Near East, but they were also a symbolic item of clothing. This may have been due to the fact that land was purchased based on whatever size triangle of land the buyer could walk off in an hour, a day, a week or a month (1 Kings 21:16-17). Land was surveyed in triangles, and a benchmark was constructed of fieldstones to serve as a boundary marker (Deut 19:14). Since they walked off the land in sandals, the sandals became the moveable title to that land. Casting a sandal was a symbolic, legal gesture employed in those situations where a levir refused to accept his responsibility to a widow. She in turn then removed his sandal, the symbol of ownership and inheritance, and cast it at him. This signified his loss of inheritance rights to the lands of his relative (see Deut 25:9 and Ruth 4:7-8). Land transfers in the Nuzi texts also involved replacing the old owner's foot on the land with that of the new owner. In this verse God aggressively casts a sandal onto Edom as a gesture of conquest or the assumption of ownership of that nation's lands.

60:9. fortified city/Edom. Since the "fortified city" is parallel to Edom, one is inclined to think of the major fortified city in Edom. This would be Bozrah, whose name is built from the same root as the word used here for fortified city. Bozrah was the capital of ancient Edom and is to be identified with Buseirah in the northern region of the country. It guards a portion of the king's highway and is fairly close to the copper mines found five miles to the southwest at Wadi Dana. Excavations demonstrate seventh- or sixth-century levels from the most heavily fortified and largest settlement in the area.

61:4. shelter in wings. See comment on 57:1.

61:8. king fulfilling vows. Kings in the ancient Near East owed obligations to the god(s) who were the source of their power. For instance, at Mari the kings were required to make annual sacrifices to gods all over their kingdom, to rebuild their temples and to insure that the priestly community was receiving its due income. In addition, special vows were taken to insure good crops, a victory in war (see Judg 11:30-31; 1 Sam 14:24) or to obtain an heir. An example of this latter effort is found in the Ugaritic epic of Keret, in which the king goes to the sanctuary of Asherah and makes a vow to give the goddess "double the bride price in silver" of a royal wife if he is al-

lowed to marry the princess Hurriya.

62:9. highborn. As in Psalm 4:2, this term, *benê 'ish,* functions as both a euphemism for the wealthy and powerful as well as a generic term for all men of influence. Both Egyptian and Babylonian contain similar expressions for this class of individuals. For example, Babylonian texts regularly make the distinction between "a gentleman" and an "ungentlemanly person."

63:1. soul/body and ancient anthropology. As noted in the comment on Psalm 42:2 on the concept of "soul" in the ancient Near East, the cultures of the Mesopotamians and Israelites did not differentiate between soul and body. Both represented the individual being, not a separate spirit or entity. In Egypt, however, the life force, *ka,* contained the essence of animated life as well as the sustenance to maintain living beings. After death the Egyptian's "soul" or *ba* manifested that life essence and was often depicted in tomb paintings as birds with human faces. The ability to differentiate between the living being and his soul is found in the Middle Egyptian wisdom piece titled *The Dispute Between a Man and His Ba.* In this document a man argues with his soul. In his despair the man states that the troubles of life demand that he commit suicide. This angers the *ba* and it threatens to leave him, a threat that the man takes very seriously since it would mean that he would not be resurrected into the afterlife.

63:7. shadow of wings. See comment on 57:1.

65:4. living in the temple courts. While the temple complex was primarily the realm of the priestly order, it was the desire of every member of the covenant community to "dwell" in God's presence (see Ps 84:2 and 96:8). The importance of the temple precinct as the place where God dwelt can be found in its use for prayer and in judicial proceedings when someone comes to take an oath "before a god" (see Hammurabi's Code). In this psalm the concept of being the "chosen" is emphasized, along with the closeness of Yahweh's promise and power. For more information see comment on 23:6.

65:7. stilling the seas. This phrase relates to Yahweh's creative power over watery chaos (as in Gen 1:2-10 and Ps 93:3). It is quite likely that the Israelite psalmist is also drawing on the terminology of the religious epics of Mesopotamia (the *Enuma Elish* creation story in which Marduk defeats Tiamat, the goddess of the primeval waters) and of Ugarit. In the latter, Baal has a monumental struggle with Yamm, the god of the sea. The use of this cosmic battle motif in other psalms (73:14; 89:9-10) is another indication of how the Israelite writers employed the religious drama of other cultures but used it as a way of demonstrating the supremacy of Yahweh over all other gods. See comment on 107:29.

65:12. grasslands of the desert. In this image of fertility even in the wilderness, the psalmist describes grasslands flourishing in the desert. During the rainy season the desert does support a growth of annuals and wild flowers in addition to the stunted scrubs, such as the white saxaul *(Haloxylon persicum).* These cling to the salty and sandy soils along the wadi beds and upper slopes where more moisture falls or collects.

66:10. refined like silver. See the comments on Proverbs 17:3 and 25:4.

67:1. make his face shine. The appearance of the deity in Israelite and Mesopotamian traditions is a shining light that in many cases is a physical danger to humans (see the comments on Ex 16:10-11 and 33:18-23). In this case the image is benevolent, with God's manifest power providing comfort and reassurance. Similarly in the Ur III coronation hymn of Ur-Nammu (c. 2000 B.C.) the monarch receives his right to rule when Enlil looks upon him "with his shining forehead." See comment on 80:3.

68:4. rides on the clouds. In Ugaritic epic literature the storm god Baal is regularly referred to as the "rider of the clouds." References can be found in both the Baal and Anat cycle and in the story of the hero Aqhat. This image of power over the winds and weather comes into the Psalms as another example of how the stories from other cultures have been restructured to demonstrate Yahweh's universal control over nature and nations (see Ps 104:3; Jer 4:13). It also serves as a polemic against belief in any other god who might be thought to provide the fertility God promises in the covenant.

68:6. lonely in families. The Egyptian *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* provides a model for this set of responsibilities to the weak. The king in this Middle Kingdom wisdom piece is called the father to the orphan and the "mother to the motherless." In this psalm Yahweh is the compassionate lawgiver who insures that orphans, widows and the stranger (translated here "the lonely" or "the desolate") are cared for as if they were members of an Israelite clan (see the comments on Deut 24:17-18 and 24:19-22 for laws dealing with justice for the vulnerable). Ecclesiastes 4:8-9 also examines the plight of the one who is isolated, lonely and neglected.

68:6. freeing prisoners. In the ancient Near

East the freeing of prisoners (from debtors' prison) as an act of justice often occurred in the first or second year of a new king's reign (and then periodically after that). For example, the Old Babylonian period king Ammisaduqa (seventeenth century B.C.) cancelled economic debts on behalf of Shamash. Thus the "jubilee" in this case was primarily concerning those in debt (for either financial or legal reasons) and for the freeing of debt-slaves. Unlike the case in Israel, this Babylonian edict was entirely at the whim of the monarch and there is no evidence that it was divinely sanctioned. For an example of this as being accomplished by an ideal king see comment on 11:1. Historically, a proclamation of freedom is recorded by the last king of Judah, Zedekiah (Jer 34:8-10). For these and other characteristics of a just king's reign, see comment on 49:9-10.

68:13. gilded dove. There is no clear consensus on the meaning attached to dove "sheathed with silver" and gold. Some consider it a reference to the battle standards of the fleeing kings, which were topped by a dove, the symbol of the Canaanite goddess Astarte. Others see it as a reference to Israel (see other bird images in Ps 74:19; Hos 7:11). Tate's suggestion of doves, perhaps adorned with colored cloth, being used as a signal of victory seems plausible.

68:14. Zalmon. Because of the parallel in verse 15 with Bashan, it is unlikely that Mount Zalmon in this psalm is the same as the mountain mentioned in Judges 9:48 near Shechem. The name means "dark" or "black" and could refer to a peak shrouded in clouds. It would also require more elevation in order to serve as a snow-covered eminence.

68:15. mountains of Bashan. The Bashan region, northeast of the Galilee, is a fertile plateau about two thousand feet in elevation. It is surrounded by extinct volcanic peaks and rolling hills with sufficient forestland to complement its cattle-raising economy (see Is 3:13 and Amos 4:1-3). The rugged mountains mentioned here probably refer to the hard-to-climb basaltic hills in this area.

68:18. ascending leading captives. Like the victorious Saul in 1 Samuel 15:7-15, the triumphant Yahweh is accompanied by a procession of prisoners, loot and tribute payments. A similar image can be found in the Assyrian annals of Sennacherib, who claims to have taken over two hundred thousand prisoners from Judah, along with their animals and other booty. The major deities of the ancient Near East were associated with high places, so for Yahweh to "ascend" would be to return to his holy mountain (see Jer 31:12), just as Baal uses Mount Zaphon as his divine base of operations in the Ugaritic and Canaanite traditions.

68:23. feet washed in the blood of enemies. The poetic language attached to battle reports can at times be rather grisly. This is certainly the case with this phrase (also used in Ps 58:10). The similar image of wading through the blood of one's enemies is also found in the Ugaritic epic of Baal and Anath. There the goddess gleefully slaughtered whole armies and "waded knee-deep in the warriors' blood."

68:24. procession into the sanctuary. The New Year's festival (Akitu) in ancient Babylon included a procession in which the image of the god Marduk was paraded along a "sacred highway" through the streets of the city. The god was guided by the king ("taken by the hand") up to the Esagila temple, where the image resided during the year. It was not the normal practice for this sort of procession to take place in Jerusalem, since Yahweh could not be represented by an image. However, the ark of the covenant, which functioned as an icon of God's power and presence, was brought into the city by King David and placed within the tabernacle (see 2 Sam 6), and this may be celebrated in this psalm.

68:25. musicians in procession. The appointment of temple musicians is found in 1 Chronicles 15:16-22. It was their task to accompany the singing of hymns of thanksgiving with stringed instruments and cymbals (see Ps 42:4). Egyptian tomb paintings contain images of singers, dancers and musicians in procession, much as they are described in this text.

68:30. beast among the reeds imagery. The most likely choices for this beast are the hippopotamus and the crocodile. Both were major hazards along the shores of the Nile River in Egypt. The tomb paintings from Beni Hasan include a number of scenes in which fishermen work while a crocodile lurks in the reeds nearby or papyrus boats are being used to hunt this dangerous amphibian. Politically, the reference is most likely to Egypt.

68:31. Egypt and Cush. Since there have been Cushite dynasties that have ruled Egypt, it is not unusual to find Egypt and Cush used in parallel here. It is possible that the bringing of tribute from this southern region of Ethiopia is keyed to God's power, which can command

homage from the ends of the earth (cf. Is 18:7).

68:33. rides the ancient skies. See comment on 68:4.

69:10. fasting. See comment on Judges 20:26.

69:11. sackcloth. See comment on 1 Kings 20:31.

69:19. scorn for the sufferer. The Israelites believed that if God is to be considered just, rewards and punishments in this life must be proportional to the righteousness or wickedness of the individual. These beliefs had also led them to believe that if someone was prospering, it must be a reward for righteousness, and if someone was suffering, it must be a punishment for wickedness. The greater the suffering, the greater the wickedness must be. Because of the retribution principle (see comment in the sidebar on common concepts in Psalms), suffering had become a source of shame. Since the supplicant is without friends or comforters, he turns to God, who "knows" his suffering and will not scorn his pleas for help (cf. Lam 1:2, 7, 9). This feeling of despair is echoed in the "Babylonian Theodicy" (c. 1000 B.C.) that pictures a world turned upside down in which the sufferer states he must "bow down before the dregs of society, who treat me with contempt."

69:21. gall in food. In some contexts this word refers to poison (e.g., snake venom in Deut 32:33), whereas on other occasions it refers to something bitter. This would match the parallel with vinegar. In the former it could lead to almost certain death, while in the latter it may be understood as some kind of sedative. Presumably the fast of mourning would be broken with food brought to the sufferer by comforters (2 Sam 3:35). In this case, however, instead of comfort and nourishment the mourner receives just the opposite—poison (compare Amos's charge that justice has been transformed into poison in Amos 6:12).

69:21. vinegar. The bitter, worthless vintage offered to the sufferer is like that described in Isaiah's "song of the vineyard" (Is 5:2). Equally repugnant is the metaphor for a "nation without sense" in Deuteronomy 32:28-33, in which the people are compared to "grapes filled with poison" and bitterness, whose wine has become "the venom of serpents."

69:28. blotted out of book of life. In a Sumerian hymn to Nungal the goddess discusses her justice as she punishes the wicked and brings mercy to those who deserve it. She claims to hold the tablets of life in her hands, on which she writes the names of the just. See comment on Malachi 3:16.

69:31. horns and hoofs. Devout worship and praise of Yahweh please God much more than rituals and sacrifices (compare similar statements in 1 Sam 15:22 and Hos 6:6). Reference to horns and hoofs indicates a full-grown bull (compare Micah 6:6), an expensive sacrificial animal, which is ritually pure according to the holiness code (see Lev 11:3-8).

71:7. portent. The use of the Hebrew term *mopet* is indicative of an extraordinary event that serves as a sign of God's power, and in this case judgment or punishment (compare the curses in Deut 28:45-46). This technical term appears often in the narrative of the plagues in Egypt (Ex 7:3; 11:9) and is used to signal a coming event (1 Kings 13:3, 5).

72:1. coronation hymns in ancient Near East. There is a good deal of evidence to indicate that in the civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia the kingship was viewed as a gift from the gods. The prologue to Hammurabi's Code contains a statement that the king has been proclaimed "the shepherd" by the god Enlil, and that it is his task to "cause justice to prevail in the land." During the *Akitu* New Year's festival, the king was reinvested with his powers of office. This would have included a great procession and mass celebration. The Ur III texts from about 2000 B.C. contain hymns composed for these occasions, celebrating the coronation of King Ur-Nammu. These compositions contain a set of statements that chronicle the stages of the investiture ritual, including the "pressing of the holy scepter" into the king's hand. These verses are to be sung by or for the king proclaiming his god-given duties as lawgiver and the constructor of canals that bring fertility to the land. There is an answering litany by the priests containing the king's titles and affirming him as "king of Ur."

72:8. extent of reign. In order to indicate that God has granted this king universal rule, the psalmist employs images that are also used in the Karatepe inscription of the Luwian king Azitiwada (730-710 B.C.). Just as the psalmist refers to "rule from sea to sea," these annals proclaim that the king has extended his rule "from sunrise to sunset." Akkadian texts also feature a king boasting that all of the human race submitted to him, from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea.

72:9. desert tribes. This text is generally emended from the Hebrew *ṣiyyim,* "desert dweller" to *ṣarayw,* "his foes." If the original reading is retained, then it could relate back to the use of Cush (the desert region of Ethiopia) in Psalm 68:31 as a geographic term for the "ends of the earth" and thus follow the coronation promise in 72:8.

72:10. Tarshish, Sheba, Seba. In order to indicate the extent of the king's power rulers from throughout the world are said to come to him with gifts. Thus Tarshish, associated with the islands and nations in the western Mediterranean, represents all points to the west (see the comment on Is 23:1). Sheba is identified with southern Arabia (Yemen) and the Sabaean kingdom (see the comment on Is 60:6). Seba's location is still disputed, although some place it in Ethiopia or along the northwest Arabian incense road (see Is 43:3).

72:12-14. king's job. It is standard in ancient Near Eastern literature to portray the king as lawgiver (Prov 29:14) and defender of the weak (an attribute of God in Ps 35:10). The Egyptian *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* states that the king's duty is to "father the orphan." The coronation hymn of the Ur III king Ur-Nammu is described as the "sustainer of Ur." The prologue of his law code tells how the gods gave Hammurabi of Babylon the task of "promot[ing] the welfare of the people" and "caus[ing] justice to prevail in the land" so that "the strong might not oppress the weak."

Psalms 73—89

Book Three

73:24. take me into glory. The NIV's inclusion of the word "into" is totally interpretive, not being found in the Hebrew text. The concept of God "taking" a person as a reference to saving his life can be seen clearly in Psalm 18:16-17, where the NIV translates the same phrase as "took hold of me." The word "glory" is never used in Hebrew as a synonym for heaven and here refers to an "honorable" resolution to the psalmist's crisis. His difficulties have brought him shame because suffering was considered a sign of sin and God's displeasure (see comments on retribution principle and on afterlife in the sidebar on common concepts in Psalms).

74:4. standards. Standards or statues of the deity were usually carried to symbolize the presence of the gods. Assyrian kings of the ninth and eighth centuries regularly refer to the divine standard that goes before them. Banners were used by the Israelites and others, including the Assyrians, as standards of warfare. In the Egyptian army the divisions were named for various gods (e.g., the division of Amun, division of Seth), and the standards would identify the division by means of some representation of the god. Battle flags and standards were used by the military as signaling devices and rallying points for the army or were hung from city walls (see Jer 4:6). Their colors and insignia designated their allegiance and would in many cases have included a symbol of the god(s) who were expected to participate in the battle along with the human forces (see Jer 50:2). The Assyrian army of Shalmaneser III traveled with its "standards" attached to the royal chariot. When camp was made, they were erected near the royal pavilion and became the focal point for sacrifice and acts of devotion to the gods.

74:6. carved paneling. It is difficult to determine whether this refers to carved panels in the temple or to engravings on some of the bronze or gold pieces connected to the temple. What is clear is that the intricate artwork that embellished this temple (like many others in the ancient world) was being ruthlessly destroyed.

74:13. split sea. There is nothing in this psalm to suggest that reference is being made to the dividing of the Red Sea. The context concerns instead the cosmic battle with the sea that is referred to many times in Psalms. The verb used here is used only here in this form, making precision somewhat difficult. If splitting is intended, it may be parallel to Marduk's splitting of Tiamat ("sea") that is recounted in *Enuma Elish.* Others have translated it as a reference to the churning of the sea that sometimes precedes such battles (see comments on Dan 7:2, 3).

74:14. Leviathan. Leviathan has often been identified as a crocodile, which were found mostly in Egypt (where it symbolized kingly power and greatness), but also sparsely in Palestine. However, the multiple heads here and the fiery breath in Job 41:19-21 make the crocodile identification difficult. Alternatively, Leviathan has been depicted as a sea monster (see Is 27:1). Support for this is found in Ugaritic texts, which contain detailed descriptions of a chaos beast, representing the seas or watery anarchy, in the form of a many-headed, twisting sea serpent who is defeated by Baal. There is a close affinity between the description of Leviathan in Isaiah as a "coiling serpent" and the Ugaritic Baal epic, which speaks of how the storm god "smote Litan the twisting serpent," which is described as having seven heads. In both cases there is a sense of the god of order and fertility vanquishing a chaos monster. In Akkadian literature there is

a creature named *bashmu* that is described as having six tongues and seven mouths. In one text *bashmu* is named alongside other fabulous creatures including one with two heads and one with seven heads. The latter is also pictured on a cylinder seal. This seal shows four of the heads hanging limp while the battle continues with the remaining three. Several other passages in the Old Testament mention Leviathan, but most of them speak in terms of God's creative act that establishes control over watery chaos (personified by the sea serpent). In Isaiah 27:1, however, that struggle between order and chaos occurs at the end of time. It may be that the fall of Satan, portrayed as a seven-headed dragon in Revelation 12:3-9, also echoes the Ugaritic image of Litan as "the tyrant with seven heads." Biblically, Leviathan would therefore most easily fit into the category of "supernatural" creature (like cherubim) as opposed to natural or purely mythological. As such it may appear in extrabiblical mythology, as well as being symbolized by something like a crocodile (as in Ezek 29:3, though Leviathan is not specifically referred to in that context).

75:3. pillars of the earth. Pillars typically represent boundaries. Solomon's temple featured two free-standing pillars on the portico, serving as a boundary to the holy place. The tabernacle used pillars from which the partitions were hung to create a boundary for the courtyard. Even when the pillars supported something (as in the Philistine temple that Samson tumbled), archaeological information suggests they stood as boundaries to porticos or courtyards. In Babylon boundary markers known as *kudurru*s were pillar shaped. Ancient Near Eastern literature has no parallel for the earth being supported by pillars. In Job 26:11 the heavens have pillars, but this comment also occurs in the discussion of boundaries (v. 10). It is more likely that cosmic boundaries of the earth would be those between the living and the dead. The word translated "earth" in this verse sometimes refers to the netherworld. In Akkadian literature the boundaries of the netherworld are represented by gates.

75:8. cup of judgment, spiced wine. The image of wine as a cup of punishment is found often in the Old Testament (Jer 49:12; 51:17; Hab 2:15-16). It is especially clear from Isaiah 51:17 that the cup results in drunkenness (staggering), not death. Those forced to drink this cup lose all control of themselves and all ability to defend themselves (vv. 22-23). They become senseless. During the Hellenistic period wine was often mixed with water so that a greater quantity could be consumed and conversation could continue throughout the meal. However, in earlier periods blended or mixed wine, a more potent intoxicant, was common; it had to be consumed with more moderation (see Judg 9:13; Prov 9:2). In Mesopotamia, where wine was less common until the time of the Assyrian empire, wine was served on special occasions. Sometimes only grape syrup would be available, mixed with honey to create a liqueur.

75:10. horns of the righteous and wicked. See the comment on "horn" in the sidebar on common metaphors in Psalms.

78:2. parables. The term translated here as "parable" is *mashal*. It has a wide range of meanings: "allegory" (Ezek 17:2), "poem" (Num 21:27), "oracle" (Num 23:7). In this case, as in Proverbs 10:1, it refers to an "instruction" from God to the people warning the Israelites specifically but relying on the universality of a wisdom theme so that "all peoples" can be addressed, not just the Israelites. It may also be compared to the dark saying in Habakkuk 2:6 in which the Chaldean aggressors are taunted with the loss of their ill-gotten wealth.

78:9. defeat of Ephraim. There are not enough details given to identify the battle that is being referred to here. Ephraim is often used as a title for the entire northern kingdom of Israel. This could refer to something fairly early in Israelite history such as the defeat to the Philistines that brought about the loss of the ark. This would be supported by the fact that the listing of problems ends with that incident (vv. 60-64). Alternatively, others would go as far into history as the fall of the northern kingdom to the Assyrians in 722.

78:12. Zoan. Zoan refers to the Egyptian city of Dja'net, which the Greeks called Tanis. It became the capital city of the delta region in the Twenty-First Dynasty (twelfth century). It is in the area where the Israelites were settled in Egypt at the time of Moses.

78:14. fire and cloud. This is a reference to the pillar of cloud and fire that accompanied the Israelites in the wilderness. For more information see comment on Exodus 13:21-22.

78:15. water from rock. For information about this incident see comments on Exodus 17 and Numbers 20.

78:24. manna. For information about manna see comment on Exodus 16:4-9.

78:27. quail. For information about quail see comments on Exodus 16.

78:44-51. plagues. For discussion of the plagues see comments on Exodus 7—11.

78:60. abandoned Shiloh. Shiloh (modern Khirbit Seilun), in the heart of the Ephraimite

hills, was the site where Israel convened sacred assemblies before using Jerusalem. Excavations have exposed extensive architecture by the eleventh century B.C. The site lasted throughout the Iron Age, but the sacred structures served as an example of a sanctuary that had come under God's judgment. It is thought to have been overrun by the Philistines in the aftermath of the victory at the Battle of Aphek (1 Sam 4).

78:61. Ark into captivity. For more information in this incident see 1 Sam 4—6 and the comments there.

79:1. historical context. The only time in the Old Testament period in which the temple was defiled and the city of Jerusalem destroyed was in the fall of the city to Babylon in 587 B.C.

79:2. dead as food to birds and beasts. In the Gilgamesh Epic the guardian of the cedar forest, Huwawa, tells Gilgamesh that he should have given his flesh to be eaten by birds of prey and scavengers. For more information see comment on exposure of the corpse in 1 Kings 16:4.

79:5. how long? This question occurs nearly twenty times in Psalms, usually in connection with a lament psalm. It is found also in Mesopotamia as the Sumerian *Lament over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* asks, "How long will the enemy eye be cast upon my account?"

80:1. enthroned between cherubim. The cherubim are associated with the ark of the covenant, which they were either mounted on or flanked. They appear in ancient art with some regularity, flanking the thrones of kings and deities. The combination of cherubim as throne guardians, chests as footstools and statements in contexts like this one concerning Yahweh being enthroned on the cherubim supports the concept of the ark as representing the invisible throne of Yahweh. In Egyptian festivals the images of the gods were often carried in procession on portable barques. Paintings portray these as boxes about the size of the ark carried on poles and decorated with or flanked by guardian creatures. Biblical descriptions as well as archaeological discoveries (including some fine ivory pieces from Nimrud in Mesopotamia, Arslan Tash in Syria and Samaria in Israel) suggest that the cherubim are composite creatures (having features of a number of different creatures, like the Egyptian sphinx), often four-legged animal bodies with wings.

80:3. face shine upon us. The metaphor "light of God's face" is found in royal letters from the Egyptian city of Amarna and in Ugaritic correspondence. For example, "and the face of the Sun (i.e., Pharaoh) shone brightly upon me" is a statement made by one of the Egyptian king's subordinates. Two small silver scrolls (about one inch long) have been found in the area known as Keteph Hinnom in Jerusalem. They were amulets in a burial cave from the sixth or seventh century B.C., and they contained the benediction from Numbers 6:25, which includes the request that the Lord "make his face shine upon you." At present they represent the oldest example of any text of Scripture. The concept of the shining face of the deity resulting in mercy is found in Mesopotamian documents and inscriptions from as early as the twelfth century B.C.

80:5. bread of tears. The word translated "bread" here can also be used more generally to refer to food. Akkadian texts use the same metaphor, as they contain statements like "for bread I ate bitter tears" or "weeping is my nourishment."

80:11. Sea, River. Given the geographical description it is likely that these are references to the Mediterranean Sea and the Euphrates River.

80:13. boars. Pigs were domesticated very early, but the wild variety continued to thrive in the Near East and are represented in Egyptian and Mesopotamian art.

81:2. tambourine, harp, lyre. See comment on 150:3-5.

81:3. ram's horn at New Moon. Keyed to their use of a lunar calendar, ancient Israel marked the first day of the month, with its "new moon" phase, as a festival day (every twenty-nine or thirty days). As on the Sabbath, all work was to cease (see Amos 8:5), and there were sacrifices to be made (Num 28:11-15). In the monarchy period the king became a prominent figure in these celebrations (see Ezek 45:17). The festival continued to be observed in the postexilic period as well (Ezra 3:5; Neh 10:33). New Moon festivals were also prominent in Mesopotamia from late in the third millennium down to the Neo-Babylonian period in the middle of the first millennium B.C. In light of the parallel with the full moon, however, it is likely that this line refers not to any New Moon celebration but to the Feast of Tabernacles (see next comment).

81:3. feast day at Full Moon. The only pilgrimage feast that potentially spans the New Moon and Full Moon is the Feast of Taber-

nacles. The description in Numbers 29 includes instructions for both days, including the sounding of horns.

81:7. thundercloud, Meribah. There was thunder at Sinai, but it is hard to see how that was an act of rescue, and Meribah preceded it. It is therefore more likely that the thundercloud is seen as the weapon of the divine warrior, Yahweh, who delivered Israel from Egypt (same term used as in Is 29:6). Meribah is where Yahweh gave water from the rock (see comments on Ex 17).

81:16. honey from rock. While most honey spoken of in the Old Testament is the syrup from the date palm, mention of the rock here suggests bees' honey from honeycombs in the rocks.

82:1. assembly judging among gods. In the ancient Near East the major decisions were all made in the divine council. There the gods would consult with one another and share their information and opinions. The familiar picture of a heavenly throne surrounded by the divine assembly is well known from the Ugaritic texts (most notably the epic of Keret), though this Canaanite council is made up of the gods of the pantheon. Examples occur also in the tenth-century building inscription of Yehimilk from Byblos and the Karatepe stele of Azitawadda. In the Akkadian *Enuma Elish* it is the assembly of the gods that appoints Marduk as their head. Fifty gods made up this assembly, with seven in the inner council. In Israelite belief the gods were replaced by angels or spirits—the sons of God or the heavenly host.

82:5. foundations of the earth. In the Babylonian perception of the cosmos, the earth's foundation is on what is called the *apsu.* This is a primordial watery region under the jurisdiction of the very important deity Enki/Ea. From the standpoint of physical geography, it represents the water table that surfaces, for example, in marshes and springs, as well as being associated with the sweet water cosmic seas and rivers. In *Enuma Elish* one of Marduk's names, Agilima, identifies him as the one who built the earth above the water and established the upper regions. For further information see the comments on Job 38:4-6 and on creation in the sidebar on common concepts in Psalms.

82:6. gods/sons of the Most High. See comment on 82:1.

83:6-8. members of the alliance. The first seven peoples/nations mentioned are all located just to the east and south of Judah. The most uncertain is Gebal, which is the name usually used for Byblos on the far northern Mediterranean coast. An alternative location, however, is found near Petra, which suits this context better. Philistia and Tyre are traditional enemies to the west and north respectively. The mention of Assyria as the formidable member of the alliance suggests a situation somewhere between the mid-ninth century and the end of the eighth century. The mid-ninth century presence in the west was focused in the north, so the eighth-century conflicts are more likely. Judah took the brunt of Assyrian invasions during the times of Sargon and his son, Sennacherib. In the context of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem, the Assyrian inscriptions report that the kings of Tyre, Byblos, Ashdod (Philistia), Ammon, Moab and Edom had already submitted before Sennacherib came against Jerusalem. This may have been enough to identify them as co-conspirators. In contrast to attempting to identify a historical situation behind the psalm, the alternative is that this is simply a list of Israel's traditional enemies.

83:9. Midian, Sisera/Jabin. This is a reference to two battles during the Judges period when there was divine intervention on behalf of Israel. For the defeat of Midian at the hands of Gideon, see the comments on Judges 6—8. For Deborah and Barak's victory over King Jabin and his commander, Sisera, see the comments on Judges 4.

83:10. Endor. Endor is not mentioned in the account of these battles in Judges, but it is in the vicinity of both of them. The eastern end of the Valley of Jezreel is about ten miles wide from north to south. The north end is blocked off by Mount Tabor, while the south end is blocked off by Mount Gilboa. The ten-mile stretch between the two is broken into two passes by the smaller Hill of Moreh. Endor is located in the middle of the northern pass, between the Hill of Moreh, where the Battle of Midian took place, and Mount Tabor, where Deborah and Barak mustered their troops.

83:11. kings. The four kings mentioned here are the ones who led the forces of the Midianites against Gideon and the Israelites. Their defeat and execution are recorded in Judges 8.

84:title. sons of Korah. See comment on 42:title.

84:1-2. yearning for dwelling place. The temple, the dwelling place of deity, was a place where one enjoyed favor and blessing. The verb used here is similar to the English idiom of "missing" someone or something. It carries a bit of nostalgia; one longs for the return of a fondly remembered circumstance or situation. Here the pilgrim misses being around the temple.

84:4. dwelling in the Lord's house. In Israel

the priests were the only ones who dwelt within the temple precinct. Throughout the ancient Near East it was considered a privilege to be constantly in the deity's presence. The Babylonian king Neriglissar expressed to his god that he longed to be where he was forever. Another text requests, "May I stand before you forever in worship and devotion." A hymn to Marduk requests that the worshiper may stand before the deity forever in prayer, supplication and entreaty. In the third millennium B.C. Sumerian worshipers tried to accomplish this objective by placing statuettes of themselves in the posture of prayer in the temple. In this way they would be continuously represented in the temple.

84:6. Valley of Baca. If this is a reference to a geographical location, it is obscure. The word *Baca* means "weeping," but this would likewise be difficult to understand. The alternative suggestion is that the word describes a tree, specifically the balsam (see comment on 2 Sam 5:24). None of these help locate the valley or identify its significance.

84:10. doorkeeper in temple. One of the most important tasks assigned to priestly personnel was controlling access to the temple precinct, the inner circle of the "sacred compass" (on this concept see comments on Lev 16:2 and Num 18:1-7). Defiling the sanctuary with impurity required a purification offering ("sin" offering, see comment on Lev 4:1-3) and could bring punishment on the individual as well as the people. The gatekeepers had to prevent unqualified intrusion. There were also many valuable items in the temple precinct. Gold and silver were plentiful and a temptation to the unscrupulous individual who may not have feared divine retribution for trespass or theft of temple property. These valuables also had to be guarded. Misappropriation of that which was sacred required a reparation offering ("guilt" offering, see comment on Lev 5:14-16). The gatekeepers were charged with guarding against these offenses. For the psalmist, however, the gatekeeper was one of those privileged people who had the opportunity to be continuously in proximity to God's presence.

84:11. sun connection. The relationship between sun and shield is that they both offer protection. For the shield that is obvious, but we would not necessarily think of the sun in those terms. Nonetheless Assyrian kings use the metaphor of their protection spreading over the land like the rays of the sun.

85:title. sons of Korah. See comment on 42:title.

87:4. Rahab. Rahab is described as one of the sea monsters slain by God (see Job 26:12; Ps 89:10; Is 51:9). In both the Babylonian and the Ugaritic creation myths the champion deity (Marduk in Babylon and Baal in Ugarit) fights and slays a sea monster and its cohorts in a manner similar to that of Yahweh. In other contexts, as here, Rahab is symbolically used as a designation for Egypt (Is 30:7). The name Rahab has not yet been found in extrabiblical sources.

87:4. list of nations. No historical situation needs to be sought here, because the text is simply listing some of the nations that will be counted among those who acknowledge Yahweh. This list includes the great powers, Egypt (Rahab) and Babylon, the near neighbors, Philistia (southwest) and Tyre (northwest), and the distant nation (Cush or Nubia, south of Egypt).

87:6. register of peoples. In the ancient world royal estate cities typically housed the administration (composed largely of relatives of the king), and their citizens enjoyed certain privileges, including exemption from taxation, corvée labor, military duty and imprisonment, as well as being beneficiaries of the most beautiful and elaborate building projects. Such privileges *(kidinnutu)* were enjoyed by Babylonian cities such as Nippur, Sippar and Borsippa, based on their status as religious centers rather than as political capitals. Political capitals such as Nineveh and Babylon also were endowed with similar status. It is presumed that records would be kept to identify those who enjoyed such privileges. In this verse the psalmist alludes to the privileged status of those born in Zion.

88:title. sons of Korah. See comment on 42:title.

88:title. Heman the Ezrahite. Along with Ethan (in Ps 89), Heman is listed as one of the famous wise men of Solomon's time (1 Kings 4:31) and was appointed one of the Levitical musicians during the time of David (1 Chron 15:17, 19).

88:3. dread of death. This psalm is full of the dread of death as the psalmist laments his condition as one who is doomed to die. This is reminiscent of Gilgamesh in the Gilgamesh Epic, who responds to his own dread of death by going on a quest for immortality. Gilgamesh's actions are motivated by the death of his close friend Enkidu in the same way

that the psalmist despairs over the loss of his close friend (vv. 8, 18).

89:title. Ethan the Ezrahite. This name occurs among the sages of the time of Solomon (1 Kings 4:31) and perhaps among the Levitical musicians during the time of David (1 Chron 15:17, 19). Nothing else is known about him.

89:7. council of the holy ones. In the ancient Near East the major decisions were all made in the divine council. There the gods would consult with one another and share their information and opinions. The familiar picture of a heavenly throne surrounded by the divine assembly is well known from the Ugaritic texts (most notably the epic of Keret), though this Canaanite council is made up of the gods of the pantheon. Examples occur also in the tenth-century building inscription of Yehimilk from Byblos and the Karatepe stele of Azitawadda. In the Akkadian *Enuma Elish* it is the assembly of the gods that appoints Marduk as their head. Fifty gods made up this assembly with seven in the inner council. In Israelite belief the gods were replaced by angels or spirits—the sons of God or the heavenly host.

89:9. rule over the surging sea. In the Bible as well as in the ancient Near East the sea represents chaos and disorder, as do the sea monsters that live there. The obvious physical struggle between the sea and the land as well as the fierce, seemingly unstoppable energy displayed by the savage sea gave rise to cosmic myths in the ancient Near East. The *Enuma Elish* creation epic from Babylon describes how Marduk vanquishes Tiamat while this goddess of watery chaos is in the form of a dragon. Much of the cycle of stories about Baal in Ugaritic legend involves Baal's struggle against his rival Yamm, the god of the sea. Similarly, the Ugaritic epic has both Anat and Baal claim to have conquered Litan, the seven-headed dragon, and thus gained mastery over the seas. Rule over the sea then concerns Yahweh's sovereign control over the chaotic forces that were thought to constantly threaten the cosmos. That rule is expressed by the calming of the sea (see comments on 65:7 and 107:29).

89:10. Rahab. Rahab is described as one of the sea monsters slain by God (see Job 26:12 and Is 51:9). In both the Babylonian and the Ugaritic myths of creation the champion deity (Marduk in Babylon and Baal in Ugarit) fights and slays a sea monster and its cohorts in a manner similar to that of Yahweh. In other contexts, Rahab is symbolically used as a designation for Egypt (Is 30:7 and Ps 87:4). The name Rahab has not yet been found in extrabiblical sources.

89:12. created north and south. The determination of directions in the ancient world was an uncertain science. The North Star was about twelve degrees south of true north during this period, so paths of stars and constellations were used. In everyday determinations fixed topographical points were used as indicators. In Mesopotamia the east wind was known as the mountain wind because of the mountains to the east. In Israelite terminology north was sometimes, as here, referred to as Zaphon, the name of a mountain in Syria (see comment on Ps 48:2).

89:12. Tabor and Hermon. These are the two most prominent mountains in Israel. Mount Hermon (elev. 9,232 feet in the Anti-Lebanon Range) is at the northern boundary of the land and is often snowcapped. Mount Tabor is at the northeastern end of the Valley of Jezreel. Even though at 1,929 feet it has a much lower elevation than Hermon, it stands in stark isolation as it rises out of the plain. If these two mountains are supposed to be parallel to the north and south of the first line, the author must be located in the Galilee region.

89:14. righteousness and justice as foundation of throne. The idea of righteousness and justice as the most fundamental obligation of the king is expressed throughout the ancient Near East. It is graphically portrayed in Egyptian art, where the symbol of Maat (the deity associated with justice and truth) is the pedestal on which the throne sits.

89:18. king as shield. See comment on "shield" in the sidebar on common metaphors for God.

89:20. anointed with sacred oil. Anointing a king was common practice in some parts of the ancient Near East. Among the Egyptians and Hittites, anointing was believed to protect a person from the power of netherworld deities. Much of the evidence comes from Hittite sources describing enthronement ceremonies. There is no evidence of kings being anointed in Mesopotamia. In Egypt the pharaoh was not anointed, but he anointed his officials and his vassals. His anointing of them established their subordinate relationship to him and indicated the pharaoh's protection on that individual. In the Amarna texts there is reference to a king of Nuhasse (in modern Syria) being anointed by the pharaoh. This model would fit the idea of David being anointed as a vassal to God. In 2 Samuel 2:4 it is the people who anoint David. This anointing suggests some sort of contractual agreement between David and the people he will govern. In Nuzi individuals entering a business agreement anointed one another with oil, and in Egypt oil anointment was used in

wedding ceremonies. For information on royal coronations see comment on 1 Samuel 11:15. The spices which were to be used for anointing purposes were myrrh, cinnamon, cane and cassia (see recipe in Ex 30:23-25). Oil symbolizes the gifts of God to the people and the responsibilities now laid on their leaders through this ceremony. In Israelite practice anointing was a sign of election and often closely related to endowment by the Spirit. Additionally, throughout the ancient world anointing symbolized an advance of a person's legal status. Both concepts of protection and change of status may correlate to the king's anointing, for it would offer him protection on the throne and identify him with the divine realm.

89:24. horn. See the comment on "horn" in the sidebar on common metaphors for God.

89:35-37. royal line lasting forever like sun and moon. In a blessing on the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal one of his courtiers prays that his kingship may be as firmly established as the moon and the sun in the sky. In the Levant the inscription of Azitawadda claims that the name of this king will endure forever like the names of the sun and moon. Another blessing on an Assyrian king says, "Just as heaven and earth last forever, may the name of the king, my lord, last forever in Assyria" (CAD Q:123). This thought is echoed in a hymn to the god Sin, where the deity is petitioned to make the reign of Sargon (eighth-century Assyrian king) last as long as heaven and earth, and his throne firm over the four quarters of the earth. Finally, Ashurbanipal requests of the god Ea that he grant him long life, good health and happiness, and that he make the foundation of his throne secure and as firm as the heaven and netherworld.

Psalms 90—106

Book Four

90:10. life expectancy. Joseph died at the age of 110, considered the ideal age for an Egyptian. Examination of mummies has demonstrated that the average life expectancy in Egypt was between forty and fifty. The Egyptian *Papyrus Insinger* details that ten years are spent in childhood and ten more learning a trade. The writer accounts for ten more in storing up possessions and another ten in gaining wisdom. He thus concludes that two-thirds of one's years are lost to him (suggesting a normal life expectancy of sixty) yet contends that the godly man will still have sixty years remaining of the days assigned by Thoth, making a round one hundred. See comments on Deuteronomy 31:2 and Isaiah 40:6-7.

91:1. rest in shadow. The shadow offers protection and is usually referred to as the shadow of his wings. See comment on 17:8.

91:3. fowler's snare. The very familiar image of fowlers trapping birds in nets and snares may be the origin of this common metaphor (see Josh 23:13; Ps 69:22; Is 8:14). There are numerous examples of this activity from Egyptian tomb paintings, and it also provides the basis for the Sumerian *Stele of the Vultures* (see the comment on Ezek 12:13). There were a number of different techniques used to snare birds. Although hunters might simply use a sling, throwing stick (as in the Beni Hasan tomb painting) or a bow to take down individual fowl, the majority of instances in the biblical text and in ancient art depict large flocks of birds being captured in nets or cages. For instance, the tomb of Ka-Gemmi at Saqqarah (Sixth-Dynasty Egypt) portrays the fowler using a net. Apparently some fowlers also used decoys in their snares to attract the birds along with bait food (attested in Ecclus 11:30).

91:11. guardian angels. In the ancient Near East it was deities rather than angels who served as guardians. Mesopotamians believed that personal gods or family gods offered special care and protection that the great cosmic or national deities would not be bothered with. The Akkadian texts also speak of guardians of well-being and health, as well as guardian spirits. These spirits were assigned to an individual by the deity, just as here. The protection that was expected in the ancient Near East was against demonic powers, who were believed to be the cause of illness and trouble. Related to that was the danger of magical spells and hexes that could be pronounced against someone. The Israelites certainly believed in the reality of the demon world, and many Israelites would not have successfully divorced their thinking from the magical perspectives of their neighbors. Nevertheless, the psalmist does not typically understand the problems he faces in those terms. This is the only place in the Old Testament where there is any reference to guardian angels.

92:title. Sabbath liturgy. This is the only psalm that is designated for the Sabbath. There is little indication in the Old Testament of any special worship ceremonies on the Sabbath. It has been suggested that this psalm ac-

companied the daily offerings on the Sabbath.

92:3. ten-stringed lyre. This is a typical musical instrument of the time and is attested in ancient Near Eastern texts, reliefs and paintings as early as the third millennium B.C. The lyre is differentiated from the harp by the number of strings. Both are hand-held with frames made of wood. A musical text has been discovered at Ugarit that sheds light on Late Bronze Age music. This text has the chords to be played on a lyre accompanying a Hurrian cult hymn.

92:10. exalting the horn. See the comment on "horn" in the sidebar on common metaphors for God.

92:10. fine oils. Banquet guests in the ancient world were often treated by a generous host to fine oils to anoint their foreheads. This provided not only a glistening sheen to their countenance but also would have added a fragrance to their persons and the room. For example, an Assyrian text from Esarhaddon's reign describes how he "drenched the foreheads" of his guests at a royal banquet with "choicest oils." Oil preserved the complexion in the hot Middle Eastern climate. Both the Egyptian S*ong of the Harper* and the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh Epic describe individuals clothed in fine linen and with myrrh on their head.

93:3-4. comparison to seas. In the Bible as well as in the ancient Near East, the sea represents chaos and disorder, as do the sea monsters that live there. The obvious physical struggle between the sea and the land as well as the fierce, seemingly unstoppable energy displayed by the savage sea gave rise to cosmic myths in the ancient Near East. The *Enuma Elish* creation epic from Babylon describes how Marduk vanquished Tiamat while this goddess of watery chaos was in the form of a dragon. Much of the cycle of stories about Baal in Ugaritic legend involve Baal's struggle against his rival Yamm, the god of the sea. Similarly, the Ugaritic epic has both Anat and Baal claim to have conquered Litan, the seven-headed dragon, and thus gained mastery over the seas.

95:8. Meribah/Massah. These are the terms applied to Rephidim near Sinai to describe the quarrelsome nature of the people. God responded by bringing water from the rock. For more information on the incident see the comments on Exodus 16—17.

97:2. surrounded by clouds. The image of a rampant God storming through the heavens in a cloud chariot is a common one (Ps 68:4; 104:3; Jer 4:13). Such descriptions of storm theophany may be found in the texts that speak of the Ugaritic god Baal. In both the Aqhat epic and in the Baal and Anat cycle of stories, Baal is referred to as the "rider of the clouds." Baal's attributes, commanding the storms, unleashing the lightning and rushing to war as a divine warrior, even appear in the Egyptian El Amarna texts. The characteristics of Yahweh as Creator, giver of fertility and divine warrior share a great deal in common with these earlier epics. One of the ways that Yahweh presents himself to the Israelites as the sole divine power is by assuming the titles and powers of the other ancient Near Eastern gods.

98:1. holy arm. The image of an outstretched or mighty hand or arm is common in Egyptian inscriptions to describe the power of pharaoh. It is used throughout the exodus narratives to describe God's power over pharaoh. In the fourteenth-century B.C. Amarna letters, Abdi-Heba, the governor of Jerusalem, refers to "the strong arm of the king" as the basis for his government appointment. Similarly, the Eighteenth-Dynasty hymn to Osiris equates his growing to majority with the phrase "when his arm was strong," and Haremhab's hymn to Thoth describes the moon god as guiding the divine bark through the sky with "arms outstretched."

98:5-6. worship with instruments. See comment on 150:3-5.

98:8. personification of nature. It is not unusual for the Bible to personify the forces of nature, but they do not embody them with personality as was done in the rest of the ancient Near East. In Mesopotamia, Canaan and Egypt the forces of nature were manifestations of individual deities, who had jurisdiction over that realm of nature and were integrated into it.

98:9. equity. The term here is comparable to that used in Mesopotamia for the declaration of release from debts. In the ancient Near East the freeing of prisoners (from debtors' prison) as an act of justice often occurred in the first or second year of a new king's reign (and then periodically after that). For example, the Old Babylonian king Ammisaduqa (seventeenth century B.C.) cancelled economic debts on behalf of Shamash. One of the ways to bring justice was to bring relief to those who were suffering under debt (usually of no fault of their own).

99:1. enthroned between the cherubim. The cherubim are associated with the ark of the covenant, which they were either mounted on or flanked. They appear in ancient art with some regularity, flanking the thrones of kings and deities. The combination of cherubim as

throne guardians, chests as footstools and statements in contexts like this one concerning Yahweh being enthroned on the cherubim supports the concept of the ark as representing the invisible throne of Yahweh. In Egyptian festivals the images of the gods were often carried in procession on portable barques. Paintings portray these as boxes about the size of the ark carried on poles and decorated with or flanked by guardian creatures. Biblical descriptions as well as archaeological discoveries (including some fine ivory pieces from Nimrud in Mesopotamia, Arslan Tash in Syria and Samaria in Israel) suggest the cherubim are composite creatures (having features of a number of different creatures, like the Egyptian sphinx), often four-legged animal bodies with wings.

99:5. worship at footstool. First of all, it must be recognized that the ark of the covenant was considered the footstool of God's invisible throne (see comment on Ex 25:10-22). Second, the footstool must be understood to be an integral part of the throne, representing the closest accessibility to the king. Third, the imagery of the footstool has significance because it is used to express the king's subordination of his foes (see comment on Ps 110:1). Finally, worshiping at the footstool is another way of expressing the reverence that is shown by prostrating oneself at the feet of God or king. On the black stela of Shalmaneser III, the Israelite king Jehu is portrayed kissing the ground before the Assyrian king. In *Enuma Elish* the tribunal of gods kisses the feet of Marduk after he has put down the rebellion and established himself as head of the pantheon. This was the common act of submission offered to kings and gods. Taking hold of the feet was a gesture of self-abasement and entreaty. This gesture occurs in a wide range of Akkadian literature as fugitives or supplicants take hold of the king's feet to demonstrate their submission or surrender and make their petitions.

103:12. east and west. In an Egyptian hymn to Amun-Re the deity is praised for his judgment of the guilty. As a result of the god's discernment the guilty are assigned to the east and the righteous to the west.

103:20-21. mighty ones, heavenly hosts. The "host of heaven" in the ancient Near East referred to the assembly of the gods, many of whom were represented by celestial bodies (whether planets or stars). The Bible sometimes uses the phrase to refer to the illegitimate worship of these deities (see comment on Deut 4:19). On other occasions, the phrase is used for Yahweh's angelic council (see comment on 2 Chron 18:18). A third type of usage treats the term as a reference to rebel angels (perhaps in Is 24:21; commonly in the intertestamental literature). Finally, it can refer simply to the stars, with no personalities behind them (Is 40:26). In the ancient Near East the major decisions were all made in the divine council. There the gods would consult with one another and share their information and opinions. The familiar picture of a heavenly throne surrounded by the divine assembly is well known from the Ugaritic texts (most notably the epic of Keret), though this Canaanite council is made up of the gods of the pantheon. Examples occur also in the tenth-century building inscription of Yehimilk from Byblos and the Karatepe stele of Azitawadda. In the Akkadian *Enuma Elish* it is the assembly of the gods that appoints Marduk as their head. Fifty gods made up this assembly with seven in the inner council. In Israelite belief the gods were replaced by angels or spirits—the sons of God or the heavenly host. Yahweh is often portrayed as the "Lord of Hosts"—the commander of the heavenly armies.

104:1-35. comparison to *Hymn to the Aten*. There is a famous composition of the Egyptian king Akhenaten dating to the fourteenth century B.C. that has a number of similarities to Psalm 104, mostly in wording and content. The hymn praises the god Aten, a sun god, for all of his care over creation. One could find some of the same motifs and analogies in other hymns to other sun gods. Once the psalmist determined to use solar motifs in a hymn to Yahweh, it was inevitable that parallels would occur. Sun worship was one of the syncretistic deviations that characterized preexilic Israel (see comments on 2 Kings 23:11 and Ezek 8:16), and adoption of sun motifs (both literary and iconographic) has been attested (in Old Testament see also Ps 84:11; Hab 3:4; Mal 4:2). Nevertheless, there is nothing syncretistic in the beliefs expressed by this psalm. It is only the imagining of Yahweh in solar terms that brings out the similarities.

104:2. garment of light. In Egyptian worship of Aten the sun disk itself was considered to be the deity. As a result the imagery of wrapping oneself in light would have been particularly appropriate to Atenism but not to the worship of other sun deities. Nevertheless, this phrase is not used in the Aten hymn. Akkadian literature speaks of celestial gods wearing the garment of heaven, but this refers

to clouds. Another passage may be more relevant in which Marduk is clothed by another deity with radiance.

104:3. beams of upper chambers. In the ancient world there were several levels of heavens, and they were understood as having floors, walls and roofs (see comment on Ex 24:10). In Mesopotamian texts *(Enuma Elish)* the waters of the heavens were made from one half of Tiamat's body when Marduk defeated her and set up the cosmos. These waters are identified with the highest level of the heavens, Anu's heaven (Anu was the ancient chief deity, before Enlil or Marduk). If this imagery is being used, Yahweh is seen as inhabiting the highest heavens, the beams being the roof beams of the upper story of his cella. In the Mesopotamian texts the cella of the chief god (Marduk) is in the middle heavens, but the description of Anu's abode in the highest heavens likewise presupposes a cella.

104:3. cosmos as temple. The psalmist's attempt to express God's complete control over all creation includes a multistoried or many-chambered sanctuary or palace in the heavens (cf. Ps 78:69; Is 66:1). In the biblical and ancient Near Eastern view the cosmos was a temple and the temple was a microcosmos. The cosmos can therefore be described in architectural terms as a temple would be.

104:3. riding the clouds. The image of a rampant God storming through the heavens in a cloud chariot is a common one (Ps 68:4; Jer 4:13). Such descriptions of storm theophany may be found in the texts that speak of the Ugaritic god Baal. In both the Aqhat epic and in the Baal and Anat cycle of stories, Baal is referred to as the "rider of the clouds." Baal's attributes, commanding the storms, unleashing the lightning and rushing to war as a divine warrior, even appear in the Egyptian El Amarna texts. The characteristics of Yahweh as Creator, giver of fertility and divine warrior share a great deal in common with these earlier epics. One of the ways that Yahweh presents himself to the Israelites as the sole divine power is by assuming the titles and powers of the other ancient Near Eastern gods.

104:4. winds, flames as messengers. In both *Enuma Elish* and the *Tale of Anzu* the winds carry the news of the victory by the hero deity over the chaos monster. In the former, the north wind carries the blood of Tiamat as tidings of her demise; in the latter, the feathers of the defeated Anzu are carried on the wind to Enlil. Flames of fire can refer to the destructiveness of God's wrath (as can winds for that matter).

104:6-9. watery chaos. This does not refer to the flood but to the initial creation narrative where the dry land emerged as all of the waters were assigned their places. The defeat of the forces of chaos, personified in the primordial sea, was one of the most common elements of ancient Near Eastern cosmology (Baal defeating Yamm in Ugaritic texts; Marduk defeating Tiamat in *Enuma Elish).*

104:9. boundary for waters. Marduk, after having defeated Tiamat, created the seas and placed guards to keep back the waters. The Babylonian *Atrahasis Epic* refers to a bolt of the sea in the possession of the god Ea (Enki). Other texts speak of locks of the sea. One of the main tasks of the head of the pantheon was to keep the sea in check so that chaos would be restrained and order would prevail. One of the earliest reflections of this motif is found in the *Myth of Ninurta and Azag*, where Ninurta builds a stone wall to contain the waters.

104:19. moon marking seasons. In contrast to the sun, which marks days by its rising and setting, the phases of the moon marked the months, which are linked to the seasons. By early in the first millennium the ancients were well aware of the difference between the solar cycle (365+ days) and the lunar cycle (354+ days). They also had a growing awareness of calendrical reckoning by the sequence of stars and constellations rising and setting. The moon remained the main determiner of months and seasons, though supplementary months were added every three years to readjust the months to the solar cycle. If only lunar calculations were used, the months would gradually drift away from their festivals that marked the planting and harvest times (which, of course, were determined by the sun).

104:26. Leviathan. See comment on 74:14.

104:28. open hand. In the Egyptian reliefs showing the worship of Aten, the deified sun disk is portrayed with numerous arms reaching from it, each one with a hand at the end of it symbolizing the giving of blessings and favor.

104:32. volcanic activity in the Near East. People in the ancient Near East were aware of the phenomenon of volcanoes but had little chance to observe them. Both Mesopotamia and Egypt are river cultures, with few mountains nearby, let alone active volcanoes. Ararat is one of the active volcanoes in the Fertile Crescent (but it has not had an eruption in historic time). Additionally there are several in Syria and quite a few along the southern rim

of Turkey. Most significantly, the Aegean features half a dozen volcano sites, including at least one that had an eruption during the Old Testament period (Santorini, 1650 B.C.).

105:13-15. patriarchal wanderings. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees in either northern or southern Mesopotamia (see comment on Gen 11:28) and traveled to Canaan. He had incidents in Gerar and Egypt. Jacob traveled to Paddan Aram in northern Mesopotamia and back again to Canaan. Joseph and his whole family journeyed to Egypt and sojourned there. God's care for them was evident in each of their lives.

105:18. shackles and irons. The shackles around the ankles chaining the feet together are clear enough. Since the other instrument goes around the neck, it must be an iron collar. These were at times used to link prisoners together. Assyrian inscriptions from the ninth and eighth centuries depict captives being transported or laboring with wooden yokes around their necks.

105:23. land of Ham. This is an alternate name for Egypt, where some of the descendants of Ham, the son of Noah, settled.

105:29-36. plagues. For discussion of the plagues see comments on Exodus 7—11.

105:39. cloud. This is a reference to the pillar of cloud and fire that accompanied the Israelites in the wilderness. For more information see comment on Exodus 13:21-22.

105:40-41. quail, manna, water. For information concerning these miraculous acts of provision see comments on Exodus 16—17.

106:7. Red Sea. For more information see comments on Exodus 14—15.

106:15. wasting disease. See Numbers 11:33. There is no information available on the nature of this disease. See comment on Numbers 25:8.

106:17. Dathan and Abiram. See comments on latter part of Numbers 16.

106:19. Horeb. Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai and is most likely located in the southern section of the Sinai peninsula. For more detailed discussion see comment on Exodus 19:1-2.

106:19-20. calf/bull. See comments on Exodus 32.

106:28. Baal of Peor. This is a reference to the incident in which the Israelites got involved with the women of Moab. See Numbers 25 and the comments there.

106:33. Moses' rash words. Moses' offense took place during the second incident where water came forth from the rock. See Numbers 20 and the comments there.

106:37. sacrificed to demons. This word for demon is used elsewhere in the Old Testament only in Deuteronomy 32:17, but it is a well-known type of spirit/demon in Mesopotamia, where the term *(shedu)* describes a protective guardian mostly concerned with the individual's health and welfare. It is not the name of a deity but a category of being (like cherub would be in the Old Testament). A *shedu* could destroy one's health just as easily as it could protect it, so sacrifices to keep it placated were advisable. They are depicted as winged creatures (similar to the cherub, see comments on Gen 3:24 and Ex 25:18-20), but they do not have idols (as the gods have idols) by which they are worshiped (see comment on Deut 4 for how this worked). For information concerning child sacrifice see comments on Genesis 22:1 and Leviticus 18:21.

106:38. idols of Canaan. Gods of the Canaanites included El, Baal (Hadad), Dagon and Anat.

Psalms 107—150

Book Five

107:10. exiles in prisons. While most of those who had been deported to Babylon would not have been imprisoned, there would have been some political prisoners. Pits were used as prisons in most of the ancient Near East. The modern idea of a prison where prisoners were to be reformed into good citizens was foreign to the ancient world. Those in debt, criminals awaiting trial and political prisoners were held in confinement of one sort or another.

107:16. gates of bronze, bars of iron. The Greek historian Herodotus described Babylon as having "one hundred gates in the circuit of the wall, all of bronze with bronze uprights and lintels." Large bronze gates have been excavated at the Assyrian period site of Balawat, giving a glimpse of what the Babylonian walls may have been like. Gates were locked by means of a bar slid across the gateway, and iron would obviously be the most difficult to break (see comment on Deut 33:25).

107:18. gates of death. Sheol was believed to be like an earthly city in that it contained houses and even a city wall (primarily to keep in its inhabitants). In the *Descent of Ishtar* the netherworld has a gate complex with seven gates and gatekeepers at each one to control access.

107:23-30. storms on the sea. The Babylonian

hymn to Shamash also has a section in which Shamash is seen as rescuing merchants (and their goods) from storms at sea. But it does not speak of Shamash either sending the waves or stilling the storm, only of watching over the traveler and saving his life.

107:29. stilling the storm. The sea was the most powerful image of uncontrolled chaos known to the ancient world. In the chaos combat motif featured in the mythologies as well as in the Old Testament, the forces of cosmic chaos were most frequently represented in the sea. Creation is sometimes spoken of as overcoming those forces and bringing order and control to the cosmos. In this context it is not the primordial past that is under discussion but Yahweh's ability to (again) bring the sea under control and restore order for these merchants. This idea of transforming cosmic acts into the historical realm occurs also in incidents like the Israelite crossing of the Red Sea, when the sea was harnessed and controlled by Yahweh to do his bidding. It should not be missed that this was a significant element in Jesus' calming of the sea as well.

107:33-35. world upside down. In the world-upside-down motif, all that is considered most consistent and reliable is jeopardized. The concept can be applied to the cosmic realm (sun growing dark), the natural realm (mountains being leveled), the political realm (empires overthrown), the social realm (poor becoming rich) and the animal realm (lion and lamb together). It is often used in prophetic literature in connection with the Day of the Lord and coming judgment. The Babylonian epic of Irra is roughly similar in that it describes a reversal of Marduk's creation of order out of the original primeval chaos.

108:2. awaken the dawn. Dawn *(šaḥar)* was often personified in the Old Testament and is known from Phoenician and Ugaritic inscriptions, as well as being referred to at Emar. In Akkadian dawn is personified under the name Sheru. There are no references to any of these roles in the mythology nor to rituals intended to awaken the dawn.

108:7. Shechem, Valley of Succoth. The site of Shechem has been identified with Tell Balatah, east of modern Nablus and thirty-five miles north of Jerusalem. Perhaps because of its proximity to two nearby peaks, Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, it has had a long history as a sacred site. Shechem is known from many ancient sources, including the Egyptian records of Sen-Usert III (nineteenth century B.C.) and the El Amarna tablets (fourteenth century B.C.). Nearly continuous occupation is evidenced through the second and first millennia, demonstrating the importance of this strategic city on the highway network running north from Egypt through Beersheba, Jerusalem and on to Damascus. It was Abram's first stop in Canaan. The fertile soil in this area promoted agriculture as well as good grazing. Succoth is situated east of the Jordan River near its confluence with the Jabbok River (Judg 8:5). A number of archaeologists have identified it with the site of Tell Deir 'Alla, based on Egyptian records (the stele of Shishak) and cultural remains dating from the Chalcolithic to Iron Age II. The name, which means "booths," would be appropriate for the temporary housing of this region's mixed population of pastoral nomads and miners (evidence of smelting has been found in Iron I levels). It is located in the valley just west of the highlands of Gilead as the land comes down to the Jordan.

108:8. helmet, scepter. The term translated "helmet" is not used elsewhere as a reference to armor or headgear. It only occurs in the parallel Psalm 60:7. The Hebrew text refers to "a fortress for my head" or perhaps "my chief fortress." The scepter is now often identified as a ceremonial engraved mace that kings are sometimes portrayed holding in their hands as a symbol of office. It is referred to elsewhere in Genesis 49:10 and Numbers 21:18.

108:9. Moab as washbasin. The container referred to here is usually used for cooking but is a multipurpose pot/basin that comes in various sizes. Washbasins were typically used for ritual washing or ritual bathing and occur in lists of fine gifts in the Amarna tablets. The imagery here is obscure.

108:9. sandal tossed on Edom. Sandals were the ordinary footwear in the ancient Near East, but they were also a symbolic item of clothing. This may have been due to the fact that land was purchased based on whatever size triangle of land one could walk off in an hour, a day, a week or a month (1 Kings 21:16-17). Land was surveyed in triangles, and a benchmark was constructed of fieldstones to serve as a boundary marker (Deut 19:14). Since they walked off the land in sandals, the sandals became the moveable title to that land. By removing the sandals of her guardian a widow removed his authorization to administer the land of her household. Land transfers in the Nuzi texts also involved replacing the old owner's foot on the land with that of the new owner.

108:10. fortified city. Since the "fortified city" is parallel to Edom, one is inclined to think of the major fortified city in Edom. This would be Bozrah, which name is built from the same

root as the word used here for fortified city. Bozrah was the capital of ancient Edom and is to be identified with Buseirah in the northern region of the country. It guards a portion of the king's highway and is fairly close to the copper mines found five miles to the southwest at Wadi Dana. Excavations demonstrate seventh- and sixth-century levels from the most heavily fortified and largest settlement in the area.

108:11. God going out with armies. In the divine warrior motif, the deity fights the battles and defeats the deities of the enemy. In Assyria Nergal is the king of battle, and Ishtar is viewed also as a war goddess. The Canaanite Baal and the Babylonian Marduk are divine warriors. In most situations prayers would be made and omens asked to assure the god's presence. Standards or statues of the deity were usually carried to symbolize their presence. Assyrian kings of the ninth and eighth centuries regularly referred to the divine standard that went before them. The ark, as Yahweh's standard, represented the Lord as clearing the way before the Israelites and leading the armies into Canaan. This concept is not very different from the Assyrian belief that the gods empowered the weapons of the king and fought before him or at his side. Nearly every army in the ancient Near East included priests and diviners (as seen in the Mari texts), prophets (2 Kings 3) and portable sacred objects (Assyrian annals of Shalmaneser III [858-824 B.C.]). In this way the god(s) could be consulted on the battlefield or invoked to lead the soldiers to victory. The psalmist here is invoking God's aid against their enemies in battle.

108:13. trampling enemies. Egyptian kings in the early third millennium B.C. are depicted as trampling over the corpses of defeated enemies. For instance, Narmer, possibly the one who unified Egypt, is seen with a mace smashing enemies and stepping over them. Likewise, the Sumerian kings from Lagash are depicted as marching over the dead bodies of their enemies. The tradition of trampling on one's enemies continued on into the first millennium in Assyria and Babylonia.

109:6-15. relationship between imprecations and hex/spell. This psalm is known as an "imprecatory" psalm because it calls down curses (imprecations) on the enemy. In the ancient Near East such curses were enhanced or activated by magical rituals and spells, but this sort of practice would have been unacceptable in the biblical system. Imprecatory psalms can be best understood against the background of the retribution principle (see discussion in the sidebar on common concepts). Since God's justice was seen as requiring punishment proportional to the seriousness of the sin, the psalmist is calling down the curses that would be appropriate if justice were to be maintained. These are the same magnitude of curses that God pronounces on his enemies (see Is 13:15-16). The forceful language of this passage contains aspects of an East Semitic curse formula that relies on the deity to carry out vengeance on the enemy nations. An example of this type of indirect curse is found in the vassal treaties of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon as he calls on a host of gods to do the treaty breaker harm. It is also employed, with the addition of ritual acts of execration, in the Aramaic Sefire inscription: "Just as this bow and these arrows are broken, so may Inurta and Hadad break the bow of Mati'el and the bow of his nobles." The psalmist indirectly curses by imprecation, calling on God to "laugh at them" in their puny efforts to menace Israel. He does not employ magical incantations or execration rituals against them but instead relies on God to render these peoples impotent—breaking their power and their weapons of destruction (see Jer 49:35; 51:56; Ezek 39:3).

109:7. prayers condemning. From the context it could be concluded that this refers to a petitionary prayer in a courtroom situation. Such prayers could be accompanied by oaths of innocence (such as Job's in Job 31). If the party were not truly innocent, such an oath would be a basis for divine punishment.

109:24. fasting. Fasting is little attested in the ancient Near East outside of the Bible. It generally occurs in the context of mourning. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with making a request before God. Presumably the principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and the humbling of oneself before God (Ps 69:10).

110:1. seat at the right hand. A fully armed warrior would hold his weapon in his right hand and his shield in his left. The person to the right of a king would have the privilege of defending him. For a king to put someone

there would be an affirmation of trust and therefore an honor. In contrast, when the Lord takes up his position at someone's right hand, as in Psalm 109:31, he is in a position to offer defense with his shield. A statue of Pharaoh Horemhab (fourteenth century B.C.) portrays him seated at the right hand of the god Horus.

110:1. enemies a footstool. The Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (thirteenth century) "puts his foot on the neck of" individual conquered kings as well as (symbolically) on that of conquered lands, clarifying that they have thus become his footstool. This is graphically depicted in a tomb painting from the fifteenth century B.C. showing Thutmose IV seated on the lap of his mother (?) with his feet resting on a box that is filled with enemies laid out in a pile. For further information see comment on 108:13.

110:4. priestly order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was the priest-king of Jerusalem in the time of Abraham (see comments in Gen 14). As a result Jerusalem had a history of a king exercising some of the prerogatives of priestly office. For evidence of this being practiced in David's family see comment on 2 Samuel 8:18. It was not unusual in the ancient world for the king to hold office as the highest ranking priest as well (compare the American president as the commander in chief of the armed forces; or the sovereign of England as the titular head of the Church of England).

114:2. Judah as sanctuary. This reflects a temple-as-state imagery. God's throne was in the temple just as the king's throne was in his palace. God and king reigned over the country from their respective thrones. This concept goes all the way back into earliest recorded history, as the temples served as the earliest administrative centers for the state. In this way it can be seen that the two lines of this verse are parallel in that the sanctuary is the central feature in the "dominion" (kingdom).

114:4. mountains skipping. In the Ugaritic tale concerning the building of Baal's palace, his enthronement is preceded by his voice thundering forth, with the result that the high places of the earth leap or quake. Similarly in a hymn to Marduk his thundering voice makes the earth quake. The Hebrew verb translated "skip" is often thought to describe a frolicking or gamboling type of motion but is more likely the undulating appearance of a flock of sheep or goats moving along a path (see comment on 2 Sam 6:14-21). This would be an appropriate image to describe the heaving of the earth in an earthquake.

115:4-7. idol ideology. Idols came in a variety of shapes and sizes in the ancient Near East. They were typically carved of wood and overlaid with hammered out sheets of silver or gold. Basically human in appearance (except those from Egypt which combined human and animal characteristics), they had distinctive, even formalized, poses, clothing and hairstyles. Images of deity in the ancient Near East were where the deity became present in a special way, to the extent that the cult statue became the god (when the god so favored his worshipers), even though it was not the only manifestation of the god. Rituals were performed to bring the god to life in its idol. As a result of this linkage, spells, incantations and other magical acts could be performed on the image in order to threaten, bind or compel the deity. In contrast, other rites related to the image were intended to aid the deity or care for the deity. The idols then represented a worldview and concept of deity that was not consistent with how Yahweh had revealed himself. The idol was not the deity, but the deity was thought to inhabit the image and manifest its presence and will through the image. Archaeologists have found very few of the life-sized images that the texts describe, but there are renderings of them that allow accurate knowledge of details. The images of deities in Mesopotamia were fed, dressed and even washed daily. Food sacrifices were brought to the deity on a daily basis (which were no doubt eaten by the temple technicians). Other attendants were required to dress and undress the statue, and still others were employed to wash the statue and transport it in times of celebration.

116:13. cup of salvation. The connection in this context to the payment of vows in the temple suggests that a libation is being poured out as testimony is given of God's goodness and protection. Libations were a common form of thanksgiving in the ancient world, as depicted on Egyptian, Phoenician and Mesopotamian reliefs. The libation represents the deliverance (salvation) afforded by deity and also accomplishes deliverance from the vow.

116:14. fulfilling vows. Vows are voluntary, conditional agreements that were common in most of the cultures of the ancient Near East, including the Hittite, Ugaritic, Mesopotamian and, less often, Egyptian. In the ancient world the most common context for a vow was when a request was being made to deity. The condition would typically involve God's provision or protection, while that which was vowed was usually a gift to deity. The gift would most frequently take the form of a sacrifice, but other types of gifts to the sanctuary or priests would be options. Fulfillment of a

vow could usually be accomplished at the sanctuary and was a public act. In Ugaritic literature King Keret makes a vow in requesting a wife who could produce offspring. In return he offered gold and silver corresponding to his bride's weight.

118:22. stone rejected by builders. Israelite Iron Age architectural design made increasing use of cut-stone masonry over the rough boulders and rubble construction of earlier periods. In order to provide stability and to bind two adjoining walls together, a finely shaped block of stone was inserted that became the cornerstone. It would have been a larger stone than those normally used, and its insertion often required special effort or rituals. Its large, smooth surface was a natural place for inscribing religious slogans, the name of the architect or king responsible and the date of construction. It is possible that the cornerstone could also serve as the foundation stone. For information on the latter see the next entry and comments on Ezra 3:3 and 3:10.

118:22. capstone. The cornerstone or, better, the foundation brick is always significant in temple building and restoration. One of the most detailed temple-building accounts in ancient Near Eastern literature describes Gudea's construction of a temple for Ningirsu around 2000 B.C. The ceremony concerning the premier brick shows its centrality to the building procedure.

118:27. festal procession. To represent the abundance and lushness of the land, Israelites were instructed to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, waving branches and decorating their booths with fruit (citron) as well as leaves and branches from willow and palm trees. The festal occasion probably included dancing and processions carrying bundles of the leafy branches. In this way the people acknowledged the abundance provided by God and communally celebrated the visible fulfillment of the covenant. Ancient Near Eastern texts also describe the itineraries of priestly processions. These differed in that they took the images of gods, along with their various divine accoutrements, from one town to another within a kingdom. This allowed the god to visit shrines, make inspection tours of facilities owned by the principal temple community and participate in annual festivals outside the capital. These sacred processions paraded the images and symbols of the gods through the city streets to their shrines, where sacrifices, sacred dancing and other cultic activities would take place.

119:1. acrostic. The divisions every eight verses that are marked in most translations represent the consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each verse in the set of eight begins with the same Hebrew letter. This is known as an acrostic. For more information on acrostics see the sidebar on common concepts.

119:72. thousands of pieces of silver and gold. This is a way for the psalmist to express a fortune. A common wage would have been about ten shekels of silver a year.

119:83. wineskin in the smoke. Though the skin bag referred to here once carried wine (1 Sam 16:20), it is not the vessel used for fermenting the wine but that used for carrying various liquids (for example, milk in Judg 4:19). The Akkadian cognate *(nadu)* is used for a waterskin (often of sheep hide), and the Gibeonites may well have used these bags for that purpose (Josh 9:4, 13). The word translated "smoke" is also unusual and could possibly refer to ash rather than smoke. In Genesis 19:28 it fills the air after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and is said to come out of a furnace. In Psalm 148:8 it is paired with snow in a series of destructive forces of nature (in which case it would refer to the ash from a volcano, see 104:32). Snow and ash (different word) are also compared in Psalm 147:16. Here in Psalm 119 the metaphor that would fit the context is one of waiting with no apparent response. Placing a skin sack in ash would reflect a situation where low-level heat was required over a sustained period of time, such as in the production of yogurt. Though ghee was the more common dairy product (see comment on Is 7:15), yogurt was known in antiquity.

120:4. burning coals of the broom tree. The trunk of the broom tree provided hard wood that made excellent charcoal.

120:5. Meshech, Kedar. Meshech, a central Anatolian kingdom, was conquered by Sargon II of Assyria and invaded by the Cimmerians from southern Russia. It is thought that they were incorporated under Lydian control after the conclusion of the Cimmerian wars. They were known to the Assyrians as Mushku and to Herodotus as the Moschi. At the end of the eighth century the king of Mushku was Mita, known to the Greeks as Midas, the king with the golden touch. His tomb has been identified at Gordion and excavated. Kedar, the second son of Ishmael (Gen 25:13), was the

name of a tribe that flourished from the eighth to the fourth centuries B.C. The tribe is known from Assyrian and Late Babylonian texts as Qadar. The personal names of the Kedarites appear to have been related to the southern branch of the Semitic languages. These tribal peoples were based in the Arabian peninsula and often made their way into the Levant via the Sinai. They worked as sheep breeders and caravaneers at least as late as the Hellenistic period. Since these places are in opposite directions from Israel, they are probably paired as representatives of remote and barbaric places.

121:1. help in hills. The NIV properly captures the idiom that sees the hills (mountains) as a place where one would need help. As a pilgrim the psalmist is intimidated by the mountains (because of the rigor of the treacherous walk and the dangers that may lurk there in the form of robbers or wild beasts) and seeks divine protection on his journey.

121:3-4. sleeping. In Mesopotamian literature a sleeping god is one who is unresponsive to the prayers of the person who is calling out for help. Enlil is said to be awake even when he appears to be asleep. In a Babylonian prayer the worshiper wonders how long the deity is going to sleep.

121:6. harm from sun and moon. Anyone who has traveled in the Middle East knows the threat of dehydration and sunstroke. Many of the roads to Jerusalem exposed the traveler to oppressive heat. Just as too much exposure to the sun could be dangerous, it was believed in the ancient world that too much exposure to the moon could pose a health threat. Medical diagnostic texts from first-millennium Babylonia and Assyria identify several conditions as a result of the "hand of Sin" (Sin was the moon god), including one in which the patient grinds his teeth and his hands and feet tremble, and another that has all the symptoms of epilepsy. English words like "moonstruck" and "lunatic" show that such belief persisted into relatively recent times.

122:5. thrones for judgment. As the highest judicial authority in the land, the king periodically held audience to hear cases that were being appealed. A throne was set up precisely for this purpose, either in an audience hall in the palace complex or at the main gate of the city. In the excavations at Dan just such an area has been uncovered at the entrance to the gate, where the king would have sat on a canopied throne in order to pass judgment.

124:7. fowler's snare. The very familiar image of fowlers trapping birds in nets and snares may be the origin of this common metaphor (see Josh 23:13; Ps 69:22; Is 8:14). There are numerous examples of this activity from Egyptian tomb paintings, and it also provides the basis for the Sumerian *Stele of the Vultures* (see the comment on Ezek 12:13). There were a number of different techniques used to snare birds. Although hunters might simply use a sling, throwing stick (as in the Beni Hasan tomb painting) or a bow to take down individual fowl, the majority of instances in the biblical text and in ancient art depict large flocks of birds being captured in nets or cages. For instance, the tomb of Ka-Gemmi at Saqqarah (Sixth-Dynasty Egypt) portrays the fowler using a net. Apparently some fowlers also used decoys in their snares to attract the birds along with bait food (attested in Ecclus 11:30).

126:4. streams in the Negev. The wadis of Palestine are similar to overflowing rivers in the rainy season. However, they have little or no water during the summer season, precisely the time when water is most needed. In the arid desert region south of Jerusalem the periodic flooding of these wadis brought relief and life.

129:6. grass on the roof. The uppermost roof on the common dwelling places in Israel would have been constructed of beams laid across the walls intertwined with reeds and grasses. The whole roof would then be plastered with mud to fill in the gaps and make them somewhat watertight. Any lingering seeds in the grass or mud might briefly sprout but would quickly die for lack of roots.

132:6. Ephrathah, Jaar. Ephrathah is identified in several passages as the home territory of David (Ruth 4:11; Mic 5:2). The "fields of Jaar" are generally considered to be Kiriath Jearim, where the ark stayed for twenty years. See comment on 1 Samuel 6:21.

132:7. worship at footstool. First of all, it must be recognized that the ark of the covenant was considered the footstool of God's invisible throne (see comment on Ex 25:10-22). Second, the footstool must be understood to be an integral part of the throne, representing the closest accessibility to the king. Third, the imagery of the footstool has significance because it is used to express the king's subordination of his foes (see comment on Ps 110:1). Finally, worshiping at the footstool is another way of expressing the reverence that is shown by prostrating oneself at the feet of God or king. On the black stela of Shalmaneser III the Israelite king Jehu is portrayed kissing the ground before the Assyrian king. In *Enuma Elish* the tribunal of gods kisses the feet of Marduk after he has put down the rebellion and estab-

lished himself as head of the pantheon. This was the common act of submission offered to kings and gods. Taking hold of the feet was a gesture of self-abasement and entreaty. This gesture occurs in a wide range of Akkadian literature as fugitives or supplicants take hold of the king's feet to demonstrate their submission or surrender and make their petitions.

132:17. horn for David. See comment on "horn" in the sidebar on common metaphors.

132:17. lamp for anointed one. See comment on 18:28.

133:2. oil on the head. Banquet guests in the ancient world were often treated by a generous host to fine oils for anointing their foreheads. This provided not only a glistening sheen to their countenance but also would have added a fragrance to their persons and the room. For example, an Assyrian text from Esarhaddon's reign describes how he "drenched the foreheads" of his guests at a royal banquet with "choicest oils." Oil preserved the complexion in the hot Middle Eastern climate. Both the Egyptian *Song of the Harper* and the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh Epic describe individuals clothed in fine linen and with myrrh on their head. Anointment of priests used the finest oil and would symbolize the gifts of God to the people and the responsibilities now laid on their leaders through this ceremony. In Israelite practice anointing was a sign of election and often closely related to endowment by the Spirit. See the comment on Leviticus 8:1-9.

133:3. dew of Hermon. The word translated "dew" is also used of light rain or drizzle. Hermon obviously got plenty of moisture because of the streams that flowed from it, a symbol of its life and prosperity. Zion is here seen as the beneficiary of the same abundance.

134:1. night service in the temple. The verb that the NIV translates "minister" has to do with taking up one's post or station. This need not refer to a ritual service of some sort but simply to those priestly personnel who were assigned guard duty at night. The temple was guarded twenty-four hours a day so that neither its sanctity would be violated nor its valuables stolen. Even such "mundane" duty gave one the opportunity of worship. On the other hand, night rituals cannot be entirely ruled out. Night rituals would have been common in the ancient Near East, but there the worship of the moon god and astral deities was of central significance. In one Assyrian prayer to the moon god that was recited in conjunction with the New Moon celebration, the worshiper speaks of spreading out a pure incense offering of the night. Interestingly, the Assyrian hymn is a *shuilla,* a "lifting of the hand" composition.

135:7. clouds from ends of earth. In the Sumerian composition titled *Enki and the World Order,* Ishkur, the weather god, opens the gates of heaven. This was the way Mesopotamians understood where clouds came from. In Mesopotamian cosmology the "ends of the earth" refers to the horizon. This is where the gates of heaven are located because the sun is seen as setting there as it goes through the gates of heaven.

135:7. wind storehouses. The Canaanites and Babylonians attributed manifestations of storms to Adad, the storm and wind god. However, Jeremiah claimed that Yahweh was solely responsible for atmospheric phenomena. He used the imagery of Yahweh having storehouses of rain, hail and snow, which are set in motion by the wind, presumably instigated by his breath (also see Deut 28:12; Ps 33:7; Job 38:22). The word translated "storehouses" can be used to refer to treasuries that would store precious objects, as well as royal weapons. Hail, snow, wind, thunder and lightning are often seen as the weapons that God uses to defeat his enemies. Likewise storehouses could serve for the storage of raw materials such as barley, dates, grain or tithes in general. In the same way God rations out the products from his storehouses as necessary. Cosmic storehouses are not common imagery in the ancient Near East.

135:11. Sihon and Og. These battles are initially recorded in Numbers 21. Sihon is only known from the biblical records, and archaeology has little to offer regarding his capital city or his kingdom. There is also no extrabiblical information from historical sources or archaeology to shed light on Og.

135:15-17. idol ideology. See comment on 115:4-7.

136:6. earth spread on waters. In the Babylonian perception of the cosmos, the earth's foundation is on what is called the *apsu.* This is a primordial watery region that is under the jurisdiction of the very important deity Enki/Ea. From the standpoint of physical geography it represents the water table that surfaces, for example, in marshes and springs as well as being associated with the sweet water cosmic seas and rivers. In *Enuma Elish* one of Mar-

duk's names, Agilima, identifies him as the one who built the earth above the water and established the upper regions. For further information see the comment on creation in Psalms in the sidebar on common concepts.

136:19-20. Sihon and Og. See comment on 135:11.

137:2. poplars. A poplar is a willow-type tree that grows best by streams or rivers (such as the Tigris or Euphrates in Babylon). The Euphrates poplar was native to the region and had low-hanging branches and limbs. For information on harps see comment on 33:2.

137:7. Edomites' action. The principal theme of the book of Obadiah is an indictment of Edom for its crimes against Judah. This nation, located south and east of the Dead Sea, has a mixed tradition among the Israelites. Much like the relationship between Jacob and Esau, the traditional founders of each nation, Edom is at times seen as a friend and ally (Deut 2:2-6; 2 Kings 3:9) and on other occasions as a deadly enemy (Num 20:14-21; Amos 1:11-15). During the period of the Neo-Assyrian empire and the Neo-Babylonian empire (734-586), Edom had been a vassal state. Most likely Obadiah's complaint against Edom, as well as that of the psalmist, relates to the participation of that nation in the final destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its people by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 587/6 B.C. Unfortunately, however, records are unclear concerning the precise role that Edom played.

139:2-4. divine omniscience in the ancient Near East. It is not unusual in the ancient world for it to be implied that gods or kings know everything or that there are no limits to their knowledge. So Nabonidus claims to be wise, knowing everything and seeing hidden things (see even 2 Sam 14:19). But in most cases this is little more than patronization. While there is no reason to see this psalm in that light, it should be recognized that the context is judicial rather than dealing in theological abstraction. Yahweh is being addressed as the judge who is in possession of all the information for judging the psalmist's case wisely and fairly. In a hymn to Gula her spouse is praised as one who "examines the heights of heaven, who investigates the bottom of the netherworld" (Foster). Shamash is praised as one who (as the sun god) sees all the lands, but it goes further as he is said to know their intentions and see their footprints. It is more common for the gods to be attributed boundless wisdom.

139:8-12. divine omnipresence in the ancient Near East. It is difficult to distinguish "having access to every place" from "being simultaneously in all places." The former is all that is demanded from the words of the psalmist and is likewise the norm in the ancient Near East. Since the sun god is usually the god of justice, and there is nowhere his light does not shine, he sees all. Even the netherworld was known because the sun was believed to traverse the netherworld during the night as he moved from the western horizon to the east to rise again. As a result the divine judge would again have all the information needed. Nothing could have been done secretly. There is no concept in the ancient Near East of deity being in every place simultaneously in the way that omnipresence is construed in Christian theology.

139:8. heights and depths. This contrast expresses the extent of God's jurisdiction. In one of the Amarna letters Tagi, a local ruler, acknowledges the pharaoh's control by stating: "Should we go up into the sky, or should we go down into the netherworld, our head is in your hand" (Moran). Similarly a hymn to Shamash affirms that no one "goes down into the depths" without Shamash.

139:9. wings of the dawn. This verse may be adopting solar terminology (rising with the dawn = east, setting in the far side of the sea = west), but "dawn" is more often equated with the "morning star." It is not unusual for the heavenly bodies (or the gods that are associated with them) to be portrayed with wings, but the phrase "wings of the dawn" does not occur in Akkadian.

139:13. deity making in the womb. There is an Egyptian parallel to the idea of the deity knowing an individual before birth. The god Amun knew Pianki (an Egyptian monarch of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty in the eighth century B.C.) while he "was in the belly of his mother," where he knew he was to be the ruler of Egypt. In the Gilgamesh Epic, Gilgamesh's role as king was said to be destined for him "when his umbilical cord was severed." Personal gods are praised as the "producer of my progeny." Nebuchadnezzar praises Marduk as the one who created him. In the *Atrahasis Epic* the goddess Mami is identified as the womb, the creatrix of humankind. In Sumerian literature the goddess Ninhursag (Nintur) is responsible for the birth process from conception through gestation and delivery, and even serves as midwife. In Egypt Khnum (a creator god portrayed as a potter) is described in his fashioning of people. He knots the flow of blood to the bones and is said to knit the bones from the start. It is clear then that the psalmist is not introducing new theological

concepts but using stock phrases familiar in the ancient world.

139:16. written in book. In a *Hymn to Nabu* the sufferer laments, "My life is spent, O account-keeper of the universe" (Foster). An Old Babylonian letter says that a favorable destiny was decreed for the writer of the letter ever since he was in his mother's womb. In contrast, the Hittite prayer of Kantuzilis wonders how the god could have ordained his sickness (and impending death?) from his mother's womb. For information on the similar book of life, see comments on Jeremiah 17:13 and Malachi 3:16.

140:10. burning coals punishment. Calling down burning coals onto someone is found in Esarhaddon's vassal treaties as a punishment for breaking the treaty. Other texts describe deities raining down fire or fiery stones on their enemies. This is a punishment from God, not from other people.

140:10. thrown into fire punishment. Burning was used as a form of execution as early as the Hammurabi laws. In fifth-century Persia (during the reign of Darius II, son of Artaxerxes), and in the second century (2 Macc 13:4-8), there are examples of execution by pushing into a bin of ashes.

141:7. bones scattered at mouth of grave. Some of the cultures of the ancient Near East practiced secondary burial: the body would be laid out (in a cave, for instance) until the flesh decomposed, then the bones would be buried in the final resting place. Even if a body was devoured, proper burial could be carried out if the bones could be retrieved. So Ashurbanipal speaks of punishment of his enemies by taking their bones out of Babylon and scattering them around outside the city. He also boasts of opening the graves of past kings of his enemies and carting off their bones "to inflict unrest upon their ghosts."

142:title. in cave. During the time that David was fleeing from Saul, he spent a lot of time in caves (1 Sam 22—26). The Judean wilderness, where David spent his fugitive years, has abundant caves scattered throughout the region.

143:10. leading on level ground. The roads of the ancient Near East were for the most part unpaved (except for a few roads in the Late Assyrian period). Although unpaved, those which were intended for wheeled transport (called "wagon roads" in the Nuzi texts) had to be staked out, leveled and consistently maintained. However, very few texts describe the construction and maintenance of these roads. Roads for heavy transport were somewhat rare and were primarily along the trade routes. Thus, a vassal king complained to the king of Mari that he had to arrive at the Syrian capital by a roundabout route along a major highway. Assyrian kings rarely boasted of their road constructions, as it appeared to be the duty of the local populations. In a treaty text Esarhaddon commands that when his son succeeds him the vassal must submit to him and "smooth his way in every respect." In a hymn to the goddess Gula the deity says that she makes straight the path of one who seeks her ways.

144:6-7. rescued from waters. See comments on 18:16 and 30:3.

144:9. ten-stringed lyre. This is a typical musical instrument of the time and is attested in ancient Near Eastern texts, reliefs and paintings as early as the third millennium B.C. The lyre is differentiated from the harp by the number of strings. Both are hand-held with frames made of wood. A musical text has been discovered at Ugarit that sheds light on Late Bronze Age music. This text has the chords to be played on a lyre accompanying a Hurrian cult hymn.

144:12. pillars carved for palace. Palaces in the ancient world featured open courtyards, audience halls and garden pavilions that all used pillars, both structurally and decoratively. Caryatids (pillars in the shape of human statues) are unattested in Israel, which would have had little statuary due to the ban on images. Caryatids of a sort are evidenced in Egypt, where, for instance, mortuary temples featured pillars that had half-figures attached to them. The word used here, however, appears to have something to do with corners (used elsewhere only in Zech 9:15). In Israel pillars would have featured the fine, detailed sculpture that represented the height of their skills.

147:4. names of the stars. Mesopotamian constellations included animal figures such as a goat (Lyra) and snake (Hydra); objects such as an arrow (Sirius) and a wagon (Big Dipper); and characters such as Anu (Orion). The most popular of the constellations was Pleiades, often portrayed on seals even in Palestine and Syria. Neo-Assyrian texts preserve sketches of stars in constellations. For further information see the comment on 8:3.

148:7. great creatures of the ocean. In the Babylonian *Hymn to Shamash,* the sun god is

said to receive praise and reverence even from the worst groups. Included in the list are the fearsome monsters of the sea. The hymn thus suggests that there is a total submission of all creatures to Shamash, just as the Genesis creation texts shows all creatures created by, and therefore submitted to, Yahweh. The *Labbu Myth* records the creation of the sea viper, whose length was sixty leagues.

148:14. raised up a horn. See the comment on "horn" in the sidebar on common metaphors for God.

149:3. dancing. Much of the dancing that is attested in the ancient world takes place in cultic contexts, though both Mesopotamian and Egyptian sources frequently depict dancers involved in entertainment. The dancing connected to festivals would probably resemble folk dancing of today, featuring the coordinated movements of a group of dancers. At other times the dances could more resemble ballet, where a scene or a drama is acted out. Single dancers usually performed either whirling, squatting, leaping, hopping type dances, or acrobatics approximating a modern gymnast's routine. Dancers sometimes performed scantily clad or in the nude. In cultic contexts the participating officials (i.e., priests and administration) at times danced, not just the professionals. In one Hittite ritual this specifically included the queen.

149:3. tambourine and harp. See comment on 150:3-5.

149:6. double-edged sword. This is literally a sword of two mouths. In the Late Bronze Age (Joshua's time), the standard sword was curved like a sickle with the sharp edge on the outside of the curve. This shape is considered responsible for the development of the idiom "the mouth of the sword" (for instance in Josh 6:21). It is possible that the idiom was retained even when the shape of the sword evolved, and a two-edged sword could be referred to as "two-mouthed" despite the loss of the shape that determined the idiom. Others, trying to retain the association between language and physical shape, have suggested a double-sided axe, though in that case the word translated "sword" here would have to be understood more broadly as blade, a difficult (though not impossible) extension.

149:8. fetters and shackles. Though the terms used here are not the typical ones, it is likely that the former were wrist cuffs chaining the hands together, while the latter went around the ankles chaining the feet together (as is clear in 105:18). Iron was used for these as early as the eighth-century Assyrians.

150:3-5. musical instruments. Musical instruments were among the first inventions of early humans. In Egypt the earliest end-blown flutes date to the fourth millennium B.C. A number of harps and lyres as well as a pair of silver flutes were found in the royal cemetery at Ur dating to the mid-third millennium. Flutes made of bone or pottery date back at least to the fourth millennium. Musical instruments provide entertainment as well as background rhythm for dances and ritual performances, such as processions or cultic dramas. Other than simple percussion instruments (drums and rattles), the most common instruments used in the ancient Near East were harps and lyres. Examples have been found in excavated tombs and painted on the walls of temples and palaces. They are described in literature as a means of soothing the spirit, invoking the gods to speak, or providing the cadence for a marching army. Musicians had their own guilds and were highly respected. These are all typical musical instruments of the time and are attested in ancient Near Eastern texts, reliefs and paintings as early as the third millennium B.C. There is still some disagreement among authorities as to which of the Hebrew words in this passage ought to be translated "harp" and which one as "lyre." The one the NIV translates "lyre" is a ten-stringed instrument, while the one translated "harp" is thought to have had fewer strings. Both are hand-held with frames made of wood. The tambourine has been identified in archaeological reliefs as the tambour, a small drum (leather stretched over a hoop) that would not have the tinny rattle sound of modern tambourines. The instrument translated as flute is likely a double pipe made of either bronze or reed. Cymbals are made of bronze and are in the percussion group, so the only remaining question concerns their size.

PROVERBS

1:1—9:18

Wisdom Exhortations

1:1. sages in the ancient Near East. The tradition of sages who expound on the wisdom of ancient cultures is a longstanding one in the ancient Near East. The manner employed in such wisdom pieces as the *Teaching of Ptah-Hotep* and the *Instruction of Amenemope* suggests that there were wisdom schools in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. The "sage" functioned as the students' "father," conveying the substance of the culture's store of wisdom and standing as a source upon which to draw precedents. The *Words of Ahiqar* from eighth-century Assyria may indicate that some of these sages also were attached in some way to the palace bureaucracy, perhaps as members of the scribal class. The "words" of the sages included essays on personal deportment and etiquette in a variety of social situations. Their sayings also include short statements giving advice on political and diplomatic affairs. In this way they transmitted a form of cultural memory as well as a sense of their society's basic values.

1:1. Solomon as a sage. According to 1 Kings 3:7-12 Solomon asked for and received a "wise and discerning heart" to better rule his people. The tradition of Solomon as a wise king thus carries over in the superscription to the book of Proverbs. The many areas of his wisdom are detailed in 1 Kings 4:30-33 (see comments on those verses).

1:6. wisdom categories. This verse lists three of the many types of wisdom writings. The proverb or *mashal* is an aphorism, a short statement often consisting of contrasting parallel lines. It is generally moral-laden and always didactic in character. Parables are extended contrast pieces that in narrative form both tell a story and require the audience to see a double or hidden meaning (see the first two comments in 2 Sam 12:1-10). Although there are no riddles in the book of Proverbs, they were apparently common enough as a form of intellectual game (see comment on Samson's riddle in Judg 14:12-14). The term used for riddle in Proverbs 1:6 only appears in Proverbs and comes from a root that is usually translated as "scornful" or "cynical." This may be an attempt to downgrade riddles as true wisdom sayings. A longer form of wisdom literature is found in Ecclesiastes, which includes both

PROVERBS ECHOED IN ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Several pieces of Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom literature contain parallels (linguistic, stylistic and content) with the book of Proverbs. From ancient Egypt this includes (in chronological order) the *Teaching of Ptah-Hotep* (c. 2500 B.C.), the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* (c. 2000 B.C.), the *Instruction of Amenemope* (c. 1200 B.C.) and the *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy* (c. 200 B.C.). There are also some echoes in the *Memphite Theology of Creation* (c. 2200 B.C.) and the *Dispute over Suicide* (c. 2000 B.C.). Similar proverbial sayings may also be found in the Assyrian *Words of Ahiqar* (c. 700 B.C.) and in the Ugaritic epics of *Baal and Anat* and of *Aqhat* (c. 1400 B.C.). Most of the similarities between these pieces of wisdom literature can be attributed to the universality of wisdom sayings and the very common practice of borrowing phrases, imagery, proverbs or even entire parables or stories. Here are some examples:

☐ Proverbs 1:12 describes the grave as a mouth that swallows its victims, and this same imagery is echoed in the epic of Baal and Anath, where the god of death, Mot, is said to "devour its prey," eating them "with both hands."

☐ Proverbs 6:23-29 and 7:24-27 both admonish the wise son to conquer his lust for women who will bring him to disaster in much the same way that Ptah-Hotep cautions that one should "stay away from the women of the house" and "keep your mind on business."

☐ Proverbs 16:8 and 21:9 provide examples of the "better than" saying that is also found in the *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy*, "Better to dwell in your own house than in someone else's mansion," and in the *Instruction of Amenemope*, "Better is a single loaf and a happy heart than all the riches in the world and sorrow."

☐ The progression pattern found in Proverbs 6:16-19, "There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him," is also used by Ahiqar, "two kinds of people are a delight, a third pleases Shamash."

☐ The model wife described in Proverbs 31:27-31 is also extolled by Ptah-Hotep, as is the son who is willing to listen carefully to his father (see Prov 2:1-5).

☐ The "Sayings of the Wise" that appear in Proverbs 22:17—24:22 find a structural model in the *Instruction of Amenemope*. Both contain a general introduction followed by thirty chapters of very similar advice on a variety of topics. For instance, both *Amenemope* and Proverbs 22:22 forbid the exploitation of the poor and weak, and both the Egyptian sage and Proverbs 23:10 counsel not to move or topple a field's boundary stone lest "your conscience destroy you."

a group of sayings as well as a set of reflections on the ironies of life. The largest category of all in the Hebrew Bible is the philosophical discourses of the book of Job. Using the common theme of suffering, Job and his friends examine and even test their understanding of why pain and suffering comes to the righteous.

1:8. instruction of the son. The call to listen to the instructions of one's parents stands as a corollary to the law requiring children to honor their father and mother (Ex 20:12). Thus the wisdom of mothers, who generally served as a child's first teacher, is equated with that of fathers. The saying also contrasts with similar statements in the *Teaching of Ptah-Hotep* and the *Words of Ahiqar* that only mention a son attending to the words of his "father." "Son" may also be understand in each of these cases as the one who receives the saying and does not always require blood relation. Students would have memorized the sayings and analogies of their teachers, but the wise would have been those who learned to apply what they had learned (see Hos 14:9). The omission of daughters reflects the reality that royal sons were generally educated, while royal daughters typically were not.

1:9. garland and chain. The words of the father and mother, which embody the wisdom of the society, can become a decorative wreath for the son's head and a chain or necklace of office. Just as a champion is adorned with a garland of victory and a newly appointed official is given the chain and vestments of his office, so too is the attentive son assured of prosperity and a stable life (see Prov 4:1-6). As Ptah-Hotep says, "The wise follow their teacher's advice [and] consequently their projects do not fail." In Egyptian literature Maat, the goddess associated with wisdom, truth and justice, provides a garland of victory to the gods and is depicted as being worn as a chain around the neck of various officials.

2:18. paths to the spirits of the dead. Ancient Near Eastern literature has several examples of the types of offers reflected here. In the Gilgamesh Epic the goddess Ishtar, impressed with the prowess displayed by Gilgamesh when he defeated the dread Huwawa, offers to make him her husband. Despite the many benefits she cites, Gilgamesh details the life in the netherworld that is the inevitable result of her seduction. Likewise, in the Ugaritic *Tale of Aqhat,* the goddess Anat offers Aqhat gold, silver and eternal life in exchange for his marvelous bow. Like Gilgamesh, Aqhat sees the lie and expounds on the inevitability of death. An affair with an adulteress is mentioned in several wisdom pieces as one of the surest ways to an early death (*Ankhsheshonqy* says, "A man who makes love to a married woman will be executed on her threshold"; see also Prov 6:25-26). The dangers involved are also reminiscent of the fate of the Sumerian goddess Ishtar's consort, Tammuz, who was forced to live half the year in the underworld as ransom for her release from the nether regions. The shadowy world where the spirits dwelt was an extremely undesirable place.

HOW PROVERBS WERE USED

As is the case in modern conversations, proverbs in ancient times functioned as a colloquial means of getting a point across. Then as now they were considered ancient wisdom that must be considered seriously (see 1 Sam 24:13). So when the proverb "A penny saved is a penny earned" is quoted today, the speaker is advocating the wisdom of personal thrift. In the same way, when Ezekiel quotes the proverb "Like mother, like daughter" (Ezek 16:44), he is condemning Jerusalem for following in the evil footsteps of her "mother" Samaria (compare Jer 3:6-11 for this theme, but using "sisters" as the kinship term). Ezekiel also used proverbs to signal a change in policy or fortunes. For example in Ezekiel 18:2-3, the prophet quotes a proverb that on its surface simply acknowledges the well-known fact that a person who sees another person eat something sour will experience a similar reaction. In Israel, however, the proverb had been used to indicate the legal idea of corporate responsibility in which a son was held responsible for the sins of his father (see Ex 20:5). Now, however, Ezekiel states no person will be punished for anyone's sins but his or her own, and thus the proverb "shall no more be used by you in Israel."

Naturally, a proverb is only as useful as the context in which it is spoken. Thus the writer of Proverbs notes that "like a lame man's legs that hang limp is a proverb in the mouth of a fool" (Prov 26:7). This is a common saying in other wisdom literature. For instance, the *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy* warns that "fools cannot tell teaching from insult," and the *Instruction of Amenemope* states that one should not "take counsel with fools," since their words "blow like a storm" and are without substance. It is clear then that proverbs were not simply phrases to be memorized that anyone could understand. Their instruction needed to be unpacked and expounded by a wise teacher. It is like a curriculum that assumes the presence of a teacher to accomplish its aims.

According to the Gilgamesh Epic, the "House of Dust" contained no light, the dead were "clothed like birds," and "dust [was] their fare and clay their food." Still, it seems that the spirits could be consulted by the living (see 1 Sam 28:11-15).

3:3. bound around neck. See the comment on Deuteronomy 6:8 for the use of amulets to serve as a reminder of the Law and a form of protection against evil. The use of the covenantal term *ḥesed* for "love" in this verse may also be compared to its use in Jeremiah 31:3, in which God "draws" the nation to him with "loving-kindness."

3:3. tablet of the heart. It is conceivable that the writer is referring to a practice of wearing a small clay tablet as an amulet (compare Judah's cord and seal in Gen 38:18). However, the parallel with Jeremiah 31:33 makes it more likely that the writer is referring to an internalization of God's law with God writing "it on their hearts."

3:6. make paths straight. In a treaty text Esarhaddon commands that when his son succeeds him, the vassal must submit to him and "smooth his way in every respect." In a hymn to the goddess Gula the deity says that she makes straight the path of one who seeks her ways.

3:15. rubies as most precious gem. While both rubies and sapphires are forms of the mineral corundum, which consists primarily of aluminum oxide, rubies are much rarer and therefore considered that much more precious. The Egyptian sage Ptah-Hotep also compares true wisdom with rare gems (emeralds), adding weight to such analogies. Diamonds were not known in the ancient world.

3:18. tree of life. The theme of the tree of life is common in ancient Near Eastern epic and art. In the Gilgamesh Epic there is a plant called "old man becomes young" that grows at the bottom of the cosmic river. Stylized trees often figure prominently in ancient Near Eastern art and on seals from both Mesopotamia and Canaan. These have often been interpreted as depicting a tree of life, but more support from the literature would be necessary to confirm such interpretations. The tree is transformed in Proverbs into an image of wisdom. As in Proverbs 11:30, wisdom, embodied in the metaphor of the "tree of life," provides the key to a fuller and more enriching life. The idea of "embracing" wisdom holds sexual connotations found in several places in Proverbs (8:17; 18:22) and may be compared to the woman of worth in 31:10 and contrasted with "Dame Folly" or the "strange woman" (9:13-18 and 5:3-14, respectively). The sense of fertility and contentment inherent to both a good marriage and a flowering tree is thus promoted as a desirable goal.

3:19-20. language of old world cosmology. As in Psalm 104:2-9, Proverbs details Yahweh as the lord of creation, a sort of "divine architect," who shapes the cosmos like a well-ordered building (compare Job 38:4-7). The extra dimension is added in these verses of God personified as "Wisdom" (see Ps 104:24 and Jer 10:12). If a deity's "desire" may be equated with wisdom, then the Egyptian *Hymn to the Aten* expresses a similar concept, saying, "You have created the world according to your desire, while you were yet alone!" According the sages, the creative act, in order to fully demonstrate God's presence and concern, is followed by an ongoing and sustaining of the structures of the heavens and the earth. The "deeps" is the Hebrew word *tehom,* which refers to the primordial cosmic ocean. In the Babylonian creation epic, *Enuma Elish*, the goddess representing this cosmic ocean, Tiamat, is divided in half by Marduk to make the waters above and the waters below.

4:9. garland/crown. The image of a marriage feast is given substance with the bestowing of the tradition symbols of union by the bride (wisdom) on her protégé (groom). In this case the marriage symbolism of the crown of splendor (see Is 61:10) could be compared with the fragrant bridal garments in Song of Songs 4:11. In the metaphorical sense it could also be paralleled with Isaiah 28:5, where God becomes a "glorious crown, a beautiful wreath" for the Israelites.

4:23. heart as wellspring of life. It is a common tradition in the ancient Near East for the heart to be the seat of the intellect (see Prov 14:33) and the source of stability for one who would adhere to a just and wise life (see Solomon's request in 1 Kings 3:5-9). In Egyptian religious thought the heart *(ib)* is distinguished from the soul *(ba)* and is considered the very essence of a person's being. It is the heart that is weighed in the balance of truth when a deceased individual is examined by the gods Anubis and Thoth. The Book of the Dead provides spells to protect and strengthen the heart as preparation for this ordeal.

5:3. adultery in the ancient Near East. Having sexual relations with another man's wife was punishable by death in both the biblical and the ancient Near Eastern codes. The Egyptian *Tale of Two Brothers* calls it a "great crime" that is not to be considered by an honest man or woman. This was an attack

on a man's household, stealing his rights to procreate and endangering the orderly transmission of his estate to his heirs (see comment on Ex 20:14). The act itself defiles both participants (Lev 18:20). Since it is not only an attack on the sanctity of the household but also a source of general contamination, adultery serves as a reason for God to expel the people from the land (Lev 18:24-25). The Egyptian *Instruction of Any* (mid-second millennium) has a paragraph that advises to beware of the strange woman away from her husband who is seeking to ensnare.

6:1. securities and pledges. The expression used here and paralleled in 11:15 and 17:18 shows an aversion to some common business practices, including charging interest on loans and standing surety for debts. The Laws of Eshnunna and Hammurabi's Code both describe in great detail the rules applied to these business transactions and the consequences of forfeiture. The weight that debt bears on an individual is graphically portrayed in the Assyrian sage Ahiqar's statement, "I have hauled sand, and carried salt, but nothing is heavier than debt." Proverbs thus provides the admonition to pay one's own debts, not burden others with interest on loans, and not become a creditor who may in turn lose everything based on bad loans (see Prov 22:26-27).

6:6. ant behavior. Examination of the creatures of nature provides both good and bad examples of behavior. The ant is proclaimed the paragon of hard work and foresightedness (compare Prov 30:25), storing food against the future. Yet another aspect of their character is noted in a letter from the El Amarna archive, stating that the ant, despite its small size, is willing to defend itself when provoked.

6:21. bound on the heart, fastened around the neck. This introductory statement, like that in 3:1-3 and 7:1-3, combines the importance of the wisdom statements with a physical object as a perpetual reminder. Thus the "Shema" statement of Deuteronomy 6:6-9 is to be tied "as symbols on your hands" and bound "on your foreheads." See the comment on Deuteronomy 6:8 for the use of a warding amulet, worn around the neck, near the heart, to protect the bearer from evil.

7:3. bind on fingers. See comments on 3:3 and 6:21.

7:8, 12. corner. Babylonian texts speak of small open-air shrines or niches on street corners or courtyards. One text says that there were 180 of them in the city of Babylon to the goddess Ishtar. These shrines featured a raised structure with an altar on the top and seem to have been frequented primarily by women. In this sense, the word "corner" may refer to what is basically a cultic niche.

7:13. brazen face. Compare the stance and attitude of the "brazen prostitute" in Ezekiel 16:30. The Hebrew term translated here as "brazen" is more often rendered as "strong" or "fierce" (see Dan 8:23), but it can also take on the connotation of "impudent" as in Ecclesiastes 8:1. This latter translation fits the context of the adulteress who lies in wait for her victims and confidently invites them into her perfumed chambers. It also can be compared to the wife in Hammurabi's Code who is "not circumspect" and "disparages her husband."

7:16. colored linens from Egypt. One of the most important trade items produced in Egypt was linen (see Ezek 27:7). Royal and personal texts contain mention of its production from flax thread and its use as a medium of exchange or barter. One Eleventh Dynasty text (First Intermediate Period) describes how a farmer used cloth woven from flax harvested on his land to pay rent. Colored cloth, adding an additional step to the manufacturing process, would have been costly and in the case of the adulteress was used as both a sign of wealth and a brightly colored enticement to enter her chamber.

7:17. perfumed bed. Like her linen coverings the adulteress uses foreign fragrances to transform her bedchamber into an exotic and desirable trap. Perfumes (like myrrh, frankincense and aloes—see Song 3:6; 4:14) traveled to Palestine by caravan from India and the Arabian desert and up the Red Sea coast. Perfume jars have been excavated at many sites in the Near East. Manufacture and rendering of spices and perfumes are depicted on Egyptian tomb paintings, but much of the details of these ancient processes have been lost.

7:23. arrow piercing liver. Egyptian tomb paintings often depict the noble deceased hunting in the marshlands. Beaters frighten the fowl to break from cover, and in their terror a hail of arrows from the hunters unexpectedly meets them. The unsuspecting character of the adulteress's victim suggests this same attitude of preoccupation or obliviousness to the real danger he faces. The liver was considered among the most vital organs, so is mentioned as the target here.

8:11. rubies as most precious gem. See comment on 3:15.

8:22-29. wisdom as preceding cosmos. Just as the Gospel of John begins with the statement "In the beginning was the Word," here the author(s) of Proverbs makes the claim that wisdom was the first of God's creations, existing alongside God from the dawn of time. Throughout the creation of everything else in the universe, wisdom is present. Like the Egyptian *Maat,* which is described as escorting the creator sun god Re, wisdom appears to be Yahweh's messenger, the oldest of created beings. It is possible that there are also some connections between this view of wisdom and the Babylonian creation myth or the Ugaritic depiction of El, but they cannot be clearly established.

8:30. wisdom as craftsman. R. Murphy has correctly connected this verse with the use of "I am" in Exodus 3:14 as a reference to God the Creator. If the role of wisdom is to serve with God as a "master craftsman" or the spirit of creativity, then this is an apt parallel with the image found in Proverbs 3:19. If, on the other hand, wisdom is "a little child" (some translations prefer this to "craftsman") playing at God's feet, there is still a sense of "delight" in being in God's presence and sharing in the thrill of emergent creation at a time when there are no other cares. Maat in Egyptian texts is also referred to as a "child of the gods," whose play delights them. There are also numerous examples of craftsmanlike creative acts, such as Marduk's shaping of humans in the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish* and the depiction of the contest between Nintu-Mami and Ea-Enki to create humans from clay in the Babylonian *Atrahasis Epic*. In Egyptian creation texts from Memphis, the creator deity, Ptah, is portrayed as the craftsman engaged in the creative work. Beyond this, Akkadian literature speaks of the seven great "craftsmen" who are the ancient sages who came just after the flood and brought wisdom to the early kings.

9:1. seven pillars of wisdom's house. There have been many theories suggested for wisdom's seven-pillared dwelling. They include the firmaments of heaven, the planets, the days of creation, the books of the law and the seven sages of ancient Mesopotamia. In addition, the Ugaritic epic of Baal and Anat contains a reference to the dwelling place of the high god El. He is said to abide in "the seven chambers of wisdom, the eight halls of judgment." Murphy's suggestion that the book of Proverbs and its chapters comprise Dame Wisdom's house is also attractive. In the Sumerian lament over Eridu, Eanna the temple of Enki (the god of wisdom) is described as having seven niches and seven fires.

9:3. significance of highest point in the city. Wisdom calls at the city gate in 8:3 as the place for making public proclamations. But the "highest point" is usually equated with the temple or the palace that typically occupies the acropolis of a site. The sense of a call to study, wisdom and righteousness is also found in Isaiah 2:2, where the Lord's temple in Jerusalem serves as the high point that draws worshipers and "all nations" to that place (see also Mic 4:1). The good tidings that are to be proclaimed to the returning exiles in Isaiah 40:9 are also to be shouted from a "high mountain."

PROVERBS AS GENERALIZED TRUTH

While there is a universality to wisdom in the book of Proverbs, many of these sayings represent the collective common sense of the ancient Near East and its cultures during that time period. However, it should also be understood that statements like "keep my commands and you will live" (Prov 7:2) and "the LORD does not let the righteous go hungry" (10:3) are not explicit promises or universal truths. The values expressed in the biblical world do not necessarily translate perfectly into our modern age. In addition, there is the physical reality of poverty, need and want that is not an indicator of a lack of righteousness but merely an expression of economic problems, mental defect and social ills.

So what is recognized as true of modern proverbs should also be understood as characteristic of ancient proverbs (biblical or otherwise). They do not represent absolute truth but true perspectives on life's circumstances. "April showers bring May flowers" is not a promise or a guarantee. Crime sometimes *does* pay. This quality of proverbs is demonstrated for biblical proverbs in the fact that opposite solutions can be offered to the same problem. Proverbs 26:4 advises not to answer a fool according to his folly, while the very next verse urges answering a fool according to his folly. The fact is that there are situations in which verse 4 would be appropriate as well as situations in which verse 5 would be appropriate. The advice to be followed is often dependent on the situation, and a wise person will know which course to choose. Our own modern proverbs show a similar tendency in "contradictory" proverbs, such as "He who hesitates is lost" but "Look before you leap." Or "Birds of a feather flock together" but "Opposites attract."

10:1—22:16

Proverbs of Solomon

10:6. retribution principle. The comparison between the wise person and the fool is a common theme in the wisdom literature of the ancient Near East. One task of wisdom is to reassure the people that evil or foolish behavior will not be rewarded. Thus in the Egyptian teachings of Ptah-Hotep (c. twenty-fifth century B.C.) the sage expresses the proper attitude about work: "The wise rise early to start to work, but fools rise early to worry about all there is to do." The ability to make one's way in society without causing undue harm or distress is described in a saying by the Egyptian sage Amenemope (c. eleventh century B.C.): "More dangerous are the words of fools than storm winds on open water." Another Egyptian teacher, Ankhsheshonqy (c. eighth century B.C.), notes that "a wise man seeks friends, and a fool seeks enemies." In each of these statements the wisdom tradition makes it clear that there is a retribution principle operating in the universe that balances the harm caused by unthinking words and actions with the healing words and actions of the wise or righteous person. For general discussion of the retribution principle see the sidebars in Job 4 and on common concepts in Psalms, and the introduction to the poetic and wisdom literature.

10:10. winks maliciously. The word "maliciously" is interpretive here, and the other occurrences of this phrase include both eyes, so winking is unlikely. An alternative is suggested by the Akkadian omen-wisdom that contains a series of omens related to the eyes. One of them asserts that if a person closes his eyes, he will speak falsehood. It is uncertain whether this refers to frequent blinking or to squinting the eyes shut while talking. This same concept is expressed in 16:30.

10:11. fountain of life. As the Egyptian sage Amenemope states, abundant life is to be found in wise action and speech, but "fools who talk publicly in the temple are like a tree planted indoors" that withers and dies for lack of light and is burned or cast away as trash. On the other hand, "the wise who are reserved are like a tree planted in a garden," which bears sweet fruit, provides shade and flourishes "in the garden forever."

11:1. cheating in the marketplace. The practice of using "dishonest scales" was a temptation for shopkeepers and bankers. Within the civil authority of the state, the Babylonian Law Code of Hammurabi attempted to curtail this illegal practice by threatening forfeiture of an investment by a corrupt banker. In the realm of wisdom admonition, however, people are encouraged to strive for proper behavior. Thus the "eloquent peasant" of Egyptian wisdom literature advises the king and his officials of a dangerous situation in which "those authorized to give full measures short their people." The assumption is that the king will see the wisdom of eliminating such harmful practices. See the comments on Amos 8:5-6 for discussion of dishonest business practices in eighth century Israel.

11:15. securities and pledges. See comment on 6:1.

11:30. tree of life. See comment on 3:18.

13:12. tree of life. See comment on 3:18.

13:24. child discipline in the ancient world. There was a real concern in ancient legal (see Sumerian law code and Ex 20:12) and wisdom writings to teach children to honor and obey their parents. For instance, the Assyrian sage Ahiqar makes the familiar statement that to "spare the rod is to spoil the child." He also notes the persons "who do not honor their parents' name are cursed for their evil by Shamash, the god of justice." The parents' responsibility for their children is also a concern. It is clearly pointed out in the Egyptian *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy:* "The children of fools wander in the streets, but the children of the wise are at their parents' sides" (compare the legal injunction regarding the prodigal son in Deut 21:18-21).

14:19. bowing down at the gates. In this instance "gates" refers to the household gates of the righteous, not the city gates (compare the obeisance of the king's servants at the king's gate in Esther 3:2). In that sense, therefore, the parallelism of the verse indicates that the evildoers will be forced to show subservience to the righteous, becoming their servants. A similar case in which due respect is granted by those who had previously taken no notice of their "new masters" is found in Moses' prediction in Exodus 11:8 that the Egyptian officials would "bow down before me."

15:4. tree of life. See comment on Proverbs 3:18.

15:25. widow's boundaries. Removal of a boundary marker was considered a covenant violation since the land was part of the people's inheritance (see Deut 19:14). In Babylonian ritual texts one explanation given for an illness is violation of the taboo against setting up a false boundary stone. The Egyptian Book of the Dead includes a disclaimer by

the petitioner of moving a neighbor's boundary marker. To add to the nature of the crime, the widow lived without the normal legal protection of her husband and could have been easily preyed on. Thus the proverb speaks against infringing her rights. A parallel to this injunction is found in the teachings of Amenemope: "Do not poach on the widow's field."

16:10. king as oracle. The words of a king carry more weight than those of an average citizen. This becomes a major responsibility for monarchs, for as Ahiqar notes, the words of rulers "are two-edged swords." Few if any may challenge the words of a king, and thus as the spokesman for the nation and the god(s), the ruler must not infringe of the rights of the people or allow injustice to occur. As the eloquent peasant says to his pharaoh: "You are my lord, my last hope, my only judge."

16:11. weights and measures. See comment on 11:1. Note also the statement in the Egyptian Book of the Dead where the soul about to be judged by the gods of the afterlife includes in his "oath of clearance" that he has "not used false weights for scales."

16:33. lots. See the comment on 1 Samuel 14:40-43 for the use of lot casting as a means of decision-making. It is a form of divination in which the assumption is that God will determine the cast and thus provide the answer (usually yes or no) to the question that is posed.

17:3. refining precious metals. Gold and silver may be refined in a graphite crucible. Gold melts at a temperature of 1,945.4 degrees Fahrenheit and sterling silver at 1,640 degrees Fahrenheit. An additional 338 degrees is necessary to allow the metal to be poured without freezing and not so hot that a destructive crystalline structure forms or alloys are dissipated before the metal cools. It is also important to avoid oxygen infiltration as much as possible during the melting process so that the structure of the metal will not become porous. The refining process requires expertise and an intimate knowledge of the tools and metals involved. As such it is an apt metaphor for God's testing of the heart (compare the "weighing of the heart" in the judgment of the soul in Egyptian religious tradition).

17:18. securities and pledges. See comment on 6:1.

18:18. casting lots to settle disputes. See comments on 1 Samuel 14:40-43 and Joshua 7:14-18 for the use of lots to determine the truth of a situation. On the one hand lots were used when a random decision was needed (as we might draw straws or flip a coin). On the other hand, despite that, it was believed that God controlled the cast (see 16:33).

19:12. king as lion. Akkadian literature as early as the third millennium B.C. described a king (Sargon) as roaring like a lion.

20:8. role of the king. The traditional role of the king was to dispense justice from his throne of office (compare comment on 2 Sam 15:2-6, where problems are created when King David fails in this responsibility, with comment on Solomon's role as a wise king in 1 Kings 3:16-28). Although the statement is made repeatedly in the teachings of Amenemope that justice "is a gift of the gods," the assumption is made that the king, as the gods' representative, voices their wishes on earth. Thus Ahiqar, the Assyrian sage, can state that "the tongue of the ruler is gentle, but it can break a dragon's bones."

20:16. security for wayward woman. The law regarding taking a garment in pledge for a debt is found in Exodus 22:26-27 and Deuteronomy 24:10-13 (see comments there). Its abuse is mentioned in Amos 2:8 and the Yavneh Yam inscription. Both of those are directed toward how one is to treat his neighbor. This proverb deals with those whose reputation is either unknown or questionable. It stands as an admonition to the creditor not to be foolishly lenient and thus risk losing the investment (compare Prov 27:13).

20:23. weights and scales. See comment on 11:1.

20:26. threshing wheel. See comment on Isaiah 28:28 for a description of the threshing sledge with attached wheels (or rollers). This type of sledge *('ôpan 'agalah)*, minus the stones and metal teeth found on the *morag* (platform sledge), would not have damaged the grain so severely and thus would have left the job of separating the chaff from the grain to the winnowing process.

21:2. weighing the heart. In Egyptian religious tradition the dead had to face a final judgment before the gods. Thoth, the scribal god, recorded the responses of the examined, while the dead person's heart was weighed in a scale against a feather symbolizing Truth. If the answers were correct, and the heart did not overbalance the feather, then the soul could enter the realm of Osiris and live forever. Failure meant extinction, since a demon-like god, Sebek, in the shape of a crocodile consumed the soul. The Pyramid Texts and the Book of the Dead contained spells and a list of the proper responses to be given during this "final examination." Israelite thought took over the imagery of this idea, portraying

God as weighing the "heart," the seat of the intellect and thus the decision-maker, to determine a person's capacity for good or evil (see Eccles 3:17; Jer 20:12).

21:9. corner of a roof. The "better" sayings provide a contrast or extreme that is preferable to contact with evil or with the disagreeable. The corner of a roof or a cramped attic chamber (see 1 Kings 17:19) would be an uncomfortable perch, but its dangers or inaccessibility might protect the sufferer from an even more unpleasant contact with a nagging wife (see Prov 21:19; 25:24). The teachings of Amenemope also use this type of saying: "Better is a single loaf and a happy heart than all the riches in the world and sorrow."

22:16—24:34
Sayings of the Wise

22:20. thirty sayings. A portion of the book of Proverbs (22:17—24:22) seems to imitate, at least in part, the literary structure of the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope.* Both contain a general introduction that is followed by thirty chapters or units of very similar advice on proper behavior. There is some dispute among scholars on the identification of the thirty units within the biblical text, since there are breaks in the sections that may indicate unrelated segments (see "my son" diversions at 23:15, 19 and 26). Also arguing against the connection is the fact that the NIV had to slightly emend the text to arrive at thirty units and had to provide the noun sayings so that there would be something that there were thirty of. Beyond this difficulty is the fact that the thirty sections in Proverbs would each be only a few verses long (four to six lines), while the thirty chapters in Amenemope average twelve to sixteen lines in length. The closest parallels between Amenemope and Proverbs come to an end at 23:11, and the remaining units have close ties to other pieces of wisdom literature, including the teachings of Ahiqar. This may indicate that the biblical writer or wisdom school had a general familiarity with Amenemope and other wisdom literature, but also a measure of literary independence.

22:26. pledge and securities. See comment on 6:1.

22:28. boundary stone. Plots of land in the ancient Near East were marked with boundary stones at each corner. It was common in Mesopotamia for these stones or *kudurrus* to contain an inscription cursing anyone who dared to remove or shift the marker. God symbols were also carved into the stones as a sign of the landowner's divine patron. Several pieces of ancient wisdom and legal materials contain injunctions against tampering with boundary stones, including the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the teachings of Amenemope, and Deuteronomy 19:14 (see the comment on Prov 15:25).

23:10. fields of the fatherless. There is a general admonition in Israelite law not to take advantage of the poor and powerless, such as widows and orphans (Ex 22:22; Deut 27:19). However, such abuse did occur. For instance, Micah 2:2 charges evildoers with seizing fields and defrauding their fellow Israelites of their inheritance. Concern for dependents of prisoners of war or their widows can also be found in the Middle Assyrian Laws, where the government can be petitioned to provide for the needs of these people.

23:13-14. child discipline. The discipline of children, including corporal punishment, was considered wise and essential to the child's welfare. The Aramaic proverbs of Ahiqar include almost identical lines to those found here: "Do not withhold your son from the rod, or you will not be able to save him. If I strike you, my son, you will not die, but if I allow you to follow your heart [you will not live]."

23:21. gluttony. Gluttony was often condemned in Egyptian wisdom literature. Closest to this verse is the instruction found in *Papyrus Insinger:* "Do not be a glutton lest you become the companion of poverty."

23:30. bowls of mixed wine. The alcoholic potency of the wine, normally mixed with water, is enhanced with the addition of honey or pepper to create a type of "spiced wine." As in Proverbs 20:1 the fool is the one who overindulges in wine. Drunkenness runs counter to the wisdom tradition. For instance, the Greek custom of the "symposium," or drinking party, regulated the amount of wine consumed so that rational discourse was possible and a general atmosphere was maintained in which the celebrants could freely release their cares and display their talents in song and poetry. See comment on Ecclesiastes 9:7.

23:31. wine when it is red. It is not clear whether there is some fascination with the color red that is a further inducement to overindulge in strong drink (as is suggested by the Septuagint reading here) or whether there is a translation problem at this point. The sparkling nature of wine may indicate a particularly potent vintage that is smooth to the palate (see Song 7:9) or may be related to a term for wine in the Ugaritic Baal epic. The Egyptian *Instruction of Any* likewise includes warnings against drunkenness as leading to careless speech, bodily harm, rejection by

friends and loss of senses.

24:13. honey and honey from the comb. The wisdom writer here follows a tradition found in both Psalm 19:10 and Ezekiel 3:3 in which God's words/laws are equated with wisdom and are therefore to be desired. In most Old Testament texts honey represents a natural resource, probably the syrup of the date rather than bees' honey. There is no evidence of bee domestication in Israel, though the Hittites had accomplished that and used bee honey in their sacrifices (as did the Canaanites). In the Bible honey occurs in lists with other agricultural products (see 2 Chron 31:5). Here the reference to the honeycomb differentiates the product as bees' honey. Note also that honey from the comb would be the freshest and tastiest kind. Akkadian texts also use honey figuratively as they speak of praise being sweeter than honey or wine.

25:1—29:27
Proverbs of Solomon Gathered by Hezekiah's Men

25:1. Hezekiah's men. Who these councilors or scribal officials might be is uncertain. Several advisers to King Hezekiah of Judah are mentioned in 2 Kings 18:18, but there is no way to equate them with the recorders of the "proverbs of Solomon." National crisis, however, is a time for reflection, and perhaps Hezekiah attempted to gain God's favor by having traditional wisdom sayings recorded and disseminated (compare the teachings of Ahiqar, a guide to proper behavior, which were presented to the king of Assyria as a means of his returning to royal favor). Certainly the text suggests that Hezekiah had court-sponsored sages who gathered and compiled wisdom sayings.

25:4. refinement of silver. For silver to be shaped into jewelry or decorative design it must be purified of the iron oxide that naturally occurs within the ore, or it will corrode or become too brittle when cool. Care must also be taken that no foreign matter be alloyed with the silver during the smelting process. This requires a temperature of 1,640 degrees Fahrenheit for sterling silver (containing 7.5 parts of copper alloy) and a graphite crucible. Proper refining of the metal thus forms a parallel with a king who attempts to purge his court of evil by removing disloyal and foolish advisers. The eloquent peasant of Egyptian wisdom also admonishes the pharaoh to be just, "a ruler without greed" and "a destroyer of lies."

25:11. apples of gold in silver settings. As in 15:23 a well-turned phrase or a wisdom statement is said to be of great value. The writer here uses the metaphor of a finely worked piece of jewelry whose craftsman has been able to balance a golden piece of fruit amidst an intricately designed silver setting. The delicacy of this decorative device draws the eye, just as a clever saying touches the mind. Some have suggested that the fruit named here is an apricot rather than an apple, but it makes no difference to the imagery.

25:13. snow at harvest. According to the work calendar outlined in the Gezer Almanac (late tenth-century Hebrew inscription), harvest activity occurred in the spring and in the mid and late summer months. Thus the dream of a cool breeze or even snow may well have been on the mind of workers laboring in the hot sun. An alternate interprets "snow" as water melted from snow and therefore cool and refreshing. Others have seen a reference to carefully packaged ice and snow being brought from the mountains. Either way this serves as an apt metaphor for the relief brought by a long-awaited messenger whose news refreshes and soothes the mind (the teachings of Ptah-Hotep likewise express the value of a messenger's words).

25:20. vinegar on soda. This verse has textual problems too numerous and complex to discuss here, and there is a disagreement in the ancient translations (LXX, Syriac) over its details. Vinegar is an acidic product, while soda is a base. Combining them would immediately produce a very noticeable chemical reaction. Taking away a coat on a cold day would likewise bring an extreme reaction (shivering with cold). Historically, singing to someone who was depressed also brought an extreme reaction when Saul tried to kill David.

25:22. heap burning coals on his head. The *Instruction of Amenemope* also advises the wise person to shame fools or their enemies by pulling them out of deep water and by feeding them one's bread until they are so full that they are ashamed. Similarly, the precepts and admonitions in Babylonian wisdom literature states that the wise man should not "return evil to the man who disputes with you" and should in fact "smile on your adversary." This is surely the direction this proverb goes, but the metaphor of heaping burning coals on the head remains elusive. Suggestions offering cultural explanations have included the following: (1) there is an Egyptian ritual (mentioned in a late demotic text from the third century B.C.) in which a man apparently gave public evidence of his penitence by carrying a pan of burning charcoal on his head when he

went to ask forgiveness of the one he had offended; (2) in the Middle Assyrian laws there is an example of a punishment in which hot asphalt was poured on the offender's head. Both of these have difficulties. The first is in a late text and the action referred to has been variously interpreted. The second is hot tar, not coals, and is a punishment much like tarring (and feathering) in more recent history. Paul quotes this proverb in Romans 12:20.

25:23. north wind. In Israel a north wind does not bring rain but fair weather. It is therefore suggested that this proverb had its origin in Egypt where the north wind does bring the rain off the Mediterranean (five to ten inches per year in the delta).

25:24. corner of a roof. See comment on 21:9.

26:1. weather cycles in Palestine. Snow never occurs in the summer in Palestine, and rain is an extremely rare event during the harvests of spring and summer. The Mediterranean climate of Syro-Palestine brings rain and cooler temperature (below freezing in the higher elevations as at Jerusalem) during the winter months (October to February), and the remainder of the year is dry, with only an occasional freak shower. Thus this statement is like many in ancient wisdom literature (*Amenemope* and *Ankhsheshonqy*) in which the fool is described as "unteachable" and dishonorable. As Ahiqar notes, there is no point is sending the bedouin to sea, for it is not his natural habitat.

26:16. seven. R. Clifford has suggested that this is a reference to the famed seven sages who brought civilization and wisdom to the world in Mesopotamian lore. The seven *apkallu* came before the flood, and their counterparts, the seven *ummanu*, came after the flood. This is possible, but one would expect a definite article (*the* seven) if it were the case.

26:23. pottery and glaze. While a glaze may be applied to pottery as decoration, it may also hide flaws and thus cheat the one who purchases the pot. Similarly, a silver dross or covering made of adulterated, oxidized metal may initially look good but will quickly tarnish or flake off. Thus the fervent or "burning" lips (see 16:27) of a scoundrel may attempt to cover his hatred and malice with deceitful words.

26:24. lips/heart. An Akkadian proverb draws the same distinction, observing that a man may speak friendly words with his lips but have a heart full of murder. The incantation series *Shurpu* speaks of one whose speech is straightforward but whose heart is devious.

27:9. perfume and incense. Various pungent scents were part of the Israelite's everyday life. To cover some of the more offensive smells, to enhance one's sexual attractiveness (Esther 2:12; Song 1:13; see the thirteenth-century B.C. Egyptian love songs) and to serve as an offering to God (see comment on Ex 30:34-38), perfumes were concocted and incense burnt. Among the most common were frankincense, myrrh, saffron and mixtures of cinnamon, cassia and olive oil. Such a pleasant fragrance is an apt parallel with a friend's wise advice.

27:13. securities and pledges. See comment on 6:1.

27:21. refining precious metals. See comment on 17:3.

28:8. exorbitant interest rates. The law forbade charging interest on money or commodities loaned to fellow Israelites (see comment on Ex 22:25). It was lawful to charge interest in transactions with non-Israelites (Deut 23:20), and there is ample evidence of interest rates as high as 20 percent in Hammurabi's Code (see the comment on Ex 22:25). Usury as a means of building one's own fortune was considered inappropriate for Israelites, since loans were designed to aid one's fellow, not to take advantage of his financial difficulties (see comment on Neh 5:7).

30:1—31:9
Sayings of Agur and Lemuel's Mother

30:25. ants. See comment on 6:6.

30:26. coneys. The Syrian hyrax or rock badger is an ungulate mammal that lives in rocky cliff faces and inaccessible rocky climes. As a result it finds its protection in its isolated existence (see Ps 104:18). In addition, the ingenuity it takes to live in seemingly uninhabitable places points up the adaptability and resourcefulness of this creature.

30:27. locusts. See comments on Amos 4:9 and Joel 1:4-7 for the destructive power of the locust. The fact that their swarms move en masse without a clear leader makes their strength even more ominous to behold.

30:28. lizard. The ability of lizards to scurry along the ground (Lev 11:29) into the most secure places, including the royal palace, may make them the envy of some humans who wish for such exalted residences. There is also a sense here that despite the fact that they lack natural defenses and can be captured by hand, lizards make the most of what abilities they do have to succeed.

31:4-7. drunkenness in ancient world. The brewing of various types of beer and the fermenting of wine from dates and grapes is known in Mesopotamia and Egypt from protoliterate times (c. 4000 B.C.). Banqueting scenes are common in Assyrian art and depict parties

of men and women eating from tables stacked high with food and drinking from cups and through straws. The Babylonian creation epic, *Enuma Elish,* describes how the gods banqueted, making "the sweet liquor flow through their drinking tubes" (a necessity since the lees of the beverage were so thick). A Sumerian hymn to the goddess Ninkasi celebrates the brewing process and gives thanks for the beverage that slakes the thirst and gushes forth in abundance like the Tigris and Euphrates. The ills of drunkenness are found in Psalm 69:12 and Proverbs 20:1 and in the drunken parties portrayed in Daniel 5:1-4 and Esther 1:3-8, and were also well recognized across the ancient Near East. Egyptian wisdom literature warns against intoxication with its accompanying lack of control and the resulting social rejection. There is evidence from the Mari texts of intoxication being viewed as a favorable condition for receiving divine oracles.

31:10-31

Noble Wife

31:10. rubies as most precious gem. See comment on 3:15.

31:13. selection of wool and flax. The idealized wife in this extended proverb has the ability to wisely choose the best grades of wool and flax for her weaving (note the prohibition against weaving wool and linen together in Deut 22:11). Flax was grown for its seeds and its fibers, and could be used to make clothing, belts and lamp wicks. Wool and flax are also paired in Hosea 2:9, along with grain and wine, as the gifts that God, Israel's husband, gives as part of the covenantal promise (also listed in Hammurabi's Code and the Middle Assyrian laws as part of a husband's responsibility to his wife).

31:16-24. business enterprises for women. Hammurabi's Code contains several laws regulating the activities of Babylonian women who operate inns or taverns. However, this may not be construed in the same light as having the ability to buy a field or sell finely dyed and woven garments as a professional seamstress. The idealized picture of the "perfect wife" in this proverb goes beyond anything that the biblical text elsewhere suggests was open to women. Ordinarily they did not have the legal standing to purchase land, although they certainly worked hard with their families to cultivate it and deal with its produce. The one industry mentioned in ancient Near Eastern texts that was open to female enterprise was weaving, and this may be the model for all the other activities.

31:19. distaff and spindle. The terms translated as distaff and spindle only appear here. However, the context suggests that the translation is appropriate and that these are simply technical terms related to the task of spinning and weaving. There is a sense of intense activity performed by a determined woman willing to "gird up her loins" (i.e., pull up her sleeves) and produce large quantities of woven goods for both her family and for merchants to sell for her.

31:21. scarlet. See the comments on Exodus 25:4 and 25:5 for discussion of the various dyes used to color fabrics, especially linen. A red or purple dye would have been expensive and reserved for the wealthy.

31:22. fine linen and purple. A sheet of fine linen would have been a valuable and desirable commodity, to be used as a bed covering or cut into smaller pieces for garments (see Judg 14:12-13 and Is 3:23). A purple dye made from the glandular fluid of sea mollusks would have been quite expensive and in this context is a symbol of how prosperous the ideal wife makes her household.

31:23. elders at the city gate. The traditional place for the city elders to gather to do business (see Lot in Sodom's gate in Gen 19:1) and to hear legal arguments was at the city gate (see Ruth 4:1-4). Old Babylonian records note the legal role of the elders in judging land disputes, hearing the taking of oaths and serving as witnesses to various transactions (see Jer 32:12).

ECCLESIASTES

1:1. "son" of David. The term "son" can signify either a political relationship or kinship (any male descendant can be called a son). In this context it associates the Teacher with one of David's royal descendants, Solomon being the most obvious candidate that comes to mind.

1:2. meaningless. As early as Sumerian literature and throughout the traditions of the ancient Near East the meaninglessness of existence, and particularly of the human plight, had been recognized: from the days of old there has been vanity (wind).

1:9. nothing new under the sun. From Assyrian royal inscriptions it appears that the kings were constantly seeking out accomplishments so they could boast they had done something that had never been done or achieved before. The king could thereby include himself among the "creators" or "founders"—ones who had established precedents. Such accomplishments included quest or conquest; building of a road, palace, temple or city; or the introduction of a new technique or celebration.

1:13. role of the sage. Sages seem to have comprised a different guild from the scribes, though their exact function and nature is obscure. They were certainly teachers, but whether they had formal training or taught formally is unknown. Sages were known in other ancient Near Eastern cultures and were sometimes counselors to royalty. For more information see comment on Proverbs 1:1.

2:5. gardens and parks. Palaces were often surrounded by a private garden planted with fruit trees and shade trees, with watercourses, pools and paths—more like a park. The arboretum often contained many exotic trees and plants. Such gardens have been excavated at Pasargadae, Cyrus the Great's capital city.

2:6. irrigation systems. Mesha of Moab (ninth century B.C.) also claims in his list of achievements to have built reservoirs for water in the king's house. The Jewish historian Josephus claims in his *Jewish War* that the King's Pool in Jerusalem was built by Solomon.

2:7. slavery in Israel. There were individuals in Israel who were deprived of at least part of their freedom and who could be bought and sold. The most common term for slave in Torah was *'ebed.* This term, however, was vague (similar to its Akkadian counterpart, *wardu),* since it was used for anyone in a subordinate position to someone of a higher rank; it was thus a term for general dependence. It has often been translated as "servant." Even patriarchs and monarchs were servants of God, and all the inhabitants of both Israel and Judah were servants or subjects of the king, including the members of the royal family. David was at one time a slave (vassal) of the Philistine king Achish, and Ahaz of Judah was servant to the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III. A chief source of slavery was prisoners of war, who were sold as slaves. However, in the Mosaic Law an Israelite could not be forced to do the work of a slave. The only way an Israelite could be reduced to servitude was because of his or her own poverty or if he or she had been given over as security for a relative's poverty. This slavery ended once the debt was paid. There is very little mentioned about the number of domestic servants and slaves in ancient Israel. For example, a census taken after the exile (fifth century B.C.) recorded over seven thousand slaves, as compared to over forty thousand free persons. A well-off family probably owned one or more domestic servants. Although a slave was considered property, he or she was also considered human and thus had certain rights. The slave was considered a part of the family, as evidenced by the requirement of circumcision. Although there was no predominance of slave labor in agriculture, the artisan trades or any branch of the economy, there appears to have been some employment of state slavery during the period of the monarchy (c. 1000-586 B.C.). David set the population to work making bricks, while Solomon used "slaves" to work in the mines at Arabah, in the factories at Ezion Geber and in the work of the royal palace and temple. Most of these slaves were Canaanites and not Israelites.

2:8. singers. Musicians were usually retained for the ruler's entertainment or for cultic ceremonies. Since both male and female singers are included here, the latter is more likely. Mesopotamia and Egypt had long histories of both popular and religious music that must have been known to the Israelites. Ancient Egyptian tomb paintings demonstrate the postures of dancers as well as a wide variety of musical instruments. Court musicians, both male and female, are attested at many royal courts throughout the ancient Near East. They are attested in texts (including, for instance, Uruk and Mari) in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, Hittite Anatolia and Egypt. They were included among permanent palace personnel, as rations lists demonstrate.

2:8. harem. The term here is usually considered a designation for concubines, but the word occurs only here and is obscure. Certainly the taking of concubines was a normal pattern of behavior for kings. Others have suggested that the word should be translated "treasure chests."

3:5. scattering and gathering stones. Stones were cleared away from a field so that the farmer could use it for agricultural purposes (see Is 5:2). One threw stones into an enemy's field so that it could not produce yield (2 Kings 3:19, 25; Is 5:2).

3:16. corruption of the judiciary. The writer bemoans the fact that what had previously been justice has become wickedness. In other words, the normal course of the world has been overturned, a common theme in Mesopotamian literature, especially in the literary piece called the Babylonian Job. For more information see comments on Isaiah 5:23.

4:12. cord of three strands. This phrase was evidently well known in the ancient Near East. In the Sumerian story of *Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living* Gilgamesh encourages Enkidu as they anxiously anticipate their battle with the fearsome Huwawa. He suggests that the two of them can defend one another and so they will succeed.

5:1. options in the temple. Ancient Near Eastern literature offers similar cautions. The Egyptian *Instruction for Merikare* commends the character of someone who is upright in heart over the sacrifice of an evil person. An inscription from Ugarit comments on the actions of a fool who rushes to offer prayers to appease his god even though he has no sense of guilt. The options mentioned in the text contrast the direction of communication. The sacrifice of the fool usually accompanies a petition to the deity for favor or the granting of a request. What one listens to in the temple would typically be an oracle in which the deity can express favor or disfavor. The Egyptian *Teaching of Ptah-Hotep* spends nearly fifty lines extolling the virtues of one who hears over the foolishness of one who speaks rashly.

5:2. swearing of oaths. This verse most likely refers to the swearing of oaths, for rash oaths were known to be a problem. The swearing of an oath was considered a very serious matter in ancient Israel. An oath was always sworn in the name of a god. This placed a heavy responsibility on the one who swore such an oath to carry out its stipulations, since he would be liable to divine as well as human retribution if he did not. Oaths were used in legal proceedings and for political treaties and covenants. Client kings and dominant kings alike were required to abide by their oaths to support each other.

5:3. dreams. Dreams in the ancient world were thought to offer information from the divine realm and were therefore taken very seriously. Some dreams given to prophets and kings were considered a means of divine revelation. Most dreams, however, the ordinary dreams of common people, were believed to contain omens that communicated information about what the gods were doing. Those that were revelation usually identified the deity and often involved the deity. The dreams that were omens usually made no reference to deity. Dreams were often filled with symbolism necessitating an interpreter, though at times the symbols were reasonably self-evident. The information that came through dreams was not believed to be irreversible, but a dream could be a cause for concern, if not alarm. This verse would then best be read, "As a dream is accompanied by many worries, so a fool's speech comes with many words."

5:4. vows. Information concerning vows can be found in most of the cultures of the ancient Near East, including the Hittite, Ugaritic, Mesopotamian and, less often, Egyptian. Vows were voluntary agreements made with deity. The vows would typically be conditional and accompany a petition made to deity. They were cultic commitments to God in which the worshiper promised to undertake a certain action if God answered his or her request. Artifacts used as votive offerings have been found at various archaeological sites in the Levant. Moreover, votive stelae from Phoenicia and literature (prayers and thanksgiving texts) from Mesopotamia, Egypt and Anatolia show evidence of vow-making. For more information see comment on 1 Samuel 1:11.

5:6. temple messenger. Scholars are not certain as to who this temple messenger was, as there is no other biblical reference to the office. From this verse we can assume there was a temple official whose job was to make sure that worshipers had fulfilled their vows. Similar functionaries may have been referred to on Phoenician inscriptions.

5:8. corrupt bureaucracy. The king in the ancient Near East was required to protect the legal rights of his people. The royal bureaucracy was thus responsible for justice and righteousness. Too often, however, reality was much harsher. By the time everyone (local officials all the way up to the temple and palace) got their share of the farmer's crop (in the form of produce taxation), bare subsistence was all that was possible.

5:17. eating in darkness. If one works in the fields from sunup till sundown, then both breakfast and supper are eaten in the dark. Thus those who desire wealth will not have fulfillment.

6:3. importance of proper burial. In Mesopotamia those who had not been properly buried were condemned to wander the earth aimlessly as spirits and to bother the living. This idea is implied in the horror observed in biblical texts concerning individuals who died in a violent manner without proper burial. Most ancient peoples believed that proper, timely

burial affected the quality of the afterlife. See the comment on 1 Kings 16:4. In the Gilgamesh Epic Enkidu, having returned from the netherworld, reports to Gilgamesh that the one who died unburied has no rest and that the one who had no living relatives to take care of him could only eat what was thrown into the street. A Babylonian curse relates burial to the uniting of the spirit of the dead with loved ones. We know that even Israelites believed that proper burial affected one's afterlife, because they, like their neighbors, buried their loved ones with the provisions that would serve them in the afterlife most often pottery vessels (filled with food) and jewelry (to ward off evil), with tools and personal items sometimes added.

6:6. all go to the same place. In Israelite understanding (reflected also in many of the surrounding cultures) the choices were not heaven or hell but life or death. This verse is talking about human destiny, and therefore the place where all went was Sheol, the abode of the dead. For more information about afterlife beliefs see the comments on Job 3:13-19 and the sidebar on Isaiah 14.

7:1. fine perfume. Banqueters in the ancient world were often treated by a generous host to fine oils that would be used to anoint their foreheads. This provided not only a glistening sheen to their countenance but also would have added a fragrance to their persons and the room. For example, an Assyrian text from Esarhaddon's reign describes how he "drenched the foreheads" of his guests at a royal banquet with "choicest oils."

7:6. crackling thorns under the pot. The thin wood of thorn bushes produces a lot of noise that draws attention as it bursts quickly into flame. In reality, however, it makes very poor firewood and gives off no lasting heat.

7:7. bribery in Israel. Gift-giving was common in ancient Israel. Sacrifices and other offerings were considered gifts to God. Gift-giving between individuals was also important, although in some cases gifts were considered improper (because of the motive of the giver), causing the gift to be considered a bribe. It is in this context that the Israelites were commanded not to take gifts (i.e., bribes) since they "blind the wise" (see comment on Ex 23:8). As evidenced by the preface to the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1750 B.C.) and the statements made by the eloquent peasant in Egyptian wisdom literature (c. 2100 B.C.), the standard of behavior for those in authority was to protect the rights of the poor and weak in society. An efficiently administered state in the ancient Near East depended on the reliability of the law and its enforcement. To this end every organized state created a bureaucracy of judges and local officials to deal with civil and criminal cases. It was their task to hear testimony, investigate charges, evaluate evidence and execute judgment (detailed in the Middle Assyrian Laws and the Code of Hammurabi). The temptation for judges and government officials to accept bribes is found in every time and place. In the ancient Near East taking bribes became almost institutionally accepted in bureaucratic situations, as competing parties attempted to outmaneuver each other. However, at least on the ideal level, arguments and penalties were imposed to eliminate or at least lessen this problem. Thus Hammurabi's Code 5 placed harsh penalties on any judge who altered one of his decisions (presumably because of a bribe), including stiff fines and permanent removal from the bench.

7:12. money as shelter. The word the NIV translates "shelter" is the word usually rendered "shade." It is a metaphor for the protection and comfort that come with relief from the hot sun. This may have been a well-known proverb, but it has not been found elsewhere. Presumably the shadow of money, like wisdom, is the protection that money affords the individual.

7:13. straighten what is crooked. In the ancient Near East the pious were constantly baffled concerning what the gods were doing and why they were doing it. In a Sumerian hymn to Enlil the poet says, "Your immensely clever deeds are dismaying, their meaning is a twisted thread that cannot be separated" (ANET, 575).

8:2. courtier's conduct. Advice concerning how to conduct oneself as a courtier is expected in wisdom literature, since its primary function was training future palace functionaries. The Egyptian *Teaching of Ptah-Hotep* addresses many of its paragraphs to people in various leadership capacities. The *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy* advises in much the same way as this section of Ecclesiastes: "Do not make a judgment in which you are wrong" (16:17); "Do not hasten when you speak before your master" (17:10). The advice to the courtier described here is also similar to that in the *Words of Ahiqar,* a counselor at the Assyrian court in the seventh century B.C.

8:11-12. criminal punishment in Israel. Israel shared a common legal tradition with the rest of the ancient Near East concerning criminal punishment. The most common penalties in the Bible were stoning, death by fire and mutilation. Ancient Near Eastern sources (e.g., the

Code of Hammurabi and the Middle Assyrian Laws) occasionally mention the methods of punishment, which included drowning, mutilation and impalement. Imprisonment was not used as a punishment for crime, though there were debtors' prisons and political prisoners. Additionally, prisons would be used to detain those awaiting trial.

9:5, 10. no reward. The term "reward" here probably refers to the benefits of life, in which the dead cannot partake. They cannot enjoy any of those things that are considered blessings in this life. Beyond that, this also indicates the Israelite belief that there was no heavenly reward for a life of faith or good works. They believed that God's justice was carried out in this life rather than in the afterlife.

9:7-10. eat, drink and be merry. The Greek philosopher Epicurus was not the first to commend this approach to life. Even Gilgamesh was advised to let his belly be full, make merry day and night, and let his garments be clean and fresh and his body be bathed. He was urged to take delight in his children and wife. In Egyptian literature the *Harper's Song* from the first half of the second millennium advise a life of rejoicing and pursuing pleasure. This includes anointing the head and dressing in fine clothes.

9:7. wine. There were a number of different types of wine in ancient Israel. The most common form of wine was from the *Vitus vinifera L.* grape. It was typically red (Gen 49:11-12; Prov 23:31; white wine is mentioned only in rabbinic sources). The Old Testament mentions the existence of a "sweet wine," probably produced by exposing the grapes to the sun for at least three days before treading. Vinegar (i.e., sour wine) was used for seasoning and for its medicinal value. The most common mixture was wine diluted with water, although spices were also mixed with this beverage. As in the rest of the Near East wine was not the most common beverage but was used for special occasions, including feasts, coronations and weddings. There were certain biblical restrictions to the drinking of wine that were primarily of a cultic (e.g., Lev 10:9) and dedicatory nature (i.e., Nazirite vow). Wine was also used in the Israelite cult (e.g., drink offerings). Wine was apparently an important commercial item, as Solomon provided wine to Hiram of Tyre in exchange for the building of the temple (2 Chron 2:10, 15).

9:8. clothed in white. Scholars have understood the color white to symbolize purity, festivity or elevated social status. In both Egypt (Story of Sinuhe) and Mesopotamia (Epic of Gilgamesh) clean or bright garments conveyed a sense of well-being. Moreover, the hot Middle Eastern climate favors the wearing of white clothes to reflect the heat.

9:8. anointed head. Oil preserved the complexion in the hot Middle Eastern climate. Both the Egyptian *Song of the Harper* and the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh describe individuals clothed in fine linen and with myrrh on their head.

9:11. concept of fate. Fate, an impersonal force, controlled the destiny of things. Enki, the god of wisdom, wore a sorcerer's hat, showing that he attempted to control and predict fate, much like a human sorcerer. Fate was written on tablets, and those who controlled them controlled the destiny of the universe. If they were in the wrong hands, there was chaos in the world. In one myth a bird deity (Anzu) stole the tablets of fate, which caused quite a stir within the divine community until he was killed. The Israelite concept of fate or chance was different than in Mesopotamia. Instead of viewing something as a random happening (Fate), they would consider it simply an unexpected event (serendipity). "Time" and "chance" are presented here not as two separate contingencies but as a single factor. A "well-timed coincidence" can occur in any situation and alter what would have been considered an assured outcome.

9:12. hunting/fishing. Although Ishmael and Esau were known as hunters, hunting was not a typical vocation in Israel except in time of hunger or to get rid of the wild animals that caused danger to flocks. In both Assyria and Egypt, however, there are numerous wall reliefs depicting royal hunting scenes. Hunting is also implied for Solomon's court (1 Kings 4:23). This vocation was known well enough in Israel to be the basis for some metaphors. Fishing, like hunting, is not mentioned as a recreational activity in ancient Israel. The book of Job describes fishing by spear or harpoon (41:7) or by hook (41:1-2; Is 19:8). Like hunting, fishing was often the basis of metaphors, primarily as a figure of God's judgment on individuals or nations.

10:1. flies in the perfume. This little phrase is somewhat like the modern "one bad apple ruins the whole barrel." Something as insignificant as flies will ruin even the best perfume by making it so disgusting that the whole container will have to be discarded.

10:2. right and left. While there is no doubt that the right side was considered the place of honor and the most protected position, there is no indication that there was anything nega-

tive or inherently weak or evil connected to the left side, either in the ancient Near East or in Israel. It was secondary in honor and an unexpected direction from which to attack. The fool chose the path of vulnerability and lower status.

10:8-9. dangers of stated activities. (1) Digging a pit was an activity designed to catch a large animal. With that purpose in mind, the pit was disguised, making it possible that one could stumble into it oneself. (2) When a stone wall was dismantled, or when a breach was made in a wall for a gate, a farmer could unwittingly disturb a snake who had taken up residence among the cool stones. (3) The quarrying of rocks referred to here is probably not that done by professionals, because the other activities are all normal agrarian activities. The verb is used for quarrying but is also used in more general contexts that deal with uprooting or taking something out. Alternatively then, this line could refer to a farmer clearing stones from his field. Injury could come from dropped rocks, hernias or scraped arms. (4) Finally, the dangers inherent in splitting logs are easily recognizable. The axhead could fly off the handle or glance off the wood, resulting in serious injury.

10:11. snake charming. Snakes were greatly feared in the ancient world as magical beings as well as for their venom. Snake charming was a skill known throughout the ancient Near East. Snake charmers appear to be represented on Egyptian scarab-amulets (see comment on Ex 7:11-12). Both Egyptian and Mesopotamian literature contains examples of incantations against serpents and their bites. The word translated "charmed" here should not evoke images of swaying serpents hypnotized by pipe-playing swamis. Instead the reference is to snakes against which the incantations are ineffective. Akkadian texts also speak of snakes that are "unconjurable."

10:20. birds as tattlers. Stories of "little birds" who told secrets are found in Aristophanes' *The Birds,* a classical Greek comedy, and in the Hittite tale of Elkuhirsa. The proverbs of Ahiqar assert that a word is like a bird and that one who releases it lacks sense.

11:1. bread on waters. This proverb has been found in the Egyptian source the *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy* ("do a good deed and throw it in the river; when it dries up you shall find it") and in Arabic proverbs. If Ecclesiastes follows the route of Ankhsheshonqy, it suggests that a spontaneous good deed carries no guarantees of reciprocity but that "what goes around, comes around."

11:2. giving of portions. The giving of portions generally assumes a situation in which goods or assets are being distributed (not just invested). This could be in the context of inheritance or generosity.

12:1-8. effects of old age. One line of interpretation sees a physiological allusion in each of these lines:

verse 2: sight dimmed, depressed
verse 3: trembling hands, stooping posture, losing teeth, cataracts
verse 4: loss of hearing, awakening early
verse 5: increased fears, gray/white hair, slow movements, decreased sexual drive
verse 6: weakened spinal cord, deteriorated mental powers; loss of bladder control; heart failure
verse 7: death

Some of these connections go back to the Targums (Jewish interpretive translations into Aramaic dating to as early as the first century A.D.), but the connections are difficult to substantiate since many of them are not attested elsewhere. So, for instance, to see the "golden bowl" as a reference to the brain would be unlikely, since in the ancient world they were unaware of the function of the brain. Could the silver cord be the aorta and the golden bowl the heart? The fact that no one can say shows the speculative nature of the whole line of interpretation. The Egyptian *Teaching of Ptah-Hotep* from the Middle Kingdom (first half of second millennium B.C.) opens with a dozen lines describing the effects of old age (such as eyes dim, ears go deaf, bones ache, memory and discernment gone), but it speaks in straightforward terms rather than using metaphors.

12:3. keepers of the house. The "keepers of the house" could be male servants, common as house slaves throughout the ancient Near East, who often were people in authority (like Joseph in Potiphar's house).

12:3. grinders. The grinders are female servants or prisoners who perform the daily work of grinding grain to provide bread for the entire estate. Grinding grain into flour was usually done with millstones and was the job of the lowest members of society. One of the basic "appliances" of any ancient household would have been the handmill (called a saddle quern) with two stones for grinding (see comment on Judg 9:53). Larger milling houses often served as prison workhouses in Mesopotamia, but each prisoner still used a handmill for grinding. Grinding houses would include prisoners of war, criminals and those who had defaulted on their debts.

12:3. looking through windows. There is a familiar motif of a woman looking out the window that is beautifully represented in ivory

carvings found at Nimrud, Samaria and Arslan Tash (in which the woman is adorned with an Egyptian wig). In literature the woman is gazing into the distance awaiting news of a husband or son who has gone to war (see comment on Judg 5:28). This is possibly the basis of the metaphor used here.

12:4. sounds of activity. The doors being shut are double doors and therefore must refer to the city gate where all the bustle of activity takes place. Neither the city noise nor the laborers' noise (from the mill) is now heard. These sounds died out at the end of the day.

12:5. almond tree. The white blossoms of the almond tree apparently represent the white hair of old age. The almond tree was the first tree to bloom in late January-early February, rising to a height of fifteen to thirty feet. The almond flower is white with shades of pink, ripening with almonds about ten weeks later. Other ancient metaphors for old age include white gypsum on a black mountain.

12:6. silver cord/golden bowl. The word for bowl here also is found in Zechariah 4:2-3, where it is a bowl that holds the wicks of candles. Some have assumed that the silver cord holds the expensive golden bowl, which, if severed, would cause the bowl to be smashed. This symbolizes the aging process and death. Josephus describes a golden lamp hung on a golden chain at the Jewish temple at Leontopolis in Egypt.

12:6. pitcher at spring/wheel at well. Both items are associated with a well or cistern. The wheel has been thought to represent the pulley, which lifts the jar out of the well, though these devices were not widely used. Alternatively, the word translated "wheel" *(galgal)* may refer to a cooking pot, based on a similar term in Akkadian *(gulgullu,* which, perhaps not coincidentally, also means "skull").

SONG OF SONGS

1:2. kiss. A kiss on the lips was used as a passionate expression throughout the Near East, though Egyptians in the early periods often touched noses instead.

1:3. perfumes. A number of oil- and resin-based perfumes were employed to scent the body and burnt as incense. Among these were myrrh, frankincense and bdellium (see Is 60:6; Jer 6:20). Saffron, calamus and aloes were imported from India, cinnamon from Sri Lanka and nard from Nepal. For other biblical usage see the incense recipe in the comment on Exodus 30:34-38 and the perfumes mentioned in the comments on Proverbs 7:17 and 27:9.

1:5. Kedar. The Kedar were among the most powerful of the northern Arabian bedouin tribal groups in the period between the eighth and fourth centuries B.C. They are mentioned in the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian annals and are tied to the genealogy of Ishmael in Genesis 25:13 (see the comments on Gen 25:12-16; Is 21:16 and 42:11). Their tents consisted of animal skins or woven fabric stretched over poles to form a three-sided pavilion. The black color would have come from the use of black goat hair (see the comment on Ex 26:7-13).

1:7. veiled woman. Although this reference is uncertain, it may hinge on the differences in costuming required in various social settings. According to the Middle Assyrian Laws, the wives, widows and unmarried daughters of citizens were required to wear a veil when out in public (note how Rebekah veils herself prior to meeting Isaac in Gen 24:65). In the house or in a setting where only family members or servants were present (such as her husband's sheepfold) the veil would be unnecessary. Note also the veil worn by Tamar in Genesis 38:14-15. This may indicate the use of the veil in Canaanite context as a sign of sacred prostitution or possibly by harlots working among the shepherds.

1:9. mare among Pharaoh's chariots. A tactic of battle attested in Egyptian literature was to release a mare in the vicinity of the chariots so that the stallions pulling the chariots would become distracted and confused. The word "harnessed" (NIV) does not occur in the Hebrew text.

1:11. earrings of gold studded with silver. As in Proverbs 25:11 the biblical writer uses the image of a finely crafted piece of precious jewelry to demonstrate devotion and affection. In this case the earrings probably had pendants of silver or studs embedded in the gold setting (see comment on Is 3:18-23).

1:13. sachet of myrrh. Myrrh bushes grow in

the arid region just north of the coastal mountains of Yemen and Oman in the rain shadow of the southwest monsoon. The reddish myrrh resin, extracted by gashing the thorny stems and exposing the inner bark, appears as juicy drupes. It was crushed for use in making perfume or as a medicinal ingredient. Its natural fragrance, somewhat like turpentine, was long-lasting enough to be placed in a sachet to enhance sexual pleasure or serve as an aromatic mask to the odors often present in ancient homes. Pouches worn around the neck containing various elements were worn as amulets in Egypt.

1:14. henna blossoms. Henna is a flowering shrub, *Lawsonia inermis L.*, with fragrant white blossoms. It grows in many areas of the Middle East, and has been discovered in the tomb of the pharaoh Tutankhamen. The leaves and twigs produce a red, yellow or orange dye that can be used to color the hair and other parts of the body. Their fragrance is similar to roses.

1:14. En Gedi. This is an oasis located thirty-five miles southeast of Jerusalem and nestled within a ravine on the western shore of the Dead Sea. The name means "spring of the young goat," and the excavation of the fourth-millennium temple within its precincts attests the antiquity of its refreshing character. In this metaphor the peculiar location of the oasis between the ridges of the surrounding hills makes it an apt parallel to the sachet of myrrh and the bouquet of henna blossoms between the "beloved's" breasts.

1:15. eyes are doves. Doves figure prominently on seals and other iconography as a symbol of lovemaking or seduction. They are sometimes understood as messengers of love. In this case the eyes are seen as having seductive power.

2:1. rose of Sharon. While the exact flower referred to here is unknown, the use of the Hebrew word *shushan* for "lily" in this verse indicates a plant with six petals. A likely choice, therefore, would be the polyanthus narcissus, which grows in the hills and moist valleys of the Sharon Plain. It flowers during the winter and has white petals and an orange cup or corona enhancing the beauty of each cluster. Narcissi have been found as offerings in Hellenistic tombs in Egypt.

2:4. banner over me is love. The translation of *degel* as "banner" is uncertain. Both Murphy and Fox make reference to an Akkadian cognate, *diglu*, "glance" or "intent," and Fox chooses to translate "his intent towards me was love." In either case, setting a standard as a symbol of possession or making an intent to carry out an action arrives at the same conclusion, to make love to the beloved (see Jer 2:33).

2:5. raisins/apples as aphrodisiac. The woman asks for raisins and apples as a cure restorative for her "love sickness" (similar to the lovesick male in Chester Beatty's love songs from Egypt). It can only be cured by the return of her lover. It is possible that the raisins are associated with the raisin cakes mentioned in association with the worship of the goddess Ishtar (see the comment on Jer 7:18). Apples also were understood as aphrodisiacs in Assyrian incantations.

2:7. gazelles and does. Gazelles and does are often portrayed as the companions of the god-

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SEXUAL METAPHOR

The explicit nature of portions of the Song of Songs may be a bit shocking to some readers. However, metaphorical erotic literature was not uncommon in the ancient Near East, as is seen especially in Egyptian Love Songs. Fertility was a major issue for the people of these cultures, since their lives revolved and relied upon the harvest. Most of their religious festivals and holidays centered on the agricultural calendar, and it was an easy step to employ these images of plowing, seeding, cultivation and harvest to human relations. As a result, the sexual metaphors that appear in the text express the high emotions of a loving couple, who find it difficult to be separated and who in sometimes flamboyant terms describe each other's merits and beauty. It would be impossible in the light of their passion to speak in anything other than sensuous and intimate terms.

There is a celebration of life here, both in the natural world and amongst humans. So when the "beloved" speaks of her lover as being graceful as a gazelle, leaping over hills (2:17) and thus demonstrating his energy and athletic skills, it is easy to enter into her passionate realm. He equates her with all that is beautiful, "a mare among Pharaoh's chariots" (1:19), with eyes like doves (1:15; 4:1) and lips a "scarlet ribbon" (4:3). She in turn describes him as a fragrant sachet of myrrh worn around her neck and close to her heart (1:13-14). Such comparison masks the thorns of everyday life and for a time restores a sense of the idyllic essence of Eden.

Most English translations disguise some of the most blatant erotic imagery with euphemism and metaphor, as is appropriate considering the poetic nature of the literature and the need to preserve a certain propriety for a general audience.

dess of love in ancient Near Eastern art.

2:9. peering through the lattice motif. The finely carved ivories found in excavations of the Iron Age levels at Samaria and Nimrud include the motif of "the woman in the window." Some associate this with the Phoenician goddess Astarte, who was identified with a cult of sacred prostitution (see the adulteress's spying through the lattice in Prov 7:6). In this case, however, it is the impatient man who periodically glances through the screen to see when his lover will be ready to admit him.

2:13. early figs. The word used for fig here, *paggâ,* does not appear elsewhere in the Bible, but there are Aramaic and Arabic cognates which refer to the first unripe fruit to appear on a fig tree. Ordinarily the fig tree has two crops a year. The first ripens in June and the second in August or September (see Jer 24:3; Hos 9:10).

2:15. foxes. In the Egyptian love poetry foxes represent sexually aggressive men, rather like the term "wolf" in American idiom.

2:16. lilies. Some translators consider the lilies mentioned here to be lotus flowers, which were symbols of sensuality and fertility in Egypt and Canaan.

3:2. motif of searching through the city. See the comment on Jeremiah 5:1 comparing Jeremiah to the Greek philosopher Diogenes in his search through a city for an "honest man." The motif of searching a city is also found in Ezekiel's vision of the executioners and the scribe in Ezekiel 9. There is an intensity in this verse that is tied to the desperation and anxiousness of the woman for her lover, which even draws her into a potentially dangerous search. Ordinarily an honorable woman would not be out on the streets alone (compare the adulteress in Prov 7:6-20). Mythological literature also depicts the search of the consort for her lover. In Canaanite mythology Anat goes seeking for Baal; in Egyptian literature Isis goes on a quest for Osiris.

3:4. mother's house. As is the case in Genesis 24:28 in the story of Rebekah and in Ruth 1:8 when Naomi instructs her daughters-in-law to return to their "mother's house," in this instance the term "mother's house" is indicative of both a spatial and a social realm. The *bêt 'em* in each of these texts is to be equated with the *bêt 'ab,* or "father's house." While most texts, perhaps due to the legal issues of inheritance and landownership, employ "father's house" (see Gen 38:11; Lev 22:13), the importance of females within the household with respect to procreation as well as management of its affairs (see Prov 31:10-31) made these terms of equal social value within Israelite culture.

3:6. merchant spices. Merchant caravans brought quantities of incense, both frankincense and myrrh, from the desert regions of southern Arabia and Somalia. These expensive items not only provide a cloud of fragrance for the procession described here but also enhance the sexual desirability of the woman. The Egyptian love songs repeatedly refer to "myrrh-anointed beauty" and other aromas as sexual intoxicants.

3:9. wooden carriage. The lovers compare their bower to the royal canopy of King Solomon, constructed from the finest wood from Lebanon and decorated with gold and silver. The term translated "carriage" here has had many interpretations based on Egyptian, Aramaic and Greek cognates. Ideas range from a litter or sedan chair to a throne room or "magnificent building." Fox's idea of a covered pavilion in a garden (see Esther 1:6) or a garden kiosk such as those in Mesopotamian texts and Egyptian tomb paintings is a likely suggestion.

3:11. crowned by mother at wedding. Wedding garlands were worn by the couple as they processed to their nuptial ceremony (Is 61:10; compare the Persian king placing a crown on Esther's head when he makes her his queen in Esther 2:17). There is no evidence elsewhere in the text of a mother crowning her son as king, although given the theme of Solomon's wise reign it may be a reference to the "crown of splendor" that Dame Wisdom places on the head of her chosen (Prov 4:9). The mother held the position of priority in the family concerning all matters of the heart.

4:1-7. description of lover's body. As Keel points out, for the most part the descriptions focus on dynamic powers rather than shapes. So the eyes are not shaped like doves but act like doves (see comment on 1:15).

4:3. temples as halves of pomegranate. Rather than "halves" of a pomegranate, Keel plausibly suggests slit of the pomegranate revealing the tender red fruit. This would fit well with the parallel of the lips earlier in the verse. If that is the case, the word translated "temples" should be translated as "cheeks."

4:4. tower of David. According to the fashion described in the Egyptian love songs and depicted in art (bust of Nefertiti) a long neck was a characteristic of a beautiful woman. Thus a comparison with a tall, well-built tower is quite apt (see 7:4 and comparison with an "ivory tower"). However, the structure itself is unknown to archaeologists, and it is unclear whether it stood in Jerusalem or some other city. More important than the shape, however, was the fact that a tower represented the pride and glory of a city. This is the imagery also

used for the neck in the Bible (for instance, Ps 75:5).

4:4. shields hung on tower. The metaphor of a woman's adorned neck continues by comparing the shields used to decorate the structure (compare 1 Kings 10:16-17) with the necklaces and strings of jewels worn by wealthy or beloved women (see Prov 1:9; Song 1:10; Ezek 16:11). In his "Lament for Tyre" Ezekiel describes how shields were hung on the city walls to add to its beauty (Ezek 27:10-11).

4:8. crest of Amana. Now the lover calls his beloved to join him from her inaccessible heights and distant lands. This is a metaphor of his desire for her presence rather than her actual geographic location. The Amana is one of the peaks of the Anti-Lebanon Range, near the source of the Amanus River.

4:8. Senir/Hermon. These are alternate names for the same peak, Mount Hermon (see comment on Deut 3:9). Assyrian records mention Senir within the Lebanon range, in northern Transjordan. The song here simply uses this metaphorically inaccessible region as synonymous with the lover's feeling of isolation when separated from his beloved.

4:8. lions and leopards. These wild animals are often the companions of goddesses, particularly Ishtar, the Mesopotamian goddess of love. Keel says that the motif stretches from Neolithic art all the way into the classical Greek and Roman period.

4:12. gardens. Gardens were places of delight and refreshment and therefore served easily as a metaphor for the beloved. Sumerian literature used the metaphor to describe the lover's partner as a well-stocked garden, and Akkadian proverbs describe a woman as a garden of delight. In Egyptian love songs the woman describes herself as a field planted with all sorts of plants.

4:13-14. spices. As is commonly the case in the Egyptian love songs, the beloved woman's beauty and desirability is compared to fragrant fruits, trees and spices (see the comments on Prov 7:17 and 27:9). The exaggeration of the number and variety of exotic plants listed here may simply be a reflection of a "lover's flattery." Nine types of spices are listed, and three actually grow in Israel (balsam, henna, saffron). The crimson saffron crocus produces such minute quantities of spice that over four thousand flowers are needed to produce an ounce. Frankincense, aloes and spikenard were imported from Arabia, India, Nepal and China, and thus were extremely expensive. Spikenard is obtained from camel grass in the deserts of Arabia and North Africa, but is also referred to as "pure nard" (see Mk 14:3). It is made from the flowers of a plant growing on the slopes of the Himalayas (thirteen thousand feet in elevation) and was considered an aphrodisiac. Myrrh, cinnamon and sweet cane/calamus were also imported. Calamus comes from an aromatic grass found in India, which today is used to produce citronella oils.

5:7. treatment by guards. It is possible that the watchmen considered an unaccompanied, young female out at night a harlot. They take away her veil or light scarf (see Is 3:18, 23), perhaps in line with the Middle Assyrian law that permits only "mothers of households, widows and other free women" to wear a veil in public. The woman may have launched into her search so quickly that she is only half dressed, like the lovesick woman in the Egyptian love songs.

5:15. pillars of marble. Now it is the woman's turn to describe her lover in flamboyant terms. Her comparisons of his legs with a pair of finely carved marble pillars set on golden bases is similar to the description Ben Sira uses for a woman's shapely legs and feet (Ecclus 26:18). A similar portrayal of perfect physical symmetry can be found in the description of the Babylonian god Marduk in the *Enuma Elish* creation epic.

6:4. Tirzah. Although the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel was moved from Tirzah (Tell el-Far'ah) during Omri's reign, that does not mean it was totally abandoned. It is possible the writer here wishes to avoid comparisons between Jerusalem and Samaria, political rivals, so Tirzah could be a substitute. The name also serves as a pun, based on the Hebrew root *rṣh,* "pleasing" or "beauty." This allows the lover to intensify his statement that she is as "beautiful as Tirzah."

6:8. harem. A royal harem consists of (1) women who are designated as "queens" and whose sons are automatically in the line of succession; (2) concubines who have a lesser status and whose sons may not inherit without the direct command of the king; and (3) maidens who may be either women who have not yet been presented formally to the king (see Esther 2:8-14) or those who have not yet borne children. In this case the man boasts that his beloved is more beautiful that any number (sixty plus eighty equals infinity) of women in the king's harem.

6:11. nut trees. While pistachios and pine nuts were common in ancient Palestine, there were no naturally occurring "nuts" such as walnuts *(Juglans regia L.).* The term *'egoz,* which only appears in this verse in the Bible, has been translated as "walnut," and that suggests that

the tree may have been introduced in Palestine from its natural habitat in Persia and India prior to the Hellenistic period.

6:13. Shulammite. Since a definite article precedes this name, it is probably an epithet, such as "perfect one," not a personal name. The name may be based on a feminine form of the name Solomon, or possibly there is a connection with the Mesopotamian goddess Shulmanitu or Sala. It is unlikely that the name refers to an inhabitant of Shunem, since the woman is so closely associated with Jerusalem in the songs.

6:13. dance of Mahanaim. No specific dance has been associated with Mahanaim, a site in Transjordan on the Jabbok River (see 2 Sam 2:9). The name means "two camps," and thus some have interpreted the reference to mean a dance in which the men and women separate and dance in lines opposite each other. Dance is often associated with the celebration of a victory (1 Sam 18:6-7) and as an expression of joy (Ex 15:20; Judg 11:34).

7:2. blended wine. During the Hellenistic period wine was often mixed with water so that a greater quantity could be consumed and conversation could continue throughout the meal. However, in earlier periods blended or mixed wine was drunk. This was a more potent intoxicant and thus had to be consumed with more moderation (see Judg 9:13; Prov 9:2). In Mesopotamia, where wine was less common until the time of the Assyrian empire, wine was served on special occasions. Sometimes only grape syrup would be available, mixed with honey to create a liqueur.

7:4. ivory tower. See the comment on 4:4 for a comparison between a woman's shapely neck and a tall structure.

7:4. pools of Heshbon. Since pools of water reflect the light, they serve as an excellent metaphor for the beloved's dazzling eyes. Excavations at Heshbon, ten miles north of Madaba in Transjordan, have uncovered a large eighth-century B.C. cistern or reservoir that could be the basis for this image. The long, dry months of summer would have required the storage of water in cisterns, and these pools of water would have been beautiful indeed to the inhabitants of the city as they saw light sparkle off the water.

7:4. gate of Bath Rabbim. This place name has not been located, although one may presume that it was the entrance to the city reservoir. There may also be a pun on the meaning of the phrase, "daughter of many," based on the similar sounding title *bat nadib,* "nobleman's daughter," thereby granting the beloved an honorable title.

7:4. tower of Lebanon. A tall mountain, such as Mount Hermon in southern Lebanon, may be meant here. However, Fox's suggestion of a play on *Lᵉbonah*, "frankincense," with the place name Lebanon is attractive. Thus the woman's nose is fragrant and as desirable as a tall pile of this expensive incense.

7:13. mandrakes. The fruit of the mandrake is also mentioned in the Egyptian love songs as an aphrodisiac. Rachel quickly moves to obtain a mandrake when her sister Leah's son Reuben finds it in a field (see the comment on Gen 30:14-15). The plant has broad leaves with purple flowers with a strong fragrance and small yellow fruit.

8:2. spiced wine. See the comment on blended wine in 7:2. In some cases wine was made from fruit juices such as the pomegranate. Egyptian sources record the use of palm sap, date syrup and figs to make wines. The sweet flavor of such beverages is paralleled here with the sweetness of a kiss (1:2; 5:16).

8:6. seal metaphor. The metaphor reflects the intimacy of the constant and close contact represented by a seal ring (see Jer 22:24) or a cylinder seal worn around the neck as an amulet and thus near the heart (see comment on Gen 38:18, 25). One of the Cairo love songs (Group B, known as the "seven wishes") contains a phrase that is comparable: "If only I were her little seal ring, the keeper of her finger!"

8:11. Baal Hamon. This place name has not been identified and only appears in this verse. A similar name, Belamon, appears in Judith 8:3, but this may only be a coincidence. The name may have been chosen simply because it means "the possessor of wealth" and thus becomes synonymous with the fruitful nature of the vineyard and by extension of Solomon's harem containing a thousand women.

8:14. spice-laden mountains. These mountains are to be equated with the "hills of ether" (NIV: "rugged hills") mentioned in 2:17. The invitation in both cases is for the young man to come to the fragrant pleasures offered by the young woman, symbolized by the mountains or hills. The image is similar to that of Ishtar's divine lover Tammuz, who as a shepherd "springs over the hills."

PROPHETIC LITERATURE

Introduction

Since as Christians we believe that there is only one God, and since we understand that prophecy contains messages from that God, we are often inclined to think that prophecy in the Bible is a unique phenomenon. While we may be justified in thinking that any prophecy outside the Bible is fraudulent, the fact remains that biblical prophecy is part of a long tradition of prophecy in the ancient Near East. Even the Bible makes this fact known to us in the narratives about Balaam and the prophets of Baal sponsored by Ahab and Jezebel.

Divination can refer to any process that seeks to gain messages from beyond the human realm. In the ancient world divination took many different forms (see comments in Deut 18), but most of them were illegal for use in Israel because they assumed a low view of deity. Prophecy was a form of divination that was practiced legally by the Israelites. It was not mantic divination that required knowledge and training in specialized literature (e.g., spells or omen texts) or the use of magical rituals but instead was premised on direct inspiration by the deity. Texts that speak of prophets and present the messages of prophets are scattered throughout ancient Near Eastern literature. In some of these the prophets use other forms of divination in order to receive their messages.

The most prominent corpus of prophetic messages is found in about fifty letters preserved on tablets found in the royal archives of the town of Mari. These date to early in the second millennium B.C. (contemporary with the events of Genesis). The letters report to the king prophecies that were brought to the attention of local officials. The prophecies come from various deities and instruct the king in military matters and other issues of government policy. Occasionally they call for certain rituals to be performed.

A second corpus of nearly thirty oracles comes from the Neo-Assyrian period (seventh century). The primary deity is Ishtar of Arbela, and the prophecies typically forecast victory and prosperity for the king in his various undertakings. Some of the oracles are collected on large tablets that served as archive copies, while others are smaller texts concerning single oracles. The oracles are fairly brief, ranging from a sentence to a paragraph or two at the most.

In Egyptian literature there are no texts claiming to represent oracles from deity, but works such as the *Admonitions of Ipuwer* and the *Visions of Neferti* (both thought to date to the early second millennium) do contain observations concerning the chaotic state of society and warnings of coming judgment. They also at times refer to a coming restoration of order. These compositions therefore include the same types of messages that can be found in Israel's prophetic literature. Despite this similarity, there is no observable prophetic institution in Egypt like that found in the rest of the ancient Near East. The most obvious reason for this difference is that in Egypt deity was incarnate in the person of the pharaoh. There was therefore no need for a mouthpiece speaking for deity—deity was in their midst.

The prophetic oracles that are known from the ancient Near East are similar to an early phase of Israelite prophecy. The writing prophets of Israel have been designated as the "classical prophets," and the earliest of these appear at the beginning of the eighth century. Prior to that time prophets such as Nathan, Elijah, Elisha and many others are mentioned in the historical literature, but no collections of their oracles are known. They are referred to as the "preclassical prophets." These preclassical prophets show the most similarity to the prophets known from the ancient world. Their messages are directed to the king and concern public policy or other issues of national significance. In that sense these prophets serve as official or, more frequently, unofficial advisors to the king. In contrast, the classical prophets often address the people as they offer their social and spiritual commentary. Though their messages include the pronouncement of blessing or rebuke, it is now directed toward society as a whole. As a result, the writing prophets express warnings concerning captivity, destruction and exile that are new to this period and to the prophetic institution.

Prophets were often identified as madmen—a consequence of the fact that it was not unusual for them to receive their messages while entranced. One of the titles used for prophets in Akkadian literature is *muḫḫu,* which is usually translated "ecstatic." Nevertheless, prophets were taken very seriously. The very act of speaking their word was considered determinative in bringing their message to reality. This was true regardless of the social standing of the prophet. Some prophets were part of the temple personnel or on the king's council of advisors. But it was not at all unusual for the prophet to be a layperson or a commoner. In Babylon or Assyria the word of the prophet would be subject to confirmation. This was accomplished by using divination procedures. The question would be posed as to whether or not the message was to be received favorably, and the divination priest would look for the answer to be "written on" the entrails of the sacrificed animal.

It is clear that all of the cultures of the ancient world believed that the gods communicated through select individuals. In most of the ancient Near East the

prophets appear to have been supportive of imperial ideology. In Israel they more often represented a counterculture movement. As such the prophets tended to cluster around periods of great turmoil. During the preclassical period the prophets Moses, Deborah, Samuel, Elijah and Elisha all served during troubled times. During the classical period prophetic activity surrounds three key periods:

1. the Assyrian crisis that brought the fall of the northern kingdom and the siege of Jerusalem (760-700: Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah)

2. the Babylonian crisis that brought the fall of Assyria and the fall of Judah and Jerusalem (650-580: Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Nahum, Jeremiah, Ezekiel)

3. the postexilic period with its Persian rule and identity crisis (530-480: Haggai, Zechariah, Joel, Obadiah, Malachi; Daniel could be counted among these, although he served during the exile)

The oracles of the writing prophets can be divided into four general categories. *Indictment oracles* notified the people of what they had done wrong. *Judgment oracles* described God's intended response to their offenses. *Instruction oracles* (which are relatively scarce until the postexilic period) told the people what they needed to do and how they needed to act and think. *Aftermath oracles* informed the people about God's plans after the judgment has come. All but the last occur also in ancient Near Eastern prophecies, but in the ancient Near East these prophecies were never collected, "published" and canonized as they were in Israel.

ISAIAH

1:1-31

Indictment of Rebellion

1:1. chronology. In 6:1 the commissioning of Isaiah is placed in the year King Uzziah died, about 739 B.C. Here it is indicated that his prophetic ministry continued into the time of Hezekiah, at least until after the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib in 701. This was a tumultuous half-century that witnessed the rise and dominance of the Neo-Assyrian empire, which was eventually responsible for the northern kingdom invasion, the fall of Samaria and massive destruction in Judah. Isaiah's commission coincided with the beginning of this renewed Assyrian threat (for details of the Assyrian threat in the previous century see comments on 1 Kings 22:1 and 2 Kings 9:14), as Tiglath-Pileser III conducted his first western campaign in 740-738. This campaign targeted Arpad in northern Syria but resulted in tribute being paid by some of the southern states such as Damascus, Tyre, Sidon and Samaria.

1:2. addressing heaven and earth. In other ancient Near Eastern literature the gods would be called as witnesses to an important event. Here the Lord is issuing a formal indictment against Israel, and the nondeified cosmos is called as witness. In one Hittite treaty, after a long list of divine witnesses, the mountains, the rivers, the sea, the Euphrates, heaven and earth, the winds and the clouds are also listed. In the covenant God made with Israel (see comment on Deut 4:26) heaven and earth had been called as witnesses, so it is appropriate here that they be called on to hear the indictment detailing the violation of that covenant.

1:4. accusations of national sin. The *Myth of Erra and Ishum* (eighth-century Babylon) speaks of the destruction of cities that was justified because the people abandoned justice and righteousness, committed atrocities and plotted wicked schemes. Nevertheless, explanations of famous city destructions in the ancient world are generally seen as a result of divine abandonment. The abandonment was usually blamed on either the violations the king had committed or simply on the idea that fate had decreed it.

1:7. fields stripped, laid waste. The devastation of the land was a natural consequence of invasion. Invading armies often lacked an adequate supply line and therefore expected to live off the land they were invading. What they didn't use for their own purposes they destroyed. Not only were the crops burned, but the trampling of the land often crippled the agricultural cycle for several seasons afterward. Sometimes people who were being attacked would even burn their own crops so that the enemy would not have the use of the food they had worked so hard to grow. The elements included in this threat of divine destruction are typical. A well-known section of the *Myth of Erra and Ishum* describes Erra's destructive intentions as including devastating cities and making them a wilderness; destroying mountains, cattle and produce; wiping out the population; putting a fool on the throne; bringing a plague of wild beasts; and leveling the royal palace.

1:8. daughter of Zion. Zion is the name for the mountain on which Jerusalem is situated and represents that cosmic location from which the Lord conquers and reigns. It is therefore also associated with the Davidic covenant and kingship ordained by God. The daughter of Zion would then be the city itself.

1:8. nature of comparison. Small huts were built in fields so that watchmen could stand guard over the fruit that was ready to be harvested. At the end of the harvest these huts would be abandoned and left desolate in a field stripped bare of its produce. So Jerusalem is portrayed as vacant and deserted with nothing left to protect.

1:9. nature of comparison. In the Sodom and Gomorrah account in Genesis 19 these cities are not destroyed by invading armies, but that is not the nature of the comparison here. The totality of the destruction as God's judgment is the emphasis of the text. Once the connection is suggested, verse 10 goes the next step by suggesting that the degree of wickedness is likewise comparable. A just God would be expected to bring comparable judgment for comparable crimes.

1:11. burnt offerings. Burnt offerings usually accompany petition. Many in the ancient world viewed sacrifice as providing food for the gods. If one had a special request to set before the gods, it was judged proper protocol to provide a meal. In Israel even though the burnt offerings were associated with petitions, the "meal for the gods" mentality had been theoretically discarded. As Isaiah and other prophets demonstrate, however, the revised view had not taken hold very firmly and there were frequent lapses into the popular syncre-

tism. The problem with the "feeding the gods" mentality was that it presupposed that God had needs that worshipers could meet and therefore procure his favor.

1:12. trampling of courts. Temples in the ancient world were considered sacred spaces that were protected by closely monitored, restricted access. Admission to the general public was granted only when a sacrifice needed to be offered and then only to the outer court. Entrance to sacred space for anything but holy purpose would be sacrilegious trespassing.

1:13. incense. In the ancient world incense was valued as an accompaniment to sacrifice. Its sweet scent effectively masked any of the unpleasant odors resulting from the performance of the rituals. It was expensive (see comment on Lev 2:1) but was believed to be favored by the gods.

1:13. New Moons and Sabbaths. Keyed to its use of a lunar calendar, ancient Israel marked the first day of the month, with its "new moon" phase, as a festival day (every twenty-nine or thirty days). As on the Sabbath all work was to cease (see Amos 8:5), and there were sacrifices to be made (see comments on Num 28:11-15). The festival continued to be observed in the postexilic period (Ezra 3:5; Neh 10:33). New Moon festivals were also prominent in Mesopotamia from late in the third millennium down to the Neo-Babylonian period in the middle of the first millennium B.C.

1:13. convocations, assemblies, appointed feasts. There were three major festivals that featured pilgrimage gatherings in Jerusalem and several others that would have included more local gatherings. Religious festivals offered frequent opportunity for celebrations, communal meals and social gatherings. What had been designed as a means to praise and honor God, however, was not bringing any pleasure to him.

1:15. spreading hands in prayer. In 2 Chronicles 6:12 Solomon is described as standing with his arms upraised and palms opened upward as he addresses the assembly and prays a dedicatory prayer for the temple. The incantation prayers of Mesopotamian sources, such as that to Ishtar, imply prostration of the supplicant as well as a ritual of raising the hands. Hittite sources suggest similar postures and gestures. Akkadian literature features a form of incantation called the *Shuilla* ("raising of the hand"). For more information see comment on 2 Kings 5:11.

1:15. deities ignoring prayers. The motif of the frustrated supplicant is well known in ancient literature. As an example, in the "Prayer to Every God" found in Ashurbanipal's library at Nineveh, the supplicant goes through a sequence of asking forgiveness for every offense he can imagine, from every deity. He then laments that despite his contrition no deity is willing to take him by the hand or stand by his side—no one hears him. Taking the standpoint of deity, the *Lament over the Destruction of Ur* reports that Anu and Enlil had determined not to heed the petitions for deliverance but were determined to carry out their plans for destruction.

1:16-17. ethical dimension of religion. Doing justice would be a basic requirement that any god would have for any people. In fact the instruction given here could not be more formulaic. These are considered the responsibilities that any civilized society would have. Establishing justice and defending the vulnerable are the hallmarks of a successful king. The only difference between Israel and the rest of the ancient world in this area would concern how these responsibilities related to spiritual obligations. In the ancient Near East the gods had the responsibility of maintaining justice. Part of that came to them for pragmatic reasons: oppressed people would be inclined to bother the gods with their continuous (annoying?) requests for relief. More foundationally they believed that justice was built into the fabric of the cosmos and its laws were under the guardianship of the gods. The difference in the Israelite worldview was that in their belief, justice was built into the very character of God and was an attribute, not just a stewardship. Mesopotamians had the spiritual obligation to please the gods. This was accomplished primarily by rituals but also by not rocking the boat of civilization. Israelites had the spiritual obligation to be Godlike. This was accomplished by ethical behavior and personal holiness. Mesopotamians would have viewed the washing in physical terms accomplished through ritual. Israelites were to accomplish it in spiritual terms through repentance and reformation.

1:18. nature of comparison. The dyes mentioned here are of the most durable and striking type, creating the most noticeable and permanent stains. There is nowhere in the Old Testament or in the ancient Near Eastern literature where red is specifically symbolic of sin, though white is symbolic of purity.

1:22. silver and dross. In the ancient world silver was extracted and assayed through a process called cupellation. In the initial smelting process silver was extracted from lead ores (galena) containing less than 1 percent silver in a given sample. The lead was melted in

shallow vessels made of porous substances such as bone ash or clay. A bellows was then used to blow air across the molten lead, producing lead oxide (litharge). Some of the lead oxide was absorbed by the bone ash, while some could be skimmed off the surface. Ideally the silver would remain. Unfortunately this process had many potential problems. If the temperature was too high or if the sample contained other metals (copper or tin were common), the cupellation would be unsuccessful. In this situation, when the litharge was skimmed off, rather than resulting in silver extraction what remained was tainted silver mixed with other metals and therefore unusable. This unusable product is perhaps what is referred to in the translation as "dross." Another possibility is that the text refers to the assaying process. This involved heating a sample of silver together with large amounts of lead in order to draw off the impurities. One of the possible results of the assaying process was that the quantity of lead would be insufficient to draw off the impurities, rendering the silver useless. Rather than being purified, then, the silver would be in worse shape than before the process. Perhaps this process is envisioned by the text, and the silver becomes this useless junk. The assaying process can be repeated and may eventually succeed (see v. 25).

1:22. choice wine. Many consider the beverage referred to here to be beer rather than wine because of the related term in Akkadian. The most common variety of beer was made from barley malt, but other types were made from emmer or even dates. There were many varieties of wine, and some were valued more highly than others. The library of Ashurbanipal contained a text that named the ten best wines (pure wine from Izalla was considered the best).

1:23. orphans and widows in courts. A major aspect of Israelite legal tradition involved making provision for groups classified as weak or poor: widows, orphans and the resident alien (see Ex 22:22; Deut 10:18-19; 24:17-21). Concern for the needy is evident in Mesopotamian legal collections as early as the mid-third millennium and generally addresses protection of rights and guarantee of justice in the courts. Based on very early statements in the prologues of the Ur-Nammu Code and the Code of Hammurabi it is clear that kings considered it part of their role as "wise rulers" to protect the rights of the poor, the widow and the orphan. Similarly, in the Egyptian *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* the plaintiff begins by identifying his judge as "the father of the orphan, the husband of the widow." This reflects a concern throughout the ancient Near East that the vulnerable classes be provided for.

1:25. nature of imagery. For identification of dross see comment on 1:22.

1:26. judges/counselors. Since this section has to do with justice in society and in the court system, the judges here are most likely judicial functionaries rather than the deliverers of the Judges period. This would also be supported by the parallel term "counselors," which is never used to describe the deliverers in the book of Judges. The counselors were responsible for helping the king to formulate and carry out policies. The judges were responsible for helping the king to formulate and enforce law. National policy and the justice system are under indictment here.

1:29. sacred oaks and gardens. Gardens in the ancient Near East were often parks of fruit and shade trees, arboretums serving as outdoor shrines or providing comfortable surroundings for sacred enclosures. Sacred trees played a significant role in popular religion of the day. These popular beliefs would have viewed stone and tree as potential divine dwellings. In Canaanite religion they were believed to be symbols of fertility (see Deut 12:2; Jer 3:9; Hos 4:13), though there is very little in the archaeological or literary remains of the Canaanites that would clarify the role of sacred trees. Excavations at Late Bronze Kition have uncovered a temple that featured a sacred grove with sixty tree pits.

2:1-5

Jerusalem in Days to Come

2:2. mountain of the temple. Topographically, Jerusalem is elevated above its surroundings, so that one always had to climb up to the city. Additionally, the temple is located on the highest ground in the city, so one goes up to the temple from other locations in the city. This oracle uses these topographical data to proclaim the future political elevation of the city. The Weidner Chronicle declares that the city of Babylon should be elevated and exalted in all lands. In addition, Assyrian building inscriptions often talk about elevating the temple by restoring it and increasing its height. In Babylonian literature the Marduk Prophecy (from several centuries before Isaiah) announces the future elevation of Babylon with the temple doubled in height. That text also mentions returning the scattered ones (by which it means the statues of the gods that have been disenfranchised from their tem-

ples). It continues by describing a period of peace, justice and prosperity, including the dismantling of fortresses. This general language of city restoration and elevation is therefore familiar in the rhetoric of the ancient Near East.

2:2. all nations coming. Texts as early as 2000 B.C. speak of the universal appeal that will characterize a new temple. Gudea speaks of the temple he is building to Ningirsu as attracting people from distant and foreign lands who will gather together to honor the deity. Temples are where oracles are given to decide legal disputes and to inquire of the deity regarding courses of action that should be taken. It is not unusual for foreign people, even kings, to travel great distances to consult a deity. The Persian king Cambyses, for instance, received an oracle from the famous Egyptian shrine of Leto in Buto.

2:4. swords into plowshares. Rather than "plowshares" that turn over the dirt as they plow, this may refer to the metal tip of the plow that breaks up the earth and scratches out a furrow. This tip is about seven inches long. However, this same Hebrew word is used in 2 Kings 6:5, where it appears to refer to some sort of ax. Since the sword is "broken up," it is possible that the resulting product is metal shards that could then be put to various uses.

2:4. spears into pruning hooks. Pruning hooks are the small knives used to remove leaves and new shoots from the grapevines. Archaeological samples found are simply thin, short pieces of metal with a curved hook at the end sharpened on the inside edge as a sickle would be. The shape is reminiscent of the tangtype spearheads that had been popular during the Bronze Age.

2:6-22

The Coming Day of the Lord

2:6. superstitions, divination. The ancient worldview was heavily encumbered with superstitions of all sorts. For centuries omens that identified many occurrences or circumstances as favorable or unfavorable had been observed and recorded. The disposition of the gods toward an individual could only be assessed by the good or bad things that happened to him or her. Demonic forces were believed to be abroad and active, so prophylactic and apotropaic rituals were pursued to combat them. Spells and curses were cast by experts in magic, and the spirits of the dead were believed to wander the earth. Divination was the science of being able to interpret the omens and formulate incantations that would be effective in dispelling the powers that threatened them. For more information see comments on Deuteronomy 18.

2:7. full of horses and chariots. Assyrian chariots were large, carrying four men and being pulled by four horses. The chariotry corps and cavalry represented the cutting edge of military technology. Vast economic resources were required to import the animals, build the chariots and train the horsemen and charioteers (for an indication of the expense see 1 Kings 10:29). Assyrian military supremacy was dependent on the horses, and even the kings worried about the supply of horses and gathering the necessary fodder to care for the horses. Careful census figures were kept of the types of horses available, and horses were often collected in tribute or captured in raids. Reliefs show great care taken with the horses, and the army on campaign traveled with principal mounts as well as remounts for the cavalry.

2:8. idols. Idols came in a variety of shapes and sizes in the ancient Near East. They were typically carved of wood and overlaid with hammered-out sheets of silver or gold and then clothed in the finest attire. Basically human in appearance (except those from Egypt, which combined human and animal characteristics), they had distinctive, even formalized, poses, clothing and hairstyles. Images of deity in the ancient Near East were where the deity became present in a special way to the extent that the cult statue became the god (when the god so favored his worshipers), even though it was not the only manifestation of the god. Rituals were performed to bring the god to life in its idol. As a result of this linkage, spells, incantations and other magical acts could be performed on the image in order to threaten, bind or compel the deity. In contrast other rites related to the image were intended to aid the deity or care for the deity. The idols then represent a worldview, a concept of deity that was not consistent with how Yahweh had revealed himself. The idol was not the deity, but the deity was thought to inhabit the image and manifest its presence and will through the image. Archaeologists have found very few of the life-sized images that the texts describe, but there are renderings of them that allow accurate knowledge of details.

2:10. splendor of the majesty of deity. In the ancient world a bright or flaming aura surrounding deity is the norm. In Egyptian literature it is depicted as the winged sun disk accompanied by storm clouds. Akkadian uses

the term *melammu* to describe this visible representation of the glory of deity. It is especially evident in the divine warrior motif where the deity unveils his glory as he fights for his people (for more information on the divine warrior see comments on Ex 15:3; Josh 3:17; 6:21-24; 10:11; 1 Sam 4:3-4; 7:10). Akkadian literature occasionally evidences the same connection as here, when the word for fear or dread is associated with the *melammu.*

2:12. Day of the Lord. See sidebar at Joel 2.

2:13. cedars of Lebanon, oaks of Bashan. These two types of tree were valued for their size, beauty, strength and durability. They would be used in the building projects (such as gates and palaces) that were the sources of pride for nations and in which they would put their trust.

2:15. towers and walls. Walls of this period were solid (in contrast to the casemate walls of the previous age) and could be made of mud brick, fieldstone or ashlar hewn stone. While towers and walls were features of fortified cities, there were also many garrison fortresses built along trade routes and borders. In Israel both the fortresses and towers were rectangular. Examples at Kadesh Barnea and Horvat Uza measure between twenty and twenty-five thousand square feet. Since city walls have not been preserved to their original height, it is difficult to say how high they were. A width of fifteen to twenty feet was common, and judging from their massive foundations and the length of ladders used for scaling the walls, a height of thirty to forty feet would not be unusual. The walls at Lachish were about fifty feet high. Assyrian inscriptions usually give the height in courses of brick. The wall of Sennacherib's Nineveh is said to have been constructed of 180 courses of brick (sixty to seventy feet?). At the time of Isaiah Sargon's capital city at Khorsabad had a wall nearly one hundred feet thick with 150 towers circling the 750-acre city.

2:16. ships. Trade by means of seagoing vessels was already taking place in the first half of the third millennium B.C. By mid-second millennium a fleet of ships from Ugarit numbered 150. Excavations of a sunken merchant ship (off the coast of Uluburun, Turkey) from the period give a good idea of the variety of items being shipped. Trading ships of the first millennium were single-masted with a crow's nest and could feature either one or two banks of oars. A typical length would be about fifty feet, though larger ones are known.

2:19. effects of theophany. In the ancient Near East the trembling of the earth is an indication of the divine involvement in battle. Additionally, the dread of a deity as a divine warrior was often believed to precede a powerful, successful army into battle. Egyptian texts attribute this terror to Amun-Re in the inscriptions of Thutmose III, and Hittite, Assyrian and Babylonian texts all have their divine warriors who strike terror into the hearts of the enemy.

2:20-21. rodents and bats, flight to caves. A Sumerian Hymn of Enheduanna to the goddess Inanna from the third millennium depicts the gods fluttering away like bats to their caves from the goddess's terrible presence. This suggests the possibility that in these verses it is the idols being carried to caves and crags by the rodents (the flight of men has already been reported in v. 19). Just as men have fled from before the glory of the Lord, so do the idols, but, incapable of moving on their own, they are transported by the lowliest creatures.

3:1—4:1
Judgment on Jerusalem and Its Women

3:1. reality of siege. Siege warfare was designed to isolate a city and create a blockade that would eventually force a surrender. With the enemy camped around the city, the fields could not be harvested for their food supply. No one could get in to bring in food, so the people in the city had to live on whatever had been stockpiled in the city. If the water source for the city was a well or spring outside the city walls, the siege would be short, for the cisterns would quickly run dry. Jerusalem had a water supply that could be accessed from inside the city walls (see comment on 2 Chron 32:3). Support is typically viewed in terms of human leaders. The "resources" to survive a siege would be found in capable leadership that could keep morale high and successfully manage food rationing.

3:2-3. classes of leadership. The list of leadership resources here is fairly extensive, covering the military, clan leadership, religious personnel (both legitimate and illegitimate) and political advisors.

3:5. status of the elderly. In Israelite society the oldest active male was the head of the household. He typically represented the family in the community and made the decisions for the family. As a result the senior members of the family usually commanded a high degree of respect and honor.

3:6. cloak of leadership. The cloak was a basic piece of clothing that even the poor were expected to own. It was considered essential

enough that it was forbidden to keep overnight a man's cloak taken in pledge (see comment on Ex 22:26-27). Though this passage may suggest that the situation had gotten so bad that hardly anyone had cloaks (and therefore possession of one distinguished a person), there is also something special about a king's cloak. In Assyrian texts of this period the cloak of the king figured prominently in certain rituals, particularly the substitute king ritual. When there were omens suggesting that the king's life was in danger, a substitute king would be designated, who would take the king's place by being garbed in his cloak and generally suffer the consequences. While there is no suggestion of a substitute king ritual here, there may have been an important function for the cloak.

3:16. ornaments on ankles. Ankle bracelets were solid rings usually made of bronze. The word is also used of the irons used to hobble camels. Some burials of the Iron Age evidence arm and ankle rings still on the body.

3:17. sores and baldness. The translation "bring sores" is very uncertain. Another possibility is that it is another expression for inflicting baldness. While many translations suggest the shaving of the entire head, the forehead seems to be specifically indicated by the Hebrew word. In Mesopotamia shaving off half the hair was used as a punishment intended to bring public humiliation. Additionally, a particular style of haircut was used to designate a slave.

3:18-23. ancient finery. The NIV's "headbands" (v. 18) have now been identified as sun ornaments, while the crescent necklaces are moon ornaments. Many of the terms used admit of various interpretations. For instance, "perfume bottles" (v. 20) is highly interpretive, and though perfume bottles have been found by archaeologists, they could hardly have been worn as jewelry. Others have suggested some sort of amulet to parallel the next term. Information about jewelry in the ancient world comes from a number of different sources. Some literary works make reference to the wearing of various ornaments. Other written sources include inventories (such as one found at Mari) and lists of gifts or tribute. The pieces that are referred to can sometimes be matched up with pictorial representations in reliefs and paintings or with archaeological finds. But many words cannot confidently be matched with objects.

4:1. offer of the seven women. It is to be presumed that these women have lost their husbands and sons, and are therefore left socially defenseless even though they are not without means. This was a common aftermath of war. It was contractually and legally the husband's responsibility to provide food and clothing. These women are not looking for financial provision and would certainly be willing to bypass the usual conventions of bride price. Their need for familial association may simply stem from social mandates or, in the worst cases, may reflect the desire for a household for children that have been conceived through rape by enemy soldiers.

4:2-6

Future Glory

4:5-6. imagery. The cloud of smoke and fire is reminiscent of the pillar that offered the Israelites guidance and protection in the wilderness. In the ancient world a bright or flaming aura surrounding deity is the norm. In Egyptian literature it is depicted as the winged sun disk accompanied by storm clouds. Akkadian uses the term *melammu* to describe this visible representation of the glory of deity, which in turn is enshrouded in smoke or cloud. In Canaanite mythology it has been suggested the *melammu* concept is expressed by the word *'anan*, the same Hebrew word here translated "cloud," but the occurrences are too few and obscure for confidence. In any case, the pillar here would then be one beacon; smoke being visible in the daytime, while the inner flame it covered would glow through at night.

5:1-7

Parable of the Vineyard

5:1-2. parables and allegories in the ancient Near East. There is continued discussion about whether this should be categorized as a parable or an allegory, the distinction being how broad a comparison is intended by the tale. Parables are known from ancient Near Eastern literature as early as the Sumerian period, and a few are available from the Neo-Assyrian period. The metaphor of a city as an unproductive plant is known from the *Myth of Erra and Ishum* (copies date to the eighth century), in which Marduk laments Babylon. He says that he filled it with seeds like a pine cone, but no fruit came from it, and he planted it like an orchard but never tasted its fruit. For more information see the comment on Ezekiel 17:1.

5:1-6. vineyard preparation and upkeep. Grapes were among the basic staple products of the ancient Near East and therefore the care necessary for a vineyard was well known. In the rocky and hilly terrain of Israel special

care had to be taken to preserve the soil and the moisture necessary to produce good fruit. As the rocks were cleared from the hillside, the stones were used to create terraces to level the ground. This would prevent water drainage and soil erosion. More stones were used to build huts and watchtowers that would be used to protect the crop when it neared harvest time. Constant hoeing between the rows of vine was necessary to prevent weeds from springing up and sapping off the water supply in the soil. Various irrigation techniques were used to assure sufficient groundwater. If the ground did not have adequate moisture or if the vines were not pruned back, the resulting crop would be small and sour. Finally, some of the stones were also used for winepresses and cisterns on the site so that the grapes could be processed without risking damage during transportation.

5:8-30

Woe to Israel

5:8. oppressive real estate development. Expansion of real estate holdings in the ancient world was usually at someone else's expense. Bad harvests over several seasons could necessitate giving up ownership over property in order to pay off or work off debt. In Israel this was a theological as well as an economic crisis. Since God had given them the land as a benefit of the covenant, each family considered its landholdings as its little share in the covenant. Therefore, what otherwise would be a financial tragedy (often with an oppressive dimension) also served to deprive family members of their part in the covenant. For more information see comments on Leviticus 25. Additionally, the decision-making body in any community was comprised of landowners. The individual who obtained all the land rights in the community would have the power to do whatever he wanted.

5:10. normal levels of production. A vineyard would typically be expected to yield at least one thousand gallons of wine per acre. Harvests of grain in irrigated areas across the ancient Near East yielded a normal seed to crop ratio of about one to ten (though higher yields are attested in the literature). Therefore a homer of seed would usually be expected to yield ten homers of grain. Here the ratio is reversed as ten to one (an ephah is about one-tenth of a homer). The yields represented here, then, are meager fractions of that normally expected.

5:12. musical instruments. These are all typical musical instruments of the time and are attested in ancient Near Eastern texts, reliefs and paintings as early as the third millennium B.C. There is still some disagreement among authorities as to which of the Hebrew words in this passage ought to be translated "harp" and which one as "lyre." The one the NIV translates "lyre" is a ten-stringed instrument, while the one translated "harp" is thought to have had fewer strings. Both are hand-held with frames made of wood. The tambourine has been identified in archaeological reliefs as the tambour, a small drum (leather stretched over a hoop) that would not have the tinny rattle sound of modern tambourines. The instrument translated as flute is likely a double pipe made of either bronze or reed.

5:14. grave. The grave was understood as the doorway to the netherworld (Hebrew *sheol).* As the entryway it was considered part of Sheol, so the context must determine whether an author is referring to the place of burial or the world of departed spirits. Sheol was not a pleasant place. There were no possessions, memory, knowledge or joy. It was not viewed as a place where judgment or punishment took place, though it was considered an act of God's judgment to be sent there rather than remaining alive. Subsequently it is inaccurate to translate Sheol as "hell," for the latter is by definition a place of punishment. The Israelite understanding of the netherworld was more similar to the concepts found in Mesopotamia than to those found in Egypt. For more information see comment on 14:9. The idea of Sheol swallowing or devouring the wicked is paralleled in the Egyptian Book of the Dead. As the heart of the individual is weighed, the composite chaos monster with crocodile head stands by expectantly, prepared to devour those who fail the test.

5:22. alcoholic beverage. A wide variety of alcoholic beverages was available in the ancient world. Wine (from honey, dates or grapes) and beer were the most common. What is classed today as "hard liquor" (requiring a distillation process) was not yet known. The two terms used in this verse may refer respectively to grape wine and date wine, but it is difficult to be certain. The mixing that is mentioned here involves mixing in herbs, spices or oils.

5:23. judges bribed in ancient Near East. As evidenced by the preface to the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1750 B.C.) and the statements made by the eloquent peasant in Egyptian wisdom literature (c. 2100 B.C.), the standard for behavior by those in authority is to protect the rights of the poor and weak in society. True justice (see Lev 19:15) is expected of kings, of-

ficials and local magistrates. In fact the world turned upside down theme found in the book of Judges and in prophetic literature (1:23) describes a society in which "laws are enacted, but ignored" (for example in the Egyptian *Visions of Neferti* [c. 1900 B.C.]). An efficiently administered state in the ancient Near East depends on the reliability of the law and its enforcement. To this end every organized state creates a bureaucracy of judges and local officials to deal with civil and criminal cases. It is their task to hear testimony, investigate charges made, evaluate evidence and execute judgment (detailed in the Middle Assyrian Laws and the Code of Hammurabi). There are some cases, however, that require the attention of the king (see 2 Sam 15:2-4) and appeals are occasionally forwarded on to that highest magistrate (as in the Mari texts). The temptation for judges and government officials to accept bribes is found in every time and place (see Prov 6:35; Mic 7:3). Taking bribes becomes almost institutionally accepted in bureaucratic situations as competing parties attempt to outmaneuver each other (see Ezra 4:4-5; Mic 3:11). However, at least on the ideal level, arguments and penalties are imposed to eliminate or at least lessen this problem. Thus Hammurabi's Code 5 places harsh penalties on any judge who alters one of his decisions (presumably because of a bribe), including stiff fines and permanent removal from the bench. Exodus 23:8 forbids the taking of bribes and the perversion of justice as an offense against God, the weak and innocent, and the entire community (see Amos 5:12).

5:26. banner, whistling. The banner, or standard, was used as a means of calling out an army of a particular territory or indicating the place where a muster was taking place or a camp was located. It often featured an insignia of the tribe or division. The word translated "whistle" can also refer to a hiss. For the significance here see the comment on 7:18.

5:27. significance of belt and sandal thong. Neo-Assyrian military uniform consisted of a knee-length kilt fastened by a broad leather belt. Many of the infantry went barefoot, but the cavalry was equipped with knee-high soft leather boots held on by long crisscrossed thongs.

5:28. bows, arrows, horses' hooves, chariots. Horses were not shod by the Assyrians, so horses with hard hooves were the more desirable, especially for the rocky terrain of Syro-Palestine. The (composite) bow was the main offensive weapon of the Assyrian army. Arrowheads were made of various materials including bone, horn and various metals. Chariots could accommodate four people and had heavy six or eight spoke wheels.

5:29. lion behavior. The lion would typically roar as a warning in a territorial confrontation. The growl is appropriate to the seizing of prey. Both images are reflected here.

6:1-13
The Throne Vision and Isaiah's Commissioning

6:1. chronology. Uzziah is generally supposed to have died in 739. This is a critical juncture in history. In 740-738 Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III made his first campaign into the west. This is the beginning of a serious military threat that will eventually bring about the downfall of the northern kingdom, Israel, the destruction of the capital city of Samaria (along with many other cities of Israel and Judah) and the deportation of large segments of the population. The Assyrians are on the brink of establishing the empire that will dominate the ancient Near East for over a century. For more information on Uzziah's reign see comments on 2 Chronicles 26.

6:1. throne. The central Holy of Holies was viewed as the throne room of the Lord, so it is logical that the vision is set in the temple complex. The ark is portrayed as the footstool of his throne, and the cherubim typically flank the throne. This is, of course, the invisible throne of the invisible deity. For more information on thrones see comments on 2 Chronicles 3:10-13; 9:17-19.

6:1. train of robe filling temple. The word translated "train" elsewhere (and probably here) refers to the hem. It is the richly decorated and distinctive border around the high priestly robe (see comments on Ex 28:31-35). The hem was used as a mark of identity for people of rank such as priests and kings. In ancient Near Eastern iconography deities were also portrayed with such garments. The edge of the cloth was embroidered, and a fringe of three- or four-inch-long tassels trimmed the skirt by the ankles. The huge size of deity is common in the ancient Near East. For instance, at the Syrian temple in 'Ain Dara footprints more than three feet long are carved into the stone slabs leading into the entrance hall.

6:2. seraphs. This is the only place in Scripture where a supernatural creature is designated as a seraph. The serpents that plagued the Israelites in the wilderness, however, also go by that designation, and Isaiah twice refers to flying serpents (NIV: "darting" 14:29; 30:6). Since supernatural creatures are often portrayed as

composite (see comment on Gen 3:24), there is therefore good reason to think of the seraphs as winged serpents. Since the Hebrew root *sarap* is usually associated with "burning," there is also good reason to associate these creatures with fire. Ancient Near Eastern literature offers some support for these portrayals. Fiery serpents are well known in Egyptian art and literature. There the serpent, or uraeus, is a symbol of royalty and authority. It adorns the crown of Pharaoh and sometimes is pictured with wings (usually either two or four). It is not unusual for them to have hands, feet or faces. Serpents in an upright position with wings also decorate the throne of Tutankhamen. Many seals decorated with winged uraei have been found in excavations in Palestine dating to this period, so we know that the Israelites were familiar with this motif. Examples of six-winged creatures are not so widely attested. A relief from Tell Halaf, however, from approximately this period portrays a human-shaped figure with six wings.

6:4. effects of seraph calls. In Akkadian texts as well as in Amos 9:1 the shaking of doorposts or thresholds indicates the beginning of demolition. If this was the case, the smoke could be the result of destructive forces at work. The cries of the seraphs, however, are not easily taken as warning of imminent destruction (a consequence of God's holiness being compromised?). It is probably better to see smoke and trembling doorways as accompanying the theophany. This same word for smoke is used in 4:5.

6:7. purification of lips. Mesopotamian rituals often feature the purification of lips as symbolic of the purification of the person. It is viewed as a prerequisite, especially for diviner priests, before they may appear before the divine council and report what they have witnessed.

6:7. atonement. Translations have struggled with this term (for instance, some render it "forgiven"). For information on the ritual concept see the comment on Leviticus 1:4. The same verb occurs in Akkadian ritual literature referring to "wiping" away ritual impurity and is used specifically in the purification of the mouth. In one Old Babylonian prayer the diviner wipes his mouth with resin in preparation for appearing before the assembly of the gods. In Babylonian incantation texts fire is commonly seen as a purifying element. One incantation series is titled *Shurpu* ("burning") and is concerned with removing ritual offense or uncleanness.

6:8. us. The familiar picture of a heavenly throne surrounded by the heavenly council is well known from the Ugaritic texts (most notably the Epic of Keret), though this Canaanite council is made up of the gods of the pantheon. Examples occur also in the tenth century building inscription of Yehimilk from Byblos and the Karatepe stele of Azitawadda. In the Akkadian *Enuma Elish* it is the assembly of the gods that appoints Marduk as their head. Fifty gods made up this assembly with seven in the inner council. In Israelite belief the gods were replaced by angels or spirits—the sons of God or the heavenly host.

6:9-10. role of the prophet. The description of eyes and ears that do not function as they should or a heart that is hard or heavy matches that which occurs elsewhere in medical texts or in contexts of fear. In 1 Samuel 25 Nabal suffers some sort of paralysis, stroke or heart attack, and his heart becomes as stone. In a Babylonian wisdom hymn a sufferer describes his fear-induced paralysis as resulting in eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear. It is difficult to know whether the paralysis that meets Isaiah's messages comes from spiritual sickness or from fear. The prophet's role was to deliver the message regardless of whether there was any response or not. If the message did not result in response, it would at least establish clearly the people's guilt.

7:1-25

Immanuel

7:1. chronology. The chronology of the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah is very complex. Nevertheless, the invasion referred to in this verse can be fairly confidently dated to 735. By 734 Tiglath-Pileser III had begun responding to the problems here in the west, and the coalition would not have felt at liberty to take such aggressive action.

7:1. political situation. Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III was occupied with Urartu and Media between 737 and 735. During this time the western states were working to put together a coalition that might resist Assyrian incursions. Rezin (see next entry) had most likely played a major role in bringing Pekah to the throne of Samaria (see comments on Pekah in 2 Kings 15). It is suspected that the attack against Jerusalem was related to Ahaz's pro-Assyrian (or at least neutral) position. The siege was intended to result in replacing Ahaz with an anti-Assyrian representative on the throne, who would then join in the coalition.

7:1. Rezin. Known to the Assyrians as Raqianu, which most likely represented the Aramaic name Radyan, Rezin ruled in Damascus from at least 738 (when he is named as paying

tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III) to the fall of Damascus in 732.

7:3. location. Hezekiah's tunnel had not yet been constructed at this time. Water was conducted from the Gihon spring (in the Kidron Valley on the east side of the city) toward the south through an aqueduct that brought the water to a reservoir at the southwestern tip of the city. This aqueduct is known as the Siloam Channel and in biblical times went by the name Shiloah (see 8:6). Presumably the waters of the reservoir (Pool of Siloam) would have been periodically released into an area below this to provide water for laundering. The road to the Washerman's Field would likely have traveled through the Kidron Valley. This would be a good place to find Ahaz if he were inspecting the water supply of the city to see how it could be secured for use inside the city in the eventuality of a siege.

7:6. son of Tabeel. Though nothing is known historically of this individual, the name Tabeel is Aramaic and thus suggests someone in the royal household (likely of Davidic lineage) whose mother was perhaps a princess from the area of Aram. Such an individual would be more likely to be a sympathizer with Aramean causes. Another possibility that has been suggested is that this is a reference to Tubail (=Ethbaal) the king of Tyre, who also had paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser in 738.

7:8. chronology. From 735, the date of these events, sixty-five years would stretch to 670 B.C. This has seemed strange to some interpreters since Ephraim suffered significant territorial reduction in 733, and Samaria was destroyed and the people deported by 721. Esarhaddon was near the end of his reign in 670. He had successfully invaded Egypt in 671 and had a number of other campaigns to the west during this time period. So far, however, there is no indication of deportations into or out of Israel during his reign.

7:11. divine sign. There are a number of cases of signs being given from deity in the Old Testament. The most similar examples are found in 1 Samuel 2:34 and 2 Kings 19:29. In these instances the sign relates to the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy. Signs given by deity in the larger ancient Near Eastern context would typically be connected to omens. Behind the omens was the belief that there was an interconnectedness that stretched across all boundaries. The omens were related to historical events the way that symptoms are related to the onset of disease. Historical events were therefore considered to be related to corresponding happenings or phenomena in the natural world. For example, the gods wrote their signs in the heavens or on the kidneys or liver of sacrificed animals. These signs would not only portend coming events but would be thought of as part of those events.

7:11. depths and heights. Babylonian texts also speak of the range of signs (omens) in heaven and on earth, as their diviners tried to make use of all possible sources of information concerning what the gods were up to.

7:14. portentous names. Names were generally believed to be related to the character and destiny of the individual. In Egypt throne names were given (usually five of them) that embodied the claims, hopes and dreams of Pharaoh. Babies were sometimes named to reflect on a situation at the time of their birth (Gen 29—30; 1 Sam 4:21).

7:15. curds and honey. "Curds" would be better understood as a butter type product, since Proverbs 30:33 shows that it is produced by churning, not by coagulation or fermentation. In Assyrian and Babylonian texts the word used here in the Hebrew text is identified as a product called "ghee"—a refined form of butterfat—that is sweet and does not spoil as easily as other dairy products. It is the liquid produced when butter from cow's milk is melted, boiled and strained. In the Mesopotamian texts this product is most frequently paired up with honey in a variety of texts including ritual texts, medical texts and descriptions of food products. It was one of many products that were used for libation offerings for the gods. Honey is often a reference to the syrup from dates or figs. Bee honey was available when found, but bees were not yet domesticated for honey production. Honey and ghee were nourishing products that traveled well and would suit the needs of someone living off the land rather than farming the land. They were mixed together and used as a condiment on either confectionery date cakes or the more common wheat cakes.

7:16. fate of two kings. The land of Pekah was the northern kingdom of Israel. In 733 the Assyrians greatly reduced the territory of Israel, leaving only the capital, Samaria, and its environs. The remainder of the country was annexed and over thirteen thousand people were deported. Pekah himself was killed in a conspiracy led by Hoshea, his successor, and backed by the Assyrians (as indicated in Tiglath-Pileser's inscriptions). The pro-Assyrian Hoshea paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser and accepted vassal status. He would reign until the final overthrow of the northern kingdom in 721—a likely time to consider the boy referred to in this verse as knowing good and evil (about age thirteen). The land of Rezin was

Aram, with its capital city, Damascus. The Aramean state was annexed by Assyria in 732, Damascus was overthrown and Rezin was executed.

7:17. Neo-Assyrian empire. The Neo-Assyrian empire was inaugurated soon after Tiglath-Pileser III's accession to the throne in 745. It was not to be overthrown until 612, when Nineveh fell to the alliance of the Medes and Babylonians. Though significant deterioration can be seen as early as 630, this still represents over a century of domination over a large expanse of the Near East. For a decade or so this even included Egypt. The major Assyrian kings, Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, are known from the biblical text as well as from many documents recovered from the period, including royal annals and chronicles from several of them. The empire expanded in all four directions: absorbing Urartu to the north, the Medes to the east, Babylonia and Elam to the south and Syro-Palestine to the west. At its height it included all or part of the modern countries of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Egypt. Assyria's reputation as a militaristic regime is supported by extensive documentation and stands as its historical legacy. Its strategy of psychological warfare included terrifying rhetoric, brutal destructions and carefully chosen examples of cruel torture. Its expansion was fueled by the potential for economic gain, which would come through the plunder, tribute and tariffs that would result from control of trade and the trade routes. For Assyrian activity in this period see comments on 1:1; 6:1; and 7:1.

7:18. flies and bees imagery. The word translated "whistle" can also refer to a hiss. Part of the lore of beekeeping maintained that a swarm could be lured out of its hive to another location by a whistling sound. Attacking armies are compared to flies and bees in Homer's *Iliad* as well.

7:19. imagery. This verse simply continues the imagery of bees by listing the places where bees are naturally inclined to make their hives.

7:20. shaving captives. In Assyrian nomenclature "barber" could be used as a divine title. Here the function is attributed to Yahweh. While many translations suggest the shaving of the entire head, the forehead seems to be specifically indicated by the Hebrew word. In Mesopotamia shaving off half the hair was used as a punishment intended to bring public humiliation. Additionally, a particular style of haircut was used to designate a slave. Most commentators believe that "the hair of your legs" is a euphemism for pubic hair.

7:23. value of vines. It is difficult to determine whether the text makes reference to a thousand vines that would be bought or sold for a shekel each (an exorbitant price), or, more reasonably, to a vineyard housing a thousand vines whose annual produce would bring a thousand shekels. The latter understanding would find support in Song of Songs 8:11.

7:24-25. farmland to pasture. Cattle and flocks could be devastating to agricultural land. Their movements would trample the soil, and their grazing would defoliate it, eventually leading to massive erosion of the topsoil and depletion of water sources.

8:1-10

Assyrian Invasion

8:1. scroll. If the writing instrument used is an engraving tool (see next entry), the material must be something that requires etching or incision—usually suggesting stone or clay that will be baked. The word used to describe the writing material is used only one other time in the Old Testament, Isaiah 3:23, where the NIV translates "mirrors" in the middle of a list of clothing. Akkadian texts list cylinder seals (worn around the neck) among other items of women's garments. These were worn as amulets to ward off demonic forces. They were inscribed with the name of the individual and often with artistic decoration as well. In Israel stamp seals were typically used, so there is no indication of what the word for cylinder seal would be, though cylinder seals have been found in Syro-Palestine and were well known there. Since cylinder seals were engraved with the name of the individual, and here an official document is being engraved with the name of an individual (including the preposition, not represented in the NIV's translation, that typically precedes the name on stamp seals as well as on Aramaic cylinder seals), it is possible that a cylinder seal is being made here, though the Hebrew word cannot be identified with any confidence (there is no known West Semitic technical term for cylinder seal). In the Neo-Assyrian period large cylinder seals (one, for instance, that is seven and one-half inches long) were used for seals of the gods. All of this information would fit well with the usage in 3:23 and with Isaiah's emphasis on significant names. Assyrian dream texts show an interesting relationship between a seal being given in a dream and information about a future offspring. One line says that if someone in his dream gives him an

inscribed seal, he will have a "name" or a son.
8:1. ordinary pen. The term for this tool is used only one other time in the Old Testament, Exodus 32:4, where it is used in the manufacture of the golden calf. It is therefore assumed to be some sort of drill or chisel. Exodus 32:16 uses the verbal root related to this noun to describe the inscription of the Ten Commandments on the tablets. Cylinder seal artisans used drills, including a "fine drill." The word translated "ordinary" here, when modifying a person, refers to humanity's fragile mortality. Perhaps here the use of a fragile drill is intended to suggest high-quality workmanship.
8:1-2. document. The presence of witnesses suggests an official document being drawn up. While some have suggested a marriage contract (because of v. 3), given the prominence of designating a name, something referring to a birth or naming appears more likely.
8:3. prophetess. The title "prophetess" is never used simply to designate the wife of a prophet but consistently for a female prophet. While we need not doubt that this prophetess was Isaiah's wife, she must also be regarded as a woman who functioned prophetically in her own right. Prophetesses, though somewhat rare, are known from Mesopotamia. The Mari texts from Syria in the early second millennium B.C. give evidence of both males and females in this position. Women are also known to have spoken out as prophetesses during the reign of Esarhaddon of Assyria. The females appeared to have served in the same role as the male prophets.
8:3. portentous names. See comment on 7:14.
8:4. plundering of Damascus and Samaria. Certainly the wealth of Damascus was carried off at the fall of the city in 732. It is more difficult to determine when one might consider the plundering of Samaria to have taken place. Second Kings 17:3 reports that Hoshea paid tribute to Shalmaneser, but this is not reported as a plundering of Samaria. It is more likely that the plundering should be associated with the fall of Samaria in 721.
8:6. waters of Shiloah. Hezekiah's tunnel had not yet been constructed at this time. Water was conducted from the Gihon Spring (in the Kidron Valley on the east side of the city) toward the south through an aqueduct that brought the water to a reservoir at the southwestern tip of the city. This aqueduct is known as the Siloam Channel and in biblical times went by the name Shiloah.
8:6. Rezin. See comment on 7:1.
8:7. flood waters overflowing its channels. This common metaphor is known as early as the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin (beginning of second millennium), in which the invading foe is likened to a flood, a deluge that overflowed the banks of the canals and destroyed cities.
8:8. Judah's treatment by Tiglath-Pileser. Tiglath-Pileser's records do not record any action taken against Judah in the campaigns of 734-732. Either that record is not preserved or verse eight offers a longer view of the eventual Assyrian invasion of Judah by Sargon and especially Sennacherib. The longer view is to be preferred, since the people of Judah would not have been "rejoicing over Rezin" (v. 6) until after the 732 campaign when Damascus was destroyed.
8:9-10. threat against the nations. Though many interpreters have attributed these words to Judah, it is more likely the threat of the Assyrians. It was a common strategy for the Assyrians to claim that the deities of their rebellious vassals had abandoned them because they had broken the oaths that had secured their loyalty to the Assyrians. Examples exist as early as Tukulti-Ninurta and as late as Esarhaddon.

8:11-22

Response to the Prophetic Message

8:14. imagery. Sanctuary and rock imagery go together in Psalms as well (such as Ps 18:1-2). The temple provided sanctuary for people in trouble, and it was built on a foundation rock. In spiritual imagery they would also then speak of God as their foundation rock. The trap and snare are used for hunting birds and small animals, though the latter more likely refers to a throwing stick, perhaps like a boomerang.
8:16. sealed documents in ancient world. Scrolls could be sealed either by tying a string around them and sealing the knot with clay or by placing them in a jar and sealing the cover. The clay or the seal around the lid would be impressed with the owner's seal. Mesopotamia used cylinder seals, Egypt used scarab seals, and Syro-Palestine used stamp seals. Tablets would be sealed inside a clay envelope, which would be impressed with the owner's seal. The seals were intended to ensure the integrity of the contents. They warned against tampering and, if intact, attested to the authenticity of the document. For more information see Nehemiah 9:38.
8:19. consultation of the dead. Because of the well-developed ancestor cult pervading much of the ancient Near East (evident, for instance, in the emphasis on the role of the male heir to

care for the father's shrine in Ugaritic documents), the dead were considered to have some power to affect the living. It was believed that if libations were poured out on behalf of the dead ancestors, their spirits would then offer protection and help to those still living. In Babylon the disembodied spirit *(utukki)* or the ghost *(eṭemmu)* could become very dangerous if not cared for and often were the objects of incantations. Proper care for the dead would begin with proper burial and would continue with ongoing gifts and honor of the memory and name of the deceased. The firstborn was responsible for maintaining this ancestor worship and therefore inherited the family gods (often images of deceased ancestors). Such care would have been based on a belief, as seen in Saul's consultation of the witch of Endor, that the spirits of the dead could communicate and had information on the future that could be of use to the living. These spirits were consulted through the efforts of priests, mediums and necromancers. This could be a dangerous practice, since some spirits were considered demons and could cause great harm. While it is difficult to totally reconstruct Israelite beliefs about deceased ancestors and the afterlife, it seems clear that prior to the exile there existed a cult of the dead or ancestral worship. This is evidenced by archaeological remains: (1) standing stones *(maṣṣebot);* (2) channels cut into tombs for the deposit of food and drink offering for the dead (see Deut 26:14; Ps 106:28); and (3) the importance placed on family tombs (see the ancestral tomb for Abraham and his descendants at Hebron) and mourning rituals performed at these tombs (see Is 57:7-8; Jer 16:5-7). The local and family ancestral cults were condemned by the prophets and the law.

9:1-7

Future Hope

9:1. treatment of Zebulun and Naphtali. The tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were among those hardest hit by the Assyrians in the 733 campaign (see 2 Kings 15:29, supported in the inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser). Their tribal territories comprised most of what became the Assyrian province of Magiddu (see next entry).

9:1. three regions. When Assyria came west in 733 to punish the northern kingdom of Israel for its participation in anti-Assyrian activities, one of the results was the reduction of their territory. All but the Ephraim hills was annexed as Assyrian territory. This territory was set up in three administrative districts referred to in the Assyrian records as Du'ru, Magiddu and Gal'aza. These are reflected in the three regions mentioned by Isaiah. Galilee of the Gentiles is the Magiddu (Megiddo) province (from the Valley of Jezreel north to the Litani River); the way of the sea is the Du'ru (Dor) province (the coastal plains from Joppa to Haifa); and along the Jordan is the Gal'aza (Gilead) province (Transjordan from the Dead Sea to the Sea of Galilee). Recent excavations in Dor have demonstrated a significant Assyrian presence at this time.

9:2. light of hope and deliverance. In Mesopotamian texts it is logically the sun god, Shamash, who provides light. He is praised for setting right the darkness and providing light for humankind. As a king who reigns justly, Hammurabi claims that he provides light for the lands of Sumer and Akkad.

9:4. Midian's defeat. The Midianite oppression in the middle of the Judges period had been some five hundred years earlier, but it still stood as the most outstanding example of God's ability to bring deliverance against overwhelming odds. It is clear that the reference is to that particular defeat of Midian because of the more specific reference in 10:26.

9:4. yoke imagery. Prophetic speech often refers to the burden of political domination as a yoke. In the Amarna letters the rulers of the Canaanite city-states speak to Pharaoh of how they willingly placed themselves in the yoke to serve Egypt faithfully. Akkadian wisdom literature indicates that bearing a god's yoke is desirable because of the fringe benefits. In the *Atraḥasis Epic* the gods find the yoke of Enlil unbearable and rebel. Assyrian inscriptions describe their conquest of other lands as imposing the yoke of the god Ashur on the people, and rebellion was portrayed as throwing off the yoke. Needless to say, the prophet is using an image familiar throughout the ancient Near East.

9:5. warrior's boot. The word for boot occurs only here in the Old Testament but is equivalent to one of the common Akkadian terms for sandal or shoe. In the Assyrian army many of the infantry went barefoot, but the cavalry was equipped with knee-high soft leather boots held on by long crisscrossed thongs. Officers also were equipped with boots. Boots would be among the most common plunder stripped from the slain.

9:5. garment rolled in blood. In Assyria it was common rhetoric to speak of cities and countrysides dyed red with the blood of enemies and of the army marching through the blood of their enemies. In Ugaritic literature

the war goddess Anat is described in battle as plunging her knees into the blood of the guards and her skirts in the gore of warriors. Paintings at Til-Barsip show Assyrians in red uniforms, and classical sources describe soldiers of this period as wearing red or purple tunics. Though there is no parallel to rolling garments in blood, there is one Assyrian text that speaks of dipping weapons in blood.

9:6. portent of the birth of an heir to the throne. In the ancient Near East the birth of an heir to the throne was a momentous occasion. An example can be seen in the Egyptian Myth of the Birth of the Pharaoh. Framed as a prophetic oracle from the god Amon, Hatshepsut's birth is announced with a proclamation of all that she will accomplish. Her name is decreed, and she enjoys the protection and blessing of the god. Even though this text represents Hatshepsut's contrived attempt to legitimate her claim to the throne, it illustrates the type of proclamation that would not be out of place in a birth ceremony.

9:6. throne names and titulary in the ancient Near East. It was common in the ancient world for the king ascending to the throne to take a throne name for himself. We should not imagine that the name Sargon, which means "The King Is Legitimate," just happened to be the given name of an individual who became king. But beyond that was the matter of titulary, titles that accredited the king with various qualities and accomplishments. In Egypt it was a formal, time-honored practice to bestow a titulary of five names on a pharaoh ascending to the throne as part of the accession ceremony. These were an expression of the Egyptian beliefs in the deity of the pharaoh. Perhaps even more intriguing is the titulary of Niqmepa, king of Ugarit (mid-second millennium) which includes titles such as Lord of Justice, Master of the Royal House, King Who Protects and King Who Builds.

9:6. sentence names in the ancient Near East. Most names in the ancient world make statements. That is, they are self-contained sentences. Many of the statements are about a deity. One can easily recognize the deity name in names such as *Ashur*banipal, *Nebu*chadnezzar, or *Ra*meses. Anyone even casually familiar with the Bible has noticed how many Israelite names end in -iah or -el, or start with Jeho- or El-. All of these represent Israel's God. This type of name is called a theophoric name, and it affirms the nature of the deity, proclaims the attributes of the deity or requests the blessing of the deity. One way to interpret the titulary of this verse is to understand it as reflecting important theophoric affirmations: The Divine Warrior Is a Supernatural Planner, The Sovereign of Time Is a Prince of Peace (note: the word "is" is not used in such constructions, as all names demonstrate).

9:6. compound names in the ancient Near East. The name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz in 8:1 is a compound name comprised of two parallel statements. Since 9:6 proposes this child's name (singular) rather than his names (plural; NIV translates around this), an attractive option is to consider this also to be just one (long and complex) compound theophoric name. Though such compound names are not the norm in the ancient Near East, Isaiah is not presenting these as common. Assyrian use of compound names can be observed in the names Tiglath-Pileser III gives to the palaces and the gates he built in Calah. The latter are named "Gates of Justice Which Give the Correct Judgment for the Ruler of the Four Quarters,Which Offer the Yield of the Mountains and the Seas, Which Admit the Produce of Mankind Before the King Their Master."

9:7. concept of coming king with ideal reign. In a work titled the Marduk Prophecy (from about 1100 B.C.) a king is "prophesied" who will rebuild temples and reestablish prerogatives for Babylon. His reign is characterized by reform, stability and prosperity. His favor with deity will open the gate of heaven permanently. Peace and justice will result from the deity's rule through this ideal king. Though the Marduk Prophecy may well have been written as propaganda for the king, who desired it to be understood as applying to himself, it demonstrates that the rhetoric used in Isaiah would have been familiar as a way to describe a future ideal kingdom.

9:8-21
Judgment Against Israel

9:10. bricks to dressed stone, figs to cedars. Sun-dried mud brick was a common building material in Palestine. It was inexpensive, readily available and reasonably sturdy. Sycamore (fig) was one of the most common trees in the region. A rapid growing tree, its shrublike character and soft wood made it less than ideal for posts and beams, but it was used nonetheless. The contrast of carefully dressed stone and imported hardwood cedar suggests luxury and permanence.

9:11. enemies of Rezin. The most notable enemies of Rezin are the Assyrians, and they are the ones from whom the judgment comes.

9:12. Arameans and Philistines. Arameans and Philistines were the other two major tar-

gets of the Assyrians in the 734-732 campaigns. It would be awkward, though not impossible, to view them as being devoured along with Israel by the enemies of Rezin. Since Rezin is the king of the Arameans, it is difficult to see them as comprising his enemies. The other possibility is that captured Philistines and Arameans had been pressed into service in the ranks of the Assyrian army as it moved against Israel. There is ample evidence of this practice during the time of Tiglath-Pileser.

9:14. palm branch and reed. The text does not refer to the date palm tree being cut off but to the frondlike branches that grow out of the top of the trunk. The head and the tail, being inseparable, are known to both go the same direction. The frond and reed are the same as they will bend in whatever direction the wind is blowing. They have no ability to act independently.

9:20. cannibalism. It is uncertain whether this text refers to cannibalism or not. Nevertheless, cannibalism is a standard element of curses in Assyrian treaties of the seventh century. It was the last resort in times of impending starvation. This level of desperation could occur in times of severe famine (as illustrated in the *Atrahasis Epic*) or could be the result of siege (as during Ashurbanipal's siege of Babylon, about 650 B.C.) when the food supply had become depleted, as anticipated in the treaty texts. Siege warfare was common in the ancient world, so this may not have been as rare an occasion as might be presumed.

10:1-34

Woes on Judah and Assyria

10:1. oppressive laws in the ancient Near East. Reference is made here not to creating a justice system but to issuing decrees or regulations regarding specific issues. In the political climate that existed in Isaiah's time one of the special issues that had to be addressed was the raising of funds with which to pay tribute. This was generally accomplished through special tax levies, though there were always exemptions granted to either classes of people or cities that had been given sacred status. Other possible issues include the manumission of debt slaves or the disposition of property in forfeiture. Usually the claim of unjust laws was made against a ruler by his successor. The Reform Text of Uruinimgina identified oppressive practices of former days that he put a stop to. Ur-Nammu claims that he did not "impose orders" but eliminated violence and cries for justice.

10:2. orphans and widows as victims. Based on the statements in the prologues of the Ur-Nammu Code and the Code of Hammurabi, it is clear that kings considered it part of their role as "wise rulers" to protect the rights of the poor, the widow and the orphan. Similarly, in the Egyptian *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant,* the plaintiff began by identifying his judge as "the father of the orphan, the husband of the widow." Individual statutes (seen in several Middle Assyrian laws) protected a widow's right to remarry and provided for her when her husband was taken prisoner and presumed dead. In this way the vulnerable classes were provided for throughout the ancient Near East.

10:9. list of cities. The first two cities represent northern Syria, with the southern city (Calno) treated as the northern one (Carchemish) had been. The second pair represents middle Syria, again with the southern one (Hamath) having been treated like the northern one (Arpad). The third pair represents southern Syria and Palestine, with the southern city (Samaria) having been treated like the northern one (Damascus). This presents a geographical rather than a chronological sequence. This leads to a final north-south sequence, with Jerusalem juxtaposed to Samaria in verse 11.

10:9. Calno. Also known as Calneh or, in the Assyrian texts, Kullani, this city was subjugated by the Assyrians in 738. The site has not been positively identified as yet, but it is in the vicinity of Arpad, in a territory known as Unqi in Assyrian texts. It was considered a significant victory by Tiglath-Pileser in that he included a relief in the Calah annals that depicts the gods of the city being carried away captive and the king bowed in submission with Tiglath-Pileser's foot on his neck. Kullani was identified as the principal target of the 738 campaign.

10:9. Carchemish. Carchemish was likely one of the allies of Urartu under Sarduri in the 743 coalition against Assyria. Carchemish did not actively oppose Tiglath-Pileser in the 738 coalition, rather its ruler, Pisiri, is listed among those that paid tribute in that year. It was not annexed until 717. The city was located on the west bank of the Euphrates, just inside modern Turkey, and was about fifty miles northeast of Arpad.

10:9. Hamath. After Arpad and its coalition collapsed in 740, another coalition was put together, including many of the cities of southern Syria. Hamath was among them and paid tribute when the coalition was broken up by Tiglath-Pileser in 738. Hamath (modern Ha-

ma, almost 100 miles south of Aleppo and about 130 miles north of Damascus) is located on the Orontes River.

10:9. Arpad. Arpad (modern Tel Rifaat), about twenty miles north of Aleppo in northern Syria, was one of the first in the west to take a stand against Tiglath-Pileser and feel the result of his determination. In 743 Mati'el king of Arpad formed a coalition with the Urartian king Sarduri and his allies to try to keep the Assyrians out of northern Syria. Tiglath-Pileser broke up the coalition in 743 but took three more years to finally subdue and annex Arpad in 740.

10:9. Samaria and Damascus. These were, of course, subjugated in the campaigns of 733-732 as Tiglath-Pileser extended his control farther and farther south.

10:10. images that excelled. There is no distinction made in this speech between the religious practices of Israel and Judah on the one hand and the other cities of the west. There is no adjective expressed in this verse, but only implied by the syntax. The idols of the nations are therefore identified as exceeding the idols of Jerusalem and Samaria. If the NIV is correct, the comparison may concern how ornately they were manufactured or clothed. The NASB prefers "greater," suggesting perhaps that they were capable of more impressive shows of strength. A third possibility could refer to the greater number of idols in the other cities. One of the grandest moments in the conquest of a city was when the idols were led out subdued and captive.

10:11. images and idols in Israel. Israelite religion was ideally supposed to be aniconic (no images). In actual practice, though, this was not the case. Isaiah as well as most other preexilic prophets indicted the people for their use of idols. For Ahaz's employment of idols see 2 Chronicles 28:2. This textual portrayal is not as well supported by the archaeological record as might be expected. The absence of idols dating to the monarchy, however, may be due to the diligence in destruction by reformers such as Hezekiah and Josiah, and the thoroughness of plunderers such as the Assyrian and Babylonian kings.

10:13-14. claims of royal inscriptions. The arrogant claims put in the mouth of the Assyrian king by Isaiah is not at all exaggerated. The royal inscriptions of these kings are extreme in the claims they arrogate to the king. Tiglath-Pileser declares himself beloved of the gods, light of all his people and shepherd of humankind, who subdued many kings, despoiled cities and imposed tribute. He claimed that he considered his enemies mere ghosts. One of his predecessors, Ashurnasirpal, shows a great propensity for proliferate titles, often including more than two dozen. Among them are included ferocious dragon, marvelous shepherd, holy creature, martial sovereign, fearless in battle, trampler of enemies, merciless hero and mighty floodtide who has no opponent and who by his lordly conflict has brought under one authority ferocious and merciless kings from east to west (excerpts from Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions 2).*

10:16-19. judgment on Assyria. Though the Assyrian king fashioned himself as the light of all his people, Yahweh, the Light of Israel, was going to outshine him. The Assyrian kings boasted of their destructions of fields and orchards, and of their incineration of cities—now they will suffer a similar fate. The armies that were the power and pride of these kings were to be decimated by disease (epidemics were a constant threat to army camps) if the army is referred to here (see next comment). A devastation of the Assyrian army did take place outside the walls of Jerusalem in 701, though not through consumption (NIV: "wasting disease"; see 2 Kings 19:35). The overthrow of Assyria was not accomplished until about eighty-five years later as the Medes and Babylonians conquered Ashur and Nineveh.

10:16. wasting disease. There is little reason to accept the NIV translation of "sturdy warriors" in this verse (it nowhere else refers to soldiers or army). The word refers to that which is rich or luxuriant and in Daniel 11:24 applies to territory. Preference here would be for the idea that God would make the lushest regions of Assyria unproductive.

10:22-23. divine decree of destruction. The divine decree that a city should be destroyed is a familiar motif in the ancient Near East. As early as the Sumerian Laments the divine council decreed the destruction of the city of Ur. There, however, it is lamented that there is no explanation for Enlil's decree. In the Marduk Prophecy the god decrees his own removal to Hatti. The Weidner Chronicle reports that Marduk decreed the destruction of the city of Babylon at the hands of the Gutians. In this piece it was for the offenses of Naram-Sin. Ishtar became angry and stirred up an enemy against her city of Uruk in the *Myth of Erra and Ishum.* Though there is not always a reason that could be cited as "righteous," the concept presented here is very familiar.

10:24. Egyptian role. Egypt had little involvement in the affairs of Syro-Palestine during the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III, since this was a time of division and competing claims be-

tween Egypt, Nubia to the south and Libya to the west. A single incident reports that Hanun king of Gaza fled to Egypt for protection when Tiglath-Pileser came against his city in 734. It was not until the accession of Shalmaneser V to the throne of Assyria in 727 that Hoshea of Israel was emboldened to approach the Egyptians for help (see comment on 2 Kings 17:4). The reference to Egypt here is to the time of the exodus.

10:26. rock of Oreb. This is a reference to the Lord's deliverance of Israel under Gideon against all odds. The Midianite ruler Oreb was killed at the (unlocated) rock of Oreb in Judges 7:25.

10:27. yoke imagery. See comment on 9:4.

10:28-32. itinerary. The twelve cities mentioned here cut a path from the north directly toward Jerusalem. This is not the itinerary followed by Sennacherib when he came against Jerusalem in 701. In that campaign he cut off all the cities of the Shephelah southwest of Jerusalem, Lachish being the last, and so approached Jerusalem from that side. Aiath is usually identified with Ai, about ten miles north of Jerusalem. Migron is thought to be the Wadi Swenit that forms a deep pass between Micmash and Geba (see comment on 1 Sam 14:2). As the army camps at Geba, there is uncertainty which of the three roads out of Geba will be used. One road goes west to Ramah (under two miles); one goes southwest to Gibeah (about three and a half miles); and a third goes south to Anathoth (about four miles). The Anathoth road would lead by Gallim (uncertain location) and then south of Anathoth would pass through Laishah to Nob. Nob is believed to have been located on what is now called Mount Scopus, overlooking the city of Jerusalem from the northwest. Mademah and Gebim remain unidentified.

10:34. Lebanon. See comment on 2:13.

11:1-16
The Future Davidic King and His Kingdom

11:1. oracle of a future ideal ruler. See comment on 9:7. Texts from both Egypt and Mesopotamia predict kings coming to power who will be successful in bringing peace, justice and prosperity, though these are usually written after the king is on the throne as a means of legitimating his rule. Such an oracle in the time of Ashurbanipal includes the hungry being fed, the naked being clothed and prisoners being set free. Tiglath-Pileser III is described as the shoot or scion of the city of Baltil (=Assur) who brings justice to his people.

11:2. endowment with divine spirit in the ancient Near East. In the Judges period the Spirit of the Lord endowed an individual with central authority that only the Lord possessed (see comment on Judg 6:34-35). The role of the king represented a more permanent central authority and likewise relied on empowerment by the Lord. The king was an agent of deity and a heavenly functionary just as judges and prophets were. The Spirit is able to give the positive attributes of courage, charisma, insight, wisdom and confidence. In Mesopotamia the king was seen as being endowed with the *melammu* of the gods (the visible representation of the glory of deity). It designated him as the divine representative and indicated that his reign was legitimate and approved by the gods. In Assyrian inscriptions it is pictured hovering over the king. An additional correlation may be found in the Akkadian term *bashtu*. It refers generally to a sense of dignity and is often bestowed by the gods, but it also is personified as a protective spirit. It provides various attributes, as here, and gives authority to its recipient.

11:3-4. judge's challenge. The foremost responsibility of a king in the ancient world was to establish justice, and therefore the rhetoric of kings throughout the inscriptional material proclaims their success in that endeavor. The wisdom of a king was assessed by the brilliance of his insight into complex cases, and his suitability for the throne was evaluated by his commitment to provide for the vulnerable classes of society. The ability to resolve difficult cases was believed to be divinely endowed (compare Solomon; see comments on 1 Kings 3:16-28 and 2 Chron 1:12) and therefore was not dependent solely on the evidence that could be presented in court (see Prov 16:10).

11:5. belt/sash. The same word is used in both lines of this verse, but one item is a wrap around the thighs, while the other winds between the thighs. These are the most basic articles of clothing, and without them an individual would be naked.

11:6-8. animal behavior to convey utopian conditions. From Sumerian times the myth called *Enki and Ninhursag* describes a utopian situation in which the lion does not kill and the wolf does not snatch the lamb. Other utopian works describe an absence of predators (no snake, scorpion, lion or wolf in the account in *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*).

11:10. banner. The banner, or standard, was used as a means of calling out an army of a particular territory or indicating the place where a muster was taking place or a camp was located. It often featured an insignia of the tribe or

division. In the Egyptian army the divisions were named for various gods (e.g., the division of Amun, division of Seth) and the banners would identify the division by means of some representation of the god.

11:11. places of exile. The places named here are not necessarily intended to represent locations of known exile for Israelites. Rather they are equivalent to the four quarters of the earth referred to in the next verse. Assyria is mentioned first as the actual location of exiles but also as a representative of the northeastern area. Egypt, to the southwest, is identified in three segments up the Nile, including the kingdom of Nubia (NIV: Cush). Elam and Babylonia represent the southeast extremes, while Hamath represents the regions to the north. Finally, the "islands" is a way of representing the areas furthest west.

11:12. four quarters. It was typical in the ancient world to refer to four regions of the inhabited world. Akkadian literature speaks of kings ruling the four quarters, most likely making reference to the most distant coasts or extremities in the four major directions. In this sense it is referring to not four slices of the geographical pie but four edges, thereby including everything in between.

11:14. near neighbors. As the previous verses had focused on a universal perspective, this verse addresses the near neighbors on the east, west and south.

11:15. gulf of the Egyptian Sea. This is the only occurrence in the Bible of a body of water called the Egyptian Sea and is therefore difficult to place with any certainty. Most commentators identify it with the Gulf of Suez.

11:15. Euphrates in seven streams. In Mesopotamia the water supply was regulated for irrigation use by separating and diverting sluice channels from canals that drew water off from the river system. As water was diverted, the various channels slowed the flow of the water.

12:1-6

Song of Victory

12:1-6. victory songs. The concept of an angry God who has now concluded the just punishment of the nation will be repeated later in Isaiah (40:1-2). The call to praise God's name is found in many Psalms, including 22:22-25 and 116:12-13. This theodicy of divine wrath followed by restoration of fortunes is also found in the Moabite inscription of Mesha. There the king notes how their god Chemosh allowed them to be conquered for a time but had eventually chosen to give them victories over their enemies. Similarly, the Assyrian annals of Esarhaddon, Shalmaneser I and Tukulti-Ninurta I praise their triumphant god Ashur, who has "universal sovereignty" and has given them authority to subjugate all nations.

13:1-22

Oracle Against Babylon

13:1. oracles against foreign nations. See comment on Jeremiah 46:1.

13:1. Babylon in Isaiah's time. At the time that Isaiah functioned as a prophet (second half of the eighth century B.C.), the Neo-Assyrian empire, under the Sargonid rulers, Sargon II and Sennacherib, was the most powerful political network the world had ever seen. It stretched across the Near East and would eventually even include Egypt for a short time. During this period Babylonia and its Chaldean rulers were subjugated, just like all other nation states by the Assyrians. However, they, like the Medes in western Iran, periodically tested the Assyrian hegemony with revolts or by attempting to subvert Assyria's allies and vassal states. Particularly troublesome was Merodach-Baladan, who ousted the Assyrian rulers of Babylon on at least two occasions. Finally, in 689 B.C. Sennacherib sacked the city and assumed the title of king of Babylon. Shortly after 660, as the Assyrian empire began to crumble, Babylonia and Media combined to put even greater pressure on the last of the great Assyrian kings, Ashurbanipal. His death in 627 marked the end of Assyrian world power and the emergence of Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonian empire.

13:10. constellations. The constellations, according to the Mesopotamian creation epic *Enuma Elish,* were the divine assembly of the great god Marduk, placed there to oversee the forces of nature and help him manage creation. Since it was assumed that movements of heavenly bodies were omens for events that would occur on earth, astronomic observations were constantly made and recorded (such as the collection in *Enuma Anu Enlil*). Eventually this was also applied to the preparing of individual horoscopes in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Greece. In this way lucky and unlucky days could be determined by consulting the guild of magicians and astrologers. Mesopotamian constellations included animal figures such as a goat (Lyra) and snake (Hydra); objects such as an arrow (Sirius) and a wagon (Big Dipper); and characters such as Anu (Orion). The most popular of the constellations was Pleiades, often portrayed on seals

even in Palestine and Syria. Neo-Assyrian texts preserve sketches of stars in constellations.

13:10. darkened stars, sun and moon. By declaring that on the "day of Yahweh" the heavens and all of its celestial bodies would be damped out, Isaiah claims that the glory of Yahweh will outshine and mask the brilliance of all other supposed gods (compare the language of Ps 104:19-22, in which Yahweh is said to control the moon and sun). Since Assyria and Egypt both worshiped the sun god (Shamash and Amun respectively) as their primary deity and the moon god Sin was of great importance in Babylonia, the prophet targets these gods and these arrogant enemy nations. Such portents of darkness, as in the Deir 'Alla inscription of Balaam, generally forecast a time of great disaster, but Isaiah's message is one of triumph in which "lesser lights" are extinguished to better illumine Yahweh.

13:12. gold of Ophir. The particular purity of the gold of Ophir is the measure for the cleansing of humanity by Yahweh's intervention. The actual location of Ophir is still unknown, although Arabian and East African (Zimbabwe or Somalia) sites are favored (1 Kings 9:28). An eighth-century B.C. inscription from Tell Qasile mentions the gold of Ophir, and it further supports the idea that the name Ophir had become synonymous with purity.

13:13. heavens and earth trembling. Isaiah uses language similar to that which is used in the "storm god" theophany common in the Ugaritic Baal Epic cycle. The divine warrior manifests himself by convulsions of nature, strong winds and a booming within the heavens that nearly tear the very fabric of earth apart. A similar example is found in David's song of praise in 2 Samuel 22:8-16 (see comment there).

13:17. Medes. Median tribes and kings begin to appear in Assyrian texts in the late ninth century B.C., especially in connection with the acquisition of horses and in gaining control of trade routes through the Zagros Mountains. Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II each invaded the area several times, exacting tribute and deporting portions of the population (2 Kings 17:6). The Medes inhabited the region of central western Iran with their capital at Ecbatana. The Iranian kingdom of Elam ruled the area to the south. They do not appear to be a unified people until the seventh century, when their king Cyaxares combined forces with Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans of Babylon to attack and destroy Nineveh (612 B.C.). Subsequently the Medes were conquered or absorbed into the Achaemenid empire by Cyrus II in 550 B.C. (Esther 1:3).

13:17. no interest in silver or gold. As the Assyrian annals of Sennacherib attest, it was possible for a city to ransom itself during a siege for a high price (2 Kings 18:13-16). However, the reputation of the Medes is that they were such fierce warriors that they could not be bribed or bought off once they had begun a campaign (see Zeph 1:18).

13:19. overthrow of Babylon. Despite the fact that Assyria is the source of Israel's destruction in Isaiah's time, that empire is seen as "the rod of God's anger" (Is 10:5), although assurance is given that its time of judgment will eventually come (14:25). Thus the elimination of the short-lived Chaldean monarchy of Merodach-Baladan provides an initial example within the larger picture of "the day of Yahweh" that will ultimately usher in a new age. The Bit Yakin tribe of the Chaldeans, who had previously inhabited the area south of Babylonia, established their rule over Babylon in 722 B.C. First Sargon II and then Sennacherib moved against them, but a final resolution of what came to be a series of revolts and counterrevolts did not occur until 689, when Sennacherib razed the city and many of its monumental buildings. The ruins of the city broke the Chaldeans for a century, and the memory as well as the sight of the destruction might well have been compared to the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet the involvement of the Medes suggests that the final destiny of Babylon provided the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy as the Medes and Persians overran the city in 539.

13:20. fate of Babylon. The description of utter devastation and its perpetual emptiness follows a pattern of city lament found in the Sumerian Laments for Ur (c. 2000 B.C.). In a similar example of a woe oracle the Egyptian *Visions of Neferti* describes the end of the Old Kingdom, leaving the people without direction, the canals dry and Egypt open to invasion by Asiatics and desert herders. Babylon's ultimate demise came not at the hands of a destructive enemy but through gradual deterioration as the course of the Euphrates shifted and left the fabled city an isolated and abandoned wilderness.

14:3-23

Taunt Against the King of Babylon

14:4. taunt song. This song uses the metric pattern of a dirge but parodies the genre by mocking rather than eulogizing the dead.

14:8. woodsman. The forests of Lebanon were

considered a treasury by kings of the ancient world. The timber from the cedar trees was essential for temples and palaces. Kings boasted of having extended their conquests to these forests and of cutting trees from it. Nebuchadnezzar calls it the forest of Marduk, and the Gilgamesh Epic portrays the cedar forests as divine property guarded by the fearsome Huwawa. Invading them and taking their resources was the greatest adventure of all. Isaiah 37:24 and Ezekiel 31 portray a similar concept.

14:9-11. dead kings. In the ancient world it was believed that spirits of the dead were quite capable of returning to haunt the living. The status or power one enjoyed in life was often transferred into the netherworld existence, perhaps with the thought that the spirit would be content to remain. In the description here in Isaiah, however, it is not the return of the spirit that is the concern. The king of Babylon is portrayed stripped of all of his power and grandeur. In Canaanite mythology the god Mot is the ruler of the netherworld and is portrayed with royal characteristics. But it is Baal who descends into the netherworld to become the leader of all the fallen heroes and honored ancestors. In Ugaritic literature these are called the *Rapiuma,* the same word that the NIV translates as "spirits of the departed" in verse 9.

14:12. morning star. The Hebrew word behind this translation, *helel,* is not used anywhere else in the Old Testament. Many interpreters, ancient and modern, see it as a designation of Venus, the morning star. It is this interpretation that was behind the early Greek translation of the term, as well as the Latin Vulgate's *luciferos* (shining one, i.e., Venus). Most modern interpreters believe that Isaiah is using a well-known mythological tale as an analogy to the failure and consequences of the king of Babylon's rebellion and arrogance, but no known literature matches the details of Helel's rebellion.

14:12. son of dawn. Dawn *(shaḥar)* was often personified in the Old Testament and was a known deity in Phoenician and Ugaritic inscriptions.

14:13. rebellion in heaven in the ancient Near East. Some have seen some similarity between the story of Helel and a Ugaritic tale concerning the god Athtar. In Baal's absence, Athtar attempted to sit on his throne (rule in his place) but found he was not up to the task and subsequently took his place in the netherworld. Though Athtar's name may have a similar meaning to Helel, he is not the son of Shaḥar (as Helel is described), nor is he thrown down from his attempt to sit on Baal's throne. Neither is the attempt itself an act of rebellion. The theme of revolt against the gods is, nevertheless, a familiar one. One of the best examples from ancient literature is the *Myth of Anzu,* where a lion/bird creature attempts to steal the Tablet of Destinies by which the gods governed the world. Anzu decides to take supremacy of the world and the gods by stealing the tablet from the chief god, Enlil. He utters a series of "I will" statements just as the king does here: "I myself will take the gods' Tablet of Destinies. The responsibilities of the

AFTERLIFE BELIEFS IN ISRAEL AND THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Sheol is the Hebrew word for the netherworld. Though it might have been considered an act of judgment for a person to be consigned to Sheol from life, it was not in itself a place of judgment to be contrasted to the reward of a heavenly destiny. The word was sometimes used as a synonym for "grave" because the grave was the portal through which one entered the netherworld. The Israelites believed that the spirits of the dead continued to exist in this shadowy world. They were not thought to have a pleasant existence, but Sheol is never associated with the torment of hellfire in the Old Testament (the imagery seen in Is 66:24 is not associated with Sheol). It is not clear that there were any alternatives to Sheol. People who were spared from Sheol were spared from it by being kept alive rather than by going somewhere else. There was at least a vague idea of somewhere else to go seen in the examples of Enoch and Elijah, who avoided the grave and presumably did not go to Sheol. But those texts are very unclear about what the other alternative was. In the absence of specific revelation to the contrary, Israelite beliefs conformed generally to those current among their Canaanite and Mesopotamian neighbors.

In Mesopotamian beliefs the dead needed to cross a desert, mountains and a river, and then descend through the seven gates of the netherworld. Though described in Mesopotamian literature as a place where there is darkness and the inhabitants are clothed in bird feathers and eat dust, kinder accounts were also current. The denizens of this shadow world were believed to be sustained by the offerings presented by those who were still alive. They enjoyed some light as the sun god passed through the netherworld when it was night in the land of the living so he could rise in the east again the next morning. The rulers of the netherworld, Nergal and Ereshkigal, were assisted by a group called the Anunnaki. Despite these depressing descriptions, no one wanted to be turned away from the gates because the alternative was to be a wandering spirit with no access to funerary offerings.

gods I will seize for myself. I will establish myself on the throne and wield the decrees. I will take command over all the Igigi-gods." Boastful arrogance was typical of the antagonist in this type of account.

14:13. stars of God. The word used for God here is El. While this is sometimes used to refer to Israel's God in the Bible, it is also known as the name of the chief god in the Canaanite pantheon. In the Old Testament the word "stars" occasionally refers to angels of the heavenly court (Job 38:7), while in Ugaritic and Mesopotamian texts it would describe astral deities.

14:13. mount of assembly. Since the gods of Canaanite mythology were believed to live on the mountain heights (see next entry), it is understandable that their place of assembly was also located on an elevated place. In fact, El is portrayed as convening the divine assembly of the pantheon on the heights of Zaphon. Though the term "mount of assembly" has not been found, the council of the assembly is said to meet on the mount of El.

14:13. sacred mountain. Ancient Near Eastern thought, not unlike that familiar from Greek mythology, visualized a mountain height as the dwelling place of deity. There would have been little difference in their minds between the tops of mountains and the heavens. Baal's home was purported in Ugaritic literature to be Mount Zaphon (commonly identified with Mount Casius, Jebel al'Aqra, in Syria, elev. 5807 feet). The Hebrew word *zaphon* means "north" and is translated here by the NIV "sacred mountain" (see Ps 48:2).

14:14. Most High *(Elyon).* In the Old Testament the term *Elyon* is normally a title for Yahweh. However, since it also occurs as a divine title (and perhaps even as a divine name) in other literature from the ancient Near East (Ugaritic, Aramaic and Phoenician), its use in a context such as this can be ambiguous. It is best known outside the Bible as a title for Baal in the Ugaritic texts.

14:15. brought to the pit. In a Sumerian myth that shares some material with the *Anzu Myth* (see comment on 14:13), the god Ninurta overcomes the creature Anzu but ambitiously wants to gain power himself. When Enki discovers his scheme, Ninurta is thrown into a pit, and Enki chides him as a bragging upstart who recklessly tried to seize power that did not belong to him.

14:19. cast out of tomb. The mythological metaphor in verses 12-15 separates the response in the netherworld (vv. 9-11) from the response on earth in verses 16-17. Since the mutilated corpse of the enemy leader was often exposed by being displayed in a public place (see comment on 1 Sam 31:10), people would pass by and stare. The phrase used here, better rendered "cast out, without a tomb," indicates that the king will be deprived of proper burial. This represented a final humiliation and a desecration, for most ancient peoples believed that proper, timely burial affected the quality of the afterlife. See comment on 1 Kings 16:4. In the Gilgamesh Epic, Enkidu, back from the netherworld, reported to Gilgamesh that the one who died unburied had no rest and that the one who had no living relatives to take care of him could only eat what was thrown into the street. A Babylonian curse relates burial to the uniting of the spirit of the dead with loved ones. We know that even Israelites believed that proper burial affected one's afterlife, because they, like their neighbors, buried their loved ones with the provisions that would serve them in the afterlife; most often pottery vessels (filled with food) and jewelry (to ward off evil), with tools and personal items sometimes added.

14:19. fate of the slain. Alternatives to the corpse being put on public display would include the ignominious end of being piled in a heap of the slain or of being trampled and unrecognizable. The reference to "stones of the pit" is obscure.

14:20. never be mentioned. The mentioning of the name of the dead was one way of giving honor to them (examples in Gen 48:16; Ruth 4:14). Alternatively this phrase could refer to the name being either invoked or renowned. In any case, the idea is clearly that this king will not enjoy a prominent place in history.

14:24-27

Oracle Against Assyria

14:25. Assyria. The judgment pronounced against Assyria again appears to refer to the destruction of Sennacherib's army outside Jerusalem in 701 (see comment on 10:16-19).

14:26-27. plans of deity. Though there were fixed decrees that the gods superintended, the idea that a deity had a plan that stretched across time and space was not easily maintained in the polytheism of the ancient world. The gods were not immune to the changes of time, nor was any deity's jurisdiction universal. These would greatly limit the ability of a god, even of a powerful head of pantheon such as Ashur or Marduk, to sustain a plan such as that claimed by Yahweh here and elsewhere in Isaiah. Nevertheless, Assyrian kings do claim that it was in the plan of the gods that their throne was established, their con-

quests made and their empires expanded. But often these divine plans were seen to be made on a short-term schedule. The gods were believed to meet each New Year's to make their plans for the year. Their decrees would be recorded on the tablets of fate to be enacted throughout the year. Divination was typically used when people wanted to find out more about those plans.

14:28-32

Oracle Against Philistia

14:28. chronology. The chronology of this period is very complicated and it is not easy to determine the year of Ahaz's death. Some chronological systems overlap Ahaz and his son Hezekiah in a coregency, with Hezekiah being the lead ruler (due perhaps to the strength of the anti-Assyrian contingent in the administration). His death may have come as early as 726 or as late as 715. The earlier one is supported by the synchronism of 2 Kings 17:1.

14:29. Philistines in eighth century. Philistia had been under the control of Judah during the reign of Uzziah, which took up the whole first half of the eighth century. It regained its independence during the reign of Ahaz and became the aggressor. With the rise of the Neo-Assyrian empire, Philistia came under attack just as the rest of the nations did. Tiglath-Pileser targeted Gaza in his campaign of 734, and the cities of Philistia thus became tribute-paying vassals. When Sargon came to the throne, the Philistines attempted to break free of Assyria, but in 720 Philistia again came under attack and Gaza renewed its loyalty. In 712 Sargon again had to come west to subdue the revolt led by Ashdod. Ekron and Gath were also targeted at this time. Sennacherib's 701 campaign brought changes on the thrones of several of the Philistine cities, but only Ekron needed to be besieged. Through most of the eighth and seventh centuries the Philistines shared the fate of their neighbors in Judah.

14:31-32. fate of Philistia. Eventually the Philistines were defeated and deported by Nebuchadnezzar just as the Judeans were. The five cities retained some degree of prominence, but by the Persian period the people had been gradually assimilated into the general mix of the empire population.

15:1—16:14

Oracle Against Moab

15:1. Moab in eighth century. Like many of the small Syro-Palestinian states during the eighth century B.C., Moab was dominated by Assyrian hegemony over the region. Several Assyrian texts list Moabite kings paying tribute or being implicated in the periodic revolts by coalitions of these small nations (Ashdod revolt of 713 recorded in a prism from Sargon II's reign). Since Isaiah is probably speaking during the early reign of Hezekiah, the destruction of Moabite cities is probably due to incursions by desert tribes rather than the Assyrians. It seems clear from Sennacherib's annals that Moab attempted to ingratiate herself during the 701 campaign that saw much of Judah devastated and Jerusalem besieged. As a result Israelite prophets (Amos 2:1-5 and Jer 48) generally list Moab as an enemy nation.

15:1-4. cities. Those cities listed as destroyed or damaged are all in the northern sector of Moab: Kir (Kir Hareseth in 16:7) is on the upper portion of the Wadi el-Kerak and serves as the capital of the district of Ar; Nebo and Medeba both are located just east of the northern end of the Dead Sea and about twenty miles north of Dibon. Also attacked were Heshbon and Elealeh, located northeast of Nebo. The more southern cities of Dibon (twenty miles north of Kir) and Jahaz were apparently not directly affected by the raiders but were in fear of future incursions.

15:2-3. mourning practices. Communal and individual laments throughout the ancient Near East included weeping, the shaving of heads and beards, wearing sackcloth and lying on the ground or rolling about. These are all illustrative of grief as well as a temporary (usually seven-day) identification with the dead. See the comments on Micah 1:8 and 1:16 for discussion of these practices and extrabiblical evidence from Ugaritic and Assyrian texts.

15:5. flight itinerary. The key to the line of flight for the Moabite fugitives is Zoar since none of the other sites mentioned can be identified (only mentioned elsewhere in the parallel text in Jer 48:3, 5, 34). According to Genesis 14:2-3 Zoar is one of the cities of the plain. Speculation on its exact location, however, places it near Mount Nebo (Deut 32:1-3), near the northern tip of the Dead Sea, as well as in the area at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Considering the apparent focus of the attack in Isaiah 15:1-4 around Kir and Nebo, it seems that a southern site for Zoar and these other cities would be more appropriate for a flight to safety towards Edom.

15:6. waters of Nimrim. Following the same reasoning regarding a flight south by the Moabite fugitives, it seems best to identify Nimrim (Jer 48:34) with the Wadi en-Numeirah,

which flows west into the southern end of the Dead Sea. There is also a nearby site, Numeirah, which may have been associated with the water source and served as a Moabite outpost.

15:7. ravine of the poplars. Assuming a southern route for the fugitives, this poplar-lined ravine would be the Wadi el-Hesa (Zered River), which marks the border between Moab and Edom. This wide valley (up to four miles across) runs for thirty-five miles and concludes at the southeast end of the Dead Sea (Num 21:12).

15:8. Eglaim. Isaiah's oracle would indicate a southern location for this site, but no exact identification has been made. Among the possibilities are Eusebius's listing of Agallim, just south of Rabbah, and Aharoni's suggestion of Mazra', a site east of the Lisan Peninsula.

15:8. Beer Elim. This site has not been positively identified. Some scholars speculate that it is to be equated with Beer of Numbers 21:16, but the large number of place names which begin with Beer, "well," makes such an identification problematic. Following the line of thought used on other sites in this oracle, one would expect it to be a southern site near the Dead Sea, possibly in the vicinity of el-Kerak.

15:9. Dimon's waters. Because of its proximity to the Wadi Ibn Hammad on the Moabite plateau, Dimon has been identified with Khirbet Dimneh, about two and a half miles northwest of Rabbah. Surface survey has not revealed Iron Age pottery, but no excavations have been undertaken at the site.

16:1. lambs as tributes. Much of the Moabite plateau is suitable for grazing herds of sheep and goats (Num 32:4). Since this would have been a major part of their economy, it would make a suitable form of tribute (2 Kings 3:4). Assyrian annals often list huge quantities of precious metals, slaves and luxury goods as tribute payments (more likely war booty). However, in the normal course of taxing subject people, sheep would better serve the daily needs of officials (Ashurnasirpal II lists a thousand cattle and ten thousand sheep paid by the frightened ruler of Hattina).

16:1. Sela. This word, meaning "rock," appears only a few times as a place name. The best known usage is in 2 Kings 14:7, referring to an Edomite fortress that was conquered by Amaziah of Judah and is identified with either Petra or modern Sela', two miles northwest of Buseira. The site mentioned in Isaiah's oracle has not been identified. It is unlikely to be the same as the Edomite site because all of the other places mentioned in this text stop short of entering Edom.

16:2. fords of the Arnon. The Valley of the Arnon is in places three miles across and is a major barrier to traffic north and south. The fords refer to the point where the north-south highway crosses the wadi at Dibon (as in Mesha's mention of this in the Moabite Stone). This would a natural crossing point for the Moabite fugitives as well as an extremely strategic site (compare the military importance of fords in Judg 12:5; Jer 51:32).

16:7-9. cities. Recapping the area of devastation, the oracle describes the physical and economic ruin of the northern section of Moab. This includes the tableland cities of Heshbon and Kir Hareseth (Kir; see 15:1-4), and Jazer (Khirbet Gazzir, at the northern end of the Dead Sea). Both Sibmah and Elealeh are listed as part of the Heshbon district and were at one time part of Reuben's allotment (Num 32:3, 37; Josh 13:19). Sibmah's location is uncertain, while Elealeh is generally identified with Khirbet el-'Al, just over a mile northeast of Tell Hesban.

16:14. Moab's fate. While no exact historical event can be suggested for the prophet's oracle against Moab, it is conceivable that raids by desert tribes or perhaps the backlash of an Assyrian army as it passed through the region is the basis for this destruction.

17:1-14
Oracle Against Damascus

17:1. Damascus. The Syro-Ephraimitic War (see comments on 7:1), which raged during the middle 730s, ended with the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III invading Syria and Israel and devastating both of these rebellious states (734-732). The Syrian kingdom, ruled from Damascus by Rezin (see 7:1-9), had been Israel's principal political and economic rival. He had meddled in Israel and Judah's internal affairs and had encroached on their territories for over a decade. It seems apparent, however, that Rezin overstepped his bounds in leading an anti-Assyrian coalition. Assyria did not welcome a rival "Greater Syria," and the destruction of Damascus in 732, as recorded in the Assyrian Annals, was massive, leaving hundreds of sites looking "like hills over which the flood had swept." This widespread destruction also included both the reduction of much of the city of Damascus to rubble as well as the redistribution of its territories in Syria as well as in Transjordan and the Galilee.

17:2. Aroer. The Assyrian campaign through Transjordan would have naturally included the capture of the strategic fortress site of Aroer on the Arnon ('Ara'ir, three miles southeast

of Dibon and two and a half miles east of the King's Highway). It guarded the passage through the valley of the Arnon and controlled the border between Moab and Ammon. It is possible that an earlier site for the city was located at Tel Esdar (one and a half miles north) and the name was moved to 'Ara'ir after its destruction in the eighth century.

17:3. fate of Damascus. Tiglath-Pileser III's Annals describe how he completely destroyed the sixteen districts and most of the cities of Aram in 732, deported portions of the population and gave charge of most of the cities and territories of Syria to other, more loyal vassals (the list includes 591 towns destroyed). Damascus was badly damaged but survived the experience to become the capital of a newly constituted Assyrian province. Subsequently Damascus joined yet another anti-Assyrian coalition, led by the Syrian state of Hamath, in 720. This rebellion was crushed by Sargon II in 720, and thereafter Damascus is ruled by Assyrian governors until 609. The city only regained its independence temporarily until the Neo-Babylonian empire absorbed it in 604.

17:5. imagery of reaper. The process of reaping, as depicted in Egyptian tomb paintings, involved the reaper grabbing the stalks of grain in his left hand while cutting them with a sickle in his right hand (Ps 129:7). In this way he was already prepared to tie together the stalks into a bundle that could be transported to a threshing floor. What little remained from this cutting would be gathered by gleaners (Ruth 2:3, 7).

17:5. Valley of Rephaim. This valley and its farms extend southwest of Jerusalem. It provided much of the food for the inhabitants of the city and must have also been heavily gleaned by the poor. A drought or a siege of the city would have put a major strain on the food supply, creating the image found in Isaiah's oracle. The Ein Yael Project has extensively surveyed the archaeological remains of the agricultural activity in this valley. It has shown the widespread use of terracing, an indication of the need to utilize as much of the land as possible to feed the growing population of Jerusalem and its vicinity.

17:6. olive gleaning. Like the grain harvesters, the workers who beat the branches of the olive trees to gather the fruit were told to leave a portion for "the alien, the fatherless and the widow" (Deut 24:20). Their long sticks brought most of the fruit to the ground, but that in the uppermost branches was to be left (Is 24:13). This provides an excellent image of a remnant who will survive to restore the covenantal relationship with Yahweh.

17:8. Asherah poles. See the comments on Deuteronomy 7:1-26 and Judges 2:13 for discussion of these cultic symbols of the fertility goddess of the Canaanites.

17:8. incense altars. Archaeological excavations have demonstrated a wide variety of incense altars throughout the ancient Near East. They range from large, elaborate stands containing intricate decoration (see the Taanach stand) to simple pedestals used in domestic worship as well as to fumigate houses, covering odors and repelling insects. While there is a long history of burning incense in Israelite worship (Ex 30:7-8; Num 16:46-48), it also has close associations with the gods of other peoples as well as magic (Is 65:3; Jer 19:13).

18:1-7
Oracle Against Cush

18:1. land of whirring wings. It is possible that this is a reference to the multitude of insects that infest the Nile Valley (Deut 28:42 contains a similar use of the Hebrew word). However, given the context of "envoys" on the waterways, this more likely refers to the many swift boats made of bundled papyrus that sped their way up and down the Nile.

18:1. rivers of Cush. Cush can refer to several different places in the Old Testament, though it most frequently is the designation for the area translations usually render "Ethiopia." This is misleading, for the area Cush refers to is not modern Ethiopia (Abyssinia), but the area along the Nile just south of Egypt, ancient Nubia (in modern Sudan). The boundary between Egypt and Nubia in ancient times was usually either at the first or second cataract of the Nile. It is unlikely that Nubia ever extended much beyond the sixth cataract at Khartoum. The period from 730 to 715 was one of flux in this area. During the Third Intermediate Period the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty was beginning to emerge, headed by Ethiopian monarchs Pianchia and his successor Shabaka. They remained for a time in the kingdom of Cush but were moving to gain control over all of Egypt and unite the country under their rule. This required battling the native Egyptian kings who held the Delta region, holding off threats from Libya to the west and negotiating mutual defense treaties with the expanding Assyrian empire to the east.

18:2. envoys by papyrus boats. Certainly there would have been a great deal of diplomatic activity during this period. There is some question, however, who is sending these envoys and to whom they are being sent. Given the desire of the Ethiopian dynasts to gain full control

over Lower Egypt and the Delta, they may well be sending messengers to Assyria seeking assistance or at least a recognition of their legitimacy to rule in Egypt (see the vision of good relations between Egypt and Assyria in 19:23-25). The use of papyrus boats on the Nile rather than the larger barque associated with nobles and troop carriers suggests some stealth was necessary. The light rafts made of papyrus could easily navigate the rapids along the Nile or could be carried past dangerous or highly populated sections.

18:2. tall and smooth-skinned. Although it seems clear that Ethiopia is sending diplomatic overtures to Assyria, they would not be making the entire trip in papyrus boats. These light crafts would only be suitable for the Nile. Since the Assyrians were neither tall nor smooth-skinned (we have many representations of short, bearded men in Assyrian reliefs), then the envoys may also be spreading the word to the Ethiopian people to join in the effort to unite Egypt. Herodotus's picture of the Ethiopians as the tallest of the Africans would fit this reconstruction.

18:2. strange speech. Despite the translation found here, the Hebrew form is a duplicated adjective *(qaw-qaw)*, which means "mighty." The onomatopoeic sound could characterize the rhythmic cadence of a marching army, and the resultant fear might arise from the blended or garbled voices of this host.

18:2. land divided by rivers. This is an apt description of Mesopotamia, the "Land of Two Rivers," the Tigris and Euphrates. However, since the envoys of the Ethiopian pharaoh Shabaka, at least initially, are being sent throughout Egypt, the "rivers" in this case may well be the tributaries and canals linked to the Nile River.

18:5. imagery from grape harvest. It is the wise farmer who knows the correct times of the year to cultivate and prune his vines to insure maximum yield. The grapevines first bloom in May, and the fruit will begin to ripen by August. There are two calculated prunings: (1) as noted in the Gezer Calendar, in the fall before the vines become dormant, the unproductive bunches from the previous year are removed, and (2) once the grapes appear, excess leaves and tendrils are cut away to encourage greater yield and even ripening. Yahweh will thus bide his time until the appropriate moment to make his pruning of nations on earth.

18:6. judgment by animals. The cuttings from the grape vines were often used for fuel (Ezek 15:2-4), but in this example they are left as food and nesting for birds and other animals. The pruned cuttings, like the shattered nations, become little more than scattered sticks, incidentally useful through the coming seasons, but no threat to Yahweh or to Judah.

19:1-25
Oracle Against Egypt

19:1. Egypt in eighth century. Egypt is a divided nation during much of the eighth century. The nominal rule of Sheshonq's successors at Tanis was virtually ignored by the dynasts at Thebes and the patchwork of kings and chiefs in the Delta. The rising threat to Egypt represented by the expansion of Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser III after 745 may have fueled the emergence of the Cushite kings Piankhy and Shabaka. Their efforts to unite all Egypt were stalled for about twenty years by the rulers of Sais, who had managed to merge all of the northern nomes under their leadership. The Saite success was aided by increased trade with the Philistines and the rest of the Levant. It was probably to the Saite king Tefnakhte that many of the Assyrian border states (Philistia, Israel, Transjordan) looked for aid in their attempts to rebel. Finally, in 712 the Sudanese king Shabaka conquered all of Lower Egypt and once again united the country under the single rule of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty.

19:1. cloud as chariot. The image of a rampant God storming through the heavens in a cloud chariot is a common one (Ps 68:4; 104:3; Jer 4:13). Such descriptions of storm theophany may be found in the texts that speak of the Ugaritic god Baal. In both the Aqhat Epic and the Baal and Anat cycle of stories, Baal is referred to as the "Rider of the Clouds." Baal's attributes, commanding the storms, unleashing the lightning and rushing to war as a Divine Warrior, even appear in the Egyptian El Amarna texts. The characteristics of Yahweh as Creator, Fertility God and Divine Warrior share a great deal in common with the characteristics of the gods in these earlier epics. One of the ways that Yahweh presents himself as the sole divine power for the Israelites is by assuming the titles and powers of the other ancient Near Eastern gods.

19:1. idols trembling. The gods/idols and the people of Egypt are paralleled here in their awe of Yahweh's command over all of nature and every creature and nation. The anthropomorphic image of "trembling" idols is comparable to the fear of the Mesopotamian gods who through their collective efforts created the flood (Gilgamesh Epic and the *Atrahasis Epic*). They were overwhelmed by the ferocity

of the forces they had unleashed and are described as cowering like whipped curs behind a wall. Yahweh's magisterial entrance into Egypt may be compared to the derision of idols in Psalm 96:4-5 and Isaiah's general attitude toward nations that are "full of idols" but lack real divine power (Is 2:8; 10:10-11; 31:7).

19:3. consultation of idols and the dead. Following his similar description of Egyptian divination in 8:19, Isaiah derides that nation for its useless dependence on idols and mediums (see, however, the comments on 1 Sam 28:7-11). There is a great deal of information on the use of magic in ancient Egypt by priests and professional practitioners. They used herbs, chants, ritual performances and bloodletting to cure illnesses, exorcise demons, curse enemy nations and their leaders, and influence the gods. A portion of these magic texts was designed to speed the journey of the spirits of the dead through the process of judgment and on to a blessed afterlife. It was assumed that these spirits could also be consulted on a variety of matters. A number of "letters to the dead" soliciting information have been recovered.

19:4. fate of Egypt. An immediate threat to the native Egyptian rulers was the Ethiopian king Shabaka. His Nubian kingdom eventually conquered the Egyptian Delta states in 716 B.C., and that would fit the time period. It is also possible that Isaiah is referring to Assyria. The Delta kings had joined the Philistine revolt lead by Gaza against Assyria and Sargon II in 720. It could easily be surmised that Assyria would eventually wish to conquer Egypt and add it to the empire. Both Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II made treaties with Arab tribes along the Sinai and Philistine borders to keep a check on Egypt. Tensions continued to grow between the nations until in 663 Ashurbanipal successfully marched south through the Nile Valley and sacked Thebes.

19:5-7. Egypt's dependence on the Nile. Like the riverine system in Mesopotamia, Egyptian agriculture and commerce was completely dependent on the Nile River system. They were fortunate in that the Nile was a fairly predictable and manageable river. Its inundations occurred on a regular schedule (carefully recorded by scribes and kept in official repositories). Failure of the Nile's flood would mean poor harvests and the destruction of its industries (especially flax). The Nile's banks could be cut with canals and irrigation channels to expand the size of fields and the movement of light shipping. In addition, the controlled flooding of the Nile brought a rich silt to Egyptian fields, insuring abundant crops and lessening the need for fertilizing or crop rotation. Travel was also based on movement up and down the Nile. There was constant, heavy barge traffic carrying grain and other raw materials, manufactured goods and building stones. Royal messengers, bureaucrats and priests from the many temple communities sailed the Nile, visiting and supervising fields and the collection of taxes. In fact the very size of Egypt's domain was made possible because troops could quickly move from one end of the kingdom to the other.

19:9. flax and linen industry. The warm and humid climate in Egypt necessitated light clothing styles. Flax, cultivated since Neolithic times, was one answer to this need. It provided both food (seeds and linseed oil) as well as a fiber that could be woven into linen cloth. In Egypt flax was tightly planted (to increase height and prevent branching) in late October and harvested at a height of three feet in April or May. Such a field would be quite susceptible to hail storms (Ex 9:23-25). Younger plants were pulled up by the roots to produce fine linen, while older plants were used for ropes and belts. The stems were first soaked in tanks of stagnant water (retting) and then dried before the fibers were separated (Josh 2:6). The dried stems were beaten and the fibers combed out for spinning, with the longer threads being used for clothing and the shorter (tow) set aside as lamp wicks (1:31). There were several grades of linen produced. The best set was aside for the pharaoh, the nobility and the priests. Any interruption in production would have had a ripple effect, destroying the livelihood of countless workers in the fields and factories.

19:11. officials of Zoan. The highest ranking members of the pharaoh's court and of the priesthood were representatives of the noble families of Egypt. Those associated with Zoan, located in the upper Delta just twenty-nine miles south of the Mediterranean coast, considered themselves the direct descendants of the most ancient noble clans in the country. Their impotence to deal with this crisis underscores the lack of importance such lineage actually possessed. Zoan had become the capital of Egypt at the beginning of the Twenty-First Dynasty (1176-931 B.C.), the same period as the development of the Israelite monarchy. Memories of official court dealings between Jerusalem and Zoan may form the basis for this reference, since the Egyptian capital was moved to Sais and Napata after 873 B.C.

19:11. disciple of the ancient kings. Because it had such a long, virtually uninterrupted history, Egyptian officials faced with a crisis or an

unexplained omen would chant ancient prayers and magical incantations (such as those found in the execration texts). Or they would consult the records of previous administrations and the instructions of model officials. The cultural memories, recorded on papyrus for generations, had great authority, and the descendants of these earlier officials took great pride in being the inheritors of such wisdom (including the twenty-fifth-century B.C. *Teaching of Ptah-Hotep* and the twenty-second century B.C. *Instruction of Merikare).* However, this attitude also could prevent creative or innovative decision-making. Isaiah ridicules these men who pride themselves in wisdom but fail to understand how to deal with present crises (compare 43:8-9).

19:13. leaders of Memphis. Prior to 715 B.C. the Delta region of Egypt was ruled by at least four rival pharaohs. The area was divided into the Tanis region (eastern delta), the region of Leontopolis (central delta) and the Saite region (western delta). There were also many petty kingdoms claiming independence and a portion of Egypt's ancient legacy. Mention here of Memphis (Hebrew reads Noph) simply ties Egypt's administrative chaos to the ancient capital city. This contrasts the irony of current anarchy with past greatness. Only after the Nubian Twenty-Fifth Dynasty arises under Shabaka will Egypt once again be united under a single ruler.

19:15. palm branch or reed. See the comment on 9:14 for this contrasting metaphor. The leaders of Egypt are so confused that they cannot tell the difference between heads or tails or the powerful (for whom palm branches are waved) or the weak, who bow like reeds before the great (58:5).

19:18. five cities. It is impossible to identify these cities based on any historical event. Jeremiah 44:1 does mention four (Migdol, Tahpanhes, Noph and Pathros) in which Israelites are dwelling, but that may have no relation to this verse. Certainly there is evidence from the time of Solomon onward (Elephantine colony, Leontopolis) of an Israelite presence in Egypt (diplomatic and commercial). What seems most important to the statement is the very idea of Yahweh worship in Egypt and perhaps even in a major city associated with an Egyptian god.

19:18. language of Canaan. Normally when a foreign community is established in a nation, it is expected that they will speak the language of that country, except among themselves. It would be difficult to do business or engage in diplomatic activity otherwise. Thus for the Israelite languages of Hebrew or Aramaic to be spoken in Egypt would be unusual. Most likely this refers to the study of the sacred writings of the Yahwists and prayer raised to Yahweh. This suggests, as do verses 19-21, a conversion of Egyptians to Yahwism.

19:18. city of destruction. The meaning of this phrase is uncertain. The various sources do not agree on whether the original text read *heres,* "destruction," or *ḥeres,* "sun." The Septuagint adds another reading, *'ir haṣṣedeq,* "city of righteousness." If "city of the sun" is meant, that could refer to Heliopolis, the city of the sun god Re. If this is one of the cities where Hebrew will be spoken, then a major religious revolution would be at hand.

20:1-6

Ashdod, Egypt and Cush

20:1. Sargon's campaign against Ashdod. This is one of those rare instances where the biblical account of the Ashdod revolt of 713-711 B.C., the Assyrian records, and the archaeological remains all corroborate one another. The Philistine city revolted at the instigation of King Azuri, perhaps with the expectation of Egyptian support. The Assyrian Annals charge him with refusing to pay tribute and fomenting rebellion among his neighbors. The Assyrian emperor Sargon II responded with a swift campaign that quickly suppressed any hopes for independence. He placed Azuri's younger brother, Ahimeti, on the throne, who in turn was almost immediately deposed by a usurper named Yamani. Sargon sent another expedition in 712, and Yamani fled to Egypt. An Assyrian commissioner was then appointed to manage Ashdod for the empire. Excavations in stratum 8 of the city have revealed a number of mass graves under the floors. Several fragments of an Assyrian monumental stele were also found. They come from a copy of the one erected in Khorsabad, listing Sargon's conquests, including Ashdod.

20:2. Isaiah's role play. The enacted prophecy employed by Isaiah was startling. This older man (who had been called to be a prophet thirty years before, in 742 B.C.) is commanded by God to strip himself naked and parade before the people in that shameful state. His purpose is to graphically demonstrate to them their ultimate fate if they choose to join the Ashdod revolt. They too will be stripped naked and taken away as slaves (compare Mic 1:8; Nahum 3:5). Since style and quality of clothing was a status marker in the ancient world, criminals were also displayed naked as

a sign of their loss of social status (Middle Assyrian Laws).

20:3. role of Egypt and Cush in Ashdod campaign. The Assyrian records (Sargon's Nimrud Prism) mention the establishment of a Mediterranean harbor jointly held by Egypt and Assyria. Such cooperation may have been forced on Egypt because of Assyrian control of Cyprus and their pacification of Arab tribes along the Sinai border. The Delta kings, fearing further incursions, attempted to take some of this pressure off by supporting first the revolt of Hanno of Gaza and then that of Aziru of Ashdod. Because of this clandestine support, the usurper Yamani fled to the Delta at the approach of Sargon II's army in 712. However, the people there refused to harbor him or give him any further military aid. Yamani then attempted to gain help from the Nubian dynast Shabaka. This was to no avail; Shabaka was more interested in conquering the Delta kingdoms and did not want to raise Assyrian ire. Thus Yamani was delivered to the Assyrians in chains as a peace offering. Sargon's annals record this as a sign of how far word of his "awe-inspiring glamour" had spread.

20:4. treatment of captives. Prisoners of war were considered spoils to be divided among the conquerors. They would become slaves, and it was necessary to immediately break their spirit and at the same time use them as a means of shaming their home countries or cities. Assyrian annals include lists of captives among the other items taken by to Ashur or in some cases impaled as an example to other rebels. Egyptian royal tomb paintings often depict lines of prisoners, bound together by the neck, marching into captivity. While these figures are not completely naked, they have been stripped of all valuables and insignias of rank (see comment on 2 Sam 10:3).

21:1-10

Oracle Against Sealand

21:1. Desert by the Sea. The Hebrew here might better be translated "wilderness by the sea" or "swampland." Either would fit the southern portion of Mesopotamia, an area of marshes and quagmire as one gets closer to the Persian Gulf. At issue is concern for the capture of Babylon by the Assyrians in 703 B.C. and the expulsion of the Babylonian leader Merodach-Baladan. The anti-Assyrian party within Hezekiah's court had hoped that Babylon would be able to successfully challenge Assyria and thus give the outlying provinces like Judah an opportunity to gain their independence. These hopes were dashed with the resurgence of Assyrian power under Sennacherib. Thus the oracle of woe reflects that disappointment.

21:2. role of Elam and Media. While verse 9 makes it clear that Babylon is the city to be attacked, it is less clear what role Elam and Media would play in these events. Both of these Iranian peoples from east of Tigris had been helpful to Merodach-Baladan when he had established himself in Babylon in 720, and after Sargon II ousted him, he fled to Elam in 710. It is possible that the prophet is urging Elam and Media to once again help Merodach-Baladan against their common enemy, Assyria. However, the chaotic conditions of the time, with attendant looting and betrayal, could see a shifting of earlier alliances. In any case Elam ceased to be a factor in Near Eastern politics after 680, and that may be the result of the growth of Median power as well as pressure from Assyria.

21:5. set tables, spread rugs. The apparent banquet scene portrayed here might suggest that Babylon was unprepared for the attack that would capture the city. It may also refer to preparations for battle (as Anat in the Ugaritic Epic set up bleachers and tables so her warriors could watch as she slaughtered her enemies) or possibly a sketching out of Babylon's defenses or her various districts prior to a siege.

21:5. oil shields. The practice of oiling shields in preparation for battle may be based on the desire to make the leather more flexible and less brittle (2 Sam 1:21). Classical sources (Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and Virgil's *Aeneid)* suggest an oiled shield was more flexible and could shed a blow. The shine from a freshly oiled leather shield might also be helpful in blinding an opponent.

21:7. chariotry in eighth century. The Assyrians used chariot corps, divided into squadrons of fifty, as the heart of their army's campaign forces. They held two, three or four men crews, with one man serving as driver and the others as archers or shield bearers. In earlier periods (Ashurnasirpal) a third horse was attached to the side of the chariot, to be detached if one of the others was injured or the charioteer needed to escape a crippled vehicle. Depictions of chariots in Assyrian reliefs demonstrate that they initially had medium-sized wheels with six spokes, and a single pole extended from the front to hitch a team of two horses. Later, during the reign of Shalmaneser III, the chariots were heavier, with huge eight-spoke wheels. Sennacherib also added an additional team of horses to help pull these heavier chariots.

21:7. cavalry in eighth century. Most of what we know about the use of cavalry in the eighth century comes from depictions on Assyrian reliefs. They show that in areas such as hilly or wooded country where chariots were ineffective, the armies in the ancient Near East employed cavalry. Some of these men were equipped with bows, while other served as lancers, carrying a long spear. These latter forces would be used as shock troops, charging along with chariots against a massed enemy, driving wedges in their ranks so the Assyrian infantry could follow into the breaches (see 1 Kings 20:21). Cavalry archers often fought in pairs, with one using his bow while the other carried a shield to protect his companion (see 2 Kings 9:25). Riders were also used to carry messages on the battlefield and to report events to nearby fortresses and cities (see Ben-Hadad's escape with covering cavalry in 1 Kings 20:20).

21:9. fall of Babylon. At the death of Sargon II in 705, Merodach-Baladan once again set himself up as the ruler of Babylon. This signaled yet another series of revolts throughout the Assyrian empire (among them the Anatolian provinces of Que, Tabal and Hilakku). Sennacherib's annals describe how he systematically subjugated each rebellious region. Babylonia and Elam were dealt with first because of their proximity to the heart of the Assyrian empire. Fighting took place at Kish and then within the marshlands of southern Mesopotamia when Merodach-Baladan fled Babylon. Still the Babylonian leader was able to maintain control over a portion of the south and cause Sennacherib continual problems, despite Assyrian attempts to conciliate the Chaldean people. Babylon was finally besieged in 689, and when the walls were breached the Assyrians slaughtered the population and destroyed the wall systems, the temples and every house within the city. They even dug canals to channel water from the Euphrates through the city to wash away foundations and brickwork.

21:9. shattered images. Sennacherib's annals contain graphic accounts of the capture of Babylon in 689. In their frenzy of destruction the Assyrian soldiers had no respect for the gods of their enemy, smashing Babylon's sacred images and crushing many of them into tiny fragments. In the midst of this destruction, however, the soldiers managed to rescue two statues of their own national gods, Adad and Shala, which had been captured 480 years earlier by the Babylonian king Marduk-Nadin-Ahe.

21:11-12

Oracle Against Edom

21:11. Dumah. This is an oasis town in north central Saudi Arabia near the southern end of the Wadi Sirhan. Its association with the Kedarite confederacy of Bedouin tribes of that region (Gen 25:13) may explain the place name's tie to Edom. There may also be a pun expressed here in the Hebrew of this word *(duma),* which means "silence," and Edom.

21:11. Seir. This portion of the territory of Edom included the wooded area which stretched from the Transjordanian plateau south to the Wadi al-'Arabah, perhaps including Petra (see Judg 5:4). The term appears in fourteenth-century Egyptian texts listing the names of peoples and cities as the "country of Seir-nomads."

21:11. Edom in eighth century. During the eighth century Edom was struggling to maintain its independence. The country was weakened by Judah's interest in expanding into the region: Amaziah (801-787 B.C.) staged a raid at the turn of the century (see 2 Kings 14:7), and his successor, Uzziah, rebuilt the port of Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba (2 Kings 14:22). A further sign of their weakness was Edom's payment of tribute to the Assyrian king Adad-Nirari III (809-782 B.C.). When the Syro-Ephraimitic war caused turmoil in Judah in the 730s, the Edomites regained Elath (2 Kings 16:6). However, they were forced into vassalage by Tiglath-Pileser III after 732 B.C. and became a link in the Assyrian empire's trade route south from Damascus to the Aqaba, the King's Highway. Assyrian tribute lists also demonstrate that for the rest of the century Edom remained loyal to the empire, giving little or no support to the other rebellious Palestinian vassals.

21:13-17

Oracle Against Arabia

21:13. Arabia. Comprising territories claimed by various Bedouin tribal groups, Arabia was an area that Assyrian kings listed as a part of their empire but never truly controlled. The Arab tribes occupied the region between the southern Negev and the north central portion of the Arabian Peninsula. This could suggest a translation in this passage of "wasteland" rather than Arabia, paralleling it with "swampland" in 21:1. Some Arab groups engaged in caravan trade, transporting frankincense and myrrh, slaves and dyes to both Egypt and Mesopotamia. The number of raids mentioned in various ancient texts also attest

to their occasional occupation as predators on the caravan routes. Arabs appear in the records of Shalmaneser III dealing with the alliance formed against him at the Battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C. They continue to appear in Assyrian records down to the reign of Ashurbanipal at the end of the seventh century. It is also noted in the annals of Sargon II that some Arabs were forced to resettle in Palestine after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.

21:13. Dedanites. The Dedanite tribes used Khuraybah (modern al-'Ula) in northwest Arabia as their base of operations. Excavations had uncovered an extensive group of small satellite villages in the nearby valley of Wadi al-Qura. They operated as caravaneers with contacts in Syria, Phoenicia and Palestine. During the seventh century they may have been part of Edom's sphere of influence and subject to Assyria's control.

21:14. Tema. Based on its mention in Assyrian and Aramaic inscriptions, Tema has long been identified with the oasis city of Tayma, located on the western border of the North Arabian Desert. It lies at the crossroads of three major trade routes of the "incense road" from South Arabia to Syria, Mesopotamia and eastern Arabia. The riches of Tema were tapped by the emerging Mesopotamian empires of the first millennium B.C. The Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III lists the city as one of those paying tribute in 734 B.C. Along with Dedan, Tema served as a major urban center for its region during the seventh and sixth centuries. The Chaldean monarch Nabonidus made it his headquarters for ten years (553-543) as he attempted to gain control over the incense trade.

21:16. Kedar. Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian texts refer to these North Arabian tribes as *Qidr* or *Qadr.* Tied to the Ishmaelites in Genesis 25:13, the Kedarites functioned as sheep breeders and caravaneers at least as late as the Hellenistic period. Their mention in this verse along with Tema may refer to Nabonidus's expedition to conquer the area in 553 B.C. There is clear evidence of ties between Kedar and Tema in Babylonian economic texts.

22:1-25
Oracle Against Jerusalem

22:1. Valley of Vision. Based on 22:5, this is probably a reference to Jerusalem and perhaps to the Hinnom Valley (see its use in Jer 7:31-34 for divination rituals). Isaiah rebukes a people who have sought guidance from other gods and thus, despite their physical location on Mount Zion, have no true vision of events.

22:1. going up on roofs. This may also be a reference to divination or false worship. There is ample evidence in the prophetic books of Israelites burning incense on the roofs of their houses (Jer 19:13; Zeph 1:5). This may also refer to the symbolic "roofs" of incense stands like the one excavated at Megiddo. It is shaped like a house, with cornices around the top and contained charred remains on top. The first alternative would be supported by the ancient Near Eastern evidence. Offerings on a rooftop occur in narrative both in Mesopotamia (Gilgamesh) and in Ugarit (Keret).

22:2-3. historical context. These events occur during the 701 B.C. campaign of Sennacherib (see comments on 2 Kings 18:1—20:21). The Assyrian king led a huge army of mercenaries and conscripts from throughout his empire. During the course of the invasion of Palestine, they will, according to Sennacherib's annals, "lay siege to forty-six fortified cities, walled forts, and countless villages." King Hezekiah was bottled up in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage." Any of his officials who attempted to escape were captured, and many were executed. The strategic western border citadel at Lachish was captured and burned. Archaeological evidence of a mass grave indicates that its garrison was massacred, and Assyrian reliefs from the palace in Nineveh depict prisoners being taken into exile. Sennacherib claims to have taken 200,150 prisoners of war—an inflated figure so large that there would have been virtually no one left in Judah. Both the biblical account and the Assyrian records agree there was widespread destruction, but the invaders eventually withdrew after Hezekiah paid a huge sum as tribute and ransom for the city of Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:13-16).

22:6. Elam. See the comment on 21:2. Sennacherib regularly conscripted levees of soldiers from subject and allied peoples. Although Elam has previously supported the Babylonians and opposed Assyria, in this 701 campaign it seems clear that they have supplied a contingent of bowmen for Sennacherib's host.

22:6. Kir. There is no consensus on the exact location of the country of Kir. Because of its association with the Arameans in Amos 9:7, several attempts have been made to place it either in northern Syria or in the western desert (west of the Euphrates). Its mention here with Elam also suggests proximity to that country east of the Tigris River.

22:8. palace of the forest. See the comment on 1 Kings 7:1-12 for this storehouse within the palace complex. The people hope to draw on the arsenal it contained to defend themselves

against the Assyrian invaders.

22:9. storing water in lower pool. Based on the comment in 2 Kings 20:20 and the discovery of the Siloam Tunnel inscription, it seems clear that Hezekiah constructed a water tunnel over eighteen hundred feet long from inside the walls of Jerusalem to the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley. In this way he was able to insure a safe and continuous water supply for Jerusalem during the Assyrian siege. The "lower pool" was one of two reservoirs used to hold and channel water (see 7:3). It was designed to provide irrigation flow to the terraced areas along the slope of the Kidron Valley, and it eventually drained into the Pool of Shelah, modern Birket el-Hamra.

22:9-11. building in Jerusalem in preparation for siege. The defenses of Jerusalem had to be repaired and strengthened in anticipation of Assyrian efforts to take the city. There was also a need to balance the demands for more housing by the people of Judah who had fled to Jerusalem for protection and the all-important defense of the city. As a result the area between the city's dual wall system was cleared of all temporary shelters to provide a "killing ground" should the Assyrians penetrate the outer defenses. This area was also partially flooded to make it more difficult to transverse and to add to the city's water supply.

22:15. royal steward. The position of "royal steward" may have evolved from a relatively insignificant post into that of a chamberlain, who was in charge of all of the affairs of the palace in Uzziah's time. There is precedent for this title in Ugaritic and Phoenician texts, and it would be comparable to the position of vizier in the Egyptian court. It has been argued that the steward in question here is Shebna, mentioned as a scribe or secretary in 2 Kings 18:18. The possibility exists that Shebna was addressed by various titles during his career, depending on his current assignment. One would expect, however, that as royal steward he would have been the preeminent adviser and facilitator for the king. If he was referred to by a lesser title in Hezekiah's reign, then it may be surmised that he had been demoted.

22:16. rock-hewn tomb. The valleys and slopes around Jerusalem contain a large number of tombs hewn from the native limestone cliffs. Among them on the slope of Silwan is a tomb containing a partial inscription and the title *'asher 'al habbayit,* the same phrase used in verse 15 to describe the position once held by Shebna. The lack of a name in this inscription makes it impossible to tie it conclusively to Shebna. Isaiah's rebuke of this official is based on the extravagance of constructing an individual tomb rather than utilizing a communal cave or hewn mortuary chamber within the confines of his family holdings. These more traditional tombs included shelves for internment of the bodies and lamp niches, as well as a recessed pit for disposal of bones when the shelves were needed for fresh burials. Only the very wealthy could afford to carve an individual chamber, perhaps incorporating Phoenician or Egyptian design (pyramids or elaborate facades).

22:20. Eliakim on seal. The name of this official, which means "May El establish," has been found on seal impressions from Tell Beit Mirsim, Beth Shemesh, and Ramat Rahel. He served as *'asher 'al habbayit,* royal steward, under King Hezekiah (see 2 Kings 18:18; 19:2; Is 36:3), and therefore would have been expected to affix his official seal to many documents. The seal impression containing the name Eliakim appears on a large collection of jar handles dating to Hezekiah's reign. The Iron Age Lachish stratum 3, dated to 701 B.C., is the most important of the sites where these handles have been found. It is likely that Eliakim's seal appears on these jars as a part of his regular duties, managing palace stores and distributing oil and wine to royal fortress sites like Lachish.

22:22. key to house of David. The relatively tiny locks used to secure our doors today require a very small key. However, in the biblical period locks were quite large and required a correspondingly large and heavy bronze or iron key (see Judg 3:25; 1 Chron 9:27). When Eliakim is given this key, its size and probably its elaborate decoration would serve as a visible symbol of his authority to lock and unlock the rooms and gates of the palace in Jerusalem. This is also known as one of the functions of the Egyptian vizier.

22:23-25. imagery. The apparently domestic images portrayed here, a tent peg in firm ground or pegs driven into mud-brick walls to hold up shelves or to hang kitchen ware, function as part of a ritual of installation for Eliakim. The origins of such images probably go back to the village culture of ancient Israel, and their basic familiarity gave them the authority that compares to Jeremiah's commissioning: "to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer 1:10). One of the most well-known installation ceremonies in ancient literature is Marduk's installation as the chief Babylonian deity in *Enuma Elish.* There it is proclaimed that his command cannot be changed and that the limits he sets (for the gods) will be inviolable.

23:1-18

Oracle Against Tyre

23:1. Tyre in eighth century. The eighth century B.C. was a time of commercial and political expansion for the Phoenicians. A colonial empire was established, with Carthage as the principal city in the western Mediterranean (founded by Dido about 814 B.C.). The degree to which the Phoenicians of the island city of Tyre and of Sidon operated freely depended in this period on the extent of Assyrian influence over them. Adadnirari III (810-783) received tribute from them, but no significant Assyrian pressure was applied until the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727). The Assyrian king skillfully played on the fear of Tyre's expanding commercial empire to gain alliances with the city-states on Cyprus. He also forced Tyre to pay a huge amount annually (evidence of which is found in Assyrian tribute lists) to save themselves from military invasion. The wealth of Tyre was legendary (see Ezek 28:4-5; Zech 9:3), and in order to defend it Tyre's king Lulli forced the Cypriot states to submit to him. This brought on a five-year siege of Tyre by Shalmaneser V (726-722) and his successor Sargon II (721-705). Some attempts were made by Lulli to negotiate an end of the hostilities since the Assyrians occupied all of the Tyrian mainland. However, when he again revolted at the time of Sennacherib's accession, the Assyrians forced Lulli to flee to Cyprus and installed Ittobaal over the Sidonian kingdom.

23:1. Tyre in the seventh century. Tyre and Sidon continued to vacillate in their allegiance to Assyria throughout the seventh century. In response to the Phoenician alliance with the Ethiopian Tirhakah of the Egyptian Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, Assyrian armies repeatedly invaded the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, devastating towns and villages and placing increasing pressure on the port cities to submit to Assyrian rule. Finally in 677 B.C. Esarhaddon utterly destroyed Sidon, parading the head of its ruler, Abdimilkutte, in Nineveh. Severe diplomatic restrictions were placed on Baal I of Tyre in an effort to prevent him from aiding the Egyptians. Ashurbanipal (667-627) also records dealing with anti-Assyrian rulers in Syro-Palestine. After crushing the Egyptians and destroying their capital at Thebes in 663 B.C., Ashurbanipal installed a native Egyptian, Psammeticus I, as ruler of Lower Egypt. He then brought his army back up the coast to punish Baal I and the Phoenicians. He completely stripped Tyre of its autonomy, transforming all of Phoenicia into an Assyrian province and taking full control of the shipping trade that had been the basis of Phoenician wealth and independence. However, after Ashurbanipal's death Tyre regained its supremacy in Mediterranean trade.

23:1. ships of Tarshish. The tonnage required for a merchant ship to make a profit and be seaworthy enough to ply the waters of either the Mediterranean or the Red Sea required skillful building practices. Since the "ships of Tarshish" are often mentioned in relation to trade mission (see 1 Kings 22:48; 2 Chron 9:21), there must have been a particular type of ship involved. It is possible that they were constructed in Tarshish, but it may be that they were named for their ability to sail as far as Tarshish in the western Mediterranean. Assyrian reliefs and the bronze gate covers of Shalmaneser III from Balawat depict these ships being used for military transport as well as carrying cargoes of tribute taken from their many vassals. A relief found in the palace at Nineveh depicts Lulli of Sidon's flight to Cyprus. Among the ships in his fleet are tubby-looking merchantmen with a row of shields along the hull and two levels of oarsmen on either side to aid the ship's movement when the sails were becalmed. Ships like this with two rows of oarsmen were called biremes.

23:2. merchants of Sidon. The silence of the usually boisterous and wealthy Sidonian merchants may be based on the extension of Assyrian hegemony over the area starting in the mid-eighth century, cutting off some of their profits. Or it refers to the growing pressure placed on that area by Sennacherib (after 701) and ending in 677 with the destruction of the city of Sidon by Esarhaddon. A new Assyrian city was built over its ruins by levies from throughout the Assyrian sphere of influence and named Kar-Esarhaddon.

23:3. grain of Shihor. Phoenician merchants transported items from throughout the Mediterranean. Grain from Shihor, possibly Egyptian *p̄ šḥr,* where Shihor would be translated "pool of Horus." It represents the fertile harvests of Egypt, shipped up the Nile and on to the coast by way of either the Wadi el-Arish (Brook of Egypt in 1 Kings 8:65) or the Pelusiac arm of the Nile. The stream may also parallel a portion of the "Way of Horus" that connected Palestine and Egypt.

23:3. economic role of Tyre. Standing out from the coast approximately six hundred yards from the mainland, the island city of Tyre and its harbor were secure from anything but a sustained siege. The waters were also deep enough to allow for heavily laden ships to approach and offload their cargoes. Dedi-

cated to commercial activity, Tyre was supplied with food and other essentials by its sister city of Ushu. Tyrian fleets established colonies, including some on Cyprus and the North African city of Carthage, around the Mediterranean to draw on the resources of these areas, especially metals, and to funnel goods back and forth between the eastern and western Mediterranean. Archaeological evidence from throughout this region of Phoenician metalwork and pottery indicates the extent and longevity of trade relations. Their principal exports were cedar wood, fabrics and dyes, and glasswork. The economic partnership between Solomon and Hiram I (969-936) that extended Phoenician and Israelite interests south to Somalia may have been only one such venture. The expansion of Assyrian hegemony over the Levantine coast forced Tyre and Sidon into cooperating with the Mesopotamian power. Efforts to revolt or withhold tribute payments resulted in invasion and curtailment of economic activity. However, the Assyrians also needed Tyrian expertise and access to the sea, so it is likely business continued virtually uninterrupted despite occasional hostilities.

23:4. fortress of the sea. Tyre was originally founded around 2750 B.C. on a sandstone reef about six hundred yards off the coast of southern Lebanon. Its occupied area was enlarged in the tenth century when Hiram I used fill to connect the older city with a nearby reef. To approaching sailors it must have looked like a city floating on the sea. No army was successful in capturing the city until the time of Alexander of Macedon, who built a causeway from the mainland in 332 B.C. However, Tyre was not totally self-sufficient. Its vulnerability was shown when its sister city of Ushu was captured by the Assyrians. As a result a vassal treaty was signed in the time of Esarhaddon that reflected Tyre's capitulation to the extent of even having an Assyrian official present whenever the king read diplomatic correspondence.

23:5. report from Tyre. The exact time period or event described here is unclear. It could be referring to any number of events that would have dismayed the Egyptians, representing the cessation of trade and the elimination of an important political ally. Possible occasions include the Assyrian incursion into Phoenicia by Sennacherib in 701 and the destruction of Sidon in 677 by Esarhaddon. Some commentators also suggest the much later period when Sidon was conquered by the Persian king Artaxerxes III (343 B.C.) or even Alexander's capture of Tyre in 332. Such a late date, however, requires either a prophetic vision of an event long after Isaiah's time or the removal of this passage completely from its Isaianic context, making it a later editor's gloss.

23:6. Tarshish. The ambiguity in biblical and extrabiblical sources only indicates that Tarshish is to be found to the west of Israel. This would allow for identification with Carthage in North Africa and sites on the southeastern coast of Spain, including Tartessos. There is even some support for identifying it with Ezion-Geber in the Gulf of Aqaba. After his defeat of the Egyptians in 677, Esarhaddon claims in his annals to have sovereignty over Cyprus, Greece and Tarshish, in other words the entire Phoenician commercial empire.

23:10. Tyre's harbor. Tyre's original site was built on two large reefs approximately six hundred yards offshore. Since the island had limited living space, multistoried houses were closely packed together (based on scenes in the Assyrian reliefs). A port existed on each side of the island to accommodate the large number of ships that were constantly arriving and departing. The natural harbor existed on the north end and was protected by a sea wall and roadstead, sheltered by a chain of smaller islands. An artificial harbor was also constructed at the southern end of the island. This southeastern area was eventually transformed after Alexander of Macedon constructed a ramp to connect the city with the mainland and further silting created a broader peninsula. Excavations are difficult since a modern city still occupies much of the site of ancient Tyre.

23:11. Phoenicia. The Hebrew text here actually reads "Canaan." The choice to translate "Phoenicia" helps the reader stay focused on Tyre's destruction. However, that destruction is (1) based on the Canaanite culture of the Phoenicians that is condemned by Yahweh and (2) exemplified here by Yahweh stretching out his hand over the sea to demonstrate that this friendly resource of the Phoenician traders will not save them. This terminology is reminiscent of the motif of the contest between Baal and Yamm in the Ugaritic epics where the sea god is defeated.

23:12. Cyprus. Cyprus lies just seventy-six miles off the Syrian coast. It served as a place of refuge for Phoenician kings (Lulli of Tyre escapes to Cyprus under pressure from Sargon II's Assyrian armies). This oracle discounts it as a safe haven. If the Phoenicians lose control of Tyre and Sidon, their merchant fleet will become orphans. Their cargoes may either rot or be turned over to the Assyrians.

23:13. Babylon punished by Assyrians. See the

comments on 13:1 and 13:19 for the historical background of Sennacherib's capture of Babylon in 689 B.C. and the exile of the Babylonian leader Merodach-Baladan. In this passage the destruction of southern Mesopotamia's major city is cited as an example of Tyre's ultimate fate at the hands of the Assyrians.

23:13. siege towers. Assyrian reliefs from the palace at Nineveh and the annals of several kings depict a number of different types of siege engines. One of the most common was the siege tower, which was rolled up as close as possible to a city's walls. From its heights archers could target enemy soldiers, and assault bridges could be extended onto the ramparts. At the base of the tower, protected from the rain of stones, hot oil and arrows, engineers and sappers could work to undermine the walls or employ battering rams (see 29:3; Ezek 21:22).

23:15. Tyre's seventy years. There are several instances in the prophets where seventy years became a term of exile or punishment (Jer 25:12; Dan 9:2; Zech 1:12). There is also a sense of completion in this number, suggesting that Tyre and the Phoenicians are in God's hands and will not be allowed to prosper again until divine judgment is fulfilled. In fact, for much of the seventh century Tyre was dormant as a succession of strong Assyrian rulers controlled both the city and its commercial activities. There was a brief resurgence after the destruction of Nineveh in 612, but the city was then besieged for thirteen years by the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar, severely limiting its contacts with the mainland. The Persians exercised control over the Phoenician ports as well, with Artaxerxes III burning Sidon in 345 after it had joined an Egyptian-inspired revolt. Tyre's destruction by Alexander of Macedon in 332 followed a seven-month siege and effectively ended the independence of the city.

23:15-16. song of the prostitute. The pitiful condition of Tyre after Yahweh's judgment of the city is compared to an aged prostitute who must now walk the streets singing to advertise her profession and attract customers who are no longer willing to come to her door. The tune and coupleted lyrics were probably part of the raucous culture of Mediterranean seaports that catered to sailors on leave.

24:1-23

Judgment of the Day of the Lord

24:1-13. description of city's desolation. The litany of destruction found in this city lament parallels the style contained in the Sumerian *Lament over the Destruction of Ur* as well as in other ancient Near Eastern expressions of grief over fallen cities. Comparisons include the descriptions of utter desolation, the fact that no person of any rank has been spared, and the failure of nature to provide what had previously nurtured the people. The Sumerian lament speaks of devastating winds, drought, famine and bodies piled in the streets unburied. The twentieth-century B.C. Egyptian *Visions of Neferti* also depicts a land laid bare and cursed by the disappearance of the sun and the drying up the life-sustaining canals. The prophecies of Balaam (found at Deir 'Alla and dating to 700 B.C.) describe angry gods who "lock up the heavens," turning every creature into a scavenger and forcing even princes to wear rags and priests to "smell of sweat."

24:18. floodgates. See the comment on Genesis 7:11 for this metaphorical expression describing the cataclysmic effects of flood waters raining down from heaven and bursting from the waters of the underworld. The scene is one of utter destruction.

24:22. prisoners in a dungeon. The apocalyptic character of this passage makes it more likely that the author is describing the imprisonment of other powers (angels) who have attempted to rival God's power, rather than earthly kings. Certainly the pattern in much of the Old Testament is for kings to be executed (see Judg 8:21; 1 Sam 15:33) or forced to negotiate terms of surrender (2 Sam 10:19). Mesopotamian texts from Mari describe the "imprisoning" of sacred images as does the Cyrus Cylinder from Persians records. The idea of holding prisoners for long periods beneath the earth is eventually developed in the apocalyptic visions of Revelation 19:20—20:15 and in *Enoch* 18:16.

25:1-12

Victory Banquet

25:6. banquet hosted by the gods. Banquets hosted by the gods were most common in coronation settings—when a deity was ceremonially ascending the seat of his domain of power. This is the case when El calls the Rephaim (see comment on 14:9-11) to a banquet to honor Baal. Marduk's enthronement also includes a banquet. Though these banquets were for the gods, the people would join in the feasting when the enthronement was celebrated annually.

25:7-8. destruction of the shroud and swallowing of death. In the Old Testament, death is occasionally personified (Hos 13:14), but

in Ugaritic mythology, Mot ("death") is a deity of the netherworld who is an enemy of Baal. Since Baal is a fertility god, his defeat of Mot is a cyclic symbol of life returning to the world each spring. Mot is often pictured as one who swallows his prey. Rituals that target Mot are intended to put an end to his destructive activities. Here it is Yahweh who swallows death (Mot) and the setting is political (nations) not agricultural. It is the ruthless, devouring empire that threatens death to the nations who are being destroyed, so that the death masks are removed from those who have been so close to extinction.

26:1-21

Judah's Song

26:19. resurrection in the ancient Near East. Concepts of afterlife are most clearly defined in Egyptian texts. The Book of the Dead provides a guide for dealing with the questions asked of each soul on entering the nether regions. Mummification, the construction of tombs, the rich grave goods and the priestly and family cult that supplied food and drink for the dead through eternity all testify to elaborate preparations for a life beyond this one. Even in this rich afterlife doctrine, however, resurrection is reflected in the belief that the righteous dead can be resuscitated in the afterlife. Mesopotamian concepts are more pessimistic. Gilgamesh, the hero who crosses the "sea of death" and seeks out the flood hero Utnapishtim, is told by the barmaid/goddess Siduri that humans are fated to die from their conception. She advises a life filled with personal enjoyment and accomplishment, since there is no joy in death. Job echoes this opinion when he says (7:9) that "he who goes down to the grave does not return." Only in Daniel 12:2 does the Old Testament clearly refer to bodily resurrection. Thus this passage, like Ezekiel 37:4-14, may speak only of God's ability to reawaken a dead nation, to revive a covenantal community. There may be some Egyptian influence here, however, in the use of "dew" as the expression of God's power. Egyptian texts describe the dew as the "tears of Horus and Thoth," containing the power of resurrection. Dew is the only moisture available to keep plants alive during the long, dry months of summer and thus is an appropriate symbol of resurrection (for further discussion see comment on Dan 12:2).

27:1-13

Israel Gathered

27:1. gliding serpent, coiling serpent. This same description occurs in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle as one of the supernatural opponents of Baal: "When you killed Litan [Leviathan], the fleeing serpent, annihilated the twisty serpent, the potentate with seven heads" ("fleeing" is the same word as NIV's "gliding"; "twisty" is the same word as NIV's "coiling"). For seven heads see comment on Psalm 74:14.'s

27.1. Leviathan. Ugaritic and Canaanite myths contain detailed descriptions of a chaos beast representing the seas or watery anarchy in the form of a many-headed, twisting sea serpent. There is a close affinity between the description of Leviathan in Isaiah as a "coiling serpent" and the Ugaritic Baal Epic, which speaks of how the storm god "smote Litan the twisting serpent." In both cases there is a sense of the God of order and fertility vanquishing a chaos monster. Several other passages in the Old Testament mention Leviathan, but most of them, like Psalm 74:14 and Job 41:1-34, speak in terms of God's creative act that established control over watery chaos (personified by the sea serpent). In 27:1, however, that struggle between order and chaos occurs at the end of time. It may be that the fall of Satan, portrayed as a seven-headed dragon in Revelation 12:3-9, also echoes the Ugaritic image of Litan as "the tyrant with seven heads."

27:1. monster of the sea. The obvious physical struggle between the sea and the land as well as the fierce, seemingly unstoppable energy displayed by the savage sea gave rise to cosmic myths in the ancient Near East. The *Enuma Elish* creation epic from Babylon describes how Marduk vanquished Tiamat when this goddess of watery chaos was in the form of a dragon. Much of the cycle of stories about Baal in Ugaritic legend involve Baal's struggle against his rival Yamm, the god of the sea. Similarly, the Ugaritic Epic has both Anat and Baal claim to have conquered Litan, the seven-headed dragon, and thus gained mastery over the seas. In Psalm 104:26 Yahweh is said to play with Leviathan, and in Job 41:1-11 God challenges Job to show his control over Leviathan as God does. Although the text is not explicit here about whether the monster represented a nation or city, it could be a reference to Egypt or Tyre, both of which had connections with the sea.

27:9. chalk stones. Limestone is crushed to produce a chalky substance that can be used for mortar, as a liming agent in cesspits and to seal stone walls with a type of "whitewash." For altars to be crushed in this manner is to completely extinguish their sacred nature. Isaiah in this passage describes the reform mea-

sures of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18:4 and prophesies the religious reforms of Josiah in 2 Kings 23:12.

27:9. Asherah poles. See the comment on Deuteronomy 7:5 for a description of these sacred objects associated with the Canaanite goddess and her cult.

27:9. incense altars. The term in Hebrew may refer to the small incense altars, usually shaped like houses, that continually burnt frankincense or some similar spice to honor the gods of Canaan. It has also been suggested that the word used here, *ḥammamim*, is a term for "standing stones," another monumental cult object of the Canaanites (see comment on Deut 7:5).

27:12. threshing imagery. There is an artful double meaning to the word in this passage for a "flowing stream *[shibbolet]*." Isaiah is speaking of Yahweh gathering all of the people from the area between the "stream of Egypt" (the Wadi el-Arish) and the Euphrates. However, this is coupled with the other meaning for *shibbolet*, "ears of grain." Thus the image of grain gathered to the threshing floor where the stalks and kernels of grain are separated becomes clear.

27:12. territory from Euphrates to wadi of Egypt. One traditional way of speaking of the full extent of the scattering of the exiles is to say from the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia to the Wadi el-Arish, which forms the boundary with Egypt (see Gen 15:18; 2 Kings 24:7). See the comment on 1 Kings 4:21 in which this geographic range is used for the limits of Solomon's kingdom. Mention of the wadi of Egypt is found in the Assyrian annals of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 B.C.). This is the limit of Assyrian expansion until Ashurbanipal finally conquers Thebes in 663 B.C.

27:13. great trumpet. Perhaps because of their use for signaling in battle (as in the reliefs from eighth-century Carchemish depicting military musicians), the blast of a trumpet became a common image used in eschatological and apocalyptic literature as a signal for the end time (see Zech 9:14 and Rev 8:6-12). Here it awakens the exiles to the moment when they will return from Assyrian exile and from the places in Egypt where they have fled for refuge.

28:1-29
Woe Oracle Against Ephraim

28:1. wreath. The garland worn by revelers is usually a sign of joy and happiness (see Prov 4:9; Is 61:10). In this instance, however, the wreath will quickly fade as the party turns sour and drunkenness presages the destruction of the city of Samaria by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

28:2. characteristics of theophany. A theophany is an appearance by a divine being to a human. To indicate the power of the deity, this encounter generally includes such things as smoke and fire, mighty winds and storms, and earthquakes (see comments on Josh 10:11 and 1 Kings 19:11-13). The manifestation of God's presence, of course, is done for a purpose, usually to call a leader or prophet to service or to carry out judgment on an enemy nation (Hab 3:13) or the wicked (Ps 94:1-3). Theophanies also are common in the Ugaritic epic (Anat and Keret both receive divine visits), and in Mesopotamian texts they often occur in dreams, either to priests or to kings.

28:7. drunkenness in ancient world. The brewing of various types of beer and the fermenting of wine from dates and grapes is known in Mesopotamia and Egypt from protoliterate times (c. 4000 B.C.). Banqueting scenes are common in Assyrian art; they depict parties of men and women eating from tables stacked high with food and drinking from cups and through straws. The Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish* describes how the gods banqueted, making "the sweet liquor flow through their drinking tubes" (a necessity since the lees of the beverage were so thick). A Sumerian hymn to the goddess Ninkasi celebrates the brewing process and gives thanks for the beverage that slakes the thirst and gushes forth in abundance like the Tigris and Euphrates. The ills of drunkenness are found in Psalm 69:12, Proverbs 20:1, and in the drunken parties portrayed in Esther 1:3-8 and Daniel 5:1-4, and were also well recognized across the ancient Near East. Egyptian wisdom literature warns against intoxication with its accompanying lack of control and the resulting social rejection. There is evidence from the Mari texts of intoxication being viewed as a favorable condition for receiving divine oracles.

28:15. covenant with death. It is tempting to see in this passage a treaty or act of submission to the Canaanite god Mot ("death") or to the Egyptian god of the dead Osiris (see 30:1-2). Both would then represent political alliances made with various Syro-Palestinian nations or with Egypt against the Assyrians. The prophet warns the Israelites, however, that this is folly and a sign of their wicked nature (see Job 8:5-21). As the Mesopotamian hero Gilgamesh learned, no human, except in rare individual cases (Enoch, Elijah, Utnapishtim) escapes death (Job 30:23).

28:16. architectural function of cornerstone. Israelite Iron Age architectural design made increasing use of cut-stone masonry over the rough boulders and rubble construction of earlier periods. In order to provide stability and to bind two adjoining walls together, a finely shaped block of stone was inserted that became the cornerstone. It would have been a larger stone than those normally used, and its insertion often required special effort or rituals. Its large, smooth surface was a natural place for inscribing religious slogans, the name of the architect or king responsible and the date of construction. It is possible that the cornerstone could also serve as the foundation stone. For information on the latter see comments on Ezra 3:3 and 3:10.

28:21. Mount Perazim. Known as Baal Perazim in 2 Samuel 5:18-20, it commands the heights above the Valley of Rephaim (Josh 15:8). Although its exact location is unknown, the text suggests that it is just northwest of Bethlehem, near Jerusalem.

28:21. Valley of Gibeon. The site of Gibeon (el-Jib) is located six miles northwest of Jerusalem. It is best known for its association with Joshua's treaty with the Gibeonites (Josh 9:3-10:15) and for his driving a Canaanite army from Gibeon to the Beth Horon Valley (Josh 10:9-11). In this case, however, Yahweh will reverse his role of Divine Warrior and allow the Israelites to be defeated in this place of former victory.

28:25. sowing strategy. Two sowing strategies are employed here. Black cumin, a condiment, and cumin, a spice and a source of oil, were broadcast by hand. This was done in the freshly plowed furrows after the first rains. Wheat, barley and spelt had to be handled more carefully to avoid mixing the seed. It seems likely that the Israelites used a seed drill to push holes into the furrows as oxen pulled the plow through the fields. A man following kept the hollow shaft of the drill filled with seed, which dropped into the ready-made spots. The action of the plow then covered the seed. Representations of the seed drill in action are found in Kassite and Assyrian art.

28:27. threshing caraway and cumin. The seeds of these two grains were too fragile to use the larger threshing instruments. Using a rod would accomplish the threshing process without damaging the seeds.

28:28. sequence of grain production. No bread can be made if the farmer performs only one of his tasks. Therefore it is necessary to bring the harvested grain to the threshing floor, where it can be crushed under the feet of the oxen (Deut 25:4) and further processed by running a threshing sledge over it. The wheel-thresher mentioned here was a common wooden device with two or more rows of wheels affixed. Once the grain had been separated from the stalks, it had to be winnowed, sieved and then given to the women to be crushed on grinding stones to make the fine flour used for baking.

29:1-24

Woe Oracle Against Jerusalem

29:1. Ariel. This is a descriptive term for the city of Jerusalem. The name itself refers to the "altar hearth of El" (translated this way at the end of v. 2; see also Ezek 43:15). The present oracle tells of a city that will be destroyed like the sacrifices brought to the altar.

29:1. cycle of festivals. See the comments on Exodus 23:15-16 and Deuteronomy 16:9-17 for descriptions of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Harvest and the Feast of Ingathering that served as the major agricultural festivals of the Israelite calendar. The Gezer calendar, a tenth-century B.C. schoolboy exercise on a small limestone tablet, also provides the breakdown of the year according to planting, harvesting and feasting.

29:2. altar hearth. The hearth was the uppermost block of the altar, on which the sacrifice would be burnt (Lev 6:9) and from which the horns projected on each corner (1 Kings 2:28). In Ezekiel 43:15 the hearth of the altar in the vision of the reconstructed Jerusalem temple is described as being eighteen feet square.

29:3. siege works and towers. See the comment on 23:13 for a description of siege towers erected by an army attacking a walled city. Assyrian reliefs depict these moving towers as well as engineers tunneling to undermine walls, battering rams being employed on walls and city gates, and siege ramps built to facilitate the movement of towers (Jer 32:24). Siege camps also would have been established to house the army and to prevent the city dwellers from escaping (see 2 Kings 25:1; Jer 52:4). One of the most striking examples still in existence is the remains of the first-century A.D. Roman camps and enveloping wall around the Jewish fortress of Masada.

29:6. characteristics of theophany. See the comment on 28:2.

29:10. covering heads of seers. Closing the eyes and covering the head are most likely images of death here, as they are parallel to the deep sleep of the first line. Both phrases, however, are used only here and are therefore difficult to decipher.

29:11. sealed in scroll. Official documents

were written on scrolls of papyrus or vellum and then, when stored or dispatched by messenger, were rolled up and sealed with string and an affixed seal (see 1 Kings 21:8; Jer 32:10-11). The seal, either a ring or signet, was impressed into either wax or a lump of clay known as a bulla (Job 38:14). Archaeologists have found many of these clay bullae with the names of Israelite officials.

29:17. Lebanon. Using the same image of nature reversed that is found in 32:15, the prophet describes how the mountains of Lebanon, known from the Gilgamesh Epic and the Egyptian Tale of Wenamon for their stands of cedar forest, will become a fertile field. The fields of Carmel will become forest land. The sense is of the fulfillment of the covenant and a magnification of fertility that will restore Israel's fortunes.

30:1-33
Woe Oracle Against Stubborn Disobedience

30:1. alliance. See the comment on 28:15 and its warning against making a "covenant with death," referring to political dealings with the Egyptians.

30:2. Egypt's role. During Hezekiah's reign the Nubian-based Egyptian Twenty-Fifth Dynasty and Pharaoh Shabaka continuously attempted to foment revolt among the Syro-Palestinian peoples against Assyria. Sennacherib's account of his 701 B.C. campaign against an Egyptian army takes him as far as Eltekeh, just about one hundred miles from Egypt's border. In Josiah's time it was Pharaoh Psammeticus I who took advantage of the growing weakness of Assyria at the end of the reign of Ashurbanipal (d. 627 B.C.). He too hoped to expand Egyptian influence but was stymied by the rising power in Babylon.

30:4. Zoan, Hanes. Isaiah emphasizes the futility of Hezekiah's diplomatic overtures to Egypt. He says that despite having ambassadors travel to the Egyptian capital at Zoan (Tanis in the upper Delta, just twenty-nine miles south of the Mediterranean) and to Hanes (Heracleopolis Magna, forty-five miles south of Cairo on the west bank of the Nile), their mission will be in vain. Hanes was an important regional capital under both the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty ruler Shabaka as well as during the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty reign of Psammaticus I (663-609). It would have been necessary for Hezekiah to send representatives to meet with the Egyptian leaders in both of these important cities in order to initiate treaty alliances or plan strategies against Assyria.

30:6. animals of the Negev. The dangers of travel through the difficult terrain of the arid Negev are magnified by reference to wild beasts that assault the unwary. The remains of carnivores such as lions and leopards appear in excavations from the Chalcolithic to the Iron Age. Poisonous snakes, including the adder and the cobra, are also known in the area. The Assyrian king Esarhaddon's annals describe a "flying serpent" that plagued his campaign (see Num 21:8; Is 14:29).

30:6. caravan from the Negev. The caravan described here is most likely that of Hezekiah's ambassadors. The route they took avoided the normal coastal highway that was blocked by Assyria during Sennacherib's reign. Instead they traveled south to Aqaba and across the Sinai to Egypt. What they carried with them may have included the sort of goods that would have been expected to induce Egypt to become involved: frankincense, resins for cosmetics and embalming, ingots of copper or iron, indigo, ivory and lapis lazuli.

30:7. Rahab. Although not mentioned in any known text outside the Bible, Rahab is comparable to the chaos monster Leviathan, which also takes the form of a twisting serpent (Job 26:12-13; see the comment on Is 27:1). Rahab is also used synonymously for Egypt. For instance, in Psalm 87:4 the major nations are listed as subject to the power of Yahweh. Rahab, Egypt's metaphorical name, is paired here with Babylon in terms of importance. The further sign of Rahab's dual character may be found in 51:9-11, a passage that refers to Yahweh's destruction of the monster (see Ps 89:10) as well as how God "dried up the sea," a clear reference to the exodus tradition and the defeat of Egypt. In 30:7 the prophet taunts an impotent Egypt/Rahab's ability to help Israel or stop Assyria.

30:8. tablet, scroll. While the mention of both tablet and scroll may simply be parallelism, writing down a prophecy on both a clay tablet (or possibly an ostracon) and a scroll may be a sign of the coming destruction. For instance, in the first-century pseudepigraphal *Life of Adam and Eve,* Eve instructs her son Seth to write down her "testament of the fall" on both stone and clay tablets to insure some record would survive either flood or fire. This charge to write is also found in 8:1, Jeremiah 30:2 and Habakkuk 2:2. Like the spoken word, the process of writing enacts the prophecy, and it also holds it secure for later generations to see.

30:10. manipulated prophets. It is a common charge by Yahweh that the Israelites have either ignored the prophets or told them to prophesy only pleasant words and visions (see Jer 7:25-26;

Amos 2:12). Throughout the ancient world it was believed that prophets not only proclaimed the message of deity but in the process unleashed the divine action. It is no wonder then that there would be some attempt to control a negatively disposed prophet. In Assyrian king Esarhaddon's instructions to his vassals he requires that they report any improper or negative statements that may be made by anyone, specifically naming prophets, ecstatics and dream interpreters. One can perhaps understand why people would be inclined to discourage a prophet whose very words might impose doom.

30:13-14. basis of imagery. Given the extensive use of mud-brick architecture throughout the ancient Near East, this must have been a common occurrence. Egyptian tomb paintings as models depict the process from gathering clay, water and straw to shaping the bricks in molds (see Ex 5:7-8). As the bricks weathered, they eroded and lost stability. If the bricks were only sun-dried and not fire-hardened in a kiln, then they were subject to crumbling under the weight of a high wall. This would often first be manifested in cracks and bulges, and eventually the entire structure would come down in an avalanche of masonry (see 9:10). To guard against faulty construction and increase the life of the brick walls, Hammurabi's Code provided strict punishments for careless contractors.

30:22. defiling idols. There could be no more defiling substance than menstrual blood (Lev 15:19-23) and, for the people, no more defiling object than an idol (Deut 4:15-19). Here then, the idols, usually among the most precious objects in the culture, will be treated as the most disgusting piece of trash.

30:24. fodder and mash spread with fork and shovel. Because of the people's return to covenant obedience, even their draft animals will share in the abundance provided by God. Fodder for animals normally consisted of the remains of the chaff left by the threshing process. A common term for fodder means "small pieces of straw," which might be mixed with barley. Here, however, the stock are fed chickpeas that had been specially prepared for them using a wooden shovel and winnowing fork. Both of these implements helped separate the grain from the chaff and were used to create heaps.

30:28. sieve of destruction. The two types of sieves used by Israelite farmers gave them different results. The *kebara* (Amos 9:9) had large holes that caught stones and other large objects as the worker shifted it back and forth. The sieve in this passage, the *napa,* had smaller holes and was meant to separate out the smaller items from the grain through a swift up-and-down motion. This makes an excellent metaphor for God's act of judgment.

30:30. characteristics of theophany. See the comment on 28:2.

30:33. Topheth. This instance is the only case in the Hebrew Bible where this word is used as a noun, meaning "crematory" or "pyre." God's wrath is to literally burn up the Assyrian king in much the same way that sacrifices were made in the cult site in the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem to the god Molech (2 Kings 23:10). In fact, the Assyrian king Sin-Shar-Ishkun died in the flames of his palace when the city of Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C.

30:33. burning sulfur. Finely ground sulfur can increase the intensity and brightness of a fire. It may be this property that has made it a symbol of God's wrath, as in the case of Sodom. In this image of Assyria's funeral pyre it magnifies the power of God to punish the enemy nation. Mixed with salt, sulfur could also rob the soil of fertility, again a sign of God's extreme displeasure.

31:1-9
Woe Oracle Against Political Alliances

31:1. role of Egypt. See the comment on 30:2.

31:8. fate of Assyria. The ultimate fate of Assyria is its annihilation as a nation by a coalition of states headed by the Chaldeans of Babylon and the Medes. The Babylonian Chronicle describes how Nineveh falls to an allied army led by Nabopolassar of Babylon and the Median ruler Cyaxares in 612. The final battle at Carchemish in 605 demonstrated the ability of the Babylonian leader Nebuchadnezzar to totally demoralize the formerly invincible Assyrian shock troops and their Egyptian allies. Thus the hand of Yahweh and the loss of strong Assyrian leadership after the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 spelled elimination of that people's influence from the ancient Near East.

32:1-8
The Coming King

32:1-5. visions of better times. These verses form a reversal of the conditions faced by Isaiah in his call narrative in 6:9-10. What changes Israel's fortunes is the rise of a righteous king who enforces the law and maintains order. Statements such as these are part of the wisdom tradition of the ancient Near East that includes works from Egypt and Mesopotamia on the "just king." Among them is the Egyptian *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant,* who describes

a righteous king as one who is "father to the orphan" and "mother to the motherless." Similarly, the eighth-century Egyptian sage Ankhsheshonqy states that "blessed is a city with a just ruler."

32:9-20
Oracle Against the Women of Jerusalem

32:11. sackcloth around waist. One of the rituals associated with mourning and supplication is to wear sackcloth (Gen 37:34; 1 Kings 20:31-32). Pictorial representation of this practice is found on the sarcophagus of the Phoenician king Ahiram (c. 1000 B.C.), which depicts two mourning women as well as other figures performing symbolic acts associated with the passage of the deceased.

32:14. citadel and watchtower. The Lachish Letters, which date to the early sixth century and the invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, describe signal fires that are lit in towers in each of the important border towns. The writer of this passage may be referring to these signal/defensive towers, or it is possible that the word for citadel *('ophel)* refers to a portion of Jerusalem where a specific watchtower stood (see comment on Neh 3:26).

33:1-24
Woe Oracle Against Those on Whom the King Will Take Vengeance

33:4. locusts. The image of locusts as a ravaging horde stripping the land of its harvest and wealth is more fully developed in Joel 1:4-12 and Amos 7:1-2. See also the comment on Deuteronomy 28:42. The irony in the Isaiah passage is that the former destroyer, Assyria, is now to be picked over even more thoroughly than were its victims.

33:9. Lebanon, Sharon, Bashan, Carmel. The shattering of nature's normal function, coupled with a gloomy recital of areas known for their fertility, once again reflects God's displeasure at work (see 24:4-7; comment on 24:1-13). The itinerary runs generally north to south: from the lush forests of Lebanon and the wine country of the Beqa' Valley (Ps 72:16; Hos 14:7), south to the fertile plain of Sharon on the coastal plain (Song 2:1), east of the Galilee to the Bashan plateau and its excellent grazing areas (Ps 22:12), and then south again to the Carmel range also known for its herding (1 Sam 25:2; Jer 50:19).

33:18. officials. Every government requires bureaucrats to conduct its business. In this vision of the future when God's king will reign once again, the people think back to the "bad old days" when their lives and fortunes were strained by the activities of men who recorded tax assessments, counted out the tribute payments and determined ("counted towers") how many soldiers would be needed to man the Assyrian garrisons (for which they had to provide troops). The Mari texts contain a number of letters sent to local officials from provincial governors and the king, instructing them to perform these tasks. The harshness of punishments threatened against the officials for failure to collect taxes or draft workers and soldiers assured that they would in turn be a "terror" to the people they oppressed.

33:19. foreign language. The Assyrian tax collectors, some of whom may have come from various parts of the empire, spoke Aramaic, while the majority of Israelites spoke only Hebrew (see 36:11). They may also have had strange-sounding accents, which added to the sense of foreign control and oppression for the people of Judah (see Jer 5:15 for the same reaction under Babylonian rule).

33:22. role of lawgiver. One of the attributes that all kings claim is "lawgiver." For instance, as early as the end of the third millennium Sumerian king Urukagina of Lagash and the Neo-Sumerian king Ur-Nammu pledge in their royal inscriptions "not to hand over the widow and orphan to the powerful." In the same vein the eighteenth-century B.C. prologue to Hammurabi's law code contains a statement that the gods appointed him "to cause justice to prevail in the land" so that "the strong might not oppress the weak." The similarity of wording in these texts, plus the language in 2 Samuel 8:15 in which David is described as "doing what was just and right for all his people," suggests a common ancient Near Eastern tradition of the "just king." However, when the monarch fails to perform this essential task, God steps in to restore order and justice (see Ezek 34:7-16).

33:23. boat metaphor. A similar metaphor is known from an Assyrian elegy about a woman who died in childbirth. She is described as a boat that is adrift with its mooring rope cut and the seat where the oarsman would sit broken.

34:1-17
Oracle of Judgment Against the Nations

34:4. imagery of disappearing stars. Always in command of all creation, Yahweh shows mastery over the heavens and celestial bodies, causing their brightness to be snuffed out in a

reversal of creation. Prominent astral motifs in the Mesopotamian religion included the idea that the gods were given stations within the heavens and "their astral likenesses" marked the zones of the calendrical year (for instance, in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* creation epic). In the celestial omens the disappearing of a star or planet always suggested that the related deity had suffered defeat in battle. Astral deities were considered among the most prominent and powerful of the gods. The dissolving of the stars and the fall of the starry host are therefore related. Both the natural manifestation as well as the deity connected to it are overcome in this act of judgment. Additionally, dream omens in Mesopotamia hold that the observation of stars falling is a bad omen. In the destruction described in *Erra and Ishum,* Erra says that he will make planets shed their splendor and will wrench stars from the sky.

34:4. sky rolled like a scroll. More often the heavens are compared to a canopy (40:22) or a tent (Ps 104:2) spread over the earth. This image in Isaiah of the whole panorama of the sky being rolled up like a parchment scroll is unique in the Hebrew Bible (see the New Testament parallel in Rev 6:14). Additionally, the three major Babylonian gods are not represented by stars but by the sky itself. Anu is the sky god, and the horizon is divided into three paths (connected to Anu, Enlil and Ea). Therefore, rolling up the sky is an act of judgment against the three main deities of the ancient world.

34:5. role of Edom. Since the larger passage here (see vv. 1-4) is concerned with God's punishment of the nations, it may be that the description of Edom as a sacrificial victim is simply a example of what will happen to them all (compare 63:1-6). Certainly Edom serves in many cases as Israel's prototype "enemy" (see Obad 5-9; Mal 1:2-4). The lack of a specific act by Edom in the late eighth-early seventh century against Jerusalem (although see 2 Chron 21:8-10) has convinced many scholars that this passage is a reference to Edom's role as Babylon's ally in 587 B.C. (see Ezek 35:2-15).

34:6. Bozrah. This is the capital of ancient Edom and is to be identified with Buseirah in the northern region of the country. It guards a portion of the King's Highway and is fairly close to the copper mines found five miles to the southwest at Wadi Dana. Excavations demonstrate seventh to sixth century levels from the most heavily fortified and largest settlement in the area.

34:9. pitch and sulfur. Although often mentioned as a sealant material for boats (see Gen 9:14; Ex 2:3), boiling pitch appears in Old Babylonian texts as a form of punishment. Coupled with the foul smell of burning sulfur, both materials being available in the region of the Dead Sea, they could easily be associated with God's wrath (see Gen 19:24).

34:11. owls and ravens. The symbol for utter destruction here is that birds best known as inhabiting and scavenging desolate places (Job 38:41; Ps 102:6) have settled in the ruins of towns (see Is 13:22). One parallel to this picture is found in the Egyptian *Visions of Neferti* (c. 2000 B.C.), which describes an Egypt so weak that a "strange bird will make its nest near the people" and "desert herds will drink from the Nile."

34:13-15. jackals, hyenas, falcons. Isaiah's vision of Edom's desolation concludes with a land left to scavengers and phantoms (see Jer 9:11). It is easy to imagine the cry of jackals and hyenas would sound demonic in origin to people who are already in fear of their lives (Mic 1:8). Some commentators read Lilith, the Mesopotamian female night demon (v. 14), as one of the creatures inhabiting this nightmare world.

35:1-10

Restoration

35:2. Carmel and Sharon. With the elimination of Edom, regions north of that land are freed from oppression and are restored to fertility and prosperity. These include Carmel and Sharon (see the comment on 33:6, where this is reversed), the area along the northern coastal plain of Israel. Even the desertlike portions of the Arabah (within the Jordan Rift Valley; Jer 17:6) will become rich and abundant with life, like these normally fertile areas.

35:7. jackals/papyrus contrast. Jackals are creatures of the steppe and desert regions, ranging over a barren landscape (Mal 1:3). In Isaiah's vision of a garden replacing what once had been wilderness, these haunts for wild predators will be transformed into wetlands like those in the Huleh Valley (see 43:20). The marshy area will remain moist year round, allowing for the growth of grasses and papyrus plants (see Job 8:11-13 and Is 19:5-6).

36:1—37:38

Sennacherib's Siege of Jerusalem

See comments on 2 Kings 18—19 and 2 Chronicles 32.

38:1-8

Hezekiah's Illness

See comments on 2 Kings 20.

38:9-20
Hezekiah's Prayer

38:9. Hezekiah's letter. A thanksgiving psalm such as this pertaining to a situation that threatened the life of the king would typically be inscribed on a stone stele. An example of this is found in the inscription of Sin-Iddinam, who was king over the town of Larsa in the nineteenth century B.C. In a letter to the god Nin-Isina (known as a healer) the king presents his piety, benevolence and effectiveness as reasons why the god should extend healing mercy, which is granted.

38:11. seeing the Lord. Hezekiah does not view "seeing the Lord" as an afterlife experience. Seeing the Lord involved worshiping in the temple and enjoying the Lord's favor. Verses 18-19 continue to make it clear that the king anticipated no positive afterlife experience. See comment on 14:9 for more information about Israelite beliefs concerning afterlife.

38:12. metaphors. The shepherd moved frequently from place to place and therefore could break camp quickly. The weaver working on a horizontal loom had the threads and material stretched on bars between stakes. When it had to be moved, the bars could simply be pulled off the stakes and rolled up (see comment on Judg 16:13-14). When the weaver finished a piece of cloth, the threads connecting the material to the loom had to be cut. The weaving of Hezekiah's life had been completed, and he was now to be cut loose from the land of the living. Life or history as a fabric being woven is known from Greek mythology but has not been identified in ancient Near Eastern literature.

38:20. play my songs. The king's involvement in psalm composition is particularly well known in connection with David but neither began nor ended with him. As early as the end of the third millennium, Shulgi king of Ur was famous for his hymns offering prayers for the health and welfare of the king. As late as the Roman period, Nero was a patron of the arts and considered himself a first-rate composer. The ideal king was a wise king, and music was one of the realms of wisdom.

40:1-31
Comfort in God's Sovereignty and Transcendence

40:3-4. building roads in the ancient Near East. The roads of the ancient Near East were for the most part unpaved (except for a few roads in the Late Assyrian Period). Although unpaved, those intended for wheeled transport (called "wagon roads" in the Nuzi texts) had to be staked out, leveled and consistently maintained. However, very few texts describe the construction and maintenance of these roads. Roads for heavy transport were somewhat rare and were primarily along the trade routes. Thus, a vassal king complained to the king of Mari that he had to arrive at the Syrian capital by a roundabout route along a major highway. Assyrian kings rarely boasted of their road constructions as it appeared to be the duty of the local populations. In a treaty text Esarhaddon commands that when his son succeeds him the vassal must submit to him and "smooth his way in every respect."

40:3-9. voice in the wilderness, bringer of tidings. Messengers were well known in the ancient Near Eastern world. They played an essential role as the bearers of political and civic news to the inhabitants of a city. Virtually every town had a "crier" who announced important news to the inhabitants. Foreign invaders often sent a herald to a town to discuss terms with those remaining in the city. An example similar to the Rabshakeh's visit to Jerusalem is when the Assyrians sent a herald to Babylon to discuss terms during a seventh-century attack in southern Mesopotamia.

40:6-7. human mortality. The awareness of fleeting human mortality is not exclusive to ancient Israel. According to the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh, the gods decreed mortality for humans, while immortality was left only to the gods themselves. Nonetheless, the Sumerian king Gilgamesh went on many adventures to gain immortality. He first attempted to gain a type of immortality through procreation, by making a name for himself through the vanquishing of nonhuman foes, and then by searching for Utnapishtim, the hero of the flood, who had been granted immortality by the gods. Though Gilgamesh was successful in finding the flood hero and even located the "plant of life," he unselfishly wanted to bring the plant back home with him to his city (Uruk), so that all of the citizens could partake of the plant. Alas, it was stolen by a snake, and Gilgamesh returned home empty-handed. However, the reader was reminded that Gilgamesh had built the walls of Uruk, which still stood, and thus had gained a form of immortality. Thus the epic was in part an explanation for something that every Mesopotamian person knew: life was short and in death one was confined to a dreary existence in the netherworld.

40:8. what stands forever in ancient Near East. The concept of "forever" in the ancient

Near East connotated continuous and permanent time rather than endless time. Mesopotamian kings hoped that their names would be established "forever." Kings gave property to individuals and their families "forever" (i.e., in perpetuity). According to the Epic of Gilgamesh, only the gods' days were "forever" (continuous), while human days were "numbered." The concept of a word standing forever is paralleled in the fixing of destinies. In the Gilgamesh Epic Enkidu uses a curse to "fix the destiny" of Shamhat forever. Assyrian inscriptions also refer to gods whose orders cannot be changed and whose words are valid forever. In *Enuma Elish* the rebel leader Kingu and Marduk each have their destiny fixed so that their command will not be changed and their word will be eternal.

40:10. reward on return of king from battle. The terms for reward and payment were probably technical words for tribute and booty brought home by victorious warriors and kings from battle. The Assyrian kings made specific reference to the large booty received from conquered peoples. For instance, Sennacherib constructed a Lachish Room in his palace at Nineveh to house all of the booty collected from the destruction of this Judahite fortress city in 701 B.C. The return home from successful battle was an opportunity for the distribution of rewards to those who were favorites of the king.

40:11. king as shepherd. The ideology of the king as a shepherd to his people is found with Lugalzagessi of Sumer as early as c. 2450 B.C. The contemporary king Urukagina of Lagash claimed that the god Ningirsu owned his state and that the king had been chosen as a "shepherd" to administer the city on behalf of the gods and the people. For the most part this ideology continued in the ancient Near East into the period of the Israelite monarchy.

40:12. ordering of cosmos. It was the job of the chief deity to bring order to the cosmos. In *Enuma Elish* (the Babylonian creation epic) the deity Marduk, after having defeated the goddess Tiamat, "crossed the heavens and surveyed the regions; he squared Apsu's quarter, the abode of Nudimmud, and measured the dimensions of Apsu." He continued to organize the constellations, the divine astral images and other heavenly bodies.

40:13-14. council of the gods in the ancient Near East. In the ancient Near East the major decisions were all made in the divine council. There the gods would consult with one another and share their information and opinions. In the Babylonian creation epic Apsu and Tiamat, the gods from whom spawned all living creatures, had as their trusted advisor Mummu, who often rebuked them. When the high council of gods assembled to determine how to attack Tiamat, they drank themselves into a stupor and subsequently chose Marduk as their king, accepting his harsh demands of absolute rule. Isaiah insists that Yahweh has no advisors nor does he work within an assembly of gods (though a divine council of sorts was believed to be operative; see comments on Ex 20:3 and 2 Chron 18:18).

40:15. dust on the scales. The dust of the earth was used to express abasement, smallness and insignificance in the Old Testament. In this passage the dust of the nations makes no significant difference in the scales. The Babylonians took no notice of a little dust on the scales when meat or fruit were being weighed.

40:16. wood and wildlife of Lebanon. The Israelites considered that the land with the greatest forests and most varied animal life was Lebanon. In addition to supplying lumber for the temple of Solomon, the cedars of Lebanon provided sacred barges for Egypt and ships for Tyre. Moreover, the Assyrians exacted a tribute of timber from Lebanon for temple building.

40:19. manufacture of idols. Images in the ancient Near East were either cast or carved. Wooden idols were manufactured by a sculptor who stretched a line over the wood to measure the length and width of the image. He then drew an outline of the idol with his stylus, chiseled out the rough spots and put all of the body parts in the right proportion. Here, however, the reference is clearly to cast images. These would have been anywhere from four to ten inches high. The mold would be created by coating wax figurines with clay, then melting out the wax and baking the clay. The bronze would then be poured into the mold through a spout on the bottom of the feet, which would later serve as a peg to attach the idol to a wooden base. The cast would then be overlaid with gold or silver foil using a small hammer to affix it to the edges provided for that purpose. Grooves were also designed on the cast so that gold or silver wires (NIV: "chains") could be squeezed into them. Then a solid wood was chosen for a base. Recent suggestions have identified the wood as sissoo, a wood similar to teak, native to India. Literally thousands of idols throughout the Near East have been uncovered by archaeologists.

40:22. circle of the earth. The picture of the universe described here is the common cosmological view of the ancient Near East. The sky was a dome that arched over the disk of the earth, which sat on top of a primeval ocean. Under the ocean was the netherworld,

virtually a mirror image of the space above the earth. Thus, the entire universe was an enormous sphere, cut in the center by the earth. Nevertheless, here it is the earth itself that is described as circular. In Babylonian literature Shamash is praised as the one who suspends from the heavens the circle of the lands. Likewise, in a prayer to Shamash and Adad Adad causes it to rain on the circle of the earth. The circle simply reflects the curvature of the horizon (thus, disk-shaped) rather than a sphere (for which Hebrew uses another word). In the ancient world the earth was consistently regarded as being circular.

40:26. creator gods. There are many creation traditions throughout the ancient Near East. Not many of them, however, speak of the creation of the heavens or the stars. In the prologue to a Sumerian astrological treatise the three great gods An, Enlil and Enki, are credited with setting up the heavens and the astral gods and decreeing their courses. Marduk in the Babylonian creation epic is given the power of creation by the assembly of the gods, and he tests it by destroying and recreating a constellation. After defeating Tiamat, he sets up the positions of the great gods and establishes the constellations.

40:26. names of the starry host. In the Babylonian creation epic Marduk constructed stations for the gods in the heavens and fixed their astral likenesses (i.e., heavenly bodies) as images for them. Thus, although he did not actually name the stars, he appointed a deity for a respective star.

40:27-28. gods being unaware or tired. In the ancient world the gods were viewed as having human weaknesses and often were inattentive or simply unaware of events that were taking place. One result of this was that the pantheon of gods were constantly outwitting or tricking each other. For example, when Enlil brought on the flood to destroy humankind, Enki outwitted him by saving a remnant of humans. However, Enki may have been tricked when he advised the human Adapa to reject the "bread of death" while in the presence of Anu, the high god. Anu subsequently gave Adapa the "bread of life," which was apparently unexpected by Enki. The gods were not indefatigable. They were in constant need of food, drink and shelter. In fact, humans were created to do the hard labor the gods preferred not to do.

41:1-29

God's Help for His Servant Israel

41:1. islands. The islands or coastlands are a reference to the far-off reaches of the Mediterranean. The word describes any place that was reached by sea travel.

41:7. smith's craft. See comment on 40:19. In this verse the craftsman is the one who prepares the mold and creates the cast figurine. The goldsmith attaches the plating and inlay. Then the hammer is used to planish (smooth out) and burnish (shine) the overlay. The last step is difficult to translate because it is full of technical terms, but it appears to refer to the fitting of the tenon (peg) into the hole in the wooden base.

41:11-12. similarity to ancient Near Eastern prophetic oracles. Prophetic oracles were not unique to Israel. They were a common theme in certain periods in Mesopotamia. The largest corpus of prophetic oracles is found at the city of Mari on the Middle Euphrates (c. 1800 B.C.). For the most part these oracles are on a mundane plain, placing divine demands (usually of a very material nature) before the king and his advisors. They are also often concerned with the well-being of the king. Closer to the time of Isaiah, the Assyrian kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal received oracles concerning the king's responsibility to shepherd his people and to act justly. Like the verses here in Isaiah, they often promise victory over enemies. In one prophecy to Esarhaddon, Ishtar states that his enemies will roll before his feet "like ripe apples."

41:15. threshing sledge. The threshing sledge was a heavy wooden sledge with stone or iron teeth. It was used to separate the grain from the chaff before the winnowing process.

41:16. winnowing. The process of winnowing was usually carried out on hilltops, where the wind carried away the chaff and allowed the grain to fall to the ground. The grain was tossed into the air with wooden shovels or fans. There are numerous depictions of winnowing on funerary wall reliefs from Egypt.

41:19. reforestation. The reforestation of depleted areas was done only on a minor scale in the ancient world. The Assyrian kings planted many "gardens" in their chief cities, including hundreds of trees, but this cannot be considered full-fledged reforestation.

41:25. parallel between north and rising sun. There is no contradiction here, as both statements here concern Cyrus of Persia, who was from the east but descended on "the rulers" (Babylon) from the north, conquering Armenia and northern Mesopotamia first. The same Cyrus is said to have come from the east (41:2).

42:1-25

The Servant of the Lord Who Will Bring Judgment

42:5. creator of heavens, earth and people. The creator gods of the ancient Near East were more limited in their range of creation. Often the cosmic elements are generated by procreation of the gods, though a creator deity may have oversight in some versions. Especially in Mesopotamian traditions, people are created by a separate deity. Egyptian traditions have more of a tendency to consolidate creative activity in one deity.

42:9. proclaiming past and future. The gods of the ancient Near East were not necessarily able to predict the future. The future was in the hands of Fate, an impersonal force that controlled the destiny of things. Enki, the god of wisdom, wore a sorcerer's hat, showing that he attempted to control and predict fate, much like a human sorcerer. Fate was written on tablets, and those who controlled the tablets controlled the destiny of the universe. If they were in the wrong hands, there was chaos in the world. In one myth a bird deity (Anzu) stole the tablets of fate, which caused quite a stir within the divine community until he was killed. At any rate it was not in the god's nature to predict the future, but rather it was a concept they desired to control.

42:11. Kedar and Sela. Kedar was a nomadic Arab tribe living in northern Arabia between Edom and Babylonia, while Sela was an Edomite capital, possibly located at the later site of Petra. They both represent remote areas of the desert and mountains who are invited to worship Yahweh.

42:13. divine warrior. In the divine warrior motif the deity is fighting the battles and defeating the deities of the enemy. In Assyria Nergal is the king of battle, and Ishtar is viewed as a war goddess. The Canaanite Baal and the Babylonian Marduk are divine warriors. This is not to be viewed as "holy war" because in the ancient Near East there was no other kind of war. In most situations prayers would be made and omens asked to assure the god's presence. Standards or statues of the deity were usually carried to symbolize their presence. Assyrian kings of the ninth and eighth centuries regularly refer to the divine standard that goes before them. The Assyrians believed that the gods empowered the weapons of the king and fought before him or at his side.

42:22. parallel between pits and prisons. When prisons were far off or not available, pits were often used to hold prisoners for a temporary period of time. In fact, prisons were primarily for detention of individuals awaiting trial or for political reasons, both in Israel and Babylonia.

43:1-28

God's Mercy on Israel

43:3. Egypt, Cush, Seba. The Persians successfully invaded Egypt and gained control of Cush (Nubia) during the reign of Cyrus's successor, Cambyses. Seba's location is disputed.

43:14. Babylonians as fugitives in ships. This passage is describing the defeat and capture of Babylon (i.e., Chaldeans) by Cyrus. Though not found in other sources, apparently the Chaldeans unsuccessfully attempted to escape the conquest by traveling in their own ships by sailing on the Euphrates to the Persian Gulf.

43:15. deity as king. Many of the polities in the ancient Near East considered the god as the true king of the land; the earthly ruler was merely a viceroy to the god. For example, the Assyrian kings were regents for the god Ashur. Marduk was king at Babylon, as was Baal in many Canaanite states. Even in ancient Sumer, Enlil was king of the gods. In fact, kingship itself was described in Sumerian as "Enlilship" (Enlilutu).

43:24. calamus. Calamus (botanically known as *acorus calamus)* was used in the manufacture of incense. It is a strongly aromatic cane that grew in the swamps of Syria and was imported from India to the west.

43:24. fat. The fat parts of the animal were also to be included in the sacrifice. Neither fat nor blood was to be eaten. Blood was drained and then sprinkled on the altar. The fat was always burned on the altar as part of the essentials of sacrifice. For more information see comment on Leviticus 3:4.

44:1-5

Servant Israel

44:2. Jeshurun. Jeshurun was an endearing name for Israel (see Deut 32:15; 33:5, 26). The meaning of the name is somewhat obscure, but some think it is derived from a Hebrew root meaning "upright."

44:5. writing on hand. The writing on the hand probably refers to the mark of a master on the hand of a slave (see 49:16). Slave markings were common throughout the Near East. For example, in many periods in Mesopotamia the slave was required to be "marked" by shaving half of the hair on his head. The marking on the hand by tattoo or brand also signifies ownership. Generally it

was the owner's name that was incised on the right hand. Hundreds of jar handles have been found in Israel from the Iron Age that are inscribed *l'mlk,* "belonging to the king."

44:6-20

Worthless Idols

44:10-14. blacksmith and carpenter in manufacture of images. See the notes on Isaiah 40:19 and 41:7. In the eighth-century copies of the Epic of Erra and Ishum, Marduk speaks of the manufacture of his image. It starts with the wood of a sacred tree with its top brushing heaven and its roots in the netherworld. The roles of the skilled carpenter and the metalworker using millstones are featured, and the craftsmen are praised for their skills.

44:17-18. how images are "brought to life." The ancients did not believe that the idol was the deity itself but a representation of the deity. However, they did believe that the god's spirit came to inhabit the image, and thus they prayed to the image as if it were the god itself. The gods of ancient Egypt were consecrated with a ritual called the Opening of the Mouth. Life was symbolically imparted to them in much the same way that the Opening of the Mouth gave life to a mummy. There was an Opening of the Mouth ritual in Mesopotamia as well. This was a rite that was performed to purify and introduce into the temple the divine image. The same ritual was repeated when the image came into contact with impurity or impure individuals.

44:21-28

Redemption of Israel

44:24. alone created. The fact that the Bible portrays Yahweh as having no pantheon means that all divine activity is carried out by him. This is in contrast to many of the traditions of the ancient Near East, where various deities were involved with different aspects of creation. Another common belief in the ancient Near Eastern creation traditions is that cosmic elements came into being through the birth of the gods associated with those elements, rather than by a creative act of a deity. This concept of creation through procreation maintains that cosmogony (the origins of the cosmos) is related to theogony (the origins of the gods). Such a concept is rejected in this text. Yahweh has no consort, and therefore neither he nor the cosmos is the result of procreation, nor does he carry out his creative activity by means of procreation. (There have been some inscriptions found in Palestine that imply that some Israelites believed that Yahweh had Asherah, a Canaanite goddess, as his consort. These texts are in direct contradiction to the writings of the Old Testament.)

44:25. diviners made fools. This verse connects to the previous one in that the omens consulted by the Assyrian and Babylonian diviners were drawn from heaven and earth. In fact, major prognostications had to be confirmed by omens from both realms. Yahweh's creation of those realms indicates his control of any signs being given. Prophets were supposed to be giving messages from deity, and diviners were presumably using their arts to determine what the gods were up to by reading the omens in heaven and earth. These professionals therefore offered a constant flow of theoretically divine insight concerning the course of political events. When Yahweh's plans brought about completely unanticipated events, those who were respected as wise men were shown to be farces.

44:28. Cyrus's background. Cyrus was born about 590 B.C. in the modern Iranian province of Fars. Virtually nothing is known of him until he came to the throne of Persia in 559 B.C., except for a few legends concerning his childhood written down by Herodotus, the Greek historian.

44:28. foundation of temple. All ancient Near Eastern temples were built with foundations. The building of temples in Mesopotamia was accompanied by certain ceremonies that are not fully understood. A series of items was deposited in the foundations of the buildings. This is known from building inscriptions and ritual texts, as well as actual foundation deposits found by archaeologists. Deposits included peg- or nail-shaped objects, animal sacrifices, cones, cylinders and tablets. One of the primary purposes of the foundation deposit was to memorialize the building of the edifice (for more information see comments on Ezra 3:3 and 3:10).

45:1-25

God's Restoration of Israel

45:1. Cyrus's accomplishments. Cyrus of Persia was one of the greatest conquerors in world history. He inherited the throne of Persia from his father, Cambyses I, in 559. In 556 the Babylonian king Nabonidus, motivated by a dream, abandoned the treaty that his country had maintained with the Medes for over half a century and made a treaty with Cyrus. This gave Cyrus the freedom to move against the Medes (ruled by his grandfather Astyges)

whom he conquered in 550. The new Medo-Persian Empire was thus formed, with control over the entirety of Iran. By 546 he defeated the Anatolian kingdom of Lydia and Ionia. For the next five years he consolidated his control over the tribes in northeastern Iran. All of this success paved the way for his crowning achievement, the conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C. The whole of the Near East (excluding Egypt) was under the control of the Persians when Cyrus was killed in battle in 530.

45:2. gates of bronze, bars of iron. The Greek historian Herodotus described Babylon as having "one hundred gates in the circuit of the wall, all of bronze with bronze uprights and lintels." Large bronze gates have been excavated at the Assyrian period site of Balawat, giving a glimpse of what the Babylonian walls may have been like. Gates were locked by means of a bar slid across the gateway, and iron would obviously be the most difficult to break (see comment on Deut 33:25).

45:4. religion of Cyrus. Cyrus most certainly was not a worshiper of Yahweh. In his inscriptions his polytheism is evident. In one case he requests that all the gods pray for him to Nabu and to Marduk his lord, whom he claims to worship. Other indications suggest that Cyrus was a Zoroastrian (a religion based on the teachings of Zarathustra, an Iranian holy man who lived sometime in the early first millennium B.C.). Zoroastrianism flourished during the Achaemenid empire in Iran (for more information see comment on Ezra 1:2). Though there is no concrete evidence for Zoroastrianism until the reigns of Darius I and his successor Xerxes I, the names of Cyrus's children show Zoroastrian influence, and he is known to have set up a fire stand (important in Zoroastrian worship) for the king's daily ritual.

45:13. Cyrus's policy of return and rebuilding. Judah was not the only land that benefited from Cyrus's policy of returning exiles to their place of origin and rebuilding the major cities of a ruined area. For example, he claimed to have restored Marduk to his rightful position as the god of Babylon. He claimed to have restored many other people groups to their homelands (including displaced Babylonians) and restored their temples and other public buildings (for more information see comment on Ezra 1:2-4). Many Babylonian structures were rebuilt during Cyrus's reign.

45:14. Egypt, Cush, Sabeans. A major canal was built in the Red Sea by the Persians during the reign of Darius I that linked the Nile cultures of Egypt and Cush with Arabia (Sabeans). This facilitated the flow of shipping between the two continents. Also see the note on 43:3.

46:1-13
Yahweh's Superiority to the Gods of Babylon

46:1. Bel. Bel was not a proper name in Babylonia but was the Akkadian equivalent of "lord" (Hebrew, *Ba'al).* The Sumerian deity Enlil of Nippur was called "lord," a title also given to Marduk the god of Babylon in later periods. Bel in this context is most certainly a name for Marduk. Marduk was the chief god of Babylon, its patron deity and the head of the pantheon. The Babylonian creation epic, *Enuma Elish,* is actually a myth recounting his elevation to that position, believed to have taken place at the end of the second millennium. He was considered to be the son of one of the members of the most august ancient triad, Enki, the patron of Eridu. Though we often see Baal in the Bible as the principal rival of Yahweh, no deity in the first millennium had the political clout that was connected to Marduk. His principal shrine was the temple Esagila ("temple with the exalted head") in Babylon, which was connected to the famous ziggurat, Etemenanki ("foundation of heaven and earth").

46:1. Nebo. Nebo (Akkadian, Nabu) was the god of Borsippa, a city near Babylon. He was the god of wisdom and the patron deity of scribes and the son of Marduk. His prominence in the Neo-Babylonian period is demonstrated by the fact that most of the kings' names make statements about Nabu (e.g., Nebuchadnezzar, Nabonidus). He was already prominent in Isaiah's time, as is demonstrated by the fact that Sargon made his shrine the most prominent one in his new capital, the citadel called Dur-Sharruken (=Khorsabad). An eighth-century inscription urges worshipers to trust in Nabu and not in any other god.

46:1-2. idols taken captive. Babylonian festivals were frequently occasions for the idols of the gods to be brought out in grand processions. But this passage does not refer to a victory parade. There are many examples of images of Mesopotamian deities taken captive during battle. Marduk the god of Babylon was taken captive and removed from Babylon on a number of occasions. The Hittites in 1595 B.C., Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria (r. 1244-1208 B.C.) and Sennacherib (r. 705-681 B.C.) all plundered Babylon and took the Marduk statue, which was eventually returned in all three cases.

46:6. use of silver and gold in image manu-

facture. See the notes on 40:19 and 41:7.

46:7. treatment and use of idols. The images of deities in Mesopotamia were fed, dressed and even washed daily. Food sacrifices were brought to the deity on a daily basis (and no doubt eaten by the temple technicians). Other attendants were required to dress and undress the statue, and still others were employed to wash the statue and transport it in times of celebration.

46:10. deity with purpose. The gods of the ancient Near East were not capable of controlling the destiny of the world without help. In Mesopotamia there existed the "tablets of destiny," texts which contained the destinies of all things (including the gods) in the universe. Whoever controlled these tablets controlled fate. Occasionally these tablets came into the "wrong hands," and chaos ensued. Some gods, including Enki, wore sorcerer's hats, showing that they had the ability to control and predict the future, but only by way of spells and incantations. Conversely, Yahweh controlled all things without resort to superficial means of tablets or spells (see comment on 14:26-27).

47:1-15

Babylon's Disaster

47:1. virgin daughter of Babylon. The biblical writers, like their cuneiform counterparts, often depicted cities as feminine in nature. The term "virgin daughter" was addressed to a community that faced disaster. In the ancient Near East no one was considered a more helpless victim of war than the unmarried girl. Defeat often meant the loss of an intended husband as well as the loss of virginity at the hands of the marauding victors. The *Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur,* an early-second-millennium B.C. Sumerian literary text, describes the fall of the city Ur in such a manner.

47:2. grinding as lowly occupation. Grinding grain at the flour mill was one of the most menial of tasks, often done by slave girls in both Egypt and Mesopotamia (see comments on Ex 11:4 and Judg 16:21).

47:2. veil. In most ancient Near Eastern cultures a married woman was partially veiled in public, and this was the mark of her marital status. This is found in the Middle Assyrian Laws. Slaves or concubines could not afford veiling, and in any case they did not have the legal right to be veiled.

47:2. wading through streams. Bridges were virtually nonexistent in the ancient world, so streams and rivers were waded across at fords. A slave had to cross a stream on foot, in contrast to a rich person who was carried over in a carriage or in a chair carried by servants.

47:5. daughter of the Babylonians. This terminology is used in Akkadian literature to refer to female inhabitants of a region, city or people. Here it is a reference to the personified city of Babylon, a usage not observed in extant Babylonian literature.

47:8. "I am, and there is none beside me." The use of "I am" would have immediately struck a chord for this Israelite audience (see Ex 3:14). There was no claim too arrogant for these kings to make for themselves. An Assyrian king of the ninth century, Ashurnasirpal, had a list of eleven "I am" titles for himself.

47:9. sorceries and spells. Babylonia was famous in the ancient world for its magic and divinatory practices. Literally thousands of texts have been uncovered, dealing with a multitude of subjects, including incantations that help alleviate the pain of a toothache, help a baby that is stuck in the womb and help a mother who is barren. It appears that the common person hired an incantation priest for even the most mundane problem. The priest then came and recited a spell to exorcise a problematic demon or other divine irritant. How much more did they resort to incantation priests to practice their art for the avoidance of disasters that were either portended or threatened. Incantations were intended to magically bind the supernatural powers that posed a threat.

47:11. ways of avoiding portended calamities. There are thousands of omen texts in which the Babylonians attempted to predict and control future events. The common person hired an omen priest before he or she made any important decision. The priest then recited the proper omen, which told the individual what to expect in the event of a certain action. The omens were related to historical events the way that symptoms are related to the onset of disease. Thus the individual who was fearful of a portended calamity avoided it by not participating in a particular activity that was harmful. For example, there were certain days in which a husband and wife were not to engage in sexual relations, since these days portended disaster (including death). In other instances, the individual would hire an incantation priest to utter a spell or incantation that would neutralize the dreaded event. Best known are the *namburbu* avoidance rituals in which ritual acts were used in conjunction with formalized prayers to the gods. Such procedures could not be sought if there had been no indication of impending danger.

47:13. astrologers and stargazers. A form of

fortunetelling in Mesopotamia that rivaled divination was astrology. In the Late Assyrian Period (c. 900-612 B.C.) reports were regularly made to the king about the appearance of the moon and planets, with comments about what these things foretold. The Babylonians appeared to have invented the twelve signs of the zodiac about 500 B.C., roughly the same time as Cyrus of Persia. For more information see comments on Isaiah 2:6; Deuteronomy 18; Joshua 10:12-13; 2 Kings 23:4.

48:1-22
Announcement of the End of Captivity

48:10. silver refining. Silver in the ancient world was refined by a process in which it was melted in order to rid it of base components. Silversmiths, as well as goldsmiths, used blowpipes to ventilate their furnaces and cast their products with the aid of steatite or clay molds. For more information see comment on 1:22.

48:13. heavens and earth. See comments on 40:12 and 42:5.

48:14. Cyrus's campaign against Babylon. Cyrus began a propaganda campaign against Nabonidus king of Babylon, an action attested in later Babylonian sources. The Persian king advanced against Babylon in 539 B.C. and fought a victorious battle at Opis, about fifty miles north-northeast of Babylon on the Tigris in early October. On the eleventh of October, Sippar (thirty-five miles north of Babylon) fell. On October 13 the Persian army marched into Babylon peacefully, welcomed by the local populace. Cyrus himself entered the city on October 30 and was proclaimed its liberator.

49:1-26
The Servant Brings Deliverance and Restoration

49:1-7. kings with divinely ordained tasks of deliverance. Although kings in the ancient Near East were given responsibilities by the gods, they generally perceived themselves as having been ordained to conquer rather than to deliver. Cyrus of Persia was seen by the priests of Marduk and the city of Babylon as a savior from an oppressive regime. In the prologue to his laws Hammurabi claims himself to be the one who gathers the scattered people of the city of Isin and gives shelter to the people of the city of Malgium.

49:2. mouth as sword imagery. The sword imagery is also used for the prophet's word (see Jer 23:29) and God's word in the New Testament (e.g., Gal 6:17). Since the sword was an offensive weapon, the implication is that the word is in some sense aggressive. One of the Hebrew words for mouth *(peh)* also signified the term edge, as in "edge of the sword." Thus there may be a play on words in this verse.

49:9-10. characteristics of restoration. In Assyrian literature the just reign of a king is characterized by prosperity, diligent worship, rejoicing, freeing prisoners, healing of sickness, anointing with oil, and providing food and clothing for the needy. Similar elements are projected for Yahweh's restoration of his people and become part of the messianic profile.

49:11. building of highways. See the comment on 40:3.

49:12. Aswan (Sinim). Sinim was the city on the First Cataract of the Nile, the ancient boundary of Egypt and Nubia to the south. The site was later known in Greek sources as Elephantine and is the modern city of Aswan.

49:16. engraved on palms. The meaning of this imagery is that Jerusalem will be cut into (or tattooed, although this was forbidden; see Lev 19:28) the flesh of God and thus will be on his mind permanently. See comment on 44:5.

49:18. ornaments of a bride. The Israelite bride sometimes wore embroidered garments, jewels, a special girdle and a veil. In this passage the bride wears an ornamental waistband. There are scores of texts from Mesopotamia that describe the exchange of gifts between two families for the purpose of marriage, but little is said of the attire of the bride or of the ceremony itself.

49:26. imagery. "Eat on their own flesh" and "be drunk on their own blood" are most likely metaphors meaning they are reduced to the last extremity (see comment on 9:20).

50:1-11
Sin and Punishment

50:1. children sold to creditors. When one took out a loan or mortgage in the ancient Near East, the security took the form of a pledge of a personal item. Where there was no security to forfeit, debtors or their family members could be sold into slavery. For example, the Middle Assyrian Laws regulate the pledge of children to pay off debts. Of course, the extended family took great pains to make sure that family members stayed within the family structure. See comment on Exodus 21:2-6.

51:1-23
God's Deliverance of His People

51:6. end of heavens and earth. This is not an

apocalyptic verse concerning the end of the earth. The writer intends on emphasizing the permanence of God's salvation, which is even more permanent than the creation itself. In the ancient Near East the universe (or rather, matter) was an uncreated entity. In the Babylonian creation epic matter had apparently always existed and was later formed by Marduk into the heavens, the earth and the netherworld. There is no discussion concerning the end of the material world.

51:9. Rahab. Although not mentioned in any known text outside the Bible, Rahab is comparable to the chaos monster Leviathan, which also takes the form of a twisting serpent (Job 26:12-13; see the comment on 27:1). Rahab is also used synonymously for Egypt. For instance, in Psalm 87:4 the major nations are listed as subject to the power of Yahweh. Rahab, Egypt's metaphorical name, is paired here with Babylon in terms of importance. See comment on 30:7.

51:14. prisoners set free from dungeons. While most of those who had been deported to Babylon would not have been imprisoned, there would have been some political prisoners. Pits were used as prisons in most of the ancient Near East. The modern idea of a prison as a place where prisoners are to be reformed into good citizens would have been foreign to the ancient world. Those in debt, criminals awaiting trial and political prisoners were held in confinement of one sort or another.

51:18. imagery of sons caring for elderly parents. In Mesopotamia as well as Israel the eldest son received a larger inheritance than the rest of the children for the purpose of caring for the parents in their old age. The imagery here shows Jerusalem as a mother without any children to take care of her in her old age.

51:20. head of the street. Some cities in the ancient Near East show evidence of intense city planning. The norm, however, especially in the smaller towns, was a very haphazard approach in which there were few real streets but only passageways or open areas on which no homes were built. The "head of the street" refers to a corner or intersection. Most cities and towns featured blocks of housing tracts filled with random alleyways and dead ends with no intersecting routes. The intersections would occur when one emerged into an open square.

51:23. walking over captives. Egyptian kings in the early third millennium B.C. are depicted as trampling over the corpses of defeated enemies. For instance, Narmer, possibly the one who unified Egypt, is seen with a mace smashing enemies and stepping over them. Likewise, the Sumerian kings from Lagash are depicted as marching over the dead bodies of their enemies. The tradition of trampling over one's enemies continued on into the first millennium in Assyria and Babylonia.

51:1-12
Captive Zion Set Free

52:11. vessels of the Lord. The vessels of the Lord were temple vessels that were transported to Babylon during the conquests of Jerusalem (for specific vessels see comments on 2 Chron 4). They were returned to Jerusalem during the Persian period. In the palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh there were numerous artifacts from the Judean fortress city of Lachish.

52:13—53:12
The Suffering Servant

52:14. battered king. During the Babylonian Akitu festival (at the New Year), the king was required to "take the hand of Bel" (Marduk) and proclaim his innocence as a righteous monarch. On the fifth day of the eleven-day festival the king was taken before the high priest, who stripped the monarch of his royal insignias (mace, loop and scepter) and struck him on the cheeks. The priest then dragged the king by his ears and forced him to bow to the ground before Marduk, again proclaiming his innocence.

53:4-10. substitutionary rites in the ancient Near East. The rite of the substitute king was used in Assyria when evil omens (especially an eclipse) suggested the life of the king was in danger. It is attested primarily in the reign of Esarhaddon in the early seventh century but had been practiced for over a thousand years. It worked on the principle that evil could be transferred from one individual to another. When the dangerous period was to occur, the king was replaced by a substitute on whom the evil fate could fall. In some cases this substitute was someone considered of no significance and was perhaps even mentally or physically impaired. He was then exalted to high status and office for as long as one hundred days, though often a shorter period. During this time the real king was kept in relative isolation (a virtual exile) and participated in numerous purification rituals. Meanwhile the substitute was going through the motions of being king and sitting on the throne. He was portrayed as the shepherd (a common title for Mesopotamian kings), but

one could understand that he was simply a sheep about to be slaughtered. At the end of the period the substitute was put to death so that the evident design of the gods would be accomplished. The omens had suggested that it was the will of the gods to crush him. As one text puts it, he died to save the king and the crown prince. He was given a rich state funeral and an offering was made and exorcism rituals performed (including washings and sprinklings) so that the omens would be cancelled and the days of the king could be prolonged.

53.4. healing of diseases. The Ugaritic myth of the struggle of Baal and Mot contains the story of the Rapiuma (saviors or healers), led by Baal, who had risen from the dead. These venerated ancestors were believed to intervene on behalf of the living. They healed mortals' diseases, helped in matters of fertility and protected them against the evils of society. The Rapiuma, however, did not take the infirmities of the mortals on themselves.

53:7. sheep silent before shearers. Ancient Near Eastern texts often describe the shearing of sheep, who underwent their lot in silence. Shearing was done annually in the spring, using shears, which were invented about 1000 B.C. An individual could shear twenty to thirty sheep a day.

53:10. guilt offering. The reparation offering was traditionally termed the guilt offering. Though the term that is used is often appropriately translated as guilt, the term serves a more technical function within the sacrificial system. This offering is designed to address a particular category of offense—a breach of faith or an act of sacrilege. Breach of faith would appropriately describe the violation of a covenant, while sacrilege refers generally to desecration of sacred areas or objects. See comment on Leviticus 5:14-16. In this context, Israel's violation of the covenant would be the most likely cause for a guilt offering to be required.

54:1-17
The End of God's Anger

54:2. enlarging tents. Zion is seen here with the patriarchal image of the tent. As a mother who has been blessed with many children, Zion will need a spacious tent. The tents were made of hand-woven, three-feet-wide strips of dark goats' hair. When more family members needed to be accommodated, additional strips could be sown on. The cords that stretched from center poles to corner poles would have to be longer and the stakes made of stronger, thicker wood in order to hold the weight.

54:4. shame of youth, reproach of widowhood. The metaphor here is clarified in verse 6. A woman who was unable to bear children in the ancient world was believed to be under the punishment of deity, incapable of serving the function for which she was married and therefore liable to be rejected and abandoned by her husband. The word translated "youth" here refers to one who has not borne a child. Her shame is her barrenness. She is a widow because her husband has abandoned her (as most marriage contracts allowed) and therefore is the object of reproach with little hope of remarrying. She is thus stripped of short-term support by a husband and the support in her old age that could be expected from children.

54:11. stones of turquoise, foundations of sapphires. An alternate translation of the word rendered "turquoise" is antimony, which was used for a mortar, especially for mosaics. The word here translated "sapphire" is generally considered to be lapis lazuli, a beautiful blue stone that was highly valued in the ancient world. The procession way to the famous Ishtar gate in Babylon was lined with intricate patterns with the background made by blue glazed bricks that gave the appearance of lapis. In a work referred to as the Uruk Prophecy, it is said that a future king will build the gates of Uruk of lapis lazuli.

54:12. gate description. The description of the approach in verse 11 leads to discussion of the gateway. The word translated "battlements" is actually "suns" and most likely refers to the round, burnished shields used as crenellations along the top of the towers that flanked the gate. These are visible along the entire wall in Sennacherib's portrayal of the fortifications at Lachish (see also Ps 84:11 for the association of sun and shield). NIV's "ruby" is a guess here, and others support jasper. The word is used only here and in Ezekiel 27:16, where it is listed among exports from Aram. Red burnished copper was popular for gates and would be plausible for these sunlike shields. The stonework of the gate area features some sort of sparkling stone. The word translated "walls" is a technical term for low walls that lined the inside passage of the gateway (see Ezek 40:12). They are described here as being made of "desirable stone"—high-quality stonework, perhaps with mosaics.

54:17. invincibility. Since the Assyrian attack in 701 B.C. there had been a tradition in Judah that Jerusalem was invincible from attacks from invaders. This idea was trampled by the Babylonian conquest and destruction of the

city (605-586 B.C.). Now Isaiah states that in the future the city will be absolutely invincible.

55:1-13

Call to Seek the Lord

55:8-9. distinctions drawn between the ways of gods and mortals. In the ancient Near East there was considerable continuity between the divine and human realms. There was a hierarchy of divinity. For example, the Mesopotamian pantheon had a council of seven gods at the top of the hierarchy, followed by numerous other gods, descending to personal gods, angels, demons, heroes (humans who had attained a semidivine status) and lastly humans. Even the highest gods resembled humans in their character and behavior, and were subject to many of the same laws and limitations as their human counterparts. They were not elevated above the natural world nor transcendent in the way that Yahweh was understood to be. Instead they were part of the natural order. Nevertheless, statements such as those made here are also made in Mesopotamian literature. Wisdom literature considers the ways of the gods unknowable. In *Enuma Elish* the proclamation of Marduk's fifty names serves as a delineation of his ways.

55:11. word will not return empty. The claim of sovereignty represented in orders and commands that cannot be countermanded and are effective without exception is made for the gods of the ancient Near East as well. As early as the Sumerian myth *Lugal-e,* Ninurta is praised as one whose orders are not changed and whose decisions are truthfully carried out.

55:13. reforestation. See comment on 41:19.

56:1—57:21

Justice and Judgment

56:2. keeping Sabbath. The Sabbath observation has no known parallel in any of the cultures of the ancient Near East and is distinctive in that it is independent of any of the patterns or rhythms of nature. A similar term was used in Babylonian texts for a full moon day when the king officiated at rites of reconciliation with deity, but it was not a work-free day and had little in common with the Israelite Sabbath. There were particular days of the month in Mesopotamia that were considered unlucky and were often seven days apart (that is, the seventh day of the month, the fourteenth day of the month, etc.). Israel's Sabbath was not celebrated on certain days of the month; it was simply observed every seventh day. During the Babylonian captivity, the Sabbath became the most conspicuous marker showing membership in the community of Yahweh worshipers. It thus became one of the central themes in postexilic Judaism (including during the time of Jesus).

56:4-5. eunuchs in temple service. This Hebrew term can at times refer simply to a court official, but it later came to refer specifically to eunuchs. Eunuchs were highly valued in government service in many varied roles during the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods. The great demand for eunuchs led to young boys being included in the tribute paid to Persia so that they could be castrated and trained for government service. They had no families to distract them from their service. They were often entrusted with the care and supervision of the royal harem since they posed no threat to the women of the harem and could not engender children by the harem women who might be mistaken for royal heirs. They would be less likely to become involved in conspiracies because they would have no heirs to put on the throne. Assyria, Urartu and Media had all made use of eunuchs in government offices. Eunuchs (or, better, castrated ones) had originally been forbidden in the Israelite community (Deut 23:1). The context in Isaiah 56:5 makes it clear that these officials cannot have children, yet the Lord provides for them.

56:9. beasts as punishment. Wild beasts were a constant source of fear for city dwellers throughout the ancient Near East. Of course, in this passage wild beasts are a metaphor for human "beasts" who plunder and pillage city dwellers. In Assyrian texts and reliefs of this period the kings are seen hunting lions to symbolically rid the city of the scourge of wild beasts. In one case it has been suggested that the killing of eighteen lions represents the eighteen gates of Nineveh and the roads leading out of them.

56:10-11. dogs in Israelite society. Dogs in the ancient Near East lived as scavengers. They often roamed in packs on the outskirts of the city (sometimes in the city) and wherever they found refuse (Ps 59:6, 14). They were often the source of a biting insult (2 Sam 3:8). However, dogs were also often associated with healing and were used in rites of purification and exorcisms, and as offerings in both Mesopotamia and Anatolia. The term *dog* was used for certain cultic functionaries in Israel (Deut 23:19), Phoenicia and Anatolia. Some have thought that these "dogs" were prostitutes. Strangely enough a dog cemetery with over

seven hundred shallow burial pits has been uncovered at Ashkelon in Philistia during the Persian period. There is no evidence of any cultic activity (although dogs were revered by the Persian Zoroastrians).

57:1. death for righteous a reward rather than a punishment. This verse implies that there has been a complete overturning in society, since the righteous perish. A number of Babylonian wisdom texts discuss this theme. For example, the Babylonian Theodicy (a text similar to the biblical book of Job) complains that the just man suffers from all kinds of injustice, while the evil man is free to do his evil activities. The writer also complains that his personal god has done nothing to alleviate the problem. This verse offers the explanation that the righteous are not being *punished* with death but rather are being spared from evil times.

57:2. afterlife of peace and rest. The line is obscure but the sense is that the death of the righteous brings them into a peaceful state. This does not offer a hope of heaven but an escape from turmoil. Even Sheol is to be preferred to the wicked state of affairs on earth.

57:3. sorceress. Sorcery and adultery together point to polytheistic fertility rites. In Mesopotamia sorcery was usually forbidden, however. The Mesopotamians as well as Hittites made a distinction between black (malevolent) magic, performed by a sorcerer/sorceress, and white (benevolent) magic, performed by a legitimate exorcist. Sorcery was punishable by death in the Middle Assyrian Laws. It involved the use of potions, figurines and curses designed to bring death, disease or bad luck to the victim. The Egyptians do not appear to have made a distinction between black and white magic. The few Ugaritic, Aramaic and Phoenician magical texts show that those people appear to have viewed magic and sorcery in a similar way to their Mesopotamian counterparts.

57:5. lust among oaks. Gardens in the ancient Near East were often parks of fruit and shade trees, arboretums serving as outdoor shrines or providing comfortable surroundings for sacred enclosures. Sacred trees played a significant role in the popular religion of the day. These popular beliefs would have viewed stone and tree as potential divine dwellings. In Canaanite religion they are believed to be symbols of fertility (see Deut 12:2; Jer 3:9; Hos 4:13), though there is very little in the archaeological or literary remains of the Canaanites that would clarify the role of sacred trees. It is likely no coincidence that the word for oaks *('elim)* can also mean "gods." The Canaanite fertility goddess was Asherah, and these trees (or wooden poles) were her cult symbol. A cult stand from Taanach pictures a sacred tree flanked by lions, as the goddess Asherah is usually pictured. The fertility of the earth was symbolized by the fertile union of humans, cynically described here by Isaiah as "lust among the oaks."

57:5. child sacrifice. The biblical writers attributed child sacrifice to the Phoenician worshipers of Molech (see comments on Lev 18:21 and 2 Chron 28:3). Archaeological discoveries at Carthage (a Phoenician site in north Africa) give evidence of child sacrifice, as hundreds of urns containing the charred remains of infants have been found. Commemorative stelae describe the role of the children as sacrificial victims, referred to in Punic as *mlk* (i.e., Molech) offerings. Outside of Scripture, however, the evidence in Syro-Palestine for child sacrifice is scant. There is a possible reference from the ninth century B.C. from Tell Halaf and from penalty clauses in Late Assyrian juridical contracts.

57:6. smooth stones of ravines. The ravines or wadis were the place where child sacrifices took place, the most notorious being the Hinnom Valley on the west side of Jerusalem. These wadis were the preferred burial place in Israel and therefore also served as the logical choice for the rituals used in the worship of the dead. If "smooth stones" is the correct translation, the text may refer to the rock-cut tombs that were found in these wadis and were so identified with them that the word for wadi can also take the meaning of tomb or grave. An alternate suggestion is based on the identification of this same root (translated "smooth stones") with a root meaning "to die, perish" in a number of Semitic languages closely related to Hebrew. This would then be a reference to the dead who had been buried in the wadis and had become the objects of worship. The cult of the dead is referred to in the latter part of the verse.

57:6. drink offerings, grain offerings. Because of a well-developed ancestor cult that pervaded much of the ancient Near East (evident, for instance, in the emphasis on the role of the male heir to care for the father's shrine in Ugaritic documents), the dead were considered to have some power to affect the living. It was believed that if libations were poured out on behalf of the dead ancestors, their spirits would then offer protection and help to those still living. In Babylon the disembodied spirit *(utukki)* or the ghost *(eṭemmu)* could become very dangerous if not cared for and often was the object of incantations. Proper care for the dead would begin with proper burial and

would continue with ongoing gifts and honor of the memory and name of the deceased. The firstborn was responsible for maintaining this ancestor worship and therefore inherited the family gods (often images of deceased ancestors). Such care would have been based on a belief, as seen in Saul's consultation of the witch of Endor, that the spirits of the dead could communicate and had information on the future that could be of use to the living. These spirits were consulted through the efforts of priests, mediums and necromancers. This could be a dangerous practice since some spirits were considered demons and could cause great harm. While it is difficult to totally reconstruct Israelite beliefs about deceased ancestors and the afterlife, it seems clear that prior to the exile there existed a cult of the dead or ancestral worship. This is evidenced by archaeological remains: (1) standing stones *(maṣṣebot),* (2) channels cut into tombs for the deposit of food and drink offering for the dead (see Deut 26:14; Ps 106:28) and (3) family tombs (note the importance of the ancestral tomb for Abraham and his descendants at Hebron) and mourning rituals performed at these tombs (see Jer 16:5-7). The local and family ancestral cults were condemned by the prophets and the law.

57:7. bed on a hill. The bed on a hill is a probable reference to the Canaanite high places (cf. Jer 2:20) where cultic fornication was committed. Its double meaning of "a place to lie down" also brings out the image of death and the grave.

57:8. fertility symbols. There is no clear indication as to what these symbols were. They may have been symbols of the household gods (fertility figurines?) or phallic symbols of fertility. This latter is likely because the last line of the verse also refers to male genitalia (NIV: "nakedness"). The Israelites also had a memorial behind their door, consisting of a metal container with a portion of Scripture inside (Deut 6:9; 11:20).

57:8. cultic prostitution. Much of the so-called sacred prostitution in the ancient Near East may have been an occasional prostitution for the payment of a vow (see comment on Deut 23:17-18). The texts that describe cultic prostitution from either Canaanite or Mesopotamian sources are ambiguous at best. One can conclude that prostitution was occasionally organized by the temple estates. The Old Testament has ample evidence of feasts that led to sexual excesses, but this does not mean that cultic prostitution was institutionalized in these regions.

57:9. Molech. The Old Testament describes Molech as a Canaanite deity to whom children were brought for sacrifice. There is literary evidence from the ancient Near East as early as the third millennium B.C. of a god Malik or Milki\u who was worshiped at Ebla and Mari in Syria. He was also worshiped in Assyria and Babylonia, as well as Ugarit (where he was known as *Mlk).* From these texts it appears that Molech was a netherworld deity involved in the cult of dead ancestors. The term Molech is probably related to the Semitic root denoting "king." See the comment on Isaiah 57:6 for the idea that Molech was involved in child sacrifice in Phoenician North Africa (see comment on Lev 18:21).

57:9. olive oil and perfumes. It is not certain what the olive oil and perfumes were used for. The olive oil may have been offerings, while the perfumes were to kindle incense offering. Another suggestion is that they were used to anoint the children that were being offered to Molech.

57:9. ambassadors/descended to Sheol. These ambassadors are those who practice necromancy, the consultation of the dead on behalf of the living. The ambassadors probably went to the shrines where the powers of the netherworld (Sheol) were venerated in order to seek their will by oracular means. Molech was the god of the netherworld.

57:13. collection of idols. In Ugaritic literature the term that occurs here is used to make reference to deceased spirits.

57:14. building highways. See comment on 40:3.

58:1-14
Fasting and Sabbath

58:2. seeking information by oracles. Oracular divination was employed throughout Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Egypt from 2000 B.C. onward to communicate with their deities. Intuitive divination involved oracles, prophecies and dreams. The Mari letters describe the relationship of Dagan to his worshipers, who spoke by way of oracles, dreams, ecstatic possession and oral command. He gave messages to both male and female prophets, as well as commoners. For example, a certain woman named Yanana claimed that Dagan came to her in a dream saying that only Zimri-Lim (the Mariote king) was able to save a kidnapped girl who had been traveling with her.

58:3-7. fasting. Fasting is little attested in the ancient Near East outside the Bible. It generally occurs in the context of mourning. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with making a request before God. The principle is that the importance

of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and humbling oneself before God (Ps 69:10; 102:4). It is not an end in itself, but rather it is the disciplined training in preparation for an important event.

58:9. pointing the finger. In the ancient world pointing the finger was involved in a formal accusation (as in Hammurabi's laws). The omen literature attaches to the gesture the power of a curse. Here it is indicative of malevolent slander.

58:12. rebuilding ancient ruins. Many ancient cities were rebuilt after having been destroyed. For instance, Babylon was plundered by the Assyrians at least three times; by Tukulti-Ninurta I in the thirteenth century B.C., by Sennacherib in 689 B.C. and by Ashurbanipal in 648 B.C. Each time the ruins of Babylon were rebuilt, often making the city more splendid than before.

58:13. significance of Sabbath. According to later rabbinic writings, the Sabbath in the postexilic period took on the idea of laying aside the day to worship God. The Sabbath became one of the primary means of showing loyalty to God and his statutes. In a Babylonian wisdom hymn the worshiper claims that the day of worshiping the god was a pleasure to him and that it was a delight and joy to make music to honor the deity.

58:13. Sabbath in the ancient Near East. The Sabbath observation has no known parallel in any of the cultures of the ancient Near East and is distinctive in that it is independent of any of the patterns or rhythms of nature. That is, it was not celebrated on certain days of the month and was not linked to the cycles of the moon or to any other cycle of nature; it was simply observed every seventh day. Though Mesopotamians did not divide time into seven-day periods, there were particular days of the month that they considered unlucky and that were often seven days apart (that is, the seventh day of the month, the fourteenth day of the month, etc.). In addition a similar term was used in Babylonian texts as a full moon day when the king officiated at rites of reconciliation with deity, but it was not a work-free day and has little in common with the Israelite Sabbath. The biblical legislation does not require rest as much as it stipulates cessation, interrupting the normal activities of one's occupation.

58:14. riding on the heights. Cities were typically built on hills because of their natural defensibility, and armies chose hills as strategic points of control. The metaphor of treading on the heights is therefore one that speaks of victory and security. As Israel rides the heights, its God rides the clouds. The image of a rampant God storming through the heavens in a cloud chariot is a common one (Ps 68:4; 104:3; Jer 4:13). Such descriptions of storm theophany may also be found in the texts that speak of the Ugaritic god Baal. In both the Aqhat epic and in the Baal and Anat cycle of stories, Baal is referred to as the "Rider of the Clouds." Baal's attributes, commanding the storms, unleashing the lightning and rushing to war as a divine warrior, even appear in the Egyptian El Amarna texts.

59:1-21

Yahweh as Redeemer

59:17. warrior's raiment. Yahweh is here again taking the role of the divine warrior and girding himself for battle. In the divine warrior motif the deity is fighting the battles and defeating the deities of the enemy. In Assyria Nergal is the king of battle, and Ishtar is viewed as a war goddess. The Canaanite Baal and the Babylonian Marduk are both divine warriors. When Marduk prepares for battle with Tiamat in *Enuma Elish,* he is equipped mostly with weapons for attack rather than the defensive gear referred to here. But he is said to be clothed with a cloak of awesome armor and crowned with a terrible radiance. Stone sculptures of the gods doing battle sometimes portray them with breastplate and helmet, but often they have only weapons.

60:1-22

Zion's Glory

60:6. camels from Midian and Ephah. Camels were freight carriers for merchants; thus those who had many camels were considered wealthy. Midian was a nomadic Arabian tribe that had had dealings with Israel from Mosaic times. Ephah is mentioned only two other times in Scripture (Gen 25:4; 1 Chron 1:33) and is associated with Midian, possibly a clan of that tribe. It is also mentioned in the Assyrian annals of Tiglath-Pileser III.

60:6. Sheba. The kingdom of Sheba was a great trading center in southwestern Arabia that exported precious stones, gold and incense. This kingdom is known as Saba in native sources and in the Assyrian annals. It had a very advanced urban civilization in the first millennium B.C. For more information see 2 Chronicles 9:1.

60:7. Kedar. Kedar was a nomadic Arabian

tribe. They were also mentioned in Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian texts. The tribe is mentioned in a text from Tell el-Maskhuta, in apocryphal writings, and even by the Latin writer Pliny the Elder.

60:7. Nebaioth. The Nebaioth were a nomadic tribe also found in the annals of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal. They are also mentioned in the Taymanite inscriptions, dated to the sixth century B.C. They may have been a precursor to the Nabataeans, an Arabian tribe known in Hellenistic and Roman times.

60:9. ships of Tarshish. The ships of Tarshish were large heavy vessels built for long voyages with high tonnage. Tarshish was thought to have been a Phoenician colony in Spain.

60:13. glory of Lebanon. The "glory" of Lebanon was its cedar forests (see 35:2), but other types of lumber were also exported.

60:16. nursing imagery. The Egyptian kings are often shown in iconographic portraits as being nursed by the gods. For example, the female monarch Hatshepsut is shown suckling at the breasts of Hathor, the bovine goddess of women, dance, drunkenness, sexuality and the dead. She was usually depicted as a woman with the horns of a cow. The image represents being given the finest of care and personal attention.

60:19-20. obsolescence of sun and moon. Both the sun and the moon were important deities in the Babylonian pantheon. The sun god was Shamash, god of justice, and the son of the moon god. As the god of justice, Shamash gave Hammurabi, the Babylonian lawgiver, the authority to make laws. Sin, the moon god, was the lord of the calendar and the god of vegetation. His consort was Ningal, the mother of Shamash. Though his main centers were at Ur and Harran, he played a fundamental role in Babylon during the period of the last Babylonian king, Nabonidus. Since these gods were so central in the religious system of the ancient world, there is no suggestion in other texts that they would become obsolete or cease to function.

61:1-11

Yahweh's Blessings

61:1. freeing prisoners as act of justice. In the ancient Near East the freeing of prisoners (from debtors' prison) as an act of justice often occurred in the first or second year of a new king's reign (and then periodically after that). For example, the Old Babylonian king Ammisaduqa (seventeenth century B.C.) cancelled economic debts on behalf of Shamash. Thus the "jubilee" in this case was primarily concerning those in debt (for either financial or legal reasons) and for the freeing of debt-slaves. Unlike that of Israel this Babylonian edict was entirely at the whim of the monarch, and there is no evidence that it was divinely sanctioned. For an example of this as being accomplished by an ideal king, see comment on 11:1. Historically a proclamation of freedom is recorded by the last king of Judah, Zedekiah (Jer 34:8-10). For these and other characteristics of a just king's reign see comment on 49:9-10.

61:4. rebuilding ancient ruins. See comment on 58:12.

61:10. adorning of bridegroom and bride. The evidence for clothing and grooming in Western Asia relies heavily on iconographic images. It appears that in ancient Israel both the bride and the bridegroom wore ceremonial clothing. The Babylonian and Israelite brides sometimes wore embroidered garments (Ps 45:13-14), a special girdle (Joel 2:32) and a veil (Gen 24:65). Here the groom wears a "garland." The type of special festive clothing probably depended on the economic status of the marriage partners.

62:1-12

Zion's Elevation

62:10. building roads in the ancient Near East. See comment on 40:3.

62:10. banner for the nations. Banners in ancient Israel were used for marking tribes. They appear to have been used most often in military contexts, either to rally troops together or to identify regiments of troops. In this, Israel was most certainly imitating its neighbors. The Assyrians used standards to identify particular regiments of troops.

62:11. reward for return of king from battle. See comment on 40:10.

63:1-19

Judgment on Edom, Loyalty to Israel

63:1. Edom, Bozrah. See comment on 34:5-6.

63:3-6. divine warrior. In the divine warrior motif the deity is fighting the battles and defeating the deities of the enemy. In Assyria Nergal is the king of battle, and Ishtar is viewed as a war goddess. The Canaanite Baal and the Babylonian Marduk are divine warriors (for more information on the divine warrior see comments on Ex 15:3; Josh 3:17; 6:21-24; 10:11; 1 Sam 4:3-4; 7:10). In Assyria it was common rhetoric to speak of cities and countrysides dyed red with the blood of enemies and the army marching through the blood of their enemies. Isaiah 9:5 refers to a

practice of warriors rolling their garments in blood. In *Enuma Elish,* after Marduk has defeated Tiamat and her general Kingu, he tramples the battle filth of his enemies, including the lower part of Tiamat's corpse.

64:1-12

Prayer for Yahweh's Deliverance

64:4. difference between Yahweh and other gods. Yahweh was distinct from other gods in the ancient Near East in a number of ways. Most fundamentally Yahweh was transcendent, meaning that he was not subject to or locked within the material universe. This is in stark contrast to the gods of Mesopotamia, who inhabited the material world. He was an only God, without consort or pantheon, unlike the gods of other nations, who shared in a multiplicity of power. The specific issue in this verse is the willingness of God to act on behalf of his faithful followers. The key here is that which motivates Yahweh to action. He does not have to be bribed or coerced into action. In the ancient polytheistic beliefs faithfulness to a deity was expressed in the gifts that were given—gifts that were intended to provide care for the deity (e.g., food). If these gifts did not motivate the kindness or action of the gods, then magical rituals could be used to bind the god or force the sort of action that was desired. See comment on 1 Samuel 15:23.

65:1-25

New Heavens and New Earth

65:3. sacrifices in gardens. Gardens in the ancient Near East were often parks of fruit and shade trees, arboretums serving as outdoor shrines or providing comfortable surroundings for sacred enclosures. Sacred trees played a significant role in popular religion of the day. These popular beliefs would have viewed stone and tree as potential divine dwellings. In Canaanite religion they are believed to be symbols of fertility (see Deut 12:2; Jer 3:9; Hos 4:13), though there is very little in the archaeological or literary remains of the Canaanites that would clarify the role of sacred trees. Excavations at Late Bronze Kition have uncovered a temple that featured a sacred grove with sixty tree pits. These gardens were likely the sacred groves of the Canaanite fertility cult of Asherah.

65:3. brick altars. Most incense altars were made of limestone. This has led to the very plausible suggestion that the word NIV translates "brick" can also mean "incense altars" (as it does in the inscription on a fifth-century limestone altar from Lachish). These were common features on the high places where illegitimate worship took place. Alternatively, there were Babylonian rituals directed toward celestial deities that included sacrifices made on bricks.

65:4. night vigils in graveyards. Many individuals who practiced necromancy (contacting the spirits of the dead, see comment on 57:6) in the ancient Near East spent the night in the graveyards, waiting for communication from the dead. This is similar to incubation rituals (see comments on 1 Sam 3:3 and 2 Chron 1:7-12).

65:4. eating pig meat. Assyrian wisdom literature calls the pig unholy, unfit for the temple and an abomination to the gods. There is also one dream text in which eating pork is a bad omen. Yet it is clear that pork was a regular part of the diet in Mesopotamia. Some Hittite rituals require the sacrifice of a pig. Milgrom observes, however, that in such rituals the pig is not put on the altar as food for the god but absorbs impurity and then is burned or buried as an offering to underworld deities. Likewise in Mesopotamia it was offered as a sacrifice to demons. There is evidence in Egypt of pigs used for food, and Herodotus claims they were used for sacrifice there as well. Egyptian sources speak of herds of swine being kept on temple property, and they were often included in donations to the temples. The pig was especially sacred to the god Seth. Most evidence for the sacrifice of pigs, however, comes from Greece and Rome, there also mostly to gods of the underworld. In urban settings pigs, along with dogs, often scavenged in the streets, making them additionally repulsive. The attitude toward the pig in Israel is very clear here in Isaiah, showing close connection to worship of the dead. It is very possible then that sacrificing a pig was synonymous with sacrificing to demons or the dead.

65:10. Sharon. Sharon was a coastal plain verging on the Judean hill country in the east and the Mediterranean Sea on the west. The valley was known for its beauty, desolation and pastureland. It was about thirty-two miles in length and was on average eleven miles in width.

65:10. Valley of Achor. The Valley of Achor was probably located on Judah's northern border and is identified with the modern El Buqe'ah, a small plain in the northern Judean wilderness in the vicinity of Jericho. Three Iron Age settlements have been uncovered in El Buqe'ah.

65:11. Fortune/Destiny. The proper (divine?) names used here, Gad (NIV: "Fortune") and

Meni (NIV: "Destiny"), are obscure. Gad is attested in Canaanite and Phoenician texts and is considered a good luck deity. Meni may have something to do with portion, and therefore some have thought that it may have had something to do with fate or fortune. It may have been the same as the Arabian goddess Manat mentioned in the Qu'ran. In the Babylonian pantheon the god Namtar ("Destiny") was the vizier of the netherworld. Fate was also at times personified and deified.

65:17-25. utopian visions. Although there is nothing else quite like the utopian visions found in the Bible, there are apocalyptic (futuristic, prophetic) visions found in Akkadian literature of the second and first millennia B.C. The Akkadian texts are pseudo-prophetic, that is, they were predictions composed after the event in question. They appear to have been written to justify a particular event that had taken place or institution that had been created. A typical phrase used is "a prince will arise." The prince is usually anonymous but easily discernible. In one of these, the Marduk Prophecy, Marduk projects a king who will arise and "draw the plans of heaven and earth" in the shrine Ekursagil. He will gather the scattered peoples, bring prosperity to the land and show compassion to the people, and society will function properly. Beyond this, however, in 66:1 it is clear that the heavens and the earth, the cosmos, is God's temple. The creating of new heavens and a new earth may then be equated to the making of new sanctuaries or renewing sanctuaries in the ancient Near East. This was a very common activity. The New Jerusalem is the new capital city, which also represents God's chosen dwelling place. Similarly Marduk orders that the new holy city of the gods, Babylon, will be rebuilt.

66:1-24

Peace Like a River

66:1. house for deity. In the Ugaritic Baal Cycle Baal wants to build a house for himself so that he will have a resting place. Likewise Ningirsu makes a request that Gudea build a house for his repose. The former is more pertinent here because Baal is building the house for himself, just as Yahweh has done. In *Enuma Elish,* after Marduk has defeated the enemy Tiamat, he proclaims that he will make a house for himself, which he names Babylon, that will serve as a resting place for the gods. At the end of tablet five a somewhat broken section relates this to Marduk's creating of the earth and his authority over it.

66:3. breaking dog's neck. The dog was not a sacrificial animal in Israel, although it was used in this manner in Hittite Anatolia.

66:3. pig's blood. Pigs and dogs figured prominently in the rituals of the Hittites in Anatolia in the Late Bronze Age. When confronted with a ritual impurity, the Hittites often slaughtered a pig (usually by cutting it in half). Pigs and dogs were particularly prominent in worship of chthonic deities (those having to do with the netherworld or the fertility of the land). For more information see comments on 56:10-11 and 65:4. Some have suggested that the treatment of the pig in this type of ritual may have been one reason why the pig was considered unclean.

66:15. fire, chariots, whirlwind. In the ancient Near Eastern imagery major deities are at times accompanied by charioteers. There is a deity known as Rakib-El, who is the charioteer of the Canaanite god El. In Akkadian literature Bunene, the advisor to the sun god Shamash, is designated the charioteer. The charioteer would be responsible for transporting the deity, especially into battle. In Israelite religious belief Yahweh is sometimes portrayed or manifested in ways familiar to ancient Near Eastern thought. For instance, in Elijah's contest with the Baal prophets, Yahweh is shown to be a God who controls fertility and responds with fire, and figurative language often associates him with the sun (Ps 84:11). Here his portrayal may share elements with Hadad, the storm god who is accompanied by a charioteer. These similarities suggest the possibility that familiar imagery was being used to clarify the involvement of deity in this unprecedented event.

66:17. rituals in gardens. See comment on 65:3.

66:17. eating flesh of pigs and rats. This is another description of foreign rites, probably of Canaanite origin (see comment on Lev 11:7). There is no extrabiblical evidence illuminating this custom. The word translated "rat" here can refer to a wide variety of small rodents.

66:19. Tarshish. Tarshish represented the farthest land across the sea to the west. See comment on 23:1.

66:19. Libyans. Here Libya is a translation of "Put," but in Nahum 3:9 the two are different entities. Ancient Libya was mostly along the coast west of Alexandria but included the long expanse of desert west of the Nile Valley. Put is more difficult. The most likely conclusion is that Put is an alternative name for Libya and that together they refer to the area to

the west of ancient Egypt represented by the modern state of Libya. This was the most distant land across land to the southwest.

66:19. Lydians. Lud was probably the area of Lydia in west central Turkey. The Lydians spoke an Anatolian language similar to Hittite. They carved out a large empire in Turkey during the sixth century B.C. but were defeated and conquered by Cyrus of Persia. This was the most distant land across land to the northwest.

66:19. Tubal. Tubal was probably an area south of the Black Sea. It is mentioned in the Assyrian annals as Tabal and in the *Histories* of Herodotus as Tiberanoi. It represented the most distant land to the northeast.

66:19. Greece. *Javan* probably represents the Greek name Ionia, the Greek region of the western coast of Turkey and the Aegean islands. Ionian Greeks settled this area just before the first millennium B.C. There is evidence of contact between them and the Assyrians by the eighth century B.C. Classical Greek literature (e.g., Homer) and philosophy appear to have begun in Ionia.

JEREMIAH

1:1-19

Jeremiah's Call

1:1. Anathoth. The precise location of Anathoth, a priestly city in Benjamin, has long been debated. It was either located on the high mound of Ras el-Kharrubeh just south of the village of Anata or in the valley adjacent to Anata (the Jewish historian Josephus identified Anathoth with Anata). The most recent idea is that Ras el-Kharrubeh was initially Anathoth, but the city relocated to Anata after the Babylonian exile of the late sixth century B.C. The archaeological record appears to confirm this. The city is first mentioned as the home of some of the bodyguards of David, and later Abiathar the priest was exiled there. According to Isaiah 10:30 the city was on the route of the Assyrian invasion of Palestine, but it was not destroyed.

1:2. chronology. Jeremiah's ministry began in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (c. 627 B.C.) and continued until the eleventh year of Zedekiah and the second deportation (c. 587 B.C.). He was apparently active for a few years after the exile (see 42—44). The initial year was a significant one in that it was just one year after the beginning of Josiah's reform activity and one year before Babylon's declaration of independence from Assyria. Both the political world and the religious world were about to see dramatic changes.

1:2. Josiah. During the early years of Jeremiah's ministry Josiah was king of Judah (640-609 B.C.). The Book of the Law (an unidentified portion of Scripture) was found early in his reign, after which Josiah enacted many religious and cultural reforms. He may have seized this opportunity because of a catastrophic civil war in Assyria (c. 631-626 B.C.). When the Assyrian empire began to collapse a decade later, Josiah sided against their Egyptian allies and was either killed in battle or murdered at Megiddo in 609 B.C.

1:3. Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was placed on the throne of Judah by the Egyptians, who had rushed into the vulnerable area of Palestine after the end of the Assyrian empire (c. 608 B.C.). His given name was Eliakim, but the Egyptians changed it to Jehoiakim. He was a vassal to Egypt until 605 when the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar II defeated Egypt at Carchemish and subsequently took control of the Levant. Because of the Babylonian setback on the border of Egypt four years later, Jehoiakim rebelled against them and once again sided with Egypt. However, Jehoiakim suffered reprisal when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem in 598/7, and he was either killed or deported (the Jewish historian Josephus states that Nebuchadnezzar killed him in Jerusalem).

1:3. chronology. Jeremiah continued his ministry until the eleventh year of Zedekiah (c. 587 B.C.).

1:3. exile. Jeremiah was evidently active after the second deportation in 587 B.C. (see 42—44). The Babylonians exiled the leading citizens of the land. Excavations in the Shephelah, Negev and Judean desert show signs of the Babylonian destruction. Babylonian sources describe the siege of Jerusalem and the deportation of many prisoners to Babylon.

1:5. ancient Near Eastern examples of deity knowing and electing before birth. There is an Egyptian parallel to the idea of the deity

knowing an individual before birth. The god Amon knew Pianki (an Egyptian monarch of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty in the eighth century B.C.) while he "was in the belly of his mother," where he knew he was to be the ruler of Egypt. In the Gilgamesh Epic, Gilgamesh's role as king was said to be destined for him "when his umbilical cord was severed."

1:5. prophet to the nations. The term translated "nations," when used in the plural, usually signifies foreign nations. Thus there were no limits to the scope of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry. His messages were not only to Judah but also to the nations who would be potential allies, as well as those who would be enemies.

1:9. hand on mouth as commissioning in ancient Near East. Royal mouth purification rites in Egypt show the idea of preparing the mouth for utterance. Mesopotamian rituals often featured the purification of lips as symbolic of the purification of the person. It is viewed as a prerequisite, especially for diviner priests, before they may appear before the divine council and report back on what they have witnessed. In contrast Yahweh put words in the mouth of his prophet, with no ritual purification.

1:11. almond tree. The almond tree reached a height of fifteen to thirty feet. It was the first tree to bloom in late January/early February. The almond flower is white with shades of pink, ripening with almonds about ten weeks later.

1:14-15. northern kingdoms. This is either a reference to Babylon or Scythia or an echo of a future where all nations come up against Jerusalem (see Ezek 38—39; Joel 3; Zech 12—14). The north was often a symbol of dark powers, such as the Philistines, Assyrians and Arameans. Enemies often had little choice but to come at Jerusalem from the north, because of the way the major routes went. As early as 627, there was little evidence that Babylon had the ability to launch an invasion in the Levant. The Scythians, however, did invade western Asia at this time, according to the Greek historian Herodotus.

1:15. thrones in gateway. The gateway was the usual site for a king to publicly perform his duties. It could have been used for ceremonial or diplomatic occasions or legal proceedings. The Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat describes King Danil sitting in the gate area judging the cases of widows and orphans. A conquering king would take his seat on this public throne in the gateway in order to pass judgment on a city and its leaders. Recent excavations at Tel Dan have revealed what appears to be a stone platform set inside the gate area, which once was canopied and may have held a throne.

1:16. purpose of burning incense. Incense was a mixture of spices that made a pleasant fragrance when burned. Offerings of incense were common throughout the Near East and Israel. They were used in conjunction with sacrifice (see comment on 44:18). One of the more luxurious spices was frankincense (a white gum resin) which came from Sheba in south Arabia. Excavations have produced a large variety of incense altars throughout Israel, including two at Arad and ten at Miqne/Ekron.

1:18. iron pillar metaphor/bronze wall metaphor. Iron and bronze were symbolic of strength in many biblical passages (see comment on Is 45:2). Bronze gates built by the Assyrians have been found at Balawat. They were a decorative feature on strong walls. Thutmose III of Egypt described himself as a wall of iron and bronze for Egypt, meaning that he was like an impregnable fortress city.

2:1—3:5

Israel's Abandonment of God

2:8. prophesied by Baal, following idols. Despite the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah, the people of Judah often reverted back to religious syncretism, performing the rituals and worshiping the deities of Canaan. The prophets who were associated with this syncretism would offer messages from Baal in his name and would ask for oracles before the idols of Baal.

2:10. coasts of Kittim. Kittim is mentioned in the table of nations (Gen 10) as a descendent of Javan (Greek, Ionia), who is associated with the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean. Kittim is probably the Hebrew term for Kition, near modern Lanarca on the south central coast of Cyprus, but most likely referred to the whole island. It was a Bronze Age site. In the period of Jeremiah, the term Kittim most likely denoted Greece or in general a faraway place. Ostraca from Arad in the seventh century B.C. mention individuals from Kittim who have Greek names. These were probably Cypriot traders.

2:10. Kedar. Kedar, the second son of Ishmael (Gen 25:13), was the name of an Ishmaelite tribe that flourished from the eighth to the fourth centuries B.C. The tribe is known from Assyrian and Late Babylonian texts as Qadar. The personal names of the Kedarites appear to have been related to the southern branch of the Semitic languages. These tribal peoples were based in the Arabian peninsula and often made their way into the Levant via the Si-

nai. The Kedarites inhabited the eastern wilderness, while the Kittim inhabited the western reaches of the sea.

2:11. nations changing gods in the Near East. Because of the infiltration of foreign elements, many nations added gods to their pantheon. Moreover, the names of gods endured slight alterations as time went on. But the concept of a nation exchanging its god(s) for others was a foreign idea in the ancient Near East. The verb possibly carries the idea of "barter" in which case it does not refer to simply a change but to trading for something of greater value.

2:13. broken cisterns. Cisterns were often built in hills made of limestone. An individual had to plaster the inside with lime plaster and direct rainwater into it. But these cisterns often developed cracks, and water would seep out, with the farmer losing a life-giving commodity.

2:15. lion metaphor. This probably represents the Assyrians who, like lions, devoured cities and lands. Any number of Assyrian military campaigns are being alluded to here. The Assyrians had winged human-headed lions at the gates of many of their cities.

2:15. burned towns. This refers to specific campaigns of a number of Assyrian rulers who came into the Levant, including Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.), Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.), Sargon II (721-705 B.C.), Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) and Esarhaddon (681-668 B.C.). Since the Assyrians had no intention of occupying these towns, their practice was to burn them in order to warn against the cost of noncooperation.

2:16. Memphis. Memphis was the residence of the early Egyptian kings. Many Judeans (as well as Phoenicians, according to Herodotus) fled there during the Babylonian invasion of 587 B.C. It is identified with the modern site of Mitrahineh, about fifteen miles south of Cairo, on the west bank of the Nile. The city had been in decline since about 1000 B.C. However, it was restored by the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty and became the primary residence of the Egyptian kings in the seventh century B.C. It was most likely also the residence of the kings of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty. For more information see comment on 46:19.

2:16. Tahpanhes. Tahpanhes was an outpost in the eastern Delta region of the Nile, bordering the Sinai. It was known as Daphne by the Greeks, who inhabited the outpost as mercenaries by the seventh century B.C. The Greek historian Herodotus states that Daphne was one of three outposts set up by the Egyptians to stop the Assyrian invasion. The Jews in flight from the Babylonians may have stopped there in the early sixth century B.C.

2:16. shaved head. A shaved head in the ancient Near East usually (but not always) denoted a slave or a subordinate. However, the Hebrew term used here "to shave" is problematic and there is little agreement on its meaning.

2:18. Shihor. Shihor is probably the Hebrew name for "waters of Horus," the falcon deity of Egypt. Although it was probably a body of water in the northeast Delta region of the Nile, its location is uncertain. Some have associated it with the Brook of Egypt, the first body of water seen traveling south into Egypt from Palestine.

2:18. the River. In Scripture the Euphrates River is often referred to as the River.

2:20. high hill and spreading tree as place of prostitution. Part of the fertility rites of local Canaanite sanctuaries were carried out on hilltops in connection with various sorts of trees (including oaks, poplars and terebinths). The sexual rituals dedicated to gods of fertility are also mentioned in Hosea 4:13. Asherah is pictured in Israelite iconography as a stylized tree.

2:22. soda, soap. The term translated "soda" refers to a sodium carbonate byproduct, most likely imported from Egypt. Soap was made from the ashes of a local plant.

2:23. Baals. The employment of the plural Baals refers to the many cult centers of Baal in Canaanite practice. In other words, there was a Baal for each city (e.g., Tyre, Sidon and Gad). A number of place names in the Old Testament contain the element Baal (e.g., Baal-Zephon and Baal-Peor). It is presumed that they mean "Baal of Peor," or "Baal of Zephon." Baal, which means "lord," occurs as a divine name as early as the eighteenth century B.C. in Amorite personal names from Mari. Some would offer examples as early as the late third millennium. By the fourteenth century the title was used by Egyptians to refer to the storm god. The name is also evident in texts from Alalakh, Amarna and Ugarit as the personal name of the storm god Adad. Baal was a fertility deity and was a dying (winter) and rising (spring) god. In the mythology of Ugarit he is pictured in combat with Yamm (the sea) and Mot (death). His consorts are Anat and Astarte.

2:23-24. camel/donkey metaphor. Young female camels are not at all reliable creatures and nervously wander around in a disorderly fashion. The female donkey, when in heat, becomes almost violent and chases after the male donkey, just as Israel, like the wild female donkey, chases after the Baals.

2:27. wood-father, stone mother. In this case the tree was an image of Asherah, a female deity, and the male symbol is that which "gave me birth." Thus the Israelites are completely confused as to their worship. It is difficult to determine whether the text is referring generally to polytheistic worship or specifically to fertility symbols.

2:28. as many gods as towns. The various pantheons of most ancient Near Eastern peoples included hundreds and sometimes even thousands of deities. Jeremiah is claiming that the Judeans are no different from their polytheistic counterparts. It was also common practice for towns to have patron deities, so that gods could multiply as towns developed.

2:32. jewelry. The term for jewelry here is translated elsewhere as "jewels," but here it probably denotes the bridal attire or a specific item that was unique to the bride. See comment on Ezekiel 16:11-12 for description of the ornaments.

2:36. disappointed by Egypt and Assyria. It is not certain whether Jeremiah is referring to specific events or to these nations in general. By at least 732 B.C. both Judah and Israel entered into a vassal relationship with Assyria. However, in the end Assyria did not protect its vassals but destroyed them, as they did to Israel in 721 B.C. and to Judah in 701 B.C. Egypt, however, had been unable to protect its vassals against the power of Assyria or other West Asiatic kingdoms. In the end then, neither kingdom provided the safety or security that Judah was looking for.

2:37. hands on head. The "hands on the head" gesture was a sign of grief in the ancient Near East. It has been illustrated by the mourning female figures on the Phoenician sarcophagus of Ahiram, thirteenth-century king of Byblos. The Egyptian Tale of Two Brothers also describes this gesture as an indication of mourning.

3:1. divorce legislation. There are numerous texts from both Mesopotamia and Egypt that describe divorce legislation. Although the laws were usually in favor of men, in both cultures women were allowed, under certain stipulations, to obtain a divorce. Jeremiah in this context is referring to the one specific piece of divorce legislation in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which states that a man may not remarry his ex-wife if she has been married to another man in the interim. Thus, the answer to Jeremiah's query is no, a man may not remarry her.

3:3. spring rains. The two kinds of rains described here are the showers, which usually fell in March, and the late rains of spring, normally falling in April.

3:6—4:4

Faithless Israel Called to Return

3:6. worship practices. See comment on 2:20.

3:8. certificate of divorce. Divorce certificates were well known in the ancient Near East. In fact, even a royal certificate of divorce written on a clay tablet from Ugarit in the Late Bronze Age has been found. Scores of texts describing divorce legislation have been found in cuneiform texts from Mesopotamia and in papyri from Egypt.

3:9. adultery with stone and wood. Committing adultery with stone and wood refers to the "spiritual adultery" of following after the Asherim (the sacred trees, i.e., wood) and the Baals (stone).

4:4. metaphor of heart circumcision. Circumcision was not unique to Israel, as iconographic evidence has been found in Egypt. But the meaning behind it was unique, as it was a sign that the people of Israel belonged to Yahweh. Regular circumcision symbolically put the organ of generation under the control of Yahweh as a reminder of his covenant promise to make Israel a great nation. The concept of circumcision of the heart symbolically put the organ of the will under the control of Yahweh as a recognition of the obligation to the law.

4:5-31

Enemy from the North

4:5. major fortified cities of Judah. According to Sennacherib, king of Assyria (r. 705-681 B.C.), Judah had forty-six strong cities (i.e., walled towns), which he had overrun, and countless small cities or villages. There were thus a number of cities with major defensive systems. The defensive system at Lachish, one of the primary fortresses in Judah, has been extensively excavated in this century. It contained two layers of city walls and strong towers.

4:6. nature of signal. The blowing of the horn announced a state of emergency (see Amos 3:6). On hearing it citizens who lived in villages or were out farming fled into the confines of the walled city. In this case the trumpet was blown throughout the entire land because of a national emergency.

4:6. army from north. see comment on 1:14-15.

4:8. sackcloth. Sackcloth was a black coarse linen garment (usually goat's wool) worn by mourners in time of sorrow (death of a loved one) or great disaster. It was also used by Palestinian shepherds because it

was cheap and durable.

4:11. wind to winnow or cleanse. The hot wind from the desert was most likely the sirocco, a wind that was too strong for winnowing the grain on the threshing floor, as it carried away both the grain and the chaff. The metaphor is thus clear; God's judgment will be like the hot wind, engulfing both the good and the bad. The word translated "cleanse" here is used in the Dead Sea Scrolls to refer to the separating of the grain and most likely has that connection here as well.

4:15. announcement from Dan. The city of Dan (modern Tel el-Qadi) was at the northern limit of Israel. Excavations have shown that it was a substantial city during the time of Jeremiah. This city would have noticed the northern invaders first. Thus a messenger from Dan would run southward, "causing all Israel to hear" the bad report.

4:15. hills of Ephraim. From Dan the invader descends the Golan Heights until reaching the hills of Ephraim, the mountainous region in the center of the former northern kingdom, reaching from Shechem to Bethel.

4:23-26. world upside-down motif. Jeremiah has taken his imagery from the creation account in Genesis 1:2. He describes in poetic imagery the reversion of creation back to its chaotic stage before God had done his work. The Babylonian *Myth of Erra and Ishum* is roughly similar in that it describes a reversal of Marduk's creation of order out of the original primeval chaos. In the world upside-down motif all that is considered most consistent and reliable is jeopardized. The concept can be applied to the cosmic realm (sun growing dark), the natural realm (mountains being leveled), the political realm (empires overthrown), the social realm (poor becoming rich) or the animal realm (lion and lamb together). It is often used in prophetic literature in connection with the Day of the Lord and coming judgment.

4:28. heavens growing dark (eclipse). In this poetic imagery the earth is personified (as are many inanimate objects in Hebrew) as if it is in mourning and "turning black" or "growing dark." It is not necessary to assume that Jeremiah is attempting to describe a heavenly phenomena, such as an eclipse, though that could be described in similar terms.

4:30. dressing in scarlet/eye paint. Scarlet clothing represented the most exquisite finery for a woman. The dye for this color was made from the eggs of an insect that were collected from oak leaves. The eye paint (antimony) was used (and is still used in the modern Middle East) to make the eyes look larger and thus enhance one's beauty. Neither of these were specifically associated with prostitutes but were simply used when a woman wished to be her most attractive.

5:1-31

Israel's Falsehood

5:1. comparison to Diogenes. Somewhat like Diogenes, the Greek Cynic philosopher of the fourth century B.C., the people of Judah are asked to traverse the city and search for an honest (or in this case, a just) man. The comparison to Diogenes ends, as the Judeans are searching for someone that acts justly and is faithful to Yahweh. Diogenes was looking for someone who conformed to his secular idea of justice, an idea not necessarily attached to a deity.

5:6. how common were predator attacks? Lions and other predators were much more common in the Middle East than they are today. An attack by a predator was not considered a rare or surprising occurrence. Thus the Judeans would have been well acquainted with this metaphor.

5:8. stallion metaphor. Stallions were known for their powerful sexual proclivity and mindless obedience to their instincts. In much the same way the people of Judah pursued their promiscuity, whether that was their spiritual adultery or their participation in the sexual aspects of the fertility cult.

5:12-13. prophets proclaiming peace. Certainly a prophet who offered the people the hope of peace, security and resolution of the problem would be popular. Denial is the path of least resistance. There would likewise be no shortage of prophets who saw personal gain in supporting the desires of the throne on these matters and were therefore willing to represent the best interests of the king and whatever propaganda he desired to circulate. The literal term for these prophets is that they "will become wind": in other words, they will be like old windbags whose words do not have any value.

5:24. autumn and spring rains. The autumn and spring rains were simply called the "former and latter" rains. Israel has a rainy season (winter months) and a dry season (summer months). The rainy season begins with the autumn rains ("early rains," October-November) and ends with the spring rains ("latter rains," early April). These are important for what they contribute to the overall moisture levels in the earth and for softening the ground for plowing. Baal was considered the lord over nature who con-

trolled the rains in the Canaanite cults of Palestine. However, Jeremiah argues that it is Yahweh who should be worshiped as the giver of rains in their proper season.

6:1-30

Siege of Jerusalem by the Army from the North

6:1. Tekoa. Tekoa (Khirbit Tequa) was a town in the highlands of Judah ten miles south of Jerusalem on the border of arable land and desert. A refugee from Jerusalem was able to reach the city within one day.

6:1. Beth Hakkerem. Beth Hakkerem was associated with Tekoa and Bethlehem, but its precise location is uncertain. The early church father Jerome stated that it could be seen from Bethlehem, and thus it has been tentatively identified with 'Ain Karim, four miles west of Jerusalem, or Ramath Rahel, two and a half miles south of Jerusalem, which would have been ideal for a signal location.

6:6. siege ramps. The ancients were notorious for their inability to conduct siege warfare. The construction of a siege ramp was a useful tool but very precarious, as the city defenders made every attempt to thwart its progress. It was normally made as a sloping ramp, built with a foundation of trees and large stones and mixed with earth and other elements at hand. Numerous wall reliefs from Assyria depict Assyrian siege ramps employed throughout the Near East. Moreover, remains of an Assyrian siege ramp have been uncovered at the Judean city of Lachish (for more information see comment on 32:24), where the Assyrians were successful in capturing and destroying the fortress city.

6:20. incense from Sheba. One of the more luxurious spices used for incense was frankincense (a white gum resin) which came from Sheba in south Arabia, a center of the spice trade. Incense accompanied sacrificial offerings (see comment on Lev 2:1).

6:20. sweet calamus. Sweet calamus (or aromatic spice cane) most likely originated from India. It was among the ingredients listed in the anointing oil in Exodus 30:23. It was a marsh plant that was used as a tonic and stimulant. It is not to be confused with sugar cane, which spread east after the Old Testament period.

6:23. cavalry units in seventh century. Chariot and cavalry warfare in the seventh century B.C. were primarily used as shock weapons. However, with the reforms of Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria (r. 745-727 B.C.), horses and chariots also played the role of light artillery, as arrows were shot from the horse-drawn chariots. Later a heavier chariot with four men appeared with Ashurbanipal (r. 668-627 B.C.). Cavalry (exclusive of chariotry) was developed in Urartu (biblical Ararat), which furnished up to a thousand specialized units to the Assyrian army by the time of Sargon II (r. 721-705 B.C.). Stud farms were created in various points of the empire, especially in Syria and in the Assyrian capitals. This cavalry tradition was inherited in its entirety by the Chaldeans in the late seventh century B.C. For more information see comment on Habakkuk 1:8.

6:26. rolling in ashes. Rolling or groveling in the dust or sprinkling ashes on oneself was a sign of mourning in the ancient Near East.

6:27. metal assayers. The assayer/refiner here was a metallurgist whose duty was to assess the quality of the ore. It was then refined by stripping it of its impure elements. However, if there were a great deal of impurities in the metal, the item was totally discarded.

6:28. bronze, iron metaphor. In the ancient world silver was extracted and assayed through a process called cupellation. In the initial smelting process silver was extracted from lead ores (galena) containing less than 1 percent silver in a given sample. The lead was melted in shallow vessels made of porous substances such as bone ash or clay. A bellows was then used to blow air across the molten lead producing lead oxide (litharge). Some of the lead oxide was absorbed by the bone ash, while some could be skimmed off the surface. Ideally the silver would remain. Unfortunately this process had many potential problems. If the temperature was too high, or if the sample contained other metals (iron, copper or tin were common), the cupellation would be unsuccessful. In this situation, when the litharge was skimmed off, rather than resulting in silver extraction, what remained was tainted silver mixed with other metals and therefore unusable. This unusable product is perhaps what is referred to in the translation as "dross." Another possibility is that the text refers to the assaying process. This involved heating a sample of silver together with large amounts of lead in order to draw off the impurities. One of the possible results of the assaying process was that the quantity of lead would be insufficient to draw off the impurities rendering the silver useless. Rather than being purified, then, the silver would be in worse shape than before the process. Perhaps this process is envisioned by the text, and the silver becomes this useless junk.

7:1-29

Sermon in the Temple Court

7:2. proclamations at the temple gate. Proclamations were typically made at public places where a lot of traffic could be expected. Gateways were hubs of activity in the ancient city. The temple gateway would receive all the traffic of those doing business at the temple, including anyone who was bringing a sacrifice. This is the target audience for Jeremiah's proclamation.

7:2. nature of worship. The two terms in Hebrew that are used for worship signify "service" and "prostration" (reverence). The latter is used here and usually represents an act of humility, often associated with petition. The temple was primarily a state sanctuary and thus was part of the royal estate. The temple was the "house of God" and was his residence. It was not intended as a place of corporate worship, and worshipers were admitted into the temple courts but not into the temple itself. Sacrificial rituals were done in the courts and elsewhere. Though there are many texts describing temples in the ancient Near East, none describe in any detail the nature of the individual's worship within the walls of the temple. We know that worshipers were given dreams by the deity (e.g., at Mari) when viewing its image, but actual entry into the temple must have been rare.

7:4. temple ideology. The people in this context had come to believe that the temple was so important to God that the people were also secure. In the ancient Near East the entire city was considered protected by the city deity. In these terms Jerusalem was considered inviolable because of housing the temple and thereby God. This was certainly enhanced by the salvation of Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah a century earlier. In a similar way temples in ancient Western Asia were described as the "house of god." The most righteous of kings was the one who kept the god's house in order and did constant rebuilding on it. The god dwelt in the temple, just as the king and people dwelt in their own houses. The temple had to be kept up in much the same way the image of the deity had to be fed and clothed daily. These were the needs of the gods. The deity "needed" a house, so it was believed that he would protect that house and the city that provided for his housing. The Israelites, thinking too much like their neighbors, had come to think the same way about their God and his temple, converting it to a protective talisman.

7:6. vulnerable people in ancient Near Eastern law. Mosaic Law had a profound concern for human welfare, especially for historical reasons. Since the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt, they were to be sensitive to the needs of slaves, widows, orphans and other vulnerable people. There are numerous legal texts in Mesopotamia concerning dealings with unfortunates such as widows, orphans and foundlings. However, these texts usually dealt with their legal rights (or lack thereof) and not with their care. For example, widows in the Neo-Babylonian period were under the legal protection of their father, brother or brother-in-law. Those who were financially independent after their husband's death were not legally considered widows, however, and thus were not in need of a protective ward. For more information see comment on Exodus 22:22-24.

7:9. ethics and religious responsibility. The religions practiced by Israel's neighbors would have expected ethical behavior from people but perhaps with a slightly different logic behind it. In Babylon, for instance, Shamash the sun god was the god of justice. Shamash was responsible for insuring that justice was maintained in the world because justice was a part of the order that was the fabric of the cosmos. In much the same way, a shop proprietor might require honesty from his employees because he knows that will contribute to the success of his business. He himself may not be honest at all. In Israel it was not the smooth operation of the cosmos that motivated Yahweh to insist on moral behavior. The law grew out of his character, and the holiness that he required was a reflection of him.

7:10. house bearing the name. The temple is where God chose to set his name or in other words, where he laid his legal claim and thus was his personal property. The temple in the ancient Near East was considered the private residence of the deity and thus his private property. The king was merely the caretaker of the building and responsible for its upkeep.

7:10. temple as providing sanctuary. In Mesopotamia and Israel the temple provided sanctuary because the deity resided there and thus the worshiper had greater access to the god's protection. Unlike in ancient Greece, however, there was no special law of sanctuary for an individual just because they were in the confines of the temple property.

7:12. Shiloh. Shiloh (modern Khirbit Seilun), in the heart of the Ephraimite hills, was the site where Israel convened sacred assemblies before using Jerusalem. Excavations have exposed extensive architecture by the eleventh century B.C. The site lasted throughout the

Iron Age, but the sacred structures were most likely in ruins by Jeremiah's time. It is thought to have been overrun by the Philistines in the aftermath of the victory at the Battle of Aphek (1 Sam 4).

7:18. cakes for the Queen of Heaven. The term for cakes described here is a loanword from Akkadian. The Babylonians used sweetened cakes in the cult of the goddess Ishtar. It is possible that the Queen of Heaven here is Ishtar as well, but some evidence points to an unnamed mother-goddess or to Asherah. The cakes were baked directly on the embers of the fire and not in an oven. As described in this passage, the entire family took part in the cult rituals. Offering cakes to deities was very common in Babylonia. Forty-seven molds for cakes representing a goddess (some female-shaped, some star-shaped) were found in an early second millennium B.C. royal kitchen at Mari in northeast Syria.

7:18. drink offerings. Drink offerings were common in Israel, but the phrase used here, "pour out libations," normally refers to offerings that are described elsewhere as offered to other gods on the roofs of houses (see comment on 32:29), suggesting astral worship.

7:20. anger against beasts, trees, produce. The parallel between "man and beast" is common in Scripture (for instance, Ex 8:13-14). However, the addition of trees and produce is not seen elsewhere. When Enlil, the king of the gods in Mesopotamia, brought on the flood, it was leashed on all flesh indiscriminately. The Babylonian *Myth of Erra and Ishum* also describes devastation that took both humans and animals. On the other hand, warfare tactics often targeted the produce and the trees. Trees were chopped down for the needs of the besieging army or simply as punitive deforestation. Produce was used to supply the army, trampled underfoot or intentionally destroyed in order to cripple the economy.

7:21. eating the meat of burnt offerings. Since the burnt offering was entirely consumed on the altar, it was supposedly unavailable as food for worshipers. However, since God had no intention of listening to the petitions that accompanied the burnt offering, they might just as well have eaten the meat themselves.

7:29. cutting off hair and throwing it away. The cutting of the hair was normally a gesture of mourning. However, the object of the verb here is often used for the consecration of priests and Nazirites, who took a vow not to cut their hair. Thus, Yahweh is ironically commanding the people to cut their consecrated hair, for their vows will accomplish nothing.

7:30—8:3

Death in the Hinnom Valley

7:31. high places of Topheth in the valley of Hinnom. "Topheth" was the cultic installation where children were offered to the god Molech. The word is thought to signify the hearth where the child was placed. The Hebrew term has parallel terms in both Ugaritic and Aramaic with the meaning "furnace or fireplace." Scholars have thought that Topheth was at the edge of the valley of Ben Hinnom before connecting with the Kidron Valley. The valley of Ben Hinnom has been identified with Wadi er-Rababi southwest of the City of David. Many consider Molech to have been a netherworld deity whose rituals had Canaanite origins and focused on dead ancestors. An eighth-century B.C. Phoenician inscription speaks of sacrifices made to Molech before battle by the Cilicians and their enemies. The name Molech appears to be related to the Hebrew term *mlk* ("to rule"). Sacrifices to Molech were done at the installation of Baal, which may mean that the term was an epithet of Baal himself, as well as other deities (32:35).

7:31. burn sons and daughters in the fire. Evidence for this practice outside of Scripture is rare indeed. Assyrian legal texts describe a penalty clause as "he will burn his son to Sin (a lunar deity) and his daughter to Belet-seri." Also see the comment on 2 Chronicles 28:3.

8:2. exposure of bones. Bones in tombs were considered sacred. The bridge between life and death in the ancient Near East was different from ours. Individuals were understood to have a consciousness after death as long as their bodies (i.e., bones) still existed and had been buried properly. Often the desecration of graves was not merely to retrieve treasure but to disturb the bones of the dead. Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, attacked the Elamite capital of Susa and carried off the bones of the dead with the purpose of "imposing restlessness upon their spirits and depriving them of food offerings and libations." Cults of the dead abounded throughout the Near East. In Israel the bodies of the dead were also treated carefully; disturbing tombs was looked on with horror. One is reminded that both Jacob and Joseph desired that their bones be taken to the Promised Land when the Israelites returned there.

8:2. astral worship. The "host of heaven" (NIV: "stars") was the celestial army that was made up of the planets and stars that were inhabited by divine spirits who were

in control of human destiny. The Babylonians were experts in the discipline of astral divination, attempting to predict and control fate by the use of omina by examining the stars. Modern astrology has its roots in Babylonia of the Hellenistic period (after 331 B.C.), centuries after Jeremiah. Israelite stamp seals of the seventh century show that astral symbols for deity were very popular in this period. For more information see comments on Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kings 23:4; 2 Chronicles 33:5.

8:4—9:26

Punishment Coming

8:7. bird migration metaphor. Though the exact identification of the birds mentioned here is uncertain, it is clear that they obey Yahweh's will (by migrating to the right place at the right time), while his children do not.

8:14. poisoned water metaphor. It was crucial for a city under siege to have access to a protected water supply. If the supply was poisoned, the city became literally defenseless and was obliged to surrender to its attackers. This then is a metaphor for shortening the siege.

8:16. Dan as direction of attack. See the comment on 4:15.

8:17. snakes in Palestine. The snakes here are most likely a metaphor for the Chaldean army. The snakes described in Scripture appear to have been of the poisonous variety, although no particular species can be determined. Isaiah 11:8 describes the "hole of the asp," and commentators have suggested that the cobra is being described, since they typically live in holes. Other poisonous snakes were probably the carpet viper (known for its striking without provocation) and the desert viper.

8:17. charmed vipers. Snakes were greatly feared in the ancient world as magical beings as well as for their venom. Both Egyptian and Mesopotamian literatures contain examples of incantations against serpents and their bites. The word translated "charmed" here should not evoke cartoonlike images of swaying serpents hypnotized by pipe-playing swamis. Instead the reference is to snakes against which the incantations are ineffective. Akkadian texts also speak of snakes that are "unconjurable."

8:20. connection between seasons and deliverance. Since the time when grains and fruits were gathered was over, and the season of growth and ripening was over, there was nothing in the granaries. This is describing a time of famine; because of invading armies there was no opportunity to harvest, and the prospect was a winter without food.

8:22. balm of Gilead. Although balm is associated with Gilead, there is no evidence for a balm-producing tree or shrub ever having grown there, although the boundaries of Gilead were never well defined. There are two possibilities: either the reference is to something other than balm (see comment on 46:11), or Gilead was the importer of balm rather than the producer of it. The King's Highway, the main trade route in the region, passed through Gilead, and balm was a primary commodity of trade. Spice caravans from the east followed that route, and no doubt balm was traded there (see Gen 37:25). Balm was probably the resin of the storax tree, obtained by an incision on the bark of the tree. It was believed to have had medicinal qualities. Josephus claimed that En-Gedi near the Dead Sea was a major center for the cultivation of perfume-producing plants (including balm), a fact confirmed by archaeologists, who have discovered at Tel Goren at En-Gedi on the west shore of the Dead Sea something that appears to be a balm installation.

9:15. bitter food. The term here for bitter food is wormwood (the name for several plants of the genus *Artemisia),* a low shrub with very bitter leaves and fruit used in folk medicine, primarily for intestinal problems. It is eaten by goats and camels, and today Bedouin dry the leaves to make a strong aromatic tea. The term wormwood in Scripture is used figuratively for bitterness and sorrow.

9:17-20. trained mourners. This is the only reference in Scripture to professional mourning women, although it was a widespread custom throughout the ancient Near East. Professional mourners (women in virtually every case) are depicted on numerous wall reliefs in Egyptian tomb paintings. They are also often mentioned in Mesopotamia and in Syria as lamenting for not only the human dead but for the dying and rising gods (e.g., Dumuzi or Tammuz). The custom was also prevalent in the eastern Mediterranean, notably in classical Greece, and continues in some parts of the Middle East today.

9:26. circumcised heart. See comment on 4:4.

10:1-25

Contrast Between the Lord and the Idols

10:2. celestial omens. The celestial gods (sun god, moon god and Venus particularly; in

Babylonia, Shamash, Sin and Ishtar respectively) were primary in most ancient religions. Controlling calendar and time, seasons and weather, they were viewed as the most powerful of gods. They provided signs by which omens were read, and they looked down on all. By the end of the second millennium, a major compilation of celestial omens, the seventy tablets of the work known as *Enuma Anu Enlil,* had been compiled and was consulted for nearly a thousand years. There were many constellations recognized by the Mesopotamian astrologers (many, though not all, the same we recognize today, transmitted through the Greeks), but the Zodiac was not yet known.

10:3-4. manufacture of idols. See comments on Isaiah 40:19; 41:7; 44:10-14.

10:5. ancient Near Eastern beliefs about and treatment of idols. Idols came in a variety of shapes and sizes in the ancient Near East. They were typically carved of wood and overlaid with hammered-out sheets of silver or gold. Basically human in appearance (except those from Egypt, which combined human and animal characteristics), they had distinctive, even formalized, poses, clothing and hairstyles. Images of deity in the ancient Near East were where the deity became present in a special way, to the extent that the cult statue became the god (when the god so favored his worshipers), even though it was not the only manifestation of the god. Rituals were performed to bring the god to life in its idol. As a result of this linkage, spells, incantations and other magical acts could be performed on the image in order to threaten, bind or compel the deity. In contrast, other rites related to the image were intended to aid the deity or care for the deity. The idols then represent a worldview, a concept of deity that was not consistent with how Yahweh had revealed himself. The idol was not the deity, but the deity was thought to inhabit the image and manifest its presence and will through the image. Archaeologists have found very few of the life-sized images that the texts describe, but there are renderings of them that allow accurate knowledge of details. The images of deities in Mesopotamia were fed, dressed and even washed daily. Food sacrifices were brought to the deity on a daily basis (and were no doubt eaten by the temple technicians). Other attendants were required to dress and undress the statue, and still others were employed to wash the statue and transport it in times of celebration.

10:5. impotence of idols. The word translated "scarecrow" occurs only here in the Old Testament. This was as close to an image that Israel was allowed to make. Thus, the "sacred" idols are diminished to the status of scarecrows, no more powerful than palm fronds twisted around a pole. They certainly inspired no fear.

10:9. silver from Tarshish, gold from Uphaz. Although Uphaz was known for its gold (Dan 10:5), its precise location is not known. An Aramaic targum locates it at Ophir, a source of gold in southern Arabia. Uphaz also may be an adjective meaning "pure." There are a number of references to Tarshish in the context of precious stones. These references appear to connect Tarshish with Ezion Geber in the Red Sea area, which correlates Uphaz with Ophir. In other passages, however, Tarshish clearly denotes a western location.

10:9. dressing idols in blue and purple. Ancient color words are difficult to interpret. These terms indicate shades of blue/purple and were colors of royalty and divinity (for more detail see comment on Num 4:6). Many images in the ancient Near East were gold or gold-plated and clothed in these colors.

10:12-13. creator God/cosmic God. This description of Israel's God portrays him both as a creator deity and a cosmic deity. He established order in the cosmos, and he maintains order in his governance of the operation of the cosmos. These two areas of operation did not often coexist in one deity in the ancient world. Marduk, the chief deity of Babylon, however, did have thunder and rain connections as well as being the creator god.

10:13. wind from storehouses. The Canaanites and Babylonians attributed manifestations of storms to Adad, the storm and wind god. However, Jeremiah claimed that Yahweh was solely responsible for atmospheric phenomena. He used the imagery of Yahweh having storehouses of rain, hail and snow, which are set in motion by the wind, presumably instigated by his breath (also see Deut 28:12; Job 38:22; and Ps 33:7). The word translated "storehouses" can be used to refer to treasuries that would store precious objects as well as royal weapons. Hail, snow, wind, thunder and lightning were often seen as the weapons that God uses to defeat his enemies. Likewise storehouses could serve for the storage of raw materials such as barley, dates, grain or tithes in general. In the same way God rations out the products from his storehouses as necessary. Cosmic storehouses are not common imagery in the ancient Near East.

11:1-17

Conspiracy Against the Covenant

11:4. iron-smelting furnace. In the ancient world they did not use a blast furnace such

as is used today to produce cast iron. Iron has a melting point of 1537 degrees centigrade, a temperature that could not be consistently achieved by ancient technology. But once the iron is heated beyond 1100 degrees centigrade, it takes a spongy, semisolid form that can be forged. The furnace was usually fueled by charcoal to provide the carbon necessary for the chemical process. The strength of the steel is dependent on the amount of carbon it is able to absorb. The lower the temperature, the more often the process has to be repeated in order to get rid of enough slag to achieve a usable product. While a furnace can certainly be a metaphor of oppression, the fire of the smelting furnace is not destructive but constructive. It is the furnace that transforms the malleable ore to the durable iron product. The Egypt experience transformed Israel into the covenant people of God.

11:5. land flowing with milk and honey. The phrase "flowing with milk and honey" was a common cliché in Scripture designating the fertility of an area. The Canaanites described the land in ritual texts in a similar manner, as did the Egyptian literary text of Sinuhe (early second millennium B.C.) from Egypt. For more information see comment on Exodus 3:7-10.

11:13. as many Baal idols as streets. The phrase is emphasizing the large amount of Baal idols in Jerusalem. A typical city in the ancient Near East had dozens of street corners in residential districts. The text does not imply that each street corner had a Baal image. Nevertheless, Babylonian texts speak of small open-air shrines or niches on street corners or courtyards. One text says that in the city of Babylon there were 180 of them dedicated to the goddess Ishtar. These shrines featured a raised structure with an altar on the top and seem to have been frequented primarily by women.

11:15. consecrated meat. Much of the meat that was consumed in Israel was connected to the sacrificial system and was therefore eaten in specified areas in the temple. Consecrated meat would refer to meat that was used under such circumstances. The irony here is that even as they sit in the temple precincts and partake of a sacral meal, they discuss their wickedness in the table conversation.

11:16. storm as judgment of god. The storm god imagery has already been used several times in the book. God's storm of judgment is accompanied by lightning that ignites the tree that stands for Israel. For more information see comment on 1 Samuel 7:10.

11:18-23
Conspiracy Against Jeremiah

11:21. Anathoth. See comment on 1:1.

11:21. prophesying as a capital crime. Elsewhere in Scripture those who prophesied falsely were legally put to death. Prophecy was a vocation employed throughout the ancient Near East, but capital punishment for false prophecy is known primarily from Israel. Nevertheless the men of Anathoth have not suggested that Jeremiah's prophecies are false. Their threats seek simply to silence him. Speaking a prophecy was a means of effectuating it (just as writing it down was; see comment on 36:23), so they believe that by silencing him (by either threat or murder), they can prevent the disasters he is announcing from taking place.

12:1-17
Jeremiah's Lament and God's Response

12:4. basis of cynical thinking. In the ancient Near East disaster struck when the deity became angry and removed his protection. The people would then be subject to all sorts of problems, many believed to be demonically perpetrated. In Deuteronomy 32:20 God says that he will respond to Israel's wickedness by hiding his face. He would then "see what their end will be"—that is, how well they would fare without his blessing and protection. Here in Jeremiah, God has hidden his face (evident from the drought and famine), but the evildoers are convinced that God will not "see their end" (same phrase as in Deuteronomy) because they are determined to survive on their own

12:5. Jordan thickets. The thickets (literally, "height") of the Jordan is a term that refers to the area where the Jordan River overflows to its junglelike thicket of reeds, bushes and trees, which often became a den for lions. It was a dangerous place and difficult to navigate.

12:9. speckled bird of prey. This word is used only in this context, and many consider it to refer not to a bird at all but to a hyena who is surrounded by birds of prey. This is supported by the Septuagint reading as well as by usage in related Semitic languages, but the text remains difficult.

13:1-14
Belts and Wineskins

13:1. identification of garment. There were two different depictions of the loincloth. One

is a Canaanite depiction of a wrapped cloth that did not pass between the legs, while the other is in an Egyptian depiction of Syrians, where the garment is composed of narrow strips of overlapping cloth that did not pass between the legs. Some of these garments were made of leather, but others were made of linen, as this one was.

13:4. Perath. Perath is a term often used for the Euphrates River, which is over 350 miles north of Anathoth, which would make for two very long round trips! Others have suggested it refers to the Wadi Pharah (symbolically called Perath?), some four miles northeast of Anathoth (referred to in Josh 18:23).

13:12. wineskins filled with wine. This has been a notoriously difficult phrase to interpret. It is possible that Jeremiah is quoting a current proverb about everything having its use; wineskins fulfill their purpose by being filled with wine in much the same way that a hat fulfills its purpose by being on a head. Jeremiah is likely making an ironic statement with a simple proverb, similar to Isaiah 28:23-29.

13:15—14:12

Judgment: Captivity, Drought, Famine

13:18. queen mother. The queen mother was an official title in ancient Israel. It was an office with high rank and official prerogatives, especially when the monarch was a minor (and the queen's husband, the former king, had died). She did not just have influence over her son the king but had great authority of her own. Athaliah was able to seize the power of the throne (2 Kings 11). Since the queen mother had an official position in the kingdom, the writer of the books of Kings mentioned her in nearly every case in conjunction with her son. She was probably afforded rank on the accession of her son as king. There are general parallels in Hittite and Ugaritic texts concerning the office of queen mother. There is no direct evidence of the office in the northern kingdom of Israel. For more information see comment on 1 Kings 2:19. The queen mother mentioned here is most likely Nehushta, the mother of Jehoiachin who sat on the throne briefly in 597 until he was carried off captive to Babylon.

13:18. crowns. The royal crown in Judah was probably a golden diadem worn over a turban (see Ps 21:3; Ezek 21:26). Kings in Egypt wore an elaborate variety of crowns, while kings in Assyria usually wore a truncated conical cap with embroidery or precious stones, and Babylonian kings wore a curved cap that came to a point.

13:19. cities in the Negev. The term *Negev* normally referred to the large desert area south of Judah. In this context, however, it likely denotes the portion of southern Judah dotted with towns and garrisons running from Bethlehem to Beersheba, with Hebron in the middle. It is unclear to what extent these cities came under attack by Babylon in 597, but the ostraca from Arad suggest that Edom posed a threat to them.

13:23. Ethiopian, leopard. In the Egyptian *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy* a similar saying ("There is no Nubian who leaves his skin") occurs in a sequence of results that are inconceivable (e.g., "There is no fool who finds profit"). In the Aramaic *Words of Ahiqar* there is a conversation between a leopard and a goat in which the former offers the latter his coat so that the goat can be warm. The goat replies that the leopard only wants to take his skin away, an exchange of coats.

13:26. skirts covering face. This does not describe women being carried away into captivity but enemy soldiers ranging through the town, raping and pillaging. Judah is here portrayed metaphorically as suffering a similar fate.

14:12. fasting. Fasting was total abstention from food for a temporary period of time. The Day of Atonement was the only national fasting day listed in Scripture, although public fasting was called at special times, especially in the postexilic period. Individuals fasted in times of mourning and penitence. Fasting is little attested in the ancient Near East outside of the Bible. When it does occur, it is usually in the context of mourning. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with making a request before God. The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and humbling oneself before God (Ps 69:10). In connection with repentance the Israelites would fast in order to remove any sin or other obstacle that may have led to their subjection.

14:13—15:21

False Hopes and Only Hope

14:22. Israelite meteorology. Like most people from the ancient Near East the Israelites

viewed seasonal climate as coming from the four winds derived from the four corners of the earth. God not only controlled the winds but created them. The north wind was associated with cold conditions, dispersing rain and snow. The south wind was at times the bringer of the sirocco. The east wind brought a dry wind from the wilderness. The west wind came in from the Mediterranean Sea and was described as the "father of rain." It is clear in this verse that the common Israelite would have thought it absolutely ridiculous to imagine that the skies rained all by themselves. Weather did not happen independent of deity.

15:4. actions of Manasseh. Second Kings 21:3-7 and 2 Chronicles 33:3-7 describe Manasseh's wicked acts, which included astral worship and Baal altars even within the temple itself. He was considered to have done the most to combine the worship of Yahweh with Canaanite cultic ritual. Though he later repented (2 Chron 33:12), his sins were so great that their consequences were not to be overturned by God.

15:7. winnowing at the gate. After grain has been threshed, it is winnowed with the winnowing-fork, with the remainder of the chaff removed with the winnowing shovel. This activity did not take place at city gates but on threshing floors out in open countryside. Here, however, winnowing is a metaphor for judgment (since winnowing separated the good from the bad), and judgment did take place in the gate areas. This verse could refer to the decisions of a conqueror made at the city gates determining who would be put to death, who would be deported and who would remain. Alternatively, the term translated "land" is sometimes a reference to the netherworld. In this case the imagery would still be of the judgment of God at the gate of the netherworld consigning people to death.

15:8. destroyer. Noon was considered the most secure time of the day and thus the time for surprise attacks. The destroyer here represents the Chaldean army, which is being prepared by God to attack his people. This is not the same word as used for the destroying angel in the Passover (Ex 12:23), but it is used of the military operations conducted by the Lord in 47:4 and 51:55.

15:20. wall of bronze metaphor. Bronze gates built by the Assyrians have been found at Balawat. They were decorative features on strong walls. Thutmose III of Egypt described himself as a wall of iron and bronze for Egypt, meaning that he was like an impregnable fortress city.

16:1—17:18

Disaster Approaching

16:4. no burial. Burial was a mandatory duty in ancient Israel. To be left unburied, vulnerable to the elements and beasts, was the worst curse imaginable. Furthermore, as there was no clear distinction between body and soul in the Hebrew mentality, death was not regarded as the separation of those two elements. Thus one who had no burial was still thought to be conscious (in some form) of his fate. In the ancient Near East those who were left unburied were restless until a proper burial had been performed.

16:5. funeral meal. The Hebrew term for funeral meal is used only here and in Amos 6:7, although it is well known in many other Semitic traditions. Extrabiblical information concerning the funeral meal have been found in Ugaritic texts, Aramaic texts from Elephantine (Egypt) and inscriptions in Punic, Nabataean and Palmyrene. In these examples the funeral meal was often held in a banquet hall with an excess of drinking and inappropriate behavior. The context in Amos 6:7 suggests the same type of atmosphere. Whatever the Israelite custom, Jeremiah was forbidden to participate (as he was forbidden to attend marriage ceremonies).

16:6. mourning rites. The rites mentioned here were both forbidden in Israelite tradition (see comments on Lev 19:28 and Deut 14:1). Slashing oneself is also mentioned in 5:7 in the context of Baal worship.

16:20. idols not gods. See comments on 10:5.

17:1. engraved tablets. The iron-engraving tool referred to here is used for etching permanent inscriptions on stone, while the flint (emery-stone) was used in engraving gems. Their hearts are here portrayed as an extremely hard writing material.

17:1. inscribed altar horns. The horns of the altar were protrusions fixed on the four corners of the altar. Though they functioned to provide a means to secure the wood and animals on the altar, they were also where the blood of the animal was dabbed to purify the altar from defilement. The imagery suggests that the sins of Judah will be permanently inscribed there, with the result that sacrifices cannot expunge them.

17:2. Asherah poles and spreading trees. See comment on 2:20.

17:3. high places. See comment on 1 Samuel 9:12.

17:6. salt land. The presence of salt in the land was a curse. There are a number of texts from Mesopotamia that describe a progressive salinity in the soil of southern Iraq in the third and second millennia. When it reached a cer-

tain point of salinity, the land was unable to be used for agriculture and was thus abandoned, sometimes for a period of centuries.

17:11. partridge behavior. The partridge lays her eggs in shallow nests on open ground. Though the eggs are therefore vulnerable to predators or to accidents, the bird lays many eggs, and both the male and female brood over them. The analogy here of laying eggs it does not hatch thus refers to hopes and plans that never come to fruition. There is no evidence that partridges hatch the young of other birds, as the NIV translation suggests.

17:13. written in the dust. This problematic passage either has the idea of a name that is written in the dust, which will disappear quickly, or a name written in the earth (or underworld). This word is not one of those usually translated "dust," but it is the same word used in 15:7, where it could mean either land or netherworld. The latter would make the best sense of the context. To have one's name written in the netherworld would mean being consigned to death. To be written in heaven's ledgers meant that one was destined for continuing life. To be blotted out from that book of life and to have one's name recorded in the ledgers of the netherworld meant doom. Psalm 88:4 expresses the same concept using different terminology.

17:13. deity as spring of living water. "Living" water refers to running water in contrast to the stagnant or contaminated water that gathers in cisterns or pools.

17:19-27

The Sabbath

17:19. gate of the people. The "gate of the people" (literally, "the gate of the sons of the people") is otherwise unknown. The gate seems to have been in the north wall of the city, where the kings left and entered the city.

17:19. number of gates in Jerusalem. There were numerous inner and outer gates in Jerusalem during the period of the divided monarchy. There were at least six outer gates and numerous gates that protected the temple and palatial enclosures. The gates were the areas where public proclamations would normally be made.

17:22-24. carrying a load. In Isaiah 46:1-2 the "burden" is made up of images that are carried around in procession, but Nehemiah 13:15 uses the same word to refer to agricultural products being brought in on the Sabbath by merchants. Either one could be referred to here.

18:1—19:15

The Lesson of the Potter and the Pot

18:2. potter's house. The potter's house, or workshop, needed to be near the clay sources and where water was available. It needed space for the potter's wheel, a space for treading, a kiln, a field for storing vessels and a dump for those discarded items. Once the pot was fired there was painting to be done. The typical hand-turned wheel was made of two pieces of stone. The upper stone had a cone-shaped protrusion on the bottom that fit into a corresponding recess in the top of the bottom stone and served as a pivot.

18:3-4. shaping a vessel on the wheel. There were two kinds of potter's wheel, a slow or hand-turned wheel (or a tournette), and the fast or kick wheel, which was rotated by foot. The potter shaped the clay vessel by hand on the smaller revolving stone that was on top. The lower stone provided the momentum and quickened the turning. The potter rotated the lower disk with his foot. This created a centrifugal force on the clay, which was shaped by the potter's hands as he exerted force to shape it against its own force.

18:13. Virgin Israel. The term translated "virgin" here refers to a woman who is still legally under her father's supervision. Comparable to such a girl who betrays her father's trust and honor is Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh, often described in the Old Testament as "playing the harlot." In Ugaritic texts this same word is used as a title for Baal's sister, "Virgin Anat," whose behavior is less than commendable and is thought by some to be promiscuous (though the evidence is not as strong as previously thought).

18:14. snow of Lebanon. The snow of Lebanon probably refers to the highest mountains of Lebanon (e.g., Qurnat as-Sawda), where snow does not leave until late August. At any rate, many of the high peaks are snowcapped for the better part of the year.

18:15. roads not built up. A paved road was one that was built up. Paving was an expensive undertaking. In Babylon dirt and gravel were used to build up the roadbed. Then bricks were laid in asphalt to form a foundation. Finally, limestone slabs were laid on top, and the crevices were filled with asphalt. This process was only affordable on the most prominent streets in a city. Excavated examples occur in Palestine as early as the Middle Bronze Period. Cobblestone streets using pebbles and pottery shards set in clay were the norm. Sometimes they were coated with a

lime plaster. There is no evidence of paved country roads during this period. Even an unpaved road, however, could be built up with dirt so that water flowed off it to the sides. The alternative was a road that had simply been traveled often enough to cut a path. These were etched into the terrain and tended to gather water and become mud holes.

18:20. digging a pit. Pits were dug in the ancient Near Eastern world for a variety of reasons. A great number of pits found in archaeological excavations were for storage of ceramics, burying rubbish or, less often, to create a makeshift prison for criminals. The terminology here is borrowed from hunting and trapping practices, where pits and snares were used.

19:1. type of pottery. The type of pottery here is described as a "flask," a word used twice in Jeremiah 19 and in 1 Kings 14:3 (where it is a container for honey) for storing liquids. Its Hebrew name, *baqbuq,* suggests the sound made by a wide-bellied bottle with a narrow neck. Because of the narrow neck, it could not be mended. This type of vessel was used throughout Palestine in the Iron Age.

19:2. Valley of Ben Hinnom. The Valley of Ben Hinnom was on the south side of Jerusalem and joined the Kidron Valley at the southeast corner of the city. It became infamous for Baal worship because of the acts of Ahaz and Manasseh. Josiah defiled the region in order to prevent future idolatrous acts.

19:2. Potsherd Gate. The location of the Potsherd Gate, mentioned only here in Scripture, is unknown. It may have been the same as the Dung Gate (known from various passages in Nehemiah), as both dung and pottery were among the items of trash thrown into the Valley of Ben Hinnom. If the Potsherd Gate was adjacent to the valley, it was on the southeastern side of Jerusalem.

19:5. burning sons and daughters. See comment on 7:31.

19:9. cannibalism in the ancient Near East. Cannibalism existed in the ancient Near East during times of famine or siege. The cities of Samaria (2 Kings 6:24-31) and Jerusalem (Lam 4:10, and later during the war with Rome, according to Josephus) both experienced cannibalism. Furthermore, "eating the flesh of one's children" was a typical curse form in Mesopotamia. There are sparse references in Mesopotamian sources concerning cannibalism for the same purposes mentioned in Scripture (dire famine conditions, city under siege).

19:10-11. smashed as pots. This imagery is known as far back as Sumerian times. The *Lament over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* states that the people of Ur were smashed as if they were clay pots.

19:13. burning incense to astral gods. Sacrifice to pagan astral gods was often done on the roofs of houses (see 2 Kings 23:12; Zeph 1:5). Ninsun, the mother of Gilgamesh in the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh, ascended the roof to offer incense to Shamash, the sun god. The same ritual is described in the Keret Epic from Ugarit. (Also see the comment on 8:2).

20:1-18

Confrontation and Imprisonment

20:2. stocks at the Upper Gate. The meaning of the term translated as "stocks" is not certain. It also occurs in Jeremiah 29:26 and 2 Chronicles 16:10 ("house of stocks"). It was most likely a device that confined the body in a stooped position or perhaps simply a dungeon or guardhouse. At any rate, it is clear that Jeremiah was incarcerated.

20:11. divine warrior. The idea that God fought as a partner in battle was a common theme in the ancient Near East. Victories were attributed to deities in both Egypt and Mesopotamia. The encounter was initiated by the deity itself, who then fought alongside the monarch (see comment on 1 Sam 4:3-7). In Egypt regiments were named after the god under whose standard they fought. In Canaan the divine warrior was identified as one who devastated nature. However, it was recognized by these societies that the gods also participated through the use of individual agents who had been commissioned to do the god's bidding in battle.

20:12. kidneys as seat of intelligence. The NIV's "heart and mind" translates the Hebrew "kidneys and heart." In the ancient world a number of human organs were held to have psychical functions, including the kidneys, which were seen to be the center of the affections and hidden motives. The kidneys could be troubled (Job 19:27; Ps 73:21), be "tested" by God (Jer 11:20) and rejoice (Prov 23:16). The kidneys also instructed (Ps 16:7), a concept known from Ugaritic texts. Akkadian texts tend to connect these abstract notions to the liver rather than the kidneys.

20:14-18. cursing one's birth. In the *Myth of Erra and Ishum* the governor of the city that is being destroyed is portrayed as expressing to his mother a wish that he had been stillborn or obstructed in the womb so that he would not have been born to this destiny.

21:1-14

God's Pronouncement of Judgment on Zedekiah

21:2. Nebuchadnezzar's attack of Jerusalem. In 589 Zedekiah had decided to withhold tribute, relying on the new, anti-Babylonian Egyptian pharaoh, Hophra, for support against the Babylonians. On January 15, 588 (by the Tishri calendar, 587 by the Nisan calendar) Nebuchadnezzar's troops arrived at Jerusalem and blockaded the city, while eliminating any potential sources of aid, including the Egyptians (see comment on 34:21). Other fortified cities were destroyed, and then full siege of Jerusalem began as the Babylonians worked toward creating a breach in the northern walls. The wall was breached in mid-August of 586.

21:7. devastations of siege. The hardships of the siege were significant. The whole idea of siege is to drive the inhabitants to the extremities of hunger and thirst so that they capitulate without a fight. Famine in this case is not an environmental condition but the results of the siege when food supplies have been exhausted. Overcrowded conditions tax the infrastructure of the city, and when water becomes scarce, people will drink even water that has been contaminated. As a result illness often reaches epidemic proportions during siege.

21:7. Zedekiah's eventual fate. See the note on 32:4. It appears that Zedekiah died in captivity after being handed over to Nebuchadnezzar.

21:14. forests of Jerusalem. Rather than referring to the adjacent woods, the term "forest" is an expression used in connection with the royal palace (see comment on 1 Kings 7:1-12) because of the large amounts of cedar used in its construction.

22:1-30

The Fate of Kings

22:5-6. making the palace a ruin. In the *Myth of Erra and Ishum* the destruction of towns and the royal palace is treated in similar terms. Erra expresses his intention to allow wild beasts from the mountains and the countryside to enter the city and devastate the public areas. He specifically states that he will make the palace a ruin.

22:6. Gilead and the summit of Lebanon. Gilead was on the east side of the Jordan River. The northern limits of Gilead were vague, and the east was bounded by desert. The summit of Lebanon refers to its forests (also see Zech 10:10). Both Gilead and Lebanon were known for the lush productivity of their forests.

22:10. exiled king. The exiled king mentioned here was probably Shallum, the fourth son of Josiah, who succeeded his father in 609/8 B.C. He took the throne name of Jehoahaz. After he had been king of Judah for three months, he was then exiled to Egypt by Necho II, where he later died. He was condemned by the writer(s) of Kings as a wicked ruler.

22:13. forced labor for palace building. This may be a reference to a rebuilding and enlargement of Solomon's palace by Jehoiakim or to another palace altogether. At Ramat Rahel a number of structures have been found that possibly date to the time of Jehoiakim, together with a large collection of stamped jar handles bearing the phrase "belonging to the king." Since the king needed to pay a heavy tribute to Egypt, he may have engaged in the forced labor project. Forced labor without compensation is reminiscent of practices during Solomon's time (see comment on 1 Kings 11:28) and of practices periodically observed in both Egypt and Babylonia. It is a form of taxation.

22:14. cedar paneling. Cedar paneling was considered the most luxurious and expensive material that could be used. It was used almost exclusively in palaces and temples. Wall painting is not widely attested in Israelite excavations but is well known in the larger Near Eastern context. Frescoes such as the coronation scene at Mari attest to the preference for red and orange in interior decoration. This characteristic is also referred to in the wall decorations in Ezekiel 23:14.

22:18. Jehoiakim. See comment on 1:3.

22:20. Lebanon, Bashan, Abarim. These are three mountainous areas; Lebanon was in the north, Bashan in Transjordan in the northeast, and Abarim in Moab to the southeast. Whether these mountains represent places for mourning, homes of allies or centers for natural resources is uncertain.

22:24. signet ring. The term "signet" probably refers to a seal, which could have been either a cylinder seal worn with a cord around the neck or a stamp seal embedded in a ring, as found here. The former was very common in Mesopotamia, while the latter was used in Israel. Thousands of cylinder seals and stamp seals have been found in Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine, respectively. They were a sign of authority, identification and ownership. By pulling off the signet ring (i.e., Jehoiachin), Yahweh was effectively rejecting his kingship.

22:25. Jehoiachin's fate. Jehoiachin was only

on the throne for three months before he was forced to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar. He was taken into exile in Babylon, where he spent the rest of his life (see 2 Kings 25:27-30). He is mentioned on a rations list from Babylon, confirming the biblical information that he was fed at the king's table.

23:1-8

The Branch

23:5. branch as royal heir. The term "branch" appears in the messianic passages such as Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12, where it is attributed to Zerubbabel. Most consider it a technical term referring to the rightful heir of an established dynastic line—in Israel, a future Davidic king who would restore the monarchy. Similarly, an early third-century B.C. Phoenician votive inscription honoring Melqart that has been found in Cyprus refers to a legitimate "branch" of the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt. The Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran do not use the term in a messianic sense, but the kingship sense does occur in Ugaritic and Assyrian texts. For instance, Tiglath-Pileser III is described as the shoot or scion of the city of Baltil (Assur), who brings justice to his people. The statement that he will do what is right and just in the land also finds a parallel in the reform declarations commonly made by Babylonian kings. Zedekiah issued such a proclamation in 588 (see comment on 34:8-11).

23:9-40

False Prophets

23:13. prophesying by Baal. Baal prophets had found support in Samaria as early as the middle of the ninth dynasty (Ahab and Jezebel). Two centuries have passed, and though the dynasty of Ahab had been wiped out, syncretism had never fully departed from the north. When the northern kingdom fell in 721, the Assyrian deportation policy had brought foreigners in to mix with the population that remained of the northern kingdom of Israel. Second Kings 17:24-34 describes the resulting syncretism that plagued the area. Undoubtedly these prophets were spreading false hopes that Baal, a fertility god, could break the drought (v. 10) and restore the land's productivity.

23:18. standing in the council of the Lord. The council of the Lord was probably the assembly of beings who stood in his heavenly court, similar to the council of holy ones of Psalm 89:7. Deities from other cultures in the ancient world were assumed to have divine councils where various gods and goddesses assembled to conduct their business. Prophets were often viewed as being privy to this assembly's actions (as in 2 Chron 18:18). For more information see the comments on Isaiah 6:8; 40:13-14.

23:19. storm of the Lord. See comment on 11:16.

23:23. God nearby, far away. Yahweh is affirming both his transcendence (above and beyond the created world) and his immanence (integrally involved in the created world) in this passage. Moreover, he is affirming his omnipresence, as no one can be hidden from him, and he is aware of everything, no matter how remote or obscure. In the broader religious spectrum of this time period a shift had taken place from seeing deities associated with the sun, aloof and removed, to deities associated with the stars and planets, who were seen as more approachable and involved. Another possibility is that "near and far" may combine the aspects of a locally involved patron deity and a powerful cosmic deity. Few gods in the ancient world would have been believed to fit this profile.

23:25. dreams as form of revelation. Dreams were one of the standard means for receiving messages from a god in the ancient Near East (see Jacob in Gen 28:12; Joseph in Gen 37:5-11; Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 2, 4). They appear in Old Babylonian omen texts, along with the reports of the examination of sheep livers, anomalies in the weather and birth of animals, and other presumed signs of the divine will. Among the most famous is the dream of Gudea of Lagash (c. 2150 B.C.), who was commanded in a dream to build a temple by a figure reminiscent of the apocalyptic figures in Daniel's dreams and Ezekiel's call narrative (Dan 7; Ezek 1:25-28). The royal correspondence from Mari (c. 1750 B.C.) contains around twenty prophetic utterances involving dreams, always from nonprofessional personnel. These portents were taken quite seriously and studied. The professional priesthood in both Mesopotamia and Egypt included instruction in the interpretation of dreams and other omens (see the comment on Dan 2:4).

24:1-10

Good Figs, Bad Figs

24:1. circumstances of Jehoiachin's exile. See the comments on 22:5 and on 2 Kings 24:12.

24:1. Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 605-562 B.C.) was the second of the Chaldean kingdom centered at Babylon which ruled the ancient Near East for nearly a century. He was

the son of Nabopolassar, a Chaldean who declared independence from Assyria in 626 B.C. In his long reign of forty-three years Nebuchadnezzar pacified Egypt (though he was unsuccessful in conquering it) and literally rebuilt Babylon. In fact, most of the city of Babylon that was uncovered by modern excavators dates from Nebuchadnezzar's reign. The Chaldean kingdom was primarily his creation, and it crumbled only a generation after his death. This great king was remembered in many cultural traditions, including sources from Greece (who knew him as a great builder) and Israel (not only the biblical material, but later rabbinic sources).

24:2. early ripening figs. The branches on fig trees from the previous year bore early fruit in late May/early June, even before the new leaves sprouted. The new branches brought forth figs at least three months later.

25:1-38

Seventy Years of God's Wrath

25:1. chronology. The fourth year of Jehoiakim and the first year of Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon has been synchronized as 604 B.C. The Babylonian king had just defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish and prepared to make Judah its vassal.

25:9. Nebuchadnezzar as Yahweh's servant. The kings of nations who came against Israel are often described as servants of God, in that they are carrying out the will of Yahweh. Since Yahweh is unconquerable, any conqueror is doing his bidding as his rod of punishment. It does not mean that the Babylonian king was a worshiper of Yahweh. Cyrus is described in a similar manner, though there is no evidence that he worshiped Yahweh (Is 44:28—45:1). In ancient Near Eastern treaties the vassal became the servant of the suzerain, and his armies became the suzerain's to command. They were at the disposal of the overlord and did his will.

25:10. millstones and light of the lamp. The cessation of the most familiar daily activities left nothing but an eerie stillness, with no food production and a fearful and terrifying darkness.

25:11. seventy-year period. Though the expression "seventy years" could denote generally an individual's life span, as it does in a statement of Esarhaddon of Assyria, it can also make reference to a specific span of time. The period of seventy years was approximately from the destruction of the temple in 587 B.C. to its rededication in about 515 B.C. It also represents the time that elapsed from the initial subjugation of Israel under Nebuchadnezzar in 605 to the return from exile by Cyrus's decree in 535.

25:12. seventy-year exile. When Esarhaddon of Assyria discusses his father Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon, he views it as Marduk's judgment of his own city. Marduk's anger with the people of Babylon led him to decree a seventy-year exile of himself from the city. Esarhaddon rebuilds the city only a decade after its destruction and announces that Marduk reduced the exile to only eleven years. Little is known of Palestine during the exile and partial reoccupation of the land. The deportation followed the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Only the leading citizens went into exile. Signs of destruction have been found throughout Judea, but not everything was destroyed. The peasants continued their life in the area, and some even worshiped amid the ruins of the temple (see 41:4-5). Judah became a Babylonian province, with headquarters at Mizpah, north of Jerusalem.

25:15. wine of wrath. The image of wine as a cup of punishment is found often in the Old Testament (Ps 11:6; 75:8; Jer 49:12; 51:17; Hab 2:15-16). It is especially clear from Isaiah 51:17 that the cup results in drunkenness (staggering) and not death. Those forced to drink this cup lose all control of themselves and all ability to defend themselves (v. 27). They become senseless.

25:19-26. geographical coverage. The geographical context of these areas is quite wide. From Egypt in Northeast Africa, Jeremiah lists the kings of Uz (probably the Negev), the Philistine cities along the coast, the Transjordanian states (Edom, Moab, Ammon) and back to the coastal regions in the north (Phoenicia). The coastlands beyond the sea refer to Cyprus and other islands. Jeremiah then traverses south across northern Arabia (Dedan, Tema and Buz; Akkadian Bazu in Arabia). He skips Mesopotamia (the land of Babylon) and travels to southwest Iran (Elam and Media). He then summarizes by adding "all the kings of the earth." The specific areas mentioned were all terrorized by Nebuchadnezzar.

25:26. Sheshach and the use of cryptograms. Sheshach is an "atbash" for Babylon. The atbash was a code in which the letters of a name counted from the beginning of the Hebrew alphabet are exchanged for letters counted from the end (see also the comment on 51:1). In English A would be represented by Z, B by Y, and so on. In the previous passage Elam becomes Zimki in Hebrew, and Babylon *(bbl)* becomes Sheshach *(shshk).* The atbash was used to disguise the identity of the adversary. There

is no atbash in Akkadian, since cuneiform uses syllables, not an alphabet.

25:30. shouts of those who tread grapes. The shout mentioned here is used both for those who tread grapes and for those who fight in battle. Yahweh's roar is like the shout of those who tread grapes. Treading grapes marked the end of the harvest season and was used as an opportunity for community celebration before the onset of winter. It was characterized by a tumult of rejoicing, sometimes heightened by overindulgence in the wine being produced.

25:34-38. shepherd/leader metaphor. The metaphor of national leaders as shepherds over their people (sheep) is a very common one in the ancient Near East. It portrayed the ruler's responsibility and authority. Just as a sheep owner would call his shepherds to account for their sheep, so deity held kings accountable for the welfare of their people. Here it is no longer the sheep who are being slaughtered but the shepherds.

26:1-24

Death Sentence for Jeremiah

26:1. chronology. The phrasing used here refers technically to what is termed the accession year. This was the initial portion of the year between when a king first came to the throne and the new year, when his first year officially began. The period of the accession year of Jehoiakim was about from September 609 B.C. to April 608 B.C.

26:6. Shiloh. See comment on 7:12.

26:8-9. prophecy as treason. Throughout the ancient world it was believed that prophets not only proclaimed the message of deity but in the process unleashed the divine action. In Assyrian king Esarhaddon's instructions to his vassals, he requires that they report any improper or negative statements that may be made by anyone, specifically naming prophets, ecstatics and dream interpreters. One can perhaps understand why a king would be inclined to imprison a prophet whose very words might incite insurrection or impose doom.

26:10. topography of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is situated on a limestone plateau about eight hundred meters above sea level in the central hill country of Judea, on the border of the desert. It consists of two main ridges surrounded by the Hinnom and Kidron Valleys, and the small depression of the Tyropoeon. The eastern ridge included the original city of David and the temple complex. The latter is on the northern and highest section of the ridge, thus one had to go up from the palace to the temple. The New Gate is also mentioned in 36:10, but its exact location is unknown. Speculation usually places it on the south side of the court as a passage between the temple precinct and the royal palace just to the south.

26:18. chronology. Hezekiah ruled a century earlier at the end of the eighth century. Here it is evident that prophetic messages were recorded and remembered.

27:1-22

Under the Yoke of Babylon

27:1. chronology. There is a major problem in this verse because the Hebrew text identifies the setting as the accession year of Jehoiakim yet in the following verses identifies the king as Zedekiah. Most interpreters think that this phrase has been misplaced here from 26:1. The chronological notation should instead read the fourth year of Zedekiah, 594 (see 28:1).

27:2. yoke construction. The yokes used for draft animals consisted of a wooden frame that sat across the top of the necks with pegs fitting through holes on either side of the neck. Under the neck the pegs were connected with straps. Yokes were used for certain human tasks as well as on plow animals. Assyrian inscriptions from the ninth and eighth century depict captives being transported or laboring in such yokes. Bars on either side of the neck are clearly visible. For more information concerning yoke imagery see comment on Nahum 1:13.

27:3. occasion for gathering of envoys. The envoys from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon all conspired with Zedekiah to revolt against Babylon in 594 B.C. The meeting was probably in response to a domestic rebellion in Babylon against Nebuchadnezzar in December 595 and January 594, which is described in one of the Babylonian Chronicles.

27:6. subjection of wild animals. Just as the yoke symbolized the subjection of domesticated animals, the prophecy goes on to suggest that wild animals will likewise come under the domesticating hand of the Lord. There are numerous depictions on wall reliefs of Assyrian kings hunting wild animals, such as lions and other large carnivores. The domestication of wild animals was also at times included in utopian visions of a kingdom controlled and at peace (see comment on Is 11:6-8).

27:7. survey of Neo-Babylonian empire. The Neo-Babylonian empire was founded by Nebuchadnezzar II's father, Nabopolassar, a Chaldean who freed himself from Assyrian

rule in 626 B.C. The founder reigned until 605 B.C. and thus contributed to the end of Assyria. He oversaw the great victory of the Babylonians over Egypt at Carchemish, causing most of Western Asia to fall into the hands of the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar inherited this powerful state in 605 B.C., becoming its most famous king. He literally rebuilt the city of Babylon and solidified Babylonian control throughout the Near East and even attacked Egypt (although unsuccessfully). His long reign lasted until 562 B.C. He was briefly succeeded by three descendants, who reigned a total of six years. The last king of the dynasty was Nabonidus, who had apparently been a high official during Nebuchadnezzar's reign. He reigned until 539 B.C. when Babylon was captured by the Medo-Persians under Cyrus the Great. Although Nabonidus is not mentioned in Scripture, his son Belshazzar figures prominently in the book of Daniel as king. Since Nabonidus abandoned Babylon and lived in Arabia for about ten years, Belshazzar took the place of his father for that time.

27:8-11. prophets advising submission. Though the biblical prophets counseled submission, such advice is unattested in ancient Near Eastern prophetic texts. Kings in the ancient world generally had high opinions of themselves, and prophets had a reputation for telling kings what they wanted to hear. If there was submission to be advised, it was submission to a god through certain rituals, not political submission. In contrast, there were diviners who might advise against one political action or another on the premise that the omens were not favorable for a particular action at a particular time.

27:9. categories of professional. Five categories of experts are identified here. The prophets received messages from deity and passed them on. Diviners read omens, most of which came from the examination of the entrails of sacrificial animals (see comment on Deut 18:11). Dreams were believed to be an important form of revelation throughout the Near East. Interpreters used a variety of academic resources (see comment on Dan 2:4). The medium was one who made contact with the dead and offered advice from them. The last category, the sorcerer, was one who specialized in spells and incantations. In seventh-century letters to Assyrian kings the five principal classes of scholarly experts serving the king were astrologer/scribe, diviner, exorcist, physician and chanter of lamentations.

27:16. articles from the Lord's house. The articles here probably refer to all types of movable objects in the temple, including vessels and utensils. Nebuchadnezzar carried off many of the temple treasures in the first capture of Jerusalem in 597 B.C., but there were still some accessories that were carried off eleven years later. For more information see comments on Daniel 1:2 and 5:2. For description of the articles see the various comments in 2 Chronicles 4.

27:19. pillars. The bronze pillars (see comment on 1 Kings 7:15-22) were just outside the forecourt situated in the courtyard of the temple. They were given names (Jachin and Boaz), and evidently the king stood by one of them on special occasions (2 Kings 11:14; 23:3).

27:19. sea. The molten sea (see comment on 2 Chron 4:2-5) was a very large bronze basin over fifteen feet in diameter and over seven feet high. It rested on the backs of twelve bronze oxen, arranged in threes, with each group of threes facing in different directions. The vessel held about ten thousand gallons and was for ritual washing.

27:19. movable stands. The movable stands were ten smaller bowls used for washing sacrificial animals. These were supported by decorated stands mounted on four mobile bronze wheels. Each basin had the capacity of two hundred gallons. Archaeologists have found a bronze stand that would have held just such a basin dating from the twelfth century B.C. The stand had wheels and was decorated with winged composite creatures (see 1 Kings 7:29).

27:20. Jehoiachin's exile. See the note on 2 Kings 24:12. A Babylonian administrative text describes tribute from Iakukinu (Jeconiah, or Jehoiachin) to Nebuchadnezzar.

27:22. sacred things taken into exile and brought back. Jerusalem was not the only temple in the ancient world that had its articles carried off and returned at a later date. For example, the statue of Marduk was plundered from Babylon on a number of occasions (e.g., by the Hittites in 1595 B.C., by Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria, c. 1235 B.C., and by Sennacherib in 689 B.C.). Eventually the statue of the deity was returned to its original place in Babylon.

28:1-17

Hananiah and the Yoke

28:1. chronology. Given the time necessary for King Zedekiah to organize his government (see 27:3; 51:59) after the capture of Jerusalem in 597 by Nebuchadnezzar, it seems most likely that the reading of "in the fourth year" is correct. This would date the event to 594-593 B.C. The proximity to the meeting of ambassadors to plan a response to the revolt against

Babylon in December 595 also argues for this date.

28:1. Gibeon. See the comment on Joshua 9:3. Like Anathoth, Gibeon (el-Jib) is located in Benjamin (six miles northwest of Jerusalem), making it likely that Hananiah and Jeremiah were acquainted prior to this incident.

28:10. breaking the yoke. Some commentators think it more probable that it is the pegs that hold the yoke in place on either side of the neck that are being broken, rather than the crossbar (for yoke construction see comment on 27:2). This would make sense of the choice of terms used throughout the passage.

28:13. contrast between wooden and iron yoke. It is likely again that it is the yoke pegs that are visualized as made from iron. Clearly a wooden yoke could be broken, providing a dramatic gesture of release from oppression. However, iron could not be broken so easily.

28:14. subjection of wild animals. See the comment on 27:6.

29:1-32
Letter to the Elders of the Exiles

29:1. letter to exiles. Evidence of correspondence between Jerusalem and the exiles taken away in 597 is found in this letter, presumably delivered by a Babylonian messenger or a merchant traveling to Mesopotamia. There is ample precedent for the transport of both private and official correspondence throughout the Old Testament period. The Lachish Letters represent the type of internal communication employed in the kingdom of Judah during the Assyrian invasion of 701. For evidence that this letter was received and respected see Daniel 9.

29:2. queen mother. The queen mother in Judah apparently had a high status and was both an influence on her son the king as well as a power in her own right (see comment on 1 Kings 2:19 and the need to remove her from power in Asa's time in 1 Kings 15:13). In this case we know that Jehoiachin's mother was named Nehushta (see 2 Kings 24:8; Jer 13:18) and that she was also stripped of her crown and attendant power when they were taken together into exile.

29:2. exile of craftsmen and artisans. In choosing persons to take as hostages in the exile of 597, Nebuchadnezzar naturally took members of the royal family and their advisers among the nobility and priesthood. Craftsmen (see 10:3) and skilled artisans might have been useful to the king's ambitious building plans, but they also represented the relatively wealthy middle class of Judah. Most importantly, the skills of craftsmen and artisans were generally passed on through families, generation to generation, and often comprised trade secrets. The Babylonians would desire to preserve these and benefit from them. This same respect for the guilds is seen in Utnapishtim's inclusion of artisans in his ark in the Gilgamesh flood story.

29:10. seventy-year period. There are a number of different ways that the seventy-year period can be calculated. The capital city of Assyria, Nineveh, fell in 612. In 605 the Babylonians gained nominal control of all Syria-Palestine. Twice the Babylonian armies came against Jerusalem and went away with exiles, 597 and at the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586. Any of these four can be identified as starting points. On the other end, Babylon fell in 539, and the first return of deportees took place in 538. The temple was rebuilt in 515. While it is therefore not difficult to put together a scenario that involves a literal seventy years, it should also be recognized that seventy is often a symbolic number representing a period of divine judgment. When Babylon was destroyed in the seventh century by Sennacherib, it was said that Marduk, the god of Babylon, had decreed seventy years as the period that it would lay in ruins. Sennacherib's son, Esarhaddon, however, used a trick of interpretation to reduce the number to eleven and had the city rebuilt.

29:26. stocks and neck irons. The word used for "stocks" here only appears twice elsewhere (2 Chron 16:10 and Jer 20:2), and in neither case is its meaning clear. Some have suggested a narrow or low prison cell, but the addition of "neck irons" in this passage suggests a restraining device of some sort in which the prophet could be held and displayed in a humiliating and uncomfortable stance (see Jeremiah's complaint in 20:7-8). Further identification will have to await future discoveries.

30:1-24
Oracle of Restoration

30:2. books. The book of Jeremiah is one of the few prophetic works in the Bible that makes explicit mention of writing down the words of Yahweh to the prophet. Jeremiah was aided in this task by Baruch, a professional scribe (see 36:2-4). In this passage the word translated as "book" is a general term for a written document, and in that time period it meant a scroll. Papyrus scrolls were in use in Egypt from the third millennium, and the climate of Egypt has allowed for the preservation and recovery

of numerous documents. In Mesopotamia, where clay tablets had long been the favored medium, scrolls are attested beginning in the Neo-Assyrian period (eighth century). Israelites were probably using scrolls during most of the Old Testament period, but little evidence has been recovered prior to the second century Dead Sea Scrolls (of these, over 90 percent are parchment). The oldest example is a few lines of a letter dated to the seventh century B.C. found in the caves at Wadi Murabba'at. An average papyrus scroll would contain about twenty pages of papyrus sheets glued together. The resulting scroll would be about fifteen feet long and about one foot tall. Parchment (using animal skins) was much less in use during the Old Testament period but was known.

30:14. situation with allies. Jehoiakim of Judah had been put on the throne by the Egyptians in 609 and remained loyal to them until Nebuchadnezzar's domination made that impossible. After the fall of Ashkelon to Nebuchadnezzar in 604, Jehoiakim paid tribute to Babylon for a few years. But when Nebuchadnezzar failed in his attempted invasion of Egypt in 601, Jehoiakim again sided with Egypt and stopped sending the yearly tribute east. Thus in 597 when Nebuchadnezzar undertook his punitive raid against Jerusalem, Egypt was the principle ally on whom Judah relied. Later that year Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah on the throne. He almost immediately began meeting with a coalition of the small western states to stand together against Nebuchadnezzar (see comment on 27:3). In 595 a new pharaoh, Psammeticus II, took the throne of Egypt. He enjoyed an early military success against the Nubians in the south, and one papyrus reports that his success was celebrated with a victory tour in Palestine. Therefore, though Egypt was not the instigator of the alliance, there was cause to expect their support against Babylon. It is uncertain which nations were actually part of the alliance when it finally took shape. As it turned out, Egypt's army was routed in their confrontation with the Babylonians in 588 (see 37:5-7), and it would appear, based on Psalm 137:7, that allies such as the Edomites threw their support to Babylon when it became clear that Jerusalem was about to fall. Only Ammon and Tyre of the western states became objects of Nebuchadnezzar's wrath.

30:23. storm of the Lord. The poetic style of these verses resembles that found in the Sumerian *Lament over the Destruction of Ur* (c. 2000 B.C.). Both there and here devastation is ascribed to a storm or a blistering wind. In one strophe of the Sumerian text the wind "blows through the gate of the city" like an invading army, while in another the author despairs over "the day of the storm fated for me." Nearer the time of Jeremiah a first-millennium lamentation titled He Is a Storm, At the Healing portrays the anger of the gods in the form of a storm sweeping over the nations. This is one of over three dozen compositions identified as *balag* lamentations that make frequent use of the storm metaphor. The original function of these lamentations was to appease a deity whose temple had been or was being razed. For more information on the elements of a storm accompanying divine activity see comment on 1 Kings 19:11-13.

31:1-40

New Covenant

31:4. Virgin Israel. See comment on 18:13.

31:8. gathered from ends of earth. This is similar language to Isaiah 11:12, where Israel is gathered from the four edges of the earth. Akkadian literature speaks of kings ruling the four quarters, most likely making reference to the most distant coasts or extremities in the four major directions. Rather than referring to four slices of the geographical pie, "the ends or edges of the earth" refers to the farthest points, thereby including everything in between.

31:9. led beside running wadis. In a land where rainfall is seasonal (basically from October to February), the wadis (stream beds) are often dry. This makes them useful as pathways (for instance the Wadi Kelt that runs between Jericho to Jerusalem), but the image of them bearing water brings to mind other examples of refreshing, even miraculous, water in the wilderness (Num 20:1-13) as well as the covenantal promise of fertility (for this theme, see the comment on Deut 8:7). As he did in the wilderness, God will provide for them as he brings them back to the land.

31:10. coastlands. See 2:10 for the use of this term for coastlands and islands. There it refers to Phoenicia, Cyprus and the Greek Islands. In this context it is a generic term for faraway lands or the ends of the earth.

31:12. grain, new wine, oil. The basic staples of life in the Mediterranean world are grain (wheat or barley), the products of the vineyard and olive oil (Hos 2:5, 8). They are the physical expression of fertility in the covenant with Yahweh. In the ancient law codes of Mesopotamia, a husband's obligation to his wife or concubine is defined in terms of his providing her with barley, oil and clothing (Code of

Lipit-Ishtar, Laws of Eshnunna, Hammurabi's Code).

31:15. Ramah. This site is most likely to be identified with er-Ram, three miles north of Jerusalem. The name itself means "height" and thus is applied to many towns in Palestine since such a place would be easier to defend. Jeremiah's reference to lamentation here may be based on the use of the site as a staging area for shipment of exiles to Babylonia after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 (see 40:1). The tie to Rachel is probably based on the proximity of Ramah to Zelzah, the site of Rachel's tomb (see comment on 1 Sam 10:2).

31:21. road signs and guideposts in ancient world. While there is no mention of formal road markers prior to the Roman period, Jeremiah's injunction to the departing exiles to mark their way with piles of stones or cairns suggests that this was not a new practice. Otherwise roads were distinguished by landmarks *(ittu* in the Gilgamesh Epic and the Enuma Elish) or by their destination (King's Highway in Num 20:17).

31:21. Virgin Israel. See comment on 18:13.

31:23. sacred mountain. Ancient Near Eastern thought, not unlike that familiar from Greek mythology, visualized a mountain height as the dwelling place of deity (see comment on Is 14:13). Since Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God, was on an elevated area, it is referred to as God's holy mountain.

31:33. written on the heart. Extispicy is the practice whereby diviners pose a question to deity and seek the answer by examining the entrails of sacrificed animals. When extispicy was being performed, the incantation priests asked the deity to write his revelation on the exta (entrails) of the sacrificed animal so that his will or instruction could be understood. Another frequent diviner's prayer was to place the truth in the exta. Both the verbs of this verse (*put,* write) and the nouns ("mind" = entrails, specifically intestines; heart) are the same words as are used in extispicy omens in Akkadian literature. But if Jeremiah is using the language and concepts of omens, it is only as a convenient bridge to his message. God's decrees and will are going to be made known through the careful examination of the heart of his people. Akkadian also uses the nouns (heart and mind) parallel to one another in reference to the center of reason and emotion.

31:36. cosmic decrees. In Mesopotamia the Tablets of Destiny contained the decrees that were the foundation for all that happened on earth. The people took omens seriously because they believed that these decrees were mirrored in the heavenly bodies, in the behavior of animals and even in the entrails of animals. The assumption is that a divine decree is binding for all time. For instance, in the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish* the gods proclaim that Marduk's "word shall not be challenged" and his "decree shall not be altered." Similarly, the wisdom sayings of the Egyptian Amenemope about justice state that "judgment belongs to the divine assembly, verdicts are sealed by divine decree." In the Ugaritic epic of Baal the goddess Anat, in her attempt to flatter the chief god El, tells him that his "decrees are wise" and his "wisdom endures forever." Occasionally a text will refer to a god's decree as "evil," as in the Atrahasis flood story, but still these commands are carried out because of the lordship the ancient gods are said to have over creation. For information concerning the reigns of kings related to the endurance of the cosmos, see comment on Psalm 89:35-37.

31:37. unknowns of the cosmos. While Yahweh is capable of measuring the heavens (see comment on Is 40:12) and is intimately familiar with the foundations of the earth, these are beyond the reach of any human endeavor. The various creation epics from Mesopotamia (Atrahasis, *Enuma Elish)* describe the establishment of the heavens and the earth, the ordering of the universe and the charges given to each god to regulate his/her sphere of influence. Thus the knowledge of the heavens and the nether regions belongs only to the divine. There is no instance in which any human succeeds in quests to gain such knowledge (the heroes Gilgamesh and Adapa come the closest, but they are also limited by their mortality). The mysteries and prerogatives of election are exclusive to Yahweh, just as much as the mysteries and prerogatives of the cosmos are.

31:38. Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. See the comments on Nehemiah 3:1 and 2 Chronicles 25:23. The reference is most likely to the western part of the north wall where the Babylonian armies are believed to have breached the fortifications and entered the city. The north side of the city was the most vulnerable because there were steep valleys to deal with on the other sides.

31:39. Gareb and Goah. The exact locations of these two hills near Jerusalem are unknown. They function as part of a restored Jerusalem in Jeremiah's vision. Gareb is generally identified with the southwest hill of the city, west of the Tyropoeon Valley and north of the Hinnom Valley (today called Mount Zion). If this is correct, Goah would be south or east of Gareb.

31:40. topography of Jerusalem. In this vision

of the restoration of Jerusalem's holy precincts Jeremiah refers to several adjacent areas. First is the Hinnom Valley (Wadi er-Rababi, west of Jerusalem), the site of Baal worship and human sacrifice. The Kidron Valley lies to the southeast of the city. Terracing of hillsides to provide space for vineyards and olive trees is common throughout Palestine. Naturally agricultural areas would not have been inside the city walls, but their importance to the city would have led them to be described as part of the city's resources. The Horse Gate was located on the east side of Jerusalem near the northern end of the Kidron Valley (see comment on Neh 3:28).

32:1-44
Jeremiah's Land Purchase

32:1. chronology. There were two different systems for reckoning a king's reign in use by Israel and her neighbors. One counted years from Nisan to Nisan (Nisan is March/April) in accordance with the religious calendar, while the other counted years from Tishri to Tishri (September/October) in accordance with the civil calendar. If the Israelite calendar began in the spring, Zedekiah's tenth year would extend from March 588 to March 587. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth regnal year extended from March 587 to March 586 (it is known that they used the Nisan system). For this and other reasons a case has been made that Israel used the Tishri system at this time, in which case Zedekiah's tenth would overlap Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth by six months. There are problems with either scheme, and at this point the difficulties cannot easily be resolved.

32:2. siege of Jerusalem. The events described here relate to the more detailed description of the siege of Jerusalem in 37—38 (with the siege probably starting on January 15, 588; alternatively, January 5, 587). There was a brief respite in the intensity of the siege when the Babylonian forces had to be partially withdrawn to deal with an approaching Egyptian army (37:5). One of the Lachish Letters mentions negotiations between a Judean official and Egypt. This may have prompted a preemptive strike by the Egyptians in hopes of preventing a Babylonian invasion of their territory. Once that allied contingent had been effectively repulsed, Nebuchadnezzar was able to concentrate all of his attention on Jerusalem.

32:4. Zedekiah's fate. See the comments on 39:4-7. Jeremiah's prophecy of Zedekiah's fate contains an ironic note since it describes an "eye to eye" confrontation with the Babylonian king. As punishment for his rebellion, Zedekiah will be forced to watch his sons executed, and then he will be blinded. This idea of the danger of close contact with the king parallels similar expressions of fear and danger in the theophanic appearances of God (see Jacob's reaction in Gen 28:16-17 and Isaiah's startled cry in Is 6:5). The Assyrian Annals of Sennacherib contain a similar example of the king's manifest "glory." In this inscription from a previous siege of Jerusalem, it states that Hezekiah "was overwhelmed by my [Sennacherib's] terror-inspiring splendor."

32:7. land redemption. In Israelite tradition the ownership of land is tied to membership in the covenantal community (see Nabal's rejection of Ahab's attempt to purchase his vineyard in 1 Kings 21:3). When Jeremiah's relative is forced to sell the property, the prophet has the obligation of "redeeming" the field so that it will remain within the extended family of his clan (see Lev 25:25-31). There is no clear indication why Hanamel felt compelled to sell the land. It may be that he simply wished to escape the Babylonian invasion and take away something with which to start over. Or, this may be a reflection of his heavy debts in a time when it would have been difficult to bring crops to market.

32:8. courtyard of the guard. Jeremiah was confined, in protective custody, within an area of the king's palace known as the courtyard of the guard (see Jer 37:21). Presumably, he would have been quartered with members of the royal guard. This was much more comfortable accommodations than the "vaulted prison" in Jeremiah 37:15-16 and the empty cistern in 38:6.

32:9. seventeen shekels of silver for land. With 11.4 grams per shekel, this would make the price of Hanamel's field about 194 grams or less than half a pound of silver. This would be the equivalent of about a year and a half of income for the regular laborer. Considering the immanent danger of Babylonian occupation of the entire area, it would seem that land prices would be depressed. However, with no other example to compare, and no idea of the size of the field, it is not possible to say whether this was a fair price.

32:10. deeds. Real estate transactions are found on some of the earliest Mesopotamian clay tablets. These documents, recording the stipulations of purchase and sale, were placed in a clay envelope that also had the details of the transaction written on it. Hammurabi's Code also contains restrictions on the sale of feudatory holdings since they are simply deeded temporarily to soldiers. For other ex-

amples of land deeds, see Genesis 23:16-18 and 33:19.

32:10. weighing silver in the scales. Standard commercial procedure would have required that the purchase price be publicly weighed out before witnesses to insure the satisfaction of both parties (see Gen 23:16; Is 46:6). This was necessary since coined money, with standardized weight and value, would not be commonly circulated until the late sixth century.

32:11. sealed and unsealed copies. The Elephantine papyri contain land deeds similar to the one drawn up by Jeremiah and Baruch. The practice of making two copies on a single piece of papyrus or parchment allowed for one to remain open and available for public inspection. The other half, containing the same inscription, served as an archival record to prevent alteration of the stipulations of the transaction. It would have been rolled up and sealed with the names of the witnesses inscribed on it.

32:12. legal agreements in courtyard. Business was often transacted in places like the city gate, where the elders of the city sat (Ruth 4:1; Prov 31:23). The addition of the notation that Jeremiah signed and sealed his deed for the purchase of Hanamel's field before witnesses and "all the Jews sitting in the courtyard of the guard" may be an attempt to mark that place as a suitable place of legal transaction. It may also be related to the charge made against Jeremiah in 37:12-15 that he was attempting to desert the city. He answered that he had only planned to view his newly acquired field, but the captain of the guard, who should have been witness to the transaction, refused to listen and imprisoned him.

32:14. deed sealed in clay jar. Given the uncertain future for Jerusalem, Jeremiah wanted to do everything he could to preserve his deed for the future. Placing the document in a sealed clay jar is similar to what the first-century A.D. inhabitants of Qumran did to store the Dead Sea Scrolls in the face of Roman occupation of their settlement.

32:17-20. connection between creator, judge, and planner. The flow from one area to another in Jeremiah's prayer demonstrates the integrated view of deity that was common in Israel and the ancient world. The role of deity was seen in terms of bringing order out of chaos. In the primeval past this had been accomplished on the cosmic scale through the creation and ordering of the universe. Whether chaos was viewed as monsters that needed to be subdued or the formless void that need to be filled and made functional, the role of deity as creator brought order to the cosmos. On a day-by-day basis, this role was accomplished in society by establishing justice. The chaos of anarchy had to be overcome in the life of the individual, the family, the community and the country. Third, God in his capacity as planner has brought order to the direction of history. As the future unfolds under his guidance, meaning and purpose are brought to what often appear to be random and jumbled sequences of events.

32:21. terror of theophany of divine warrior. The terror in this case is that which is imposed on Israel's enemies (see the comment on Ex 15:13-16). The splendor or "glory" of God overwhelms the enemy. In Mesopotamian texts, the might of the gods is referred to with the term *melammu,* "terrifying radiance and splendor." It is the gods who infuse the kings of Assyria and Babylonia with the knowledge of warfare, give them strength to overcome

SEALS AND BULLAE

Seals are small oval stones (sometimes semiprecious) engraved with names or designs to identify the owner. They were stamped onto clay or wax as a signature. The lump of clay or wax is called a bulla. Official and legal documents were sealed to indicate their authenticity. Thousands of seals and bullae have been found by archaeologists, most dating from the eighth to the sixth centuries B.C. These stamp seals were popular in Israel, in contrast to the cylinder seals that were used in Mesopotamia (see comments on Is 8:1 and 8:16). The seals were often engraved with the owner's name and either his father's name or his position. Seals of many periods feature a decoration of some sort. There are many names on these seals that are known from the Bible, but most of the seals do not refer to the person in the Bible, just to someone of the same name. There are, however, about a dozen biblical personages who are named on seals or bullae. This list includes kings such as Jeroboam II, Uzziah, Jotham, Pekah, Ahaz, Hezekiah and perhaps Jehoahaz and Manasseh. Another seal names a Jezebel who may well be the queen who was Elijah's nemesis. Other high officials include Eliakim (Is 22:20), Baruch (in this passage), Jerahmeel (Jer 36:26), Gedaliah (40:5), Jaazaniah (40:8) and perhaps Pelatiah (Ezek 11:1, 13). The seal of Baalis, the sixth-century Ammonite king (see 40:14), has also been found. The greatest significance of the seals is in their ability to help trace the popular beliefs from one period to the next, since the images represented in the art and the divine names used in the personal names both offer authentic data concerning that which was of most importance to the people.

the enemy "like a clashing flood" (Sargon II) or "the onslaught of a storm" (Sennacherib). In the face of such divine magnificence, both the gods and the forces of other nations are utterly defeated and forced to submit to the supreme deity.

32:22. milk and honey. See comment on Numbers 13:27.

32:24. siege ramps. Evidence for the use of siege ramps in the mid-first millennium includes archaeology, reliefs and textual material. The ramp built by the Assyrians for the siege of Lachish in 701 is still visible today. It is estimated that its construction required about twenty-five thousand tons of soil and stone and would have taken a thousand workers three to four weeks to build. Sennacherib's depiction of the siege likewise shows the ramp being used for the battering rams and siege machines. Literary references include Tiglath-Pileser III's description of the artificial mounds and siege works that he used to conquer cities. For more information see comment on 6:6.

32:29. burning incense on roofs. See the comment on Isaiah 22:1 for information on incense altars. Rooftop offerings are predictably made to celestial deities and are attested in Mesopotamia (Gilgamesh's mother in the Gilgamesh Epic) and in Ugarit (Keret).

32:34-35. apostate practices. This litany of offenses relates to the apostasy of Ahaz and Manasseh as traced in the books of Kings and Chronicles. For details see the comments on 2 Chronicles 28 and 33. See the comment on Deuteronomy 12:2-3 for discussion of outdoor shrines. See the comment on Deuteronomy 18:10 for the practice of child sacrifice associated with the god Molech. See the comment on 1 Kings 11:5, 7 for discussion of Molech/Milcom, an Ammonite deity also mentioned in the Old Babylonian Mari texts. Phoenician texts also mention the sacrifice of children to Molech.

33:1-26

Coming Restoration

33:4. tearing down buildings to be used against siege ramps. The Hebrew in this passage is difficult and may be based on technical terms referring to the construction of battlements during the siege of Jerusalem. During time of siege, residences along the wall (common or royal) were commandeered for military use. Some would be used for headquarters or army barracks; some would be dismantled or scavenged for building materials to strengthen the fortifications; some would be used for makeshift hospitals and morgues; some would be torn down to make room for additional towers, ramparts or a counter-ramp. In Lachish the evidence remains of a counter-ramp that was built inside the walls of the city to strengthen the wall against the ramp the Assyrians constructed outside the city. Archaeological excavations on the eastern slope of Jerusalem, overlooking the Kidron Valley, have uncovered huge masses of masonry that may have been the evidence of the Babylonian attack and the demolishing of private homes that once stood there on terraces. But if this is referred to here, it is difficult to understand what verse 5 is referring to when it says they will be filled with corpses.

33:15. Branch. See comment on 23:5.

34:1-22

Proclamation of Release

34:1. chronology. A more detailed chronology for the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem appears in 2 Kings 25:1 and Jeremiah 52:4, the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign and the tenth day of the tenth month (January 588). The events described in Jeremiah 34:1-7 most likely took place in early spring 588, prior to the Egyptian invasion that briefly lifted the siege.

34:5. funeral fire. These funeral rites were quite elaborate and included the burning of spices as well as a general lamentation and internment in the family tomb. The fire does not imply cremation of the body or an attempt to mask the odors associated with a diseased body, but rather was an expensive display of the king's wealth. The practice is well known among Assyrian kings, where it was used as an apotropaic ritual.

34:7. Lachish and Azekah. These two Judean fortresses guarded the Shephelah border and were the last remaining towns to fall to the invading Babylonians. Dominating the Shephelah and western Judah, Lachish served as the center point of the defensive line of the kings of Judah. Located midway between Jerusalem and the Philistine city states, Lachish guarded the major roads from the coast inland. Its site, Tell ed-Duweir, shows evidence of occupation from the Chalcolithic Period, with massive construction of city defenses and an impressive city gate in the Middle Bronze II (as a major Canaanite city) and Iron II (as the western bastion established after the division of the kingdoms; 2 Chron 11:5-10). Despite its commanding position (a tell 150 feet high), the city fell after a siege by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 B.C. (Annals of

Sennacherib; for more information see 2 Chron 32:9). Graphic evidence of the ferocity of this siege are found in Assyrian reliefs from the royal palace at Nineveh depicting the events and the remains of a massive siege ramp on the southwest corner of the tell. A mass burial, with approximately fifteen hundred bodies, may also be a result of the fall of the city. The city was rebuilt toward the end of the seventh century, but it never regained the importance it had in Assyrian times. Written records of the Babylonian siege in Jeremiah's time exist in the form of twenty-one ostraca letters that were discovered in a guardroom in the city gate (see next entry). Azekah (Tell Zakariya), stood eleven miles north of Lachish and eighteen miles southwest of Jerusalem. It is only a one-acre site overlooking the Elah Valley, but since it is about thirteen hundred feet above sea level, it has strategic value as a mountain stronghold (mentioned in the Assyrian records of Sargon II). The Lachish Letters mention when Azekah's signal fire went out—a very ominous sign for both Lachish and Jerusalem.

34:7. Lachish Letters. The Lachish Letters consist of twenty-one inscribed pieces of broken pottery (ostraca—only twelve of which are actually letters), found at Tell ed-Duweir in British excavations led by J. L. Starkey between 1932 and 1938. The letters were written in a cursive form of Hebrew with a reed pen and a soot-based black ink. They were found in the remains of the city's guardroom and may have been copies of letters sent to Jerusalem by the commander of the garrison during the invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar in 589-587. The letters reflect the breakdown in military discipline during this time of emergency and describe the negotiation with Egypt to reinforce Judah and the desperate situation of the defenders as they note the extinguishing of the signal fires from neighboring Azekah.

34:8-11. proclamation of release. Zedekiah's extraordinary proclamation to release all Hebrew debt slaves comes in the period after the beginning of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem (January 588) and before the Egyptian invasion of Palestine that temporarily ended the siege (summer 588). It is unclear whether the release was simply a way to add to the number of available defenders for the city or was associated in some way with the slave legislation found in Exodus 21:2-6, Leviticus 25:39-55 and Deuteronomy 15:2-3. In the ancient Near East the freeing of prisoners (from debtors' prison) as an act of justice often occurred in the first or second year of a new king's reign (and then periodically after that). For example, the Old Babylonian period king Ammisaduqa (seventeenth century B.C.) cancelled economic debts on behalf of Shamash. Thus, the "jubilee" in this case was primarily on behalf of those in debt (for either financial or legal reasons) and debt-slaves. Unlike that of Israel, this Babylonian edict was entirely at the whim of the monarch, and there is no evidence that it was divinely sanctioned.

34:14. sabbatical year release. See the comments on Exodus 21:2-6; Leviticus 25:39-55; and Deuteronomy 15:2-3. Each of these passages deal with the matter of releasing slaves either in the seventh year or during the Jubilee year.

34:18. cutting a calf in two. The ritual of severing an animal body as part of a covenant-making ceremony is found only here and in Genesis 15:9-10 (see the comment on this passage). Ancient Near Eastern parallels from the Old Babylonian Mari letters and the eighth-century Aramaic text of the Sefire Treaty between Abban and Yarimlim both describe cutting an animal in two. The symbolic aspect of this type of sacrifice is to provide a graphic picture of what would happen to the covenant-breaker. When the landowners of Judah took back their debt slaves after the Egyptian invasion had temporarily lifted the siege of Jerusalem, they broke their solemn oath to Yahweh and laid themselves open to horrendous punishment.

34:21. Babylonian withdrawal. The Egyptian pharaoh Psammeticus II had spent much of his reign attempting to regain the territory in Phoenicia and Palestine that Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from his predecessor Necho II. Judah relied heavily on Egyptian promises of aid in return for rebellion against the Babylonians (as noted in the Lachish Letters). Their hopes and the hopes of the Judean exiles were seemingly answered when Pharaoh Apries (who had succeeded to the throne in 589) finally invaded southern Palestine in early summer 588 (see Ezek 30:20-26). This, plus an Egyptian fleet that sailed to Tyre and quickly took control there (mentioned by the Greek historian Herodotus), forced Nebuchadnezzar to withdraw from Jerusalem. The Egyptians, however, were quickly defeated (possibly near Gaza), and the siege resumed by late summer 588.

35:1-19

The Example of the Recabites

35:2. Recabites. This clan associated with the Kenites (1 Chron 2:55) took on a special

distinction as a result of the founding of a nomadic order or guild of craftsmen by a ninth-century member, Jehonadab (or Jonadab) son of Recab (2 Kings 10:15-23). Over two centuries later the clansmen told Jeremiah that they lived according to their "father's" rule a nomadic existence, never planting a crop, cultivating a vineyard or tasting wine.

35:6-10. lifestyle of Recabites. What we know about the Recabites is found only in this passage. They claim to follow the command of their founder, Jonadab son of Rechab, who instructed their community to live a nomadic existence, dwelling in tents. They were not to build houses, cultivate fields or drink wine. Frick's evaluation of this group removes them from the realm of religious fundamentalists who have rejected the corrupt religion of the cities of Judah. Instead, he sees them as itinerant craftsmen, doing metal work and repairing chariots and weaponry. This is based in part on Ugaritic and Aramaic texts that associate the name Recab with chariot makers or chariot drivers (see Jehu's invitation to Jonadab in 2 Kings 10:15). By maintaining an independent life on the fringes of settlements, the Recabites were free to move to where employment was available and did not have to be troubled by local jurisdictions or taxes. Their refusal to drink wine may be a defensive measure designed to prevent guild secrets from being disclosed by a drunk member. Their loyalty to the rules of their founder stands in stark contrast to the broken covenant in Zedekiah's time.

35:11. Aramean army. The magnitude of the danger to Judah's inhabitants is found in the Recabites' acceptance of refuge in Jerusalem and the inclusion of an Aramean army in the coalition of Nebuchadnezzar's forces. These events actually occur during the reign of Jehoiakim, and the Recabites are speaking to Jeremiah during the first siege of Jerusalem in 600-597. The Babylonian Chronicle lists a series of campaigns by Nebuchadnezzar into Syria and Palestine between 601 and 598. As a result of these military forays, legions of vassal troops would have been added to the Babylonian ranks. Though we are most familiar with the Arameans connected to the Aramean state north of Israel, there were also eastern Arameans, a Semitic-speaking people who inhabited much of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley. They often appear alongside the Chaldeans. It appears that the Chaldeans were more of an urban based group, while the Arameans were seminomadic.

36:1-32

Burning the Scroll

36:1. chronology. The fourth year of king Jehoiakim was 605-604 (using the Tishri calendar, see comment on 32:1). Nebuchadnezzar's first full regnal year had begun in the spring of 604 (See comments on Daniel 1:1-2). Though Jehoiakim was pro-Egyptian, it is considered likely that he had paid tribute to Nebuchadnezzar in Syria in early 604. The dictation of the scroll probably takes place at the end of Jehoiakim's fourth year (August-September 604), because it is not read until the fifth year (v. 9). Toward the end of 604, Nebuchadnezzar traveled down the coast of Palestine and captured the Philistine city of Ashkelon. There was a massive destruction of the city and a significant deportation. Nebuchadnezzar's march into the south was an occasion for much fear in Judah.

36:2. scroll. The Hebrew in this case suggests a technical term for a special or finer quality scroll, suitable for official use by a government scribe. Such a medium for writing would only be used for the most important proclamations of the king. For more information on scrolls see comment on 30:2.

36:4. scribe taking dictation. The public nature of Jeremiah's dictated oracle required that a careful copy be made, and Baruch's skills as a professional scribe are therefore employed. Many Egyptian tomb paintings as well as the *Teachings of Khety* attest to the importance of scribes to ancient society. Scribes, of course, could be used by anyone, but archaeological evidence (seal impressions containing his name) strongly suggests that Baruch is a royal scribe.

36:6. day of fasting. Baruch is instructed to read the dictated scroll on a fast day when a large crowd would be gathered in Jerusalem. A "fast day," other than the one associated with the Day of Atonement, was not a part of the regular religious calendar but instead was called in the face of some emergency that required the full religious energies of the people. This was likely based on the arrival of Babylonian forces in Palestine (December 604).

36:9. chronology. The ninth month of the fifth year was November-December 604. In December 604, the Babylonian army marched down the Philistine coast and captured the city of Ashkelon. The likelihood that this enemy "from the north" would then turn east toward Jerusalem would be plausible occasion for the fast day on which Baruch was to read the dictated scroll. Nebuchadnezzar returned

to Babylon January/February 603.

36:10. topography. The temple of the monarchy period featured three stories of side chambers surrounding the temple on three sides. It can be assumed that Gemariah's chamber was one of these. Little description is offered in the Old Testament of the courts of the temple. It is likely that the upper court referred to here should be considered the same as the "inner" court of 1 Kings 6:36, the area surrounding the temple itself. This is the highest elevation in the temple precinct. The New Gate is also mentioned in Jeremiah 26:10, but its exact location is unknown. Speculation usually places it on the south side of the court as a passage between the temple precinct and the royal palace just to the south.

36:12. secretary's room. The king's audience chamber must have been offset by small rooms where groups could meet to discuss official business or share information. One sign of authority as a king's advisor or scribe would be to have one of these rooms designated as his "office." It seems likely that Jehoiakim's advisers gathered in "Elishama, the secretary's room" prior to taking Jeremiah's scroll to the king because this was their regular meeting place.

36:16. obligation to report prophetic message to king. According to the eighteenth-century Mari texts, it was a strict obligation of any royal adviser or official to report prophetic speech to the king. Several of these documents report warnings by prophets, in one case of a possible revolt, in another to offer a sacrifice, while yet another cautions the king against going on campaign. The emphatic nature of the Hebrew in this verse reinforces the urgency associated with such startling warnings. These officials are frightened by the message, but they also know how important it is to apprise the king of the potential danger in Jeremiah's oracle.

36:18. ink. The composition of the ink used by scribes in the ancient Near East varied somewhat, although they all contained a carbon base. In Egypt, it was common to combine a gum mixture with lampblack. Chemical analysis of the ink used to write the Lachish Letters shows that iron ink was created by mixing the carbon with oak galls and olive oil.

36:22. firepot. Since this event occurred in December, it would have been necessary for the king to have several braziers burning in his audience chamber. It was therefore not surprising that one was near at hand for warmth and perhaps to burn a fumigating incense. It is possible this was actually a permanent hearth within his "winter apartment," but the narrative seems to suggest a portable brazier into which the scrap of scroll could be dramatically dropped.

36:23. written in columns. The word used for "column" in this verse is usually translated as "door." This may suggest that the sheets of the scroll are hinged together or perhaps only that the size of each sheet is approximately the same as that of hinged writing tablets. These tablets, usually wood covered with beeswax, have been found in ancient shipwrecks as well as in a Neo-Assyrian context (the latter being sixteen ivory boards found at the bottom of a well in Nimrud).

36:23. scribe's knife. It is conceivable that Jehoiakim borrowed the scribe's penknife to cut the scroll or that he simply ordered the scribe to do this task. However, if this is a parchment scroll, it would have been easier to cut the leather hinges binding the portions of the scroll together. Parchment would also be slow to burn and would leave a foul odor. If this was a papyrus scroll, the text could have more easily been shredded and burned.

36:23. cutting and burning as means of nullifying. In a sense, by cutting and burning Jeremiah's scroll the king is performing an execration ritual. Early in the second millennium the Egyptians had the practice of writing down the names of cities to be attacked on clay bowls or figurines and, after reciting appropriate spells, smashing them. The writing down of a prophecy like Jeremiah had done was a means of effectuating it (just as speaking it would be). By burning the scroll Jehoiakim hopes to undo or take away the effect of the pronouncement.

36:30. exposure of corpse. What is combined in this phrase is the physical act of dishonoring a corpse by leaving it unburied as well as the divine pronouncement that Jehoiakim's family will be denied the right to rule Judah. A similar curse was laid on Jeroboam by the prophet Ahijah in 1 Kings 14:10-11 and on Ahab by Elijah in 1 Kings 21:21-24. In a later period the Jews of Elephantine cursed their regional governor, Vidranga, who had ordered the destruction of their temple. They prayed to God to allow his corpse to be eaten by dogs, having been exposed to the elements instead of being given proper burial. On the importance of proper burial see comment on 1 Kings 16:4.

37:1-21

Jeremiah Imprisoned

37:1. chronology. Jehoiachin succeeded his father Jehoiakim during the Babylonian siege of

Jerusalem in December 598. His reign only lasted until the city was taken three months later. At that point, his uncle Mattaniah (see 2 Kings 24:17) was placed on the throne by the victorious Nebuchadnezzar and renamed Zedekiah.

37:5-8. Egyptian troop movements. During the siege of Jerusalem in 588, the Egyptian pharaoh Apries dispatched an army into Palestine. This required the Babylonians to temporarily lift their siege (see the comments on Jer 32:2 and 34:21). This action by the Egyptians may be based on treaty commitments made between Zedekiah and Psammeticus II when that pharaoh made a brief visit to Palestine in 592 (based on the Rylands IX papyrus). No actual treaty document exists, and it is not clear whether Zedekiah personally met with the pharaoh or whether (according to the Lachish Letters) a Judean delegation was sent to Egypt. References in Herodotus indicate that the Egyptian troops were more concerned with reestablishing their control over the Phoenician ports of Tyre and Sidon, and there is no indication of a battle with the Babylonians in Palestine before their withdrawal to Egypt.

37:13. Benjamin Gate. Of the many gates of Jerusalem, the Benjamin Gate opened to the northeast and would have been the most convenient for Jeremiah to use when he wished to visit Anathoth. Its importance and the amount of traffic going through this gate are attested in Jeremiah 17:19 and the fact that King Zedekiah used it as a seat of office in Jeremiah 38:7.

37:15. prisons. In the ancient Near East, prisons were used for temporary detention, usually pending a final judgment or prior to execution of sentence. For instance, Mesopotamian practice included imprisonment in a holding cell in a temple (Nungal Hymn) or under house arrest (Mari letters). The fact that Jeremiah is imprisoned in the house of Jonathan the secretary suggests that formal prisons were also uncommon in monarchic Jerusalem. Prisons are seldom mentioned in biblical literature. Only Joseph is described (Gen 39:20) as being held with other prisoners in a detention facility. The prophet Micaiah is imprisoned in an unspecified location pending judgment on whether his prophecies against Ahab came true (1 Kings 22:27). Other examples of imprisonment include work houses, such as that in which the blinded Samson was forced to grind grain (Judg 16:21).

37:16. vaulted cell in a dungeon. Since Jeremiah was accused of attempting to defect to the enemy, it may be presumed that his cell was in an undesirable portion of the house of Jonathan the secretary. Quite likely the architecture of a house built near a gate area or the temple complex would include some small alcoves among the ceiling vaults. These cramped spaces would probably have been too small for a man to stand erect and might well have been poorly ventilated.

37:21. courtyard of the guard. See the comment on Jeremiah 32:8 for this minimum-security area where Jeremiah was next confined.

37:21. street of the bakers. Several references in the prophets suggest that the city of Jerusalem had market and manufacturing districts (see Is 7:3—fullers; Jer 18:2—potters). Similar establishments are mentioned in the Egyptian *Teachings of Khety,* which describe a weaver's shop where workers were confined to an airless room all day. The courtyard of the guard was located near the palace (Jer 32:2), and thus the street of the bakers must have been near by.

38:1-13

Imprisoned in a Cistern

38:6. imprisoned in a cistern. A staging area for troops would have had a cistern to store rainwater during the dry months. Since this stage of the siege of Jerusalem took place during the normally rainy winter months of 588-587, the fact that a narrow-necked limestone cistern was available as a prison and was empty of water attests to the larger population in the city and the desperate situation they faced. The quagmire at the bottom of the cistern, however, would have prevented Jeremiah from resting and would have been extremely unhealthy. Since the king was afraid to execute Jeremiah, he may have been relying on disease or malnutrition to rid him of the prophet (see Ps 79:11).

38:7. Cushite official in the palace. Since Ebed-Melech had a Hebrew name (meaning "servant of the king"), it is likely that he was either an Ethiopian slave or a freedman who had come into royal service. The easy manner in which he confronted Jeremiah's guards and King Zedekiah as he sat in judgment in the city gate suggests both familiarity with the king and that his counsel was held in high esteem. The designation "eunuch" may indicate either his capacity as a royal official and/or his physical condition (see comment on Is 56:4-5).

38:7. king sitting at the Benjamin Gate. There is ample biblical and archaeological evidence available for kings having regularly sat in judgment at the city gate. For example, the

Iron Age gate area at Tell Dan contains a raised platform with stone pedestals for a canopy that served as a place of justice. Absalom argued against his father David's political ability when he charged that the king was not sitting at the gate hearing the cases of his people (2 Sam 15:2-6).

38:14-28

Audience with Zedekiah

38:14. third entrance to the temple. This "third" entrance to the temple is only mentioned in this text. However, since Zedekiah wished a very private audience with Jeremiah, no more secure place could be found than the king's personal entrance to the temple precincts.

38:23. wives and children brought out. When a city fell and a king was taken, his family and his administration were taken also. It was a fearful time, for prospects included, at best, exile and captivity, and at worst, rape, torture and death. Less is known about Babylonian treatment of captives than about the Assyrian practices.

39:1-18

Fall of Jerusalem

39:1-2. chronology. The siege of Jerusalem began in January 588 and ended as the wall was breached on July 18, 586, and the temple destroyed in mid-August of the same year. See comments on 2 Kings 25:1-12.

39:3. seats in the middle gate. The place where the Babylonian officers took their place after the walls of Jerusalem were breached is only attested in this passage. Recent archaeological excavations by Avigad in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City have revealed a portion of the northern wall and a gate area that shows signs of attack and burning. Others believe it should be identified with the Fish Gate in Nehemiah 3:3.

39:4. Zedekiah's flight. Realizing that the city had fallen, Zedekiah and his court took flight through a southern gate (the Babylonian attack was targeting the north wall; see comment on 31:38), located near the "king's garden." This royal estate was probably an orchard watered by the springs of the Kidron Valley (see Neh 3:15). The reference to the two walls may be the section of wall reconstructed by Hezekiah when he bolstered the city's defenses against the Assyrian threat (see 2 Chron 32:5).

39:5. Jericho on way to Arabah. The Arabah refers to the Jordan Valley, where Zedekiah hopes to cross at the fords of the Jordan by Jericho and escape to Moab or Ammon to find asylum. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho plains is about fifteen miles, a steep descent through barren rocky hills. There are no places to hide, no alternate routes and no defensible fortress on the way—the king is simply counting on a head start to help him escape the country. He nearly made it—he was within a few miles of the river when the Babylonians overtook him.

39:5. Riblah in Hamath. The site of Riblah is located on a large plain in Syria. It was then being used by Nebuchadnezzar as the headquarters for his army. The modern city of Ribleh is located on the Orontes River just south of Lake Homs (see comment on 2 Kings 23:33). Necho II had used the same site as his staging area during the Battle of Carchemish. Hamath refers to both the Syrian city of Hamath as well as the district, which includes the entire area of the Orontes Valley.

39:7. blinding captured kings. See the comment on 2 Kings 25:7. The Assyrian vassal treaty between Ashur-Nirari V and Matti-Ilu of Arpad includes the curse that the one who breaks the treaty will have his eyes torn out. The Assyrian king Esarhaddon boasted of depriving his enemies of ear, nose and eye. Other examples of the use of blinding as a punishment for rebellion can be found in Samson's fate (Judg 16:21) and in the Ammonite threat to blind the right eye of every man in Jabesh-Gilead (1 Sam 11:2).

39:7. bronze shackles. There is evidence from the Assyrian bas-reliefs in Ashurbanipal's palace of prisoners being shackled together as they are herded off to captivity. As early as Tiglath-Pileser III, iron fetters began to be used, and certainly this would be expected in the Neo-Babylonian period. There is no reason to think, however, that bronze shackles did not continue to be used as well.

39:9. Babylonian policy of deportation. The Neo-Babylonians continued the policy of deporting rebellious populations that was first employed by the Assyrian kings Ashurnasirpal II and Tiglath-Pileser III. This was both a political and an economic ploy. It was designed to hold a portion of the people as hostages while a native dynast continued to rule the vassal state. Thus, in 597 Zedekiah had been placed on the throne of Jerusalem while Jehoiachin, much of the royal family, high-ranking priests, nobles and artisans had been taken back to Mesopotamia. Even after Zedekiah's revolt and the fall of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar attempted to maintain native Judean rule through the appointment of Ged-

aliah. However, his assassination resulted in a Babylonian governor being installed. It should be noted that only a portion of the population was ever deported. The Babylonians still wanted to derive revenue from Judah, and thus land was redistributed to the landless poor with the expectation that the economy of the region could be restored.

39:10. gift of vineyards to poor. Not all of the people of Judah were deported after the fall of Jerusalem in 586. Many of the people, like Jeremiah, had actually been pro-Babylonian or at least anti-Jerusalem in their sentiments (compare Micah's condemnation of Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time—Mic 3:8-12). By redistributing the land that had belonged to persons now exiled, the Babylonians created friendships with the landless poor and also laid the foundation for the agricultural and economic restoration of a land that had been devastated by years of warfare.

40:1-6

Jeremiah Given Freedom

40:1. imperial guard. While Nebuzaradan's honorific literally means "chief butler," this is clearly a traditional job title. It had evolved into a position as the commander of a contingent directly under imperial orders. He and the company of soldiers in his charge were given specific tasks (see Jer 39:10, where he is in charge of the deportation of prisoners, and 2 Kings 25:8-11, in which his company destroyed the Jerusalem temple). Delicate tasks, such as the release of Jeremiah from the prisoner-of-war camp at Ramah after the fall of Jerusalem were also part of this extraordinary official's duties.

40:1. Ramah. See the comment on Jeremiah 31:15. This site just north of Jerusalem was being used as a staging area for the deportation of prisoners from Judah.

40:5. Gedaliah. After the fall of Jerusalem in 586 and the arrest of Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar installed Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, of the important but non-Davidic house of Shaphan, as governor of Judah. During approximately one to two months of work, he began the restoration of the country's economy from his new administrative center at Mizpah (see 2 Kings 25:22-26). A seal impression bearing the name Gedaliah has been found at Lachish, suggesting that this man had some administrative experience. It is also possible that he was "Master of the Palace" under Zedekiah, a post fitting him for his Babylonian appointment. His efforts at getting a harvest in did encourage some of the refugees to return to Judah (Jer 40:12), but this was cut short when he was assassinated by Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, who was a member of the royal house and did not want a precedent set of non-Davidic rule.

40:6. Mizpah. After the destruction of Jerusalem and most of the southern Judean cities, Gedaliah was forced to place his administrative capital in the border fortress of Mizpah. The most widely accepted location for this site is Tell en-Nasbeh, eight miles north of Jerusalem on the border with Israel. Archaeological excavations reveal Iron Age fortifications at Tell en-Nasbeh and no destruction level from this period, both suggesting the suitability for immediate use by a newly appointed royal governor. There is also a significant architectural change in the Babylonian period evidencing the change from fortress to government center.

40:7—41:18

Assassination of Gedaliah

40:11-12. refugees in ancient Near East. The nearly continuous periods of warfare in the ancient Near East from the eighth to the sixth centuries created many refugees. While this could include whole families, many times unattached males slipped away, perhaps to form guerilla bands (like those commanded by Jephthah and David in earlier periods) or to blend into the wadis and isolated caves, waiting for the invaders to leave. The less fortunate are depicted on the walls of the palace in the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. These reliefs show some of the refugees from the destroyed city of Lachish (principally women and children), riding in and walking beside wagons containing their few salvaged belongings. Both Assyrian and Babylonian annals contain accounts of the number of prisoners taken from the sacked cities of Syro-Palestine, but one may presume that many others fled before the armies, hiding in the hills, crossing the Jordan River into Moab or joining Bedouin groups.

40:14. Baalis. This Ammonite king may have been supporting the Davidic family's claim to the Jerusalem throne, or he may have simply been an anti-Babylonian monarch who wished to further destabilize Gedaliah's fledgling government. He appears nowhere else in the Bible, but a recently recovered seal impression may provide extrabiblical evident of his reign. This seal, which dates to around 600 B.C., was found at Tell el-'Umeiri, just south of Amman, Jordan. The inscription contains the names Baal-yasha, "Baal saves" and Milkom'or,

"Milkom is light." Recently the seal of Baalis has also been found.

41:1. chronology. Although some commentators suggest that Gedaliah's administration lasted as many as five years, most consider his assassination to have taken place in 586, just one month after the destruction of the temple. The seventh month would have been the time of the Feast of Booths, when many pilgrims would have been on the road, masking the group led by Ishmael.

41:5. shaved beards. See the comments on Leviticus 19:28; Isaiah 7:20; and Esther 4:1 for these common mourning practices and their prohibition. Clearly, popular practice, especially during this period after the destruction of Jerusalem, still included shaving the beard, but there is little attestation of this practice in the extrabiblical texts.

41:5. bringing sacrifices to a destroyed sanctuary. With Jerusalem and its temple destroyed, it seems curious that pilgrims would be on their way to make sacrifices there. Considering the places from which these pilgrims are coming (Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria), all of which have been cultic and political centers, their journey may have overtones of an attempted restoration of Jerusalem. It may be that they even were planning to perform cultic rituals to purify the destroyed temple and thus restore its usefulness (compare the restoration by Josiah in 2 Chron 34:8 and see comment there). Considering the number of destroyed shrines throughout the ancient Near East, there must have been prescribed rituals designed to cleanse them and prepare them to be used once again. Evidence of this is found in the Assyrian annals of Esarhaddon that describe how Marduk allowed Babylon and its temples to be destroyed and restored.

41:9. historical reference. Since Mizpah was not destroyed by the Babylonians, its architectural remains from that period are more intact than those of most other sites. They include large-roomed houses and possibly a small palace indicating Gedaliah's administrative center. There have also been a number of rock-cut cisterns uncovered, one of which may be the one referred to here as having been constructed by King Asa three hundred years earlier (see comment on 2 Chron 16:6). At that time the king of Judah received help from Ben-Hadad of Syria in his war against Israel's King Baasha. A portion of the looted building materials taken from Baasha's fortress at Ramah was used to fortify Mizpah.

41:10-12. distance and directions. If the party is trying to get to Ammonite territory, Gibeon is in the wrong direction. From Mizpah travelers would usually go a couple of miles north to Bethel or a couple of miles south to Ramah to connect to a major road heading east to Jericho and the Jordan. One could only surmise that perhaps when they reached Ramah they found they were being pursued from the north, or perhaps they were even confronted by Johanan's party cutting off the eastern road. Such circumstances might explain their decision to head west toward Gibeon rather than continue east. Gibeon (el-Jib, six miles northwest of Jerusalem) was about three miles southwest of Mizpah.

41:17. Geruth Kimham. This site near Bethlehem is probably the traditional holding of Kimham (2 Sam 19:37). Royal pensioners such as this man generally received a plot of land in exchange for their service (a practice also found in the Mari texts). Geruth is a word unknown elsewhere in the text and may mean "fief" or "land holding."

42:1-22

The Egypt Decision

42:10. God grieving over punishment he sent. In the *Myth of Erra and Ishum,* Marduk abandons his shrine in Babylon to allow Erra, a destructive god, to bring judgment on the people of the city. When the destruction has been carried out, Marduk is full of grief for the city of his dwelling. Yahweh's grief is over the destruction that Jerusalem brought on herself, not second thoughts wishing that he had not acted the way that he did. There is much that is different between the Israelite and Babylonian material, but the motif of a deity grieving over destruction that he himself has brought or allowed is an element common to both. In earlier Sumerian literature, a similar motif is reflected when deities abandon a city for which the divine council has decreed destruction.

43:1-13

Flight to Egypt

43:7. Jewish settlements in Egypt. The flight of Judean refugees to Tahpanes after the assassination of Gedaliah simply swelled the existing Israelite population in Egypt. Isaiah 11:11, dating to the Assyrian period, mentions remnants of the Israelites in both Upper and Lower Egypt. Jeremiah himself addresses Judean settlements in Lower Egypt at Migdol and Memphis (44:1 and 46:14) and in Pathros in Upper Egypt. Papyri found at some of these sites contain obviously Jewish names. The best known of the Jewish communities in

Egypt was that at the island military colony of Elephantine, founded prior to 525, and mentioned in Josephus's "Letter to Aristeas" as the home of mercenary troops in the employ of Pharaoh Psammeticus I. Letters and legal documents from Elephantine speak of a transplanted culture attempting to maintain traditional customs in the face of some hostility by the local Egyptian government and populace. For instance, a small temple was constructed there, but it was subsequently destroyed. Among the letters are communications with the returned Jewish community in Jerusalem during the time of Nehemiah.

43:7. Tahpanhes. This Egyptian fortress is located in the eastern Delta region as it borders on the Sinai. It has been identified with Tell ed-Defenna, with its earliest substantial occupation coming in the seventh century, when Psammeticus I placed a garrison of Greek mercenaries there. Its proximity to the major road leading to Syro-Palestine makes it a likely spot for Judean refugees to find sanctuary.

43:9. Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes. Excavations at Tell ed-Defenna are centered on a large rectangular building that dates to the Saite period (seventh-sixth centuries B.C.) and probably served as a governor's residence/administrative center. It is possible that this is the building referred to as "Pharaoh's palace," since all bureaucrats were extensions of royal power. The burial of the large stones at this point could easily symbolize a change of rulers, as the prophet lays the foundation in a clay-brick courtyard (the Hebrew word used occurs only here, and the translation is based on a related word appearing in 2 Sam 12:31 and Nah 3:14).

43:10. royal canopy. For King Nebuchadnezzar to sit in state, it would be necessary to construct a temporary throne, covered by a canopy. The latter served to shelter the king from the sun and also functioned as a symbol of his universal rule (compare God's glory manifested by a canopy of smoke and cloud in Is 4:5).

43:11-12. Babylonian invasion of Egypt. It was inevitable that Nebuchadnezzar would eventually invade and attempt to conquer Egypt. The Medes had united the territory east of the Tigris, effectively cutting Babylon off from direct trade with the east, and the Egyptians, with their Phoenician allies, were constantly causing political and commercial problems in the west and along the Arabian trade routes. An extended (thirteen years according to the fourth-century Greek historian Menander) siege bottled up Tyre and devastated much of Phoenicia (584-571). A fragmentary portion of Nebuchadnezzar's annals from his thirty-seventh year, Herodotus and Ezekiel 29:19-21 refer to the invasion of Egypt in 568, but no details are given other than victories over desert tribes. It is likely that some Babylonian garrisons were installed in the fortresses of the Sinai following this campaign.

43:13. temple of the sun. Jeremiah applies the Hebrew place name "Beth-Shemesh" (NIV: "temple of the sun") to designate the Egyptian city of Heliopolis in this instance. The usual name applied to this city located near Cairo is On (Gen 41:45), but the prophet apparently wishes to emphasize the worship of the sun god Amon-Re at this site.

43:13. sacred pillars. The Hebrew term used here refers to pillars or standing stones erected to commemorate an event, mark the concluding of a covenant agreement or the entrance to a sanctuary, or as an image of a god (see Gen 28:18-22; 31:49-52; 1 Kings 14:23). In the Egyptian context, these free-standing monumental stones are usually termed obelisks, and they were commonly erected to commemorate major victories or the dedication of a temple. For example, the procession way leading up to the temple of Amon-Re in Heliopolis was lined with two rows of obelisks.

44:1-30

Judgment in Egypt

44:1. geographical territory. Jeremiah's message to the Israelite settlements in Egypt encompasses the general area around Tahpanhes in the Delta region, including Migdol (located about twenty miles to the northeast; see Ex 14:2 and Num 33:7) and Memphis. Pathros (NIV: "Upper Egypt"), is a place name referring to the area south of the Delta in Upper Egypt between Memphis and Aswan. Assyrian inscriptions use similar terminology, and Egyptian terminology supports the identification. Excavations at a site now being identified with Migdol reveal Saite period pottery and a fortress whose walls stretch over six hundred feet on either side.

44:15. upper and lower Egypt. The geographical area where Judean refugees had established settlements are spoken of in general terms with this reference. They were primarily situated in the Delta and were not scattered throughout the full length of Egyptian territory. Since the Nile flows north, Upper Egypt is the southern portion. Lower Egypt, the north, includes the Delta region and extends to the region of Memphis.

44:17. Queen of Heaven. See comment on 7:18.

44:18. incense and drink offerings. Incense was valued in the ancient world as an accompaniment to sacrifice. Its sweet scent effectively masked any of the unpleasant odors resulting from the performance of the rituals. It was expensive (see comment on Lev 2:1) but was believed to be favored by the gods. In Mesopotamia, incense was used for dedicatory and propitiatory offerings. The people believed that the incense helped transport prayers to the deity, who would then inhale the incense (for more information see comment on Ex 30:7-8). Pouring out libation offerings is common throughout Mesopotamian history, including offerings of water, wine and blood (compare David's action in 2 Sam 23:16). Assyrian art stylized libation offerings into various classes depending on the type of liquid and where and on what it was poured.

44:19. cakes in her image. It is likely that the use of offering cakes shaped in the goddess's image is a practice borrowed from Mesopotamia. The Hebrew word *kawwanim* is a loan word from Akkadian *kamanu*, a type of sweet cake associated with the cult of Ishtar. They were baked in ashes and often were sweetened with honey or figs. The ritual texts describing *eshsheshu* festivals in Mesopotamian cities mention both meat and cake offerings.

44:30. Hophra's demise. As in Isaiah 7 the prophet Jeremiah offers a sign of God's intentions to a disobedient people. Hophra (known in Greek in Herodotus as Apries) was the fourth king of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty, succeeding Psammeticus II in 589. He did send a relief army into Palestine during Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem, but it quickly withdrew (see Jer 37:5). His naval expedition flanking the Babylonian land forces was partially successful, with Cyprus being conquered. After the fall of Jerusalem, Hophra provided for refugees to settle in the Egyptian Delta region. His eventual end came as a result of his overreliance on mercenary troops and his inability to control the Greek colony at Cyrene. Both Herodotus and a fragmentary stele from the period report that he was killed in a coup carried out by his successor, Amasis, around 570.

45:1-5

Rebuke to Baruch

45:1. chronology. The fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign would have been 605/604 B.C. It was the year in which Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Assyrians at Carchemish. At that point Jehoiakim is still a vassal of the Egyptians, but his political masters are soon to change. See comment on 36:1.

46:1-28

Oracle Against Egypt

46:1. oracles against foreign nations. There is a distinct literary genre within prophetic literature known as oracles against foreign nations. They are found in Isaiah 14—21, 23 and Ezekiel 25—30, Jeremiah 46—51, Amos 1—2, Zephaniah 2 and the books of Obadiah and Nahum. Although they are all condemnations of Israel's enemies, taunting them, their rulers and their gods, each is a distinct unit, free to accomplish its mission without being constrained to follow a set structure or outline. Because these oracles appear in chapter 25 in the Septuagint version of Jeremiah, it is often suggested that they were a distinct unit that circulated as an independent body of literature before being added to the book of Jeremiah. In most cases the oracles were not delivered to the countries they targeted, because their intended audience was Israel. There are short examples of the genre as early as the Mari texts. In one prophecy, the god Dagan delivers a message to Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, concerning his enemy Babylon: "O Babylon, what are you trying to do? I will gather you up in a net."

46:2. Necho. Ruling from 609 to 595 B.C., Necho II was a member of the Egyptian Twenty-Sixth Dynasty. As Assyrian influence waned, this pharaoh expanded his commercial dealing with Palestine and captured the former Philistine city of Gaza (see Jer 47:1-7). The Babylonian Chronicle describes how he took advantage of the mortally wounded Assyrian nation, allying himself with them just prior to the 605 Battle of Carchemish. His expedition to that northern Syrian battlefield to help Ashuruballit took him through Palestine. He defeated Judah's king Josiah in 609 at the Battle of Megiddo and subsequently claimed all the territory he had traversed going north (see comments on 2 Kings 23:33; 2 Chron 35:20; Dan 1:1-2). After the Assyrian defeat at Carchemish, the Babylonian Chronicle details how the Egyptian army was overtaken and utterly destroyed. Babylon extended its sovereignty over Judah in 604, confining the Egyptians to their own territory for the rest of Necho's reign.

46:2. Battle of Carchemish. After the destruction of Nineveh in 612 by a combined Babylonian and Median army lead by Nabopolassar, the last Assyrian dynast, Ashuruballit II,

moved his capital to Haran. This stronghold was then captured in 610. Ashuruballit was able to secure an alliance with Necho II of Egypt and continued to claim territory along the Upper Euphrates for the next several years. However, it was only the remnants of the once "invincible" Assyrian army that were defeated at the Battle of Carchemish in 605. The victory was achieved under the leadership of the crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar. Carchemish may be considered a major turning point in ancient Near Eastern history. It signals the final collapse of the largest empire to that time and set the stage for an even larger Persian empire that will succeed the short Neo-Babylonian period. While Egypt gained some temporary claim to Palestine and Phoenicia, Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian armies quickly followed up the Carchemish campaign by establishing their hold over all of Syro-Palestine by 604.

46:3. large and small shields. Because most ancient Near Eastern warriors were not heavily armored, it was necessary to supply them with shields that would deflect arrows as well as the thrust of sword or dagger (see the equipment for Asa's army in 2 Chron 14:8). The small shield *(magen)* served as a buckler, either held in the left hand or attached to the left arm. Its maneuverability aided hand-to-hand combat. The larger shield *(ṣinna)*, which might be either oblong or a figure eight, made from heavier material—either metal, leather or wood—was designed to withstand thrown spears or arrows. However, it was cumbersome and might be difficult to carry into close combat. Some warriors were aided by a shield bearer (see 1 Sam 17:7).

46:4. use of cavalry in seventh-century Egypt. Since Egyptian art does not depict cavalry and no mention is made of cavalry in Egyptian texts from the period of the Battle of Carchemish, it is probably fair to say that this feature had not become an important part of the Egyptian army during this era. However, the Medes and Babylonians had been using horsemen as messengers, scouts and mounted warriors (archers as well as shock troops) for at least two centuries prior to Carchemish. For example, a tenth-century relief from the Syro-Hittite site of Tell Halaf depicts horse-men in battle dress. The mobility afforded cavalry, as opposed to the heavier chariots, would have given the Babylonians an edge in battle and in communications on the field. Jeremiah's remarks may then be as ironic as those of the Rabshakeh, who had offered Hezekiah two thousand horses if he had men to ride them (2 Kings 18:23). It is possible that the prophet is taunting an Egyptian army for its lack of men to "mount their steeds."

46:9. Cush, Put and Libya. The Egyptian army included contingents of mercenary and allied troops that evoke past political events in Egyptian history. The list included in this verse, and the order in which each name appears, can be compared to the list of the sons of Ham in Genesis 10:6. A Cushite dynasty ruled Egypt from 711 until 593 B.C. Its recent glory thus gives it prominence of place in the list. Put and Libya are synonymous and represent a much earlier foreign domination of Egypt during the Twenty-Second and Twenty-Third Dynasties (950-720 B.C.). Ionian Greek mercenaries were also part of the Egyptian host. A Greek shield is among the artifacts unearthed at the site of the Battle of Carchemish.

46:11. balm of Gilead. As part of Jeremiah's taunting of the defeated Egyptian forces, he suggests they salve their wounds with the medicinal balm of Gilead, though he gives them no hope of relief. The Hebrew word *ṣori*, based on the Septuagint Greek translation, *rhetine*, "pine resin," is apparently a healing salve made from this resin and mixed with olive oil. It is a product of the upper Galilee and Transjordan region and is referred to by the ancient Greek botanist Theophrastus (see Jer 8:22; 51:8). It remains a matter of dispute which tree or shrub was the source of the resin.

46:13. Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt. See comment on 43:11-12.

46:14. geographical territory. See comment on 44:1.

46:18. comparison to Tabor and Carmel. Perhaps playing on Egyptian art, which always depicted the pharaoh as much larger than all other men, the prophet now predicts the coming of one (Nebuchadnezzar) whose height and power is to be compared to the mountain peaks (Tabor—1800 feet; Mt. Carmel—1700 feet). This could also be a reference to the route of flight taken by the Egyptians. Mount Tabor is at the eastern end of the Valley of Jezreel, and Mount Carmel forms part of the range of hills that lead south down the Palestinian coast.

46:19. destruction of Memphis. During the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., Memphis (Hebrew: Noph, fifteen miles south of modern Cairo) was the cultural and political capital of Egypt. During the Assyrian period (674 B.C.), Esarhaddon had been successful in capturing Memphis (see comment on 2 Kings 19:9), but that was well before Jeremiah's time. Nebuchadnezzar had moved against Egypt in 601 but had not successfully invaded their ter-

ritory. The Babylonian forces were repulsed at the Egyptian stronghold of Migdol on the Gaza road and forced to retreat. There is some evidence of Nebuchadnezzar undertaking a second invasion, in his thirty-seventh year (568), but there is no information concerning what success he might have had or whether Memphis was involved. Memphis was captured by the Persian king, Cambyses, in 525, and the pharaoh, Psammeticus III, was taken captive.

46:20. gadfly metaphor. This insect occurs only in this passage, so any identification can only be made with the information provided by the context. With Egypt cast as a heifer in this metaphor, it is easy to see the applicability of the attacking Babylonians as the gadfly or some comparable stinging insect.

46:22. hissing serpent metaphor. The Hebrew text speaks of the snake's "voice" rather than mentioning hissing specifically. Nonetheless, one can imagine a snake hissing its warning at a would-be attacker. The snake is an important part of Egyptian religion and a symbol of royal authority.

46:22. axes, cutting down trees. Destruction by a conqueror often included cutting down trees or orchards (see comment on 2 Kings 19:28). In addition conquest at times had the objective of gaining access to natural resources (see comment on Is 14:8), though, of course, Egypt was not known for its forests.

46:25. Amon of Thebes. The Greek name "Thebes" referred to the city the Egyptians called Waset, about 325 miles south of Memphis. The great temple of Karnak at Thebes was dedicated to Amon-Re, the chief god of Egypt's pantheon beginning with the pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty (sixteenth and fifteenth centuries). Associated with the wind or the "breath of life," Amon was combined with the sun god Re as his worship encompassed all of Egypt. This god's prominence increased as the fortunes of Egypt's empire expanded. As a result, he was credited with being the creator god and his city of Thebes as the site of creation. Thebes had been sacked by Ashurbanipal's Assyrian army in 663 B.C., and much of its wealth had been plundered. Like Memphis, it was also raided by Cambyses in 525.

47:1-7

Oracle Against the Philistines

47:1. Egyptian attack of Gaza. Nebuchadnezzar began his move toward invading Egypt in early 601. However, the investing of Palestine, including the acceptance of Jehoiakim's pledge of loyalty to Babylonian rule, required some delays that prevented any direct move against Egyptian territory until November of that year. Perhaps the king hoped to make as easy a conquest of Egypt as had Ashurbanipal in 663. Since that time, however, the Saite pharaohs of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty had concentrated much of their efforts and wealth on building several lines of defense along the Gaza road as well as further south. This was designed to prevent an army from making either a direct march along the Sinai's Mediterranean coast or inland across the desert. When, according to Herodotus, Nebuchadnezzar's army was defeated at the Egyptian fortress of Migdol on the eastern branch of the Nile Delta, Necho II's forces pursued him north and captured Gaza. They held it for two years until Nebuchadnezzar once again campaigned in Palestine.

47:4. Philistine situation at end of seventh century. The Philistine city states had been subject to Assyrian rule for much of the seventh century. Ekron, for instance, served as a major olive oil manufacturing and distribution site, bolstering Assyrian fortunes in the region. With the demise of the Assyrians after the death of Ashurbanipal in 627, the Egyptian pharaohs Psammeticus I and Necho II moved into Philistia. Excavations at Ashkelon have revealed evidence (bronze statuettes of Egyptian deities, bronze weights, pottery) of an Egyptian enclave in this Philistine seaport city. Their sway only lasted a couple of decades until Nebuchadnezzar's fall 604 campaign. The Babylonian Chronicle describes a November-December drive to capture Ashkelon signaling a "scorched-earth" policy that eventually totally devastated Judah and Philistia, and was followed by the deportation of a large portion of their population. The Babylonians were primarily concerned with Egypt and did not want to have to deal with establishing a bureaucracy and presence in Philistia as the Assyrians had.

47:4. Philistine relations to Tyre and Sidon. While there may have been some political ties between Philistia and Phoenicia, most of their relations were based on trade and mutual economic interests. The Phoenician seaports of Tyre and Sidon sent their ships throughout the Mediterranean Sea. Their cargoes of "fine ware," ingots of metal and amphoras of oil and wine came from ports in Ionia, Greece and Cyprus. The Philistines, especially Ashkelon and Ashdod, served as one of the markets for these products as well as distributors to customers in Egypt, Arabia and Palestine. The Egyptians also exploited the Phoenician

seaports (see the comments on Jer 37:5-8), competing with Nebuchadnezzar for them. The competition eventually leaves Philistia in ruins and Tyre and Sidon in Babylonian hands.

47:4. coasts of Caphtor. This place of origin for the Philistines is most often identified with the island of Crete. The name *kftyw* appears in Egyptian, Ugaritic, Greek and Akkadian texts. While some attempts have been made to equate this with Cyprus, archaeological and geographical indications favor Crete.

47:7. attack on Ashkelon. The Babylonian Chronicle, although a fragmentary account, boasts that Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army attacked Ashkelon in the month of Kislev (November-December). This was unusual since it was during the rainy season, a time when most armies do not attempt major campaigns (compare 2 Sam 11:1). The Chronicle notes that not only the walls were breached and the city taken, but the soldiers burned and leveled the inner city as well, transforming the "city into a mound and heaps of ruin." Modern excavators have found ample evidence of this destruction in every part of the city. Among the artifacts are piles of smashed pottery, skeletal remains showing traumatic injuries, charred grain and collapsed houses.

48:1-47

Oracle Against Moab

48:1. Moabite situation at end of seventh century. Like Philistia, Moab was a vassal state of the Assyrians during the seventh century B.C. Assyrian texts list four Moabite kings who paid tribute down to the reign of Ashurbanipal. Herodotus notes that the Transjordanian kingdoms of Moab and Ammon then fell under the sway of the Babylonians shortly after the fall of Jerusalem. This was a further step by Nebuchadnezzar to exclude the Egyptians from Syro-Palestine and to control the important caravan route through Transjordan. The Egyptians had had a long history of economic and political activity in Moab, dating back to the reign of Thutmose III (c. 1479-1425) and reflected in the eighth-century Shihan Stele, depicting the god Chemosh wearing an Egyptian-style kilt.

48:1. Nebo and Kiriathaim. The site of the town of Nebo, identified with Khirbet el-Mekhayyat just over a mile from the highest peak of Mount Nebo, is mentioned in the Moabite Stele of King Mesha as a Moabite settlement and thus appropriate to this oracle. Mesha claims in his victory stele to have built Kiriathaim. Its exact location is still unsettled, although several sites have been suggested.

48:2. Heshbon. See the comment on Deuteronomy 2:26 for this Moabite city.

48:3. Horonaim. The strategic location of sites along the King's Highway that transverses the Moabite Plateau must have been a necessity for the Moabite rulers. The Mesha Stele mentions Horonaim as one of these important posts. It was probably located near the modern city of Kathrabba, on the southwestern portion of the plateau—with a clear view of both the Dead Sea valley and the King's Highway.

48:5. Luhith. Extrabiblical source material, including a Nabataean inscription from Madeba and a contract written in Hebrew dating to the Bar Kochba revolt (A.D. 132-135), indicates that Luhith was located in the southwestern section of the Moabite Plateau. There is a Roman road at this point that leads off the plateau and descends to the southern end of the Dead Sea. Surface surveys of pottery suggest occupation during the Iron Age and later at several sites southwest of Kerak and near the modern town of Kathrabba.

48:7. Chemosh. See the comment on Judges 11:24 for this principal deity of the Moabites. A dedicatory stele depicting Chemosh and dating to the ninth or eighth century B.C. has been found at Shihan. As this god is described in the Moabite inscription of Mesha, this meter-tall stele portrays Chemosh as a divine warrior, holding a spear and standing ready to defend the Moabite people.

48:8. valley and plateau, topography in Moab. The Moabite Plateau runs approximately sixty miles north-south as its ragged edge borders the Dead Sea valley on the west and the Arabian desert on the southwest. It then extends about fifteen miles east and west, with an elevation of about three thousand feet. Cutting through this plateau east to west is the Wadi el-Mujib, which has been created by the Arnon River. The southern border is marked by another deep canyon, the Wadi el-Hesa (Zered River). There is an extension of the plateau, known as the "tableland of Medeba" to the north that is more accessible since it does not contain the deep canyons demarking the south.

48:9. salting Moab. See the comment on Judges 9:45 when Abimelech salted the ground of the destroyed city of Shechem. The Annals of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I record how captured the enemy stronghold of Hunusa and sowed salt over its ruins while pronouncing a curse on anyone who dared to rebuild the town (compare Josh 6:26). The translation of Hebrew

ṣiṭṣ as "salt" is based on a Ugaritic parallel.

48:11. wine dregs. After the grapes have been trod, the resulting juice was poured into large storage jars (9 ¾ gallons), which were sealed with clay, leaving only a small vent hole to bleed off the fermentation gases. The fermentation process was allowed to continue for forty days, as the wine lay with its dregs or lees. Jeremiah's metaphor here relates to the fact that the Moabites had never suffered deportation and so their "processing" was not complete.

48:11-12. pouring from jar to jar. In order to complete the wine-making process, the fermented grape juice must be poured from its original jars into fresh ones. This also involved straining out the dregs so that the fermentation could be completed and the flavor of the wine could age in the underground storage cellars, where a constant 65 degrees Fahrenheit could be maintained. Wine cellars of this type have been discovered at Gibeon and Tell Qasileh. Finally, portions of the wine would be poured into smaller jars for immediate transport and consumption.

48:13. trusting in Bethel. It is likely that this reference is to the Northwest Semitic deity Bethel, attested in personal names and texts for over a thousand years, including the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon (c. 675 B.C.) and at the sixth century B.C. Jewish military colony of Elephantine. The comparison between Chemosh and Bethel adds weight to this being a citation of that god's name. However, it also provides a dual reference to Jeroboam's sanctuary at the city of Bethel (see 1 Kings 13:26-33; Amos 7:13).

48:15-16. invasion of Moab. The only source currently available for a Babylonian invasion of Moab is Josephus. He notes that five years after the destruction of Jerusalem, in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (582/581), the Babylonian king campaigned in Transjordan, subjecting both Moab and Ammon to his rule. Since hardly any of the Babylonian Chronicles are preserved beyond 594, this cannot be confirmed at this time.

48:18. Dibon. See comment on Numbers 21:30. This city north of the Arnon Gorge was the Moabite capital during the ninth century reign of Mesha.

48:19. Aroer. See the comment on Deuteronomy 2:36-37 for this city located southeast of Dibon and right on the lip the Arnon Gorge.

48:20. Arnon. See the comment on Deuteronomy 2:24 for this deep river valley that bisects Moab east-west.

48:21-24. towns of Moab. The tableland towns mentioned for destruction include unidentified sites (Holon) and some that are uncertain. Jahzah (most likely Khirbet Medeiniyeh, on the eastern edge of the Moabite Plateau), Beth Meon (Ma'in, four miles southwest of Medeba), Kerioth (possibly Khirbet Aleiyan, northeast of Dibon), Dibon, Kiriathaim (possibly el-Qereiyat, five miles northwest of Dibon), Beth Diblathaim (possibly Khirbet Libb, eight miles north of Dibon), Bozrah (possibly Umm el-'Amed, east of Heshbon) are all mentioned in the Mesha inscription. Beth Gamul only appears in this text and may be identified with Khirbet el-Jemeil, eight miles east of Dibon.

48:25. horn. In Mesopotamia the crowns of gods and kings often featured horns as a sign of their power and authority, particularly as it relates to ferocity in war. This would explain why the word horn is often synonymous with strength. Another explanation is that here the word means "bow." This is based on one of the materials used to construct the composite bow (described in the Ugaritic epic of Aqhat) and the phrase "to break the bow" found in Jeremiah 49:35 and Hosea 1:5. There is possible support for this usage in Greek and Egyptian literature.

48:28. dove behavior. The flight of the Moabites from danger is compared to the nesting habits of rock doves. These birds relied on placing their nests in fairly inaccessible cliff faces and the crevices along the sides of gorges like the Arnon to protect their young. The shade afforded would also aid the young birds until their plumage was complete.

48:31. Kir Hareseth. Identified with modern Kerak (seventeen miles south of the Arnon and eleven miles east of the Dead Sea), this was a major Moabite site. It guarded a portion of the King's Highway as well as caravans traveling east and west across the Moabite Plateau.

48:32. Jazer and Sibmah. See comment on Numbers 21:32 for Jazer. Sibmah has not been positively identified, although Khirbet Qarn el Qibsh and Bet Baal Meon have been suggested. It must have been within the region commanded by Heshbon and was apparently known for its vineyards (see Is 16:8-13).

48:34. cites of Moab. For Heshbon see comment on Numbers 21:25-28. For Jahaz see comment on Numbers 21:23. For Horonaim see comment on Jeremiah 48:3. Elealeh is located one and a half miles northeast of Tell Hesban at Khirbet el-'Al. Eglath Shelishiyah has not been identified (see Is 15:5). Zoar (possibly Safi, on the south bank of the Wadi Zered) is the most southern point in this oracle and would be near the Dead Sea. The waters of Nimrim are usually identified with the

Wadi en-Numeirah, a stream that flows into the Dead Sea at its southern end.

48:37. mourning practices. Each of the actions described here are common mourning practices in the ancient Near East. See the comments on Leviticus 10:6-7; Isaiah 15:2-3; 32:11; and Jeremiah 41:5 for further discussion of these rituals and clothing styles.

48:40. eagle metaphor. This is an image of an attacking bird of prey (Babylon), either an eagle or a vulture. The "swoop" is not an easy glide, but an all-out plunge to sweep up the prey (in this case Moab) and carry it away (compare Ezek 17:3-4).

48:41. Kerioth. This Moabite town is mentioned in the Mesha Inscription as well as in the oracle in Amos 2:2. Its exact location still has not been determined, although some possibilities are el-Qereiyat and Khirbet Aleiyan, both in the Moabite tableland.

48:45. Heshbon, Sihon. For Heshbon see the comment on Numbers 21:25-28, and for Sihon see the comment on Numbers 21:24-30. Since Sihon was an Amorite king of the Moab region and his capital was at Heshbon, the reference here must be to the territory he once ruled.

49:1-6

Oracle Against Ammon

49:1. Ammonite situation at end of seventh century. Although the Ammonite kingdom, centered around the capital at Rabbah, was to come under the control of the Babylonians, there is no record of a general exile of its people (v. 3). Inscriptional evidence from Tell el-'Umeiri and Heshbon shows that the Ammonite language continued to be used into the Persian period. There is also a continuity of architecture, with no major destruction levels and the existence of administrative facilities that show continuous use. In addition, there was no disruption in the Iron II style pottery produced even during the Persian period.

49:1. Molech. See comment on 1 Kings 11:5, 7 for this Ammonite god, written Milcom in the Hebrew, not Molech. Coming as it does from the word for "king," the name probably refers to this god as the head of the Ammonite pantheon. He is most often associated with child sacrifice but in this verse refers to the Ammonite takeover of territory once controlled by the Israelite tribe of Gad.

49:1. territory of Gad. See the comment on Numbers 32:34-42 for the extent of Gad's settlements in Transjordan. They are principally in Gilead and Bashan.

49:2. Rabbah. The capital city of the Ammonite kingdom was located at Jebel Qal'a. It presently is in the middle of the modern city of Amman but has been surveyed and partially excavated. Occupation at the site and in its vicinity goes back to Paleolithic times. Although it was occasionally subjected to Israelite rule (see 2 Sam 12:26-31), during the sixth century, the Ammonites attempted to expand their rule northward after the destruction of Jerusalem.

49:3. connection of Heshbon, Ai and Rabbah. The connection between Ammon and Moab in this oracle is clear: both kingdoms and their capital cities are put on notice of coming destruction. However, the mention of Ai seems out of place. The city of Ai (usually identified with et-Tell) is located near Bethel in Israel and has no direct relation to Heshbon or Rabbah. It is possible, since this city name means "the ruin," that another Ai is the subject of Jeremiah's warning.

49:7-22

Oracle Against Edom

49:7. Edomite situation at end of seventh century. Edom had become an Assyrian vassal state in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III and continued under Assyrian rule until the death of Ashurbanipal a century later. It is likely that the Edomites submitted themselves to Nebuchadnezzar's rule in 605 B.C. Although some Judean refugees may have found shelter in Edom, they apparently remained passive as Jerusalem was destroyed (see Ps 137:7 and Obad 11). The Babylonian campaign against Ammon and Moab in 594 seems not to have affected Edom. It is likely that they remained unscathed until the time of Nabonidus's campaign in 552.

49:7. Teman. This is a geographical name synonymous with Edom (Obad 9) or with the northern section of that southern Transjordanian kingdom, with its capital at Bozrah (see Amos 1:12). It is likely that the nation of Edom originated in this region and eventually was able to expand to the south (see Ezek 25:13).

49:7. wisdom tradition in Teman. See the comment on Obadiah 8. While various types of wisdom are ascribed to ancient peoples, it is possible that that of the Edomites originated in their ability to adapt to their rugged physical environment (see the comment on Obad 3) or their facility in dealing with the caravaneers that regularly passed through their land.

49:8. Dedan. This northwest Arabian oasis (modern al-'Ula) served as a major caravan stop during the sixth century B.C. Although it

is mentioned in conjunction with Teman in Ezekiel 25:13, there is no clear evidence of Edom's control of territory that far south. However, inscriptional and pottery evidence do indicate that continual commercial activity, resident merchants and possible political ties may have existed. It is also possible that Edom and the Arabs were being mentioned collectively by the prophets (see Is 21:13).

49:13. Bozrah. Located just west of the King's Highway as well as by the western trade route to the Wadi Arabah, Bozrah (modern Buseirah) served as Edom's capital. Excavations confirm that there was no destruction during Nebuchadnezzar's reign, when Edom was able to stay out of the conflicts that destroyed Jerusalem. There is evidence, however, of a cultural transition after 550, due to Nabonidus's campaign and the shift to Persian rule.

49:23-27

Oracle Against Damascus

49:23. Damascene situation at end of seventh century. Following the collapse of the Assyrian empire, it may be assumed that Aram (Syria, of which Damascus was the capital) regained temporary independence. However, like all the other small states, it then would have had to submit to Babylonian rule after 605. There is no extrabiblical evidence concerning the role or status of Damascus or Aram during the subsequent period, and no large scale excavations have been possible in the modern city. The fact that only Syrian cities are mentioned in this oracle suggests that the nation had been fragmented and that contingents of troops from these sites have raised the prophet's and Yahweh's ire against them.

49:23. Hamath and Arpad. The site of Hamath is in central Syria on the Orontes River, about 130 miles north of Damascus. It has a long history, going back to the third millennium Ebla texts, as a commercial and administrative center. Arpad (Tell Rifaat), was a regional center in northern Syria, and like Hamath had a history of influence until the Assyrian conquest. Both sites are mentioned often in the Assyrian Annals, but their power and intermittent revolts were quenched by the end of the eighth century. For more information see comments on Isaiah 10:9.

49:27. fortresses of Ben-Hadad. As is the case with Omri for the kingdom of Israel (Mesha Inscription and Assyrian Annals) and David for the United Kingdom and later for Judah (Hazael Inscription from Tell Dan), Ben-Hadad's name is associated with the ruling house of Aram. No king bearing that name actually ruled during the seventh or eighth centuries. However, it was traditional to continue to use the founding ruler's name when referring to the nation or its resources.

49:28-33

Oracle Against Kedar and Hazor

49:28. Kedar. The Kedar are one of the north Arabian tribal groups. The name appears in Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian texts suggesting that this was a particularly powerful group. The reference here may be to Nebuchadnezzar's campaign into Arabia in 599-598 and may in fact refer as much to the geographical limit of his army's march as it does to the people they had to deal with.

49:28. Hazor. This refers to the country of the *ḥaṣerim* rather than to the city of Hazor in the upper Galilee region. The desert tribesmen, perhaps associated with those mentioned as inhabitants of the Negev in Joshua 15:23-25, would have been among the targets of Nebuchadnezzar's campaign to pacify and incorporate the northern Arabian area.

49:33. jackals. It is quite common, especially in Jeremiah (see 9:11; 10:33), for desolate or uninhabited places to be referred to as the lair of jackals (see Ps 44:19; Is 34:13). These scavengers would only frequent the desert wastes. What is particularly telling in this verse is that Nebuchadnezzar's campaign will transform these already desolate desert regions into totally uninhabitable places. Similar descriptions occur both in Egypt in the visions of Neferti, and in Mesopotamia, in the Sumerian *Lament over the Destruction of Ur.*

49:34-39

Oracle Against Elam

49:34. Elamite situation at end of seventh century. Occupying much of the Iranian Plateau east of the Tigris River, the Elamite kings allied themselves with the Babylonians for much of the seventh century, as they both fought the Assyrians. The Babylonian Chronicle details many examples of their help, starting with the reign of Merodach-Baladan. Ashurbanipal's annals describe the capture of the Elamite capital of Susa in 640, the systematic pillaging of its treasures and the seizure of their gods. The anger of the Assyrians is seen in the treatment of the Elamite king's body. It was preserved in salt and brought to Nineveh, where it was cremated and the ashes were scattered to the winds. Despite Assyrian hostility, another Elamite dynasty was established after the death of Ashurbanipal and continued to rule in Susa until the merging of

their territory with that of the Medes and Persians under Cyrus in the mid-sixth century. This latter situation was facilitated by Nabopolassar's alliance with the Medes prior to the Battle of Carchemish and a resulting deemphasizing of former ties with Elam.

50:1—51:64

Oracle Against Babylon

50:2. fall of Babylon. Jeremiah's predicted fall of Babylon did not actually occur until 539, when Cyrus the Persian king captured the city. Herodotus records that the Persians diverted the waters of the Euphrates and thus entered the Babylon by means of one of its many water channels. Even then the city was not destroyed or looted, since Cyrus was assisted in its capture by disaffected priests of the chief god Marduk and other Babylonian citizens who had become dissatisfied with Nabonidus's rule. (The Cyrus Cylinder preserves the Persian version of these events; see comments on Is 45:1; 48:14.) Since Jeremiah makes no direct mention of Cyrus in his oracle, it may be assumed that this material was written and edited prior to the actual fall of Babylon. He had certainly called for the destruction of the Babylonians and the return of the exiles on other occasions (see Jer 27:7; 29:10). It is therefore appropriate that in this current set of oracles against the nations that Babylon's demise be targeted as the greatest achievement of Yahweh and the greatest good for the people of Judah.

50:2. Bel and Marduk. The title Bel was applied to the supreme god of the Akkadian pantheon, which until the beginning of the second millennium B.C. was Enlil (the patron of the city of Nippur). After the emergence of Babylon as the chief city of Mesopotamia, the title was transferred to its patron deity, Marduk. Evidence of this succession to divine supremacy can be seen in Marduk's prominent place in the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish* and in the prologue to the Code of Hammurabi. In both instances, Marduk is said to have achieved the rank of chief god through his combative powers and the will of the other gods. The name Bel Marduk then continues to be used by the Assyrians and the Neo-Babylonians, and his New Year's festival is the celebration of the renewal of fertility and life (see comment on Is 46:1). Even the Persian king Cyrus looked at his own accession to power and the capture of the city of Babylon as having been achieved through the assistance of Bel Marduk. Connections in the northwest Semitic pantheon with Bel are to be found in the name Baal, also translated as "lord."

50:9. alliance from the north. This is a piece of irony that harks back to Jeremiah's call narrative (Jer 1:14-15), where Babylon was the threat from the north that was destined to overwhelm Jerusalem. Now, in this oracle predicting Babylon's demise, they in turn are to be destroyed by an alliance of forces from the north. In fact this came in the form of the alliance between the Medes and the Persians that had been shaped over a period of twenty years by Cyrus.

50:19. geographical designations. The restoration of the exiles to Israel includes a resumption of their basic economic activities, herding and farming, and a restoration of the covenant promise of fertility within the promised land. Bashan and Carmel are both known for their grazing, while the hill country of Ephraim held rich vineyards and fields, and Gilead served as both a farming area and pastureland. The range of these place names fully encompasses the boundaries of the northern kingdom of Israel.

50:21. Merathaim. The term employed here by Jeremiah is a play on words for Babylon or Babylonia. It is based on an Akkadian term, *marratum*, which is used for the marshy area in southern Mesopotamia where the Tigris-Euphrates delta merges with the salt waters of the Persian Gulf. Thus this Akkadian word that actually means "bitter" fits well with the prophet's oracle of doom against a people who had made the Israelites bitter and now faced rebellion and bitterness themselves.

50:21. Pekod. Again, Jeremiah is using an Akkadian term as a synonym for Babylon. Among the Aramean tribal groups inhabiting Babylonia was one named the Puqudu. The prophet references this tie while employing a pun on the Hebrew word for "punish," *paqad.* It is possible that Jeremiah's choice of the Puqudu, who dwelt principally in the Sealands of southern Mesopotamia and east of the Tigris River, is a further taunt of a once powerful state that has become fragmented and subject to the rebellions of tribal groups within its domain.

50:38. idols going mad with terror. The theme of taunting worthless idols is found elsewhere in the prophets (see Is 40:18-20; Hos 8:4). However, personifying them to the extent of giving them emotions like fear and madness is less common (see Is 19:1). It may be that Jeremiah is drawing on allusions in the Gilgamesh flood epic, where the gods who were responsible for creating the flood waters became frightened by them and "cowered like dogs crouched against the outer wall."

50:39. history of Babylon after 539. After the capture of Babylon by Cyrus of Persia in 539,

the city's native dynasty headed by Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar was eradicated and a Persian administrator was appointed to rule there. Economic texts from the year of the takeover indicate little disruption of trade or normal activity, as the Persians made a smooth transition. Each successive Persian king included among his titles "King of Babylon" and used the city as one of their official residences (according to Xenophon). However, there were periodic revolts in Babylonia that had to be quelled (522-521 and again in 482-481). Fearing future uprisings, Xerxes removed the eighteen-foot golden statue of Marduk and destroyed the Esagila temple. The final insult came when the city was merged with the province of Assyria for political purposes. When Alexander seized the Middle East from Persian rule, Babylon was thrown open to the young conqueror and restoration of the Esagila Temple commenced. The city fared poorly under Alexander's successors. Seleucus had a new city, Seleucia on the Tigris, built north of Babylon. This new city competed with Babylon and in 275 B.C. was declared the royal city. The population of Babylon was forcibly removed to Seleucia, and Babylon became no more than an archaic sacred site. By the first century B.C., its desolation was complete.

50:43. Nabonidus in 540-539. Fearing the approach of the Persians, Nabonidus had returned to Babylon from his Arabian capital at Tema in 543. He gathered the images of the gods from his empire (reported on the Cyrus Cylinder) and for the first time in ten years conducted the New Year's festival honoring the god Marduk. According to his own Chronicles, Nabonidus also restored the temple of his personal god Sin. However, his long absence from the city and the neglect of its priesthood and gods by Nabonidus and his coregent Belshazzar had taken a serious toll. He could not prevent the fall of the city of Babylon. Cyrus advanced against Babylon in 539 B.C. and fought a victorious battle at Opis, about fifty miles north-northeast of Babylon on the Tigris in early October. On the eleventh of October, Sippar (thirty-five miles north of Babylon) surrendered, apparently without a battle. On October 13 the city of Babylon submitted, and the Persian army marched into Babylon peacefully. Persian reports claim that they were welcomed by the local populace and that when Cyrus himself entered the city on October 30, he was proclaimed its liberator. This, however, is standard conqueror's rhetoric and may obscure other facts. Classical sources suggest that after the city was captured, the king was taken away as a hostage and died in Persia.

51:1. Leb Kamai cryptogram. The phrase used here is a form of cryptogram known as an atbash. This literary device exchanges the letters of the intended word with corresponding letters counted from the other end of the alphabet (another example occurs in Jer 25:25-26, where Babylon, *bbl,* is replaced by Sheshak, *shshk).* In English this would require replacing A with Z, B with Y, C with X, etc. Thus New York might be referred to as New Blip. In this passage the name Chaldea is masked by using the consonants *lbqmy* (Leb Kamai) for *ksdym* (Caldea). Possibly this was done because of the dangers involved in speaking the name of the enemy, but more likely it is a form of taunting.

51:8. Balm as medicinal ointment. See the comments on 8:22 and 46:11. Akkadian prescription texts exist that take note of symptoms and provide a list of herbs to be used and instructions on how to administer them. The healing balms or resins Jeremiah refers to, however, may be a taunt of these medicines and a reference to God's healing power.

51:11. Medes. During the eighth and seventh centuries, the Median tribes began to organize as a result of their conflict with the Assyrian empire. Eventually, they were able to form an identifiable kingdom in northwestern Iran. The kingdom of Media, led by their king Cyaxares, then allied itself with the Neo-Babylonians to eliminate the Assyrian empire's last hold on Mesopotamia. This alliance allowed the Medes to expand their territory significantly. The Babylonian Chronicle and Herodotus record most of what is known about the conflict between the Medes and the Persians. It seems to have begun with a revolt by Cyrus against his lord, Astyages, king of Media. Once Cyrus had conquered the Median king in 550, he then was able to take advantage of Media's gains to create a much larger empire for the Persians almost immediately.

51:17. no breath in images. See comment on 10:14. Just as Isaiah taunts those who trust in images made my human hands of wood, gold or silver (see comment on Is 44:17-18), Jeremiah ridicules them as lifeless frauds. This is just the reverse of the Israelite God, whose breath brings humans to life and restores the nation from the "dry bones" of Ezekiel 37:5-10. Mesopotamian rituals to activate a cult image include the mouth-washing ritual, a reenactment of the birth of the deity and the use of holy water to open the mouth and eyes and allow the statue to move, but nothing that is intended explicitly to give it breath.

51:27. Ararat. The geographic region referred to here is Urartu, a large area in eastern Asia Minor

near Lake Van. It united into a kingdom starting in the ninth and continued to appear in Assyrian and Babylonian records until the sixth centuries. Its conflicts with the Assyrians were the result of Urartian attempts to expand to the southwest and enlarge its trading contacts as far as the Mediterranean. During most of the early period of the kingdom the Urartians built many cities, and their manufactured goods were transported as far away as Greece. They were finally overwhelmed by the coalition of Medes and Scythians in a campaign in 585 that swept through their territory. Subsequently their territory was added to the Persian empire.

51:27. Minni. This nation, summoned by Yahweh to punish Babylon, is the Manneans, who lived in the region just south of Lake Urmia in the northern part of western Asia. These people were caught between the territorial and economic ambitions of Urartu and Assyria. Assyrian texts mention them from the early eighth century onward. Because they were allied with Assyria at the time of the Battle of Carchemish in 605, their territory was given to the Medes and was eventually absorbed into the Persian empire.

51:27. Ashkenaz. The Ashkenaz are mentioned as the Ishkuza in the Assyrian Annals of Sargon II and thereafter, and are referred to by Herodotus as the Scythians. They occupied the region around the Black and Caspian Seas in northwestern Iran starting in the eighth century. These horse-riding pastoralists may be the most likely of the three nations to be a real threat to Babylon in the sixth century. They are mentioned in Babylonian and Persian texts as fierce, even savage, fighters, who occasionally allied themselves with the major powers but also raided them quite often. The excavation of their graves shows widespread contact with Near Eastern and Greek sources as well as a native art style known as "animal style."

51:28. Medes. See comment on 51:11.

51:32. river crossings seized. Military objectives always include control of the fords of streams and rivers (see Judg 3:28; 12:5). In this way, communication links are cut and armies can no longer take the most direct route and are prevented from flanking an enemy force. One of the major fords across the Tigris came under the control of the Persians when they took the city of Opis a few weeks before Babylon fell. They took Sippar on the Euphrates just a few days later. By the possession of these two cities the Persians could effectively cut off any supplies coming down either the Tigris or Euphrates. It would have been extremely demoralizing to the Babylonians to hear that they were becoming increasingly isolated from their allies as well as the towns and villages that supplied their food and raw materials. This report might well be compared to the progressively negative reports chronicled in the Lachish Letters during Nebuchadnezzar's 598 campaign in Judah.

51:32. marshes on fire. In addition to the wall systems, towers and other typical defensive installations, Babylon was also protected by a number of ditches and pools, designed to slow or stop enemy advance to the city. Within these pools or bordering them were canebrakes. If these were set on fire, they would have added to the sense of peril for the city's inhabitants, and the smoke would have masked enemy movements and intensified the breathing difficulties of people downwind. The fires would also have flushed out any sentries or advance troops that the Babylonians might have stationed along these water obstructions.

51:41. Sheshach. See comment on 25:26 for this cryptogram.

51:44. Bel. See comment on 50:2 for this divine title.

51:58. walls leveled, gates on fire. The main defenses of an ancient city were the walls and fortified gate area. Babylon had a defensive system consisting of two walls surrounding the city. The inner wall was twenty-one feet thick, while the outer wall was over twelve feet thick. Excavations have been unable to reveal evidence of the gates in the outer wall, but there were nine massive gates built into the inner wall, each with the name of a god. The Ishtar gate has been excavated and restored, and is now in the Berlin Museum. It is decorated with lions and dragons, and gives some idea of the grandeur of the ancient city. These walls and gates were constructed of a combination of stone and mud brick. However, in the gates there would have been rooms that required the use of timber as beams and scaffolding for the movement of troops. When submitted to fire, the stone would weaken and collapse (see Judg 9:42-49). With the walls breached and systematically leveled, and the gates in ruins, the physical and symbolic power of the city would evaporate. In the Persian conquest, however, the city was taken without a fight as the Babylonians submitted peacefully to the Persian army (see comment on 50:43).

52:1-34

The Fall of Jerusalem

52:1-27. the fall of Jerusalem. See comments on 2 Kings 25:1-26.

52:31-34. Jehoiachin. See comments on 2 Kings 25:27-30.

LAMENTATIONS

1:1-22

Despair and Distress: First Acrostic Lament

1:1. acrostics. "Acrostic" is a literary form in which the first letter in consecutive lines form a pattern. In alphabetic acrostics the pattern is the alphabet (the first line begins with the first letter of the alphabet, the second line with the second letter, etc). Other forms of acrostic might spell out a message or a name (for instance of the scribe who composed the work or of the deity being honored). There are a number of acrostics in the book of Psalms. Psalm 119 is the most complex in that each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is represented by eight consecutive lines. All Hebrew acrostics in the Bible are alphabetic acrostics. In Lamentations the first four chapters are all alphabetic acrostics. In chapters one and two each verse begins with the appropriate letter and contains three lines. In chapter three there are three lines that start with each letter. In chapter four each verse starts with the appropriate letter and contains two lines. Chapter five has the appropriate number of verses for an acrostic but does not contain one. The seven examples of acrostics in Mesopotamian literature are name/sentence acrostics (since Akkadian was syllabic, there was no alphabet and therefore no alphabetic acrostics) and generally date to the first half of the first millennium. Egyptian examples offer numerical sequences or complex messages that involve both horizontal and vertical patterns. They are more dependent on puns to accomplish their stylistic objective. Acrostics depend on writing and therefore would not be composed orally. They are intended to be read, not just heard, because of the importance of the visual element. This is especially clear in the Babylonian examples, where a variable sign needs to be read with one value in the poem but with a different value in the acrostic. Some of the Babylonian examples also contain a pattern in the last sign of each line. Another variation is found in those examples where the acrostic is repeated each stanza.

1:3. chronology. Although Judah's deportations had begun a decade earlier, the event that is the focus of the book is the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem, along with the general deportation and exile that occurred in 586 B.C.

1:4. pilgrimage feasts. There were three pilgrimage festivals in the Israelite calendar: the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. Under normal circumstances the roads would be filled with pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem during those times. They were occasions for joy and celebration. In troubled times, few would have taken the risk, and now there was no city or temple to come to.

1:10. pagans in sanctuary. There were very strict regulations about non-Israelites gaining access to the temple courts (see Deut 23). Only priests had any access to the sanctuary, and that was limited. The care taken to preserve the sanctity of God's dwelling place had been frustrated in desecration.

2:1-22

Yahweh's Anger: Second Acrostic Lament

2:1. footstool. The footstool of God's throne

LAMENTS OVER FALLEN CITIES IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

As the fall of Jerusalem became a pivotal point in the history, theology and literature of Israel, the fall of Ur (to an army from the east) at the end of the Ur III Dynasty (about the year 2000) served in the ancient Near East as an illustration of the divine abandonment of a city, resulting in its destruction. The lamentations that memorialize the weeping and the theological reflection on those two great falls are preserved in their respective literatures. Two separate works lament the fall of Ur (known as *The Lament over the Destruction of Ur* and *The Lament over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*). Other city laments exist for Nippur, Uruk, Eridu and Ekimar (though the last three of these are fragmentary). These date to the twentieth century B.C. Unlike the biblical Lamentations, each of the ancient Near Eastern works includes a decision of the gods to restore the city. Literarily they played a role in the attempts to legitimize a new dynasty.

The major theme of these works is that the gods have abandoned the city, thus exposing it to destruction at the hands of the enemy. In poetic detail the distress of the population is described--loss of land and homes, death of loved ones, exile and captivity. This despair is reflected in the wondering questions of why they have been treated in this way by the gods and how long their condition will persist. When explanations are offered, the fall of the city is not blamed on offense but simply reflects the fact that change and the shifting of political power is inevitable.

was the cherished ark of the covenant (see comment on 1 Chron 28:2). As the most sacred relic of their faith, it was considered that which Yahweh would most jealously protect. If even that held no sway, nothing would be guarded from his anger.

2:3. horn. Horns symbolized strength, but they also represented leadership. The latter would fit better with the end of verse 2. It was common in Mesopotamia for kings and gods to wear crowns featuring horns. Sometimes the sets of horns were stacked one upon another in tiers. The winged lion from Ashurnasirpal's palace has a conical crown on its human head with three pairs of tiered horns embossed on it. In the Sumerian *Lament over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* the description of the dismantling of the deity's throne includes the line "Its mighty cows with shining horns were captured, their horns were cut off."

2:8. measuring line of destruction. The measuring line was used to determine the area of landholdings, where boundaries were drawn, and what territory belonged to which landholder (private or city), but none of these explain the connection to the walls and ramparts in this verse. From the use of this metaphor in 2 Kings 21:13 and Isaiah 34:11, it can be assumed that it represents a typical action connected with military conquest. A besieging army would not have the leisure to do such measuring during the battle, so this must refer to the demolition phase. It was rare for city walls to be totally demolished, and from Nehemiah we know that Jerusalem's wall was not totally demolished. However, many sections of wall could have suffered damage due to siege machines, battering rams and sapping operations. Plumb lines would have been used to help determine segments of wall that were no longer stable, and the measuring line would have been used to delineate how much of which sections would need to come down.

2:9. gates and bars. In the Sumerian laments it is the gates and bars of the temple that are thrown down as part of the desecration of the temple. Here it is the city's gates and bars. For further discussion of the functions of bars in the gate structure see comment on Judges 16:3.

2:15. clapping hands. Gestures and body language take on different meanings in different cultures. In current Western society, clapping hands can be used to show appreciation, to summon subordinates or children, to get someone's attention, to accompany music or to express frustration (one clap). There were also several functions in the ancient world. Clapping could be used in praise (Ps 47:1) or applause (2 Kings 11:12), but in these verses a different verb is used. The verb used here designates a gesture of anger or derision (Num 24:10; Job 27:23). Variations may exist in the precise movement involved: compare the different significations in Western culture of (1) striking the palms together parallel to the body on a horizontal plain (applause); (2) slapping the palms together in a roughly vertical movement (frustration); and (3) striking the palms together perpendicular to the body while alternating which hand is on top and which is on bottom (as if knocking the dust off). It is unclear precisely what motion is conveyed here.

2:19. heart poured out like water. Their oppressors clap their hands *(spq kappayim,* v. 15), but here Israel is encouraged to pour out like water *(shpk kammayim)* their hearts. Pouring out water is an act of worship (libation).

2:20. cannibalism. Cannibalism is a standard element of curses in Assyrian treaties of the seventh century. It was the last resort in times of impending starvation. This level of desperation could occur in times of severe famine (as illustrated in the *Atrahasis Epic*) or could be the result of siege (as during Ashurbanipal's siege of Babylon, about 650 B.C.) when the food supply had become depleted, as anticipated in the treaty texts. Siege warfare was common in the ancient world, so this may not have been as rare an occasion as might be presumed.

3:1-66
Hope in God's Faithfulness: Third Acrostic Lament

3:15. bitter herbs and gall. Gall (wormwood) is a bitter-tasting shrub used for medicinal purposes and also occasionally to brew a strong tea. The word translated "bitter herbs" occurs only elsewhere in the Passover passages. It is related to an Akkadian word for lettuce, but since the noun is simply drawn from a word for "bitter" there are numerous other possibilities.

3:16. teeth broken with gravel. The second phrase would suggest that the teeth were broken by shoving the face hard into the gravel rather than forcing someone to chew gravel.

4:1-22
Sin's Results: Fourth Acrostic Lament

4:3. ostriches. There is still controversy over whether "ostrich" is the proper translation of this Hebrew word. Ostriches occur in hunting

scenes in Egyptian paintings as well as on cylinder seals, and inhabited many of the regions of the ancient Near East. The alternative translation preferred by some is "eagle-owl." The ostrich identification would correspond with the inattention to the young attributed to the ostrich (different word) in Job 39:16. Casual observation could make the ostrich appear heartless since it lays its eggs in the sand and often leaves the nest to hunt for food.

4:5. delicacies. With the rarity of this word, it must provisionally be concluded that it refers not to a specific food or dish but generally to the delicacies of any sort that would have graced the royal table.

4:5. nurtured in purple. Again the allusion is to royalty, as the color of the garment indicates. Blue/Purple dye was very expensive (see comment on Num 4:6 and Esther 8:15), and its use was restricted to the ceremonial garments of only the highest ranking civil and religious leaders.

4:10. cannibalism. See comment on 2:20.

4:17. expected help from allies. In 597 when Nebuchadnezzar undertook his punitive raid against Jerusalem, Egypt was the principle ally on whom Judah relied. Later that year, Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah on the throne. He almost immediately began meeting with a coalition of the small western states to stand together against Nebuchadnezzar (see comment on Jer 27:3). In 595 a new pharaoh, Psammeticus II, took the throne of Egypt. He enjoyed an early military success against the Nubians in the south, and one papyrus reports that his success was celebrated with a victory tour in Palestine. There was cause to expect his support against Babylon. It is uncertain which nations were actually part of the alliance when it finally took shape. As it turned out, Egypt's army was routed in its confrontation with the Babylonians in 588 (see Jer 37:5-7), and it would appear, based on Psalm 137:7, that allies such as the Edomites threw their support to Babylon when it became clear that Jerusalem was about to fall.

4:21. Edom's role. Edom had become an Assyrian vassal state in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III and continued under this rule until the death of Ashurbanipal a century later. It is likely that they submitted themselves to Nebuchadnezzar's rule in 605. Although some Judean refugees may have found shelter in Edom, the Edomites apparently remained passive as Jerusalem was destroyed (see Ps 137:7 and Obad 11). The Babylonian campaign against Ammon and Moab in 594 seems not to have affected Edom. It is likely that they remained unscathed until the time of Nabonidus's campaign in 552.

4:21. Uz. Uz, the homeland of Job, is identified with Edom and northwest Arabia in Esau's genealogy (Gen 36:28).

5:1-22

Joy Is Gone: Nonacrostic Lament

5:6. Egypt and Assyria. From the beginning of the seventh century, Judah had been under Assyrian control. Manasseh was a loyal vassal for most of his fifty-five years. During the time of Josiah, Judah experienced a glimpse of independence as the mantle was shifting from Assyria to Babylon. During that interim, Egypt began to exercise more control in the region. Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, had been put on the throne by the Egyptians in 609 and remained loyal to them until Nebuchadnezzar's domination made that impossible. After the fall of Ashkelon to Nebuchadnezzar in 604 Jehoiakim paid tribute to Babylon for a few years. But when Nebuchadnezzar failed in his attempted invasion of Egypt in 601, Jehoiakim again sided with Egypt and stopped sending the yearly tribute east. Thus in 597 when Nebuchadnezzar undertook his punitive raid against Jerusalem, Egypt was the principal ally on whom Judah relied. It can fairly be said then that Judah had been totally dependent on Egypt and Assyria—and that goes back a century or more.

5:12. princes hung by their hands. The Hebrew text is ambiguous regarding whether the princes are hung "at the hands of the enemy" or are hung "suspended from their own hands." There is no precedent for the latter. Hanging implies execution and was generally used after the execution had taken place. Victims were usually hung by being impaled. The practice was most commonly used on rebellion leaders or members of the royal house (1 Sam 31:10). The practice of impaling the bodies of their defeated enemies was commonly used by armies in the ancient Near East. For instance, the Assyrians considered it a psychological ploy and a terror tactic (as depicted on the walls of their royal palaces). See also the comment on Esther 2:23.

5:13. toiling at millstones. Grinding grain into flour was usually done with millstones and was the job of the lowest members of society. One of the basic "appliances" of any ancient household would have been the handmill (called a saddle quern) with two stones for grinding: a lower stone with a concave surface and a loaf-shaped upper stone. The daily chore of grinding grain into flour involved sliding the upper stone over the

grain spread on the lower stone. Larger milling houses often served as prison workhouses in Mesopotamia, but each prisoner still used a handmill for grinding. The large rotary mill that could be powered by donkey or slave labor was not invented until after the Old Testament period. The palace at Ebla had a room containing sixteen handmills inferred to be a place where prisoners ground grain. Grinding houses would include prisoners of war, criminals and those who had defaulted on their debts.

5:13. loads of wood. Wood was a constant necessity for keeping the fires of the kitchens supplied. Palace, temple and the upper class employed the services of slave labor to man the system. Even children were capable of helping transport and distribute the wood.

5:16. crown. Crowns are worn by royalty as a symbol of their status and authority. As a result the word was extended to refer to the abstract concept of the dignity and honor that are the natural accompaniment of status and authority. In this passage the reference is not to an actual crown that Israel wore but to the dignity and honor.

EZEKIEL

1:1-28

The Chariot Throne Vision

1:1-2. chronology. The fifth year of Jehoiachin's reign would have been the year 593 B.C., at the end of the month of July (the fourth month). This chronology takes into account Jehoiachin's accession to Judah's throne during the siege of Jerusalem, which according to the Babylonian Chronicle began in November/December 598. There has been a great deal of speculation regarding the meaning of "in the thirtieth year," because 593 is not the thirtieth year of anything. A common suggestion is that this simply refers to Ezekiel's own birth date and qualifies him to speak on these matters since he has officially reached the age required for admission into the working priesthood (Num 4:30).

1:1. Kebar River. Rather than being an actual river, the Kebar was a canal that diverged from the Euphrates River north of Babylon and continued for sixty miles southeast until it rejoined the Euphrates near Erech. The network of irrigation and transport canals was known as the "waters of Babylon" (Ps 137:1). It served as a means of extending the arable land of southern Mesopotamia and provided water to small settlements along its course (see comment on 3:15).

1:1. apocalyptic visions. Apocalyptic literature is characterized by visions filled with the imagery associated with God's manifold powers as creator. A divine messenger usually interprets the message that is conveyed to the prophet (see Rev 1:1-3). There are some pieces of Akkadian literature that show prototypes of some of the characteristics of biblical apocalyptic, but nothing that is very close (for closest connection see sidebar on Akkadian apocalypses at Dan 11). Apocalyptic literature is most recognizable in its use of rich symbolism that draws heavily on mythological motifs. In prophetic literature the symbols are rarely interpreted. Often the visions themselves do not symbolically represent a foretold happening but serve as occasions for a message concerning what God is going to do. Most scholars now consider Ezekiel's prophetic visions as being influential on later apocalyptic literature (see Dan 7—12 and Zech 8—14). For instance, his vision of God enthroned in a shining chariot has been incorporated into Daniel 10:5-6 and the pseudepigraphal *1 Enoch* 14:18.

1:2. Jehoiachin's exile. Along with most of the royal court and many of the influential or wealthy members of Judean society, Jehoiachin was taken into exile when Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar's army in 597 (see 2 Kings 24:8-17). Babylonian ration lists include mention of quantities of oil being supplied to the "king of Judah" along with other high-ranking prisoners of war and dependents of the royal household. Eventually, in 561 B.C., during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's successor, Amel-Marduk (the biblical Evil-Merodach), Jehoiachin was freed from his imprisonment (probably house arrest) and allowed the freedom of the king's court (see 2 Kings 25:27-30). He died in exile, bringing an official end to the Judean monarchy.

1:3. exilic community. The exilic community, of which Ezekiel was a member, was a relatively small group in 593 B.C.—perhaps ten

thousand persons. However, looking at Nebuchadnezzar's list of deportees in 2 Kings 24:14-16, it would appear that they comprised the military, political and religious leaders as well as craftsmen who could be employed in the Babylonian king's numerous building projects. The trained soldiers were also probably pressed into service in the Babylonian army. It was only after 587 that a large portion of Judah's population joined their fellows in Mesopotamia. This policy of deporting hostages and large segments of a rebellious nation was widely used by both the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The Babylonian practice of settling the exiles in self-contained villages is demonstrated in texts from Nippur. While it was a traumatic event for the people of Judah, they were encouraged to settle into their new situation (see Jer 29:4-23). Textual evidence from the Persian period (fifth century B.C. Murashu texts) suggests that they followed this advice, starting businesses, working farms and creating an identity for themselves in exile.

1:4. elements of theophany. A theophany consists of a manifestation of God's presence to a human (see the classic example in the Sinai theophany of Moses in Ex 3). This may occur in person, although God's person is never actually described in any detail, and there is always a great sense of dread on the part of the human involved (see Gen 28:16-17; 32:24-30). Fear is generated by the power evidenced in God's "glory" *(kabod),* a divine attribute also found in Mesopotamian epics (there called *melammu).* The purpose of a theophany is often to call a human to serve the deity. Thus Elijah, although already serving Yahweh as a prophet, is called to greater tasks during his meeting with God on Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19). The major prophets each have a theophany that marks the beginning of their ministry. For instance, Isaiah's vision (Is 6) encompasses the Jerusalem temple and harks back to Moses' experience, and Jeremiah's call narrative has coronation overtones (Jer 1). In Ezekiel's case the appearance of God is described as overwhelming and mysterious. There are symbols of God's power implicit in the divine chariot, the accompanying creatures and the dominance of all of nature's forces. Naturally, once chosen, prophets must ultimately accept their mission, although they generally try to provide excuses.

1:5. winged, upright creatures as throne guardians in ancient Near East. There are numerous examples from ancient Near Eastern art of winged creatures with human faces, especially from the Assyrian palaces and temples of Nimrud and Nineveh, but most of these are quadrupeds. Among these are the massive guardian figures uncovered in the remains of the Nimrud palace of the Assyrian king Sennacherib. One is a winged bull with a human head, and the other has the body of a lion with a human face. Ashurnasirpal's palace at Kalhu contains figures of this type strategically placed at the entrance to palaces and temples and in throne rooms. Their huge size (eight feet high) was designed to intimidate all who entered. Syro-Phoenician art contains similar images of winged sphinxes (lion's body, eagle's wings and human head). Upright (biped) composites are less attested. Four-winged, eagle-headed human figures are portrayed in the Ninurta temple at Nimrud. Achaemenid Persian iconography depicts upright creatures that have four wings, human heads and bull legs and hooves.

1:6, 10. four-faced creatures. There does not seem to be any exact Near Eastern parallels to these multifaced creatures. Though eagle, bull and lion faces are all common on composite creatures (in fact, these are the only beasts so featured in Mesopotamian art), there are few examples of multiple faces on the same creature. One example exists that has a lion head with a human head perched on top of it. Only the far-removed Roman god Janus provides an attenuated model, with one face looking forward and one backward. The purpose of these creatures is also multifaceted. By being able to look in all four directions, the creatures serve the same function as the wheels of the chariot (v. 17), which could travel in any of the four directions. Both represent the power of the deity to be present anyway and to be aware of all events on earth. In addition, the animal bodies represented here (lion, eagle, bull/ox) all have parallels in Near Eastern art, and each symbolizes specific powers or attributes that signify the omnipotence of God: the lion indicates strength (2 Sam 1:23); the eagle indicates speed and gracefulness (Is 40:31); the ox indicates fertility (Ps 106:19-20).

1:15-18. wheel technology. Naturally a chariot with wheels facing all four directions could not travel effectively in any direction. However, the purpose of the image is found in its symbolic value of attention to all of the corners of the world—God's omnipresence. In addition, the chariot is actually upheld on the outstretched wings of God's four-faced creatures and flies through the air. There is, however, a sense of motion implicit in having the wheels in place. This is based on a comparison with the winged-bull figures that guarded entranceways in Assyrian palaces. Many of them

have a fifth leg to suggest that though the figure is frozen in the relief, it is actually dynamic and in motion. Assyrian art also provides examples of wheeled chariots with high rims and multiple spokes that may be the origin of this image in Ezekiel. The wheels sometimes feature thick rims made up of concentric bands, as well as spokes. The depiction of a "wheel within a wheel" may thus represent greater stability for the chariot, as multiple axles and tires do for modern trucks. The description of "eyes" within the wheels finds its explanation in Babylonian terminology where the word "eyes" is used for oval gems. Semiprecious stones were embedded in the rims to sparkle and dazzle onlookers.

1:22. expanse over the heads. Above the heads of the four creatures is a platform sparkling like crystal or ice. Ancient Near Eastern glyptic art and sculpture contain images of winged creatures holding up a pillar, a throne or a platform. For instance, in the seventh-century Assyrian palace at Nineveh, miniature sphinxes served as column bases. Similarly, a twelfth-century Phoenician wheeled cult stand depicts a human-faced, lion-bodied, winged figure. Its wings and head appear to be holding up one side of the stand. More significantly, first-millennium Mesopotamian texts speak of three levels of the heavens, each of which feature pavements of different colored stone. The lower heavens are said to have a platform of jasper, usually associated with a glassy, translucent or opaque appearance. In these texts the pavement of the middle heavens is lapis lazuli (see comment on Ex 24:10) and holds up the dais of the god Bel (Marduk).

1:26. throne chariot. Since the gods in the ancient Near East often participated in processions, there were vehicles used for their transport. Engraved cylinder seals from the end of the third millennium show a deity standing in a four-wheeled chariot/cart drawn by a composite quadruped with a lion's head and wings. Assyrian reliefs show wheeled thrones for both kings and gods that also feature poles for bearers to use to carry the throne.

1:26-28. appearance of throne and figure. The dazzling character of this vision can only be compared to a rainbow or a fiery visage. This would be in keeping with the Mesopotamian concept of *melammu* ("clothed with power") as it regularly appears in the description of Mesopotamian gods (for instance, Marduk in the *Enuma Elish* creation story). In Mesopotamian texts of this general period, a platform in the middle heavens made of lapis lazuli (a better interpretation of the word translated sapphire in v. 26) supports a cella and dais of Bel. The cella is said to shine with the appearance of glass and crystal. The description of the elements of this vision conform to the conventions of the motifs familiar in Mesopotamia.

2:1—3:15
Ezekiel's Call

2:6. briers, thorns and scorpions. Call narratives for prophets generally follow a set pattern. When the chosen prophet makes excuses and shows apprehension, God provides reassurances (see Jer 1:7-8). In Ezekiel's case the use of unusual terms (these particular words translated briers and thorns appear only in Ezekiel) is somewhat confusing. However, what may be implied is that God is building a protective wall around the prophet made of stinging thorns. It has been plausibly suggested that "scorpion" here refers to a type of bush rather than the stinging creature.

3:1-3. eating a scroll. The imagery associated with Ezekiel eating the scroll presented to him by God is part of his call narrative and his acceptance of his mission. The words on the scroll must be internalized. They are also empowering in much the same way that God's touching Jeremiah's mouth empowered him to speak his prophecies (Jer 1:9). There are no direct ancient Near Eastern parallels. It is possible that consuming a piece of parchment or papyrus with an incantation or the name of a god was part of the ritual practices of either Egypt or Mesopotamia. The term *asakku,* meaning "set aside for the gods" or taboo, is used in the Mari texts and other Old Babylonian texts in reference to not "consuming" what belongs to the gods.

3:9. imagery of hard forehead. Comparison with Akkadian usage of the same term suggests that Ezekiel's forehead is being compared with the hardest of stones. It is unlikely to be a diamond since there is no attestation of diamonds in the ancient Near East for another century after Ezekiel.

3:14. transported by the spirit. In Hebrew the word for spirit can also mean wind. As early as Sumerian usage the word for wind/spirit was also used in connection with dreams and visions. The god of dreams was named "the winds." In Akkadian the name of the god who brought dreams was Zaqiqu, which is derived from the word for wind/spirit. Additionally, in a dream or vision, it was believed that the "spirit" of the person arises and may move around. In later literature the pseude-

pigraphal book of *1 Enoch* describes the antediluvian patriarch being transported by angels to the garden of Eden, where he served as a "watcher" of the doings of humanity and recorded them in a book.

3:15. Tel Abib. Technically, the name Tel Abib (Babylonian *til abubi)* means a place created by the flotsam and jetsam of a flood. A "tell" is the term used for any ruined city site. Thus the exiled families of Judah might have been set in a place that had been destroyed, either by war or flood, and expected to rebuild it and bring the Nippur area on the canal Kebar back into production. There is also an excellent dual meaning, since the people of Judah had been swept here by the tide of Babylonia's military victory.

3:16-27

Ezekiel the Watchman

3:22-26. results of Yahweh's hand (mute). Some have suggested physical ailments, from aphasia to schizophrenia, as the cause of Ezekiel's problems. Several commentators have also suggested either a conscious decision on Ezekiel's part to limit his role as mediator between the people and God, or a divine restriction on his speech (either one being divinely imposed). Ezekiel's experience is comparable to that described in Akkadian incantation texts, which speak of being "touched by a god" and struck dumb. This material would have been familiar to the prophet and provided him with an excellent parallel to the nature of his prophetic state rather than a physical diagnosis. The sense of paralysis (cf. 4:8) and the inability to speak were well-known symptoms of supernatural overpowerment in the ancient world. Incantations sought to impose such conditions, and demonic oppression was characterized by them. In one piece of Babylonian wisdom literature *(Ludlul Bel Nemeqi),* an individual who cannot understand why he is suffering describes his condition as including his lips being struck dumb and his arms and legs being stiff and paralyzed. His suffering is all attributed to the "heavy hand of Marduk."

4:1—5:17

Sign-Act Prophecies of Coming Destruction

4:1. sign acts. In the Mari texts from over a millennium earlier than Ezekiel, prophets were already using symbolic actions and wordplays as a medium for their prophetic message. In one instance a prophet devoured a raw lamb to announce an imminent danger that could devour the land. Forms of street theater are employed by Isaiah (Is 20—traveling naked) and Jeremiah (Jer 19—execration ritual following a procession) to engage their audience and demonstrate through their actions how serious the threat is to the people.

4:1. clay tablets used for maps. While it is rare to find a clay tablet that contains a map image, there is a Kassite period (fifteenth century B.C.) map of the city of Nippur. It shows canals radiating from the Euphrates River and suggests that these water channels into neighborhoods divided the city. The map shows two parallel lines and indicates three gates and the city walls. Temples and storehouses also are marked on the drawing. A world map was found near the site of Sippar dating to the seventh century B.C. A river surrounds the circular disk of the world, and mountains are drawn at the top of the image. Babylon, Assyria and other cities, regions and nations are identified on the map.

4:2. siege strategies. All of the strategies described here are typical of Assyrian and Babylonian siege engines and techniques. They are often depicted on palace walls in Nineveh and Babylon. See the comments on Jeremiah 6:6 and Isaiah 29:2 for siege works and ramps. Battering rams are sometimes attached to portable towers that are wheeled up to city walls or gates. The glacis, a slope built diagonally against the wall, was constructed to prevent effective use of the ram. Camps were erected all around a city to prevent the escape of the inhabitants. One of the most graphic examples of this still in existence is the remains of the Roman camps built all around the fortress of Masada during the revolt of A.D. 70.

4:3. function of iron pans. The Israelites baked their bread and prepared grain offerings on griddles laid over an open fire or placed into an earthen oven. The rich would have been able to afford copper or iron griddles, while the poor would have used ceramic disks.

4:3. symbolism of iron wall. Iron in earlier periods was counted among the precious metals. Although more commonly used in the sixth century B.C., it still would have been considered a prized object because of its strength and durability. Since Ezekiel is directing the symbolic siege, he must represent God. The iron wall is then understood to be the barrier between God and the people of Jerusalem. It signals that they may expect no help in the coming siege from the Divine Warrior Yahweh.

4:9. ingredients of bread. The items listed

here from which Ezekiel is to make his loaf of bread include some common grains (durum wheat, barley and emmer wheat). These grains were part of the diet of all the peoples of the ancient Near East, and there are cognate words in Akkadian and Ugaritic for each of them. Millet is a summer grain. The unusual items in this recipe are beans and lentils. While these vegetables were used for soups and occasionally ground up and mixed with wheat to make a crude bread, that would have been unusual. D. Block suggests plausibly that Ezekiel's mixture is symbolic of a siege bread made from whatever could be scraped from the bottom of all of the food bins.

4:10. amount of food. The fact that Ezekiel's food has to be weighed out and eaten at a particular time signals that this is the hard rationing that would have been necessary during a siege. Twenty shekels would be equivalent to eight ounces of food. That amount of calories would keep him alive, but it would also significantly weaken him. The weakness of a starvation diet mirrors conditions in Jerusalem.

4:11. amount of water. Water rationing would also be necessary during the siege, since the people would be dependent on the supply in cisterns (see the comment on Jer 38:6) and the pool deriving from the Siloam tunnel. Ezekiel's ration is one-sixth of a hin or two-thirds of a quart per day. The extremely hot conditions during the summer and fall of 588 would have severely taxed the besieged people of Jerusalem. Such a small water ration would have further contributed to their misery.

4:12, 15. fuel for fire. The typical fuel in areas like Mesopotamia and Palestine was dried animal dung or cakes made from the waste pulp of crushed olives. Trees were too precious to be cut for cooking and warming. Ezekiel, however, is horrified when God commands him to cook using human dung, an unclean substance that must be buried away from human habitation (Deut 23:12-14). He was a priest and this act would defile him; he simply cannot bring himself to obey. Thus God compromises by allowing him to cook over animal dung.

5:1. sword as razor. A sword would have been an awkward instrument to shave the beard and head. Though "sword" is the usual translation of this Hebrew word, it can be used for other sharp implements, including axes, daggers and chisels (cf. 26:9 and Josh 5:2). In Ugaritic, an implement described by this word is used to carve roast meat. A general-purpose translation like "blade" would be preferable. The choice of this word may have been dictated by the desired reference to the use of the sword by the Babylonians to shame and conquer Jerusalem.

5:2. use of hair in offerings. Cutting or shaving the hair is most often associated with rituals of mourning (see comment on Is 15:2). However, when a Nazirite vow has been completed, the law commands that the hair that has been dedicated during the period of the vow is to be cut and placed as a sacrifice in the fire (Num 6:18). In ancient thinking, hair (along with blood) was one of the main representatives of a person's life essence. As such it was often an ingredient in sympathetic magic. This is evident, for instance, in the practice of sending along a lock of the presumed prophet's hair when the prophecies were sent to the king of Mari. The hair would be used in divination to determine whether the prophet's message would be accepted as valid.

5:10. cannibalism. One of the terrible results of a long siege of a walled city was food shortage. It sometimes became so severe that the inhabitants of the city restored to cannibalism (see comment on 2 Kings 6:29). For instance, the Assyrian annals of Ashurbanipal describe his siege of Babylon 650-648 B.C. and the desperation of the starving people who were reduced to cannibalism. There are also a number of Mesopotamian treaties that contain a curse that calls for the violator of the treaty to feed on his own family or his own people (as in the Ashurnirari V's treaty with Mati'ilu of Arpad). Biblical versions of this type of curse can be found in Leviticus 26:29 and Deuteronomy 28:53-57.

5:17. famine and wild beasts. These two punishments are related only as part of a typical group of punishments that deity is inclined to send (two more, plague and bloodshed, occur in the second half of the verse). As early as the Gilgamesh Epic in Mesopotamia, the god Ea had reprimanded Enlil for not sending lions to ravage the people rather than using something as dramatic as a flood. The gods used wild beasts along with disease, drought and famine to reduce the human population. A common threat connected to negative omens in the Assyrian period was that lions and wolves would rage through the land. In like manner, devastation by wild animals was one of the curses invoked for treaty violation (see also Deut 32:24).

6:1—7:27
Prophecies of Judgment Against Israel

6:3. high places. See the comment on 1 Sam-

uel 9:12 for these local places of worship often associated with Canaanite or false religious practices.

6:5. bones scattered around altars. There are three significances that combine to give this action meaning. The first concerns the exposure of the corpses of the dead. For the importance of proper burial, see the comments on Joshua 8:29 and 1 Kings 16:4. The second concerns desecration of the holy sites. In Israelite thinking, contact with the dead rendered someone or something unclean. Sacred sites could therefore be permanently contaminated if they were made repositories for that which was unclean (see comment on 2 Kings 10:27). The third significance concerns assigning responsibility for the fate of the Israelites who have perished. Their death is on the heads of these idols and altars that did nothing to save them. For yet one more significance, see the comment on verse 13.

6:11. body language. Gestures and body language take on different meanings in different cultures. In current Western society, clapping hands can be used to show appreciation, to summon subordinates or children, to get someone's attention, to accompany music or to express frustration (one clap). There were also several functions in the ancient world. Clapping could be used in praise (Ps 47:1) or applause (2 Kings 11:12), or as a gesture of anger or derision (Num 24:10; Job 27:23). Variations may exist in the precise movement involved: compare the different significations in western culture of (1) striking the palms together parallel to the body on a horizontal plain (applause); (2) slapping the palms together in a roughly vertical movement (frustration); and (3) striking the palms together perpendicular to the body while alternating which hand is on top and which is on bottom (as if knocking the dust off). Ezekiel is instructed by God to perform a series of symbolic gestures (clapping, stomping his foot and uttering an exclamation) that display God's wrath. Stomping one's foot is often a sign of frustration or anger, as in the Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat. In that tale the hero refuses to give his bow to the goddess Anat, telling her hunting weapons are for men. She is so angry that she violently stamps her foot and goes off in a rush to seek revenge from the gods. The exclamation (NIV: "Alas") that is used indicates that someone will get what's coming to them ("you'll be sorry!"), reinforcing this scene of impending divine punishment.

6:13. slain around altars (provided no sanctuary). False altars can offer no right of sanctuary. Just as God scoffs at those who put their trust in other gods as if in a rock of "refuge," (Deut 32:37), now Yahweh denies them the safety ordinarily extended to those who approach or grab hold of the altar (compare 1 Kings 1:50-51).

6:13. spreading tree and leafy oak. The degree to which idolatry has spread is emphasized in this reference to cultic shrines beneath the branches of every spreading oak (see the comment on Deut 12:2-3 on Canaanite "outdoor shrines"). Hosea 4:13 also uses this image of hilltop and leafy glade as places of idol worship.

6:14. desert to Diblah. The geographic range here, like the more familiar "from Dan to Beersheba," expresses God's ability to punish the Israelites from one end to the other of their territory. The desert refers to the wilderness around Beersheba. Diblah appears in the Septuagint and is a variant of Riblah, which was in the land of Syro-Hamath just south of Kadesh (2 Kings 23:33). Its mention here may refer to the city's use by Nebuchadnezzar. It was the headquarters for his army's campaign during his siege of Jerusalem in 588-586 B.C.

7:2. four corners. The idea of the whole earth is implied by this reference to the "four corners" of the land. A similar expression is found in Malachi 1:11 and the royal Phoenician inscription of Azitiwadda (730-710 B.C.) from Karatepe. These texts express universal rule and power by referring to the land "from sunrise to sunset." The Assyrian annals of Shalmaneser III state that the "totality of the countries" have been placed in his hands. The phrase used here and elsewhere in Assyrian texts, as in Ezekiel, refers to the four corners of the earth as the king's domain.

7:13. seller will not recover land. The extent of the doom pronounced upon the nation is such that even the Jubilee year will not be celebrated (see the comment on Lev 25:8-55). Ordinarily, property that had been sold to satisfy debts could be redeemed during the Jubilee, thereby restoring the grants of lands that were first made after the conquest (the Code of Hammurabi contain similar clauses regarding redemption of land). Now the "divine lease" has been revoked, and there will be no economic advantage for buyer or seller in the age of destruction to come.

7:18. sackcloth. Sackcloth, one of the traditional signs of mourning and repentance, was made of goat or camel hair and was coarse and uncomfortable. In many cases the sackcloth was only a loin covering. This custom

not only set a person aside with a mark of separation from normal life, but as the sackcloth chaffed the skin, it also served as a continual reminder of the pain of loss.

7:18. shaved heads. Although this practice is condemned in Deuteronomy 14:1 (perhaps as part of the ancestor cult—see the comment on Deut 14:1-2), shaving the head as a sign of mourning was very common (see Job 1:20 and Jer 48:37). It also occurs as part of the purification ritual for the diseased (Lev 14:8-9) and in the law of the Nazirite (Num 6:9). In Mesopotamia shaving off half the hair was used as a punishment intended to bring public humiliation.

7:23. chains. Captives are usually depicted in Egyptian and Mesopotamian art bound in chains. This is the case in a relief found in the Ramesseum at Thebes picturing Asiatic, Ethiopian and central African captives being paraded before Rameses II. A similar scene of captive Canaanite and Philistine prisoners is carved into the wall of the mortuary temple of Rameses III at Medinet Habu.

7:24. sanctuaries desecrated. Mention of the desecration of the temple in Jerusalem (Ps 74:7) and of Josiah's systematic destruction of the high places throughout his domain and at Bethel (2 Kings 24:8-15) indicates that sanctuaries were not safe from the hand of avenging or crusading rulers. Ancient texts from Old Babylonian Mari and the Persian period Cyrus Cylinder describe the destruction of temples and the taking of sacred images as "hostages." In Ezekiel's vision the false altars and shrines erected by the Israelites will now be swept away and destroyed by an avenging God.

7:26. vision, law, counsel as means of deliverance. The prophetic vision offered a message from God that might at times bring encouragement or hope of deliverance. The priest's instruction here is possibly ritual instruction intended to point the way toward appeasing divine wrath. The counsel of the elders was believed to be a channel for divine wisdom leading to proper decisions. In a time of upheaval and destruction, the land is left without direction from God or regarding God. All of the traditional means of providing guidance are lost or ineffective (see these groups of counselors in Jer 26:7-17). Just as the *Visions of Neferti,* a twentieth-century B.C. Egyptian seer, describe how "officials no longer administer the land" and "those who could speak have been expelled," now Judah faces a future without the counsel needed to plan and make decisions (compare Saul's dilemma in 1 Sam 28:6).

8:1—11:25

Transported to Jerusalem in a Vision

8:1. chronology. Fourteen months after his initial vision calling him to serve as a prophet, Ezekiel now experiences a new vision that will dramatically demonstrate the decadence of Jerusalem's religious state. Based on the calendar used for Ezekiel 1:1, the date of this vision would be September 17-18, 592 B.C.

8:2. figure of metal and fire. A divine apparition that confronts Ezekiel is similar in its brilliance to the one in his call narrative (Ezek 1:26-27). In both instances he uses qualifiers and the combination of blinding fire and shining metal or electrum. It is the magnificence of God's or a divine messenger's glory that is being conveyed here. This follows the pattern of the dangerous nature of contact with the divine found throughout ancient Near Eastern literature (see the comment on Ezek 1:26-28).

8:3. transported in visions. Since Ezekiel will not physically leave the exile, it is necessary for him to be transported in a vision to Jerusalem, where he can witness the city's abominations. There is little in the literature of the ancient Near East to provide information on visions or visionary experiences. In one interesting text, *A Vision of the Netherworld* (seventh century), an Assyrian prince sees Nergal, king of the netherworld, seated on his throne, with lightning flashing from him. The text does not say how the prince was transported, but it does mention that he is dragged by his hair to Nergal. A parallel to spiritual transport might be found in the Mesopotamian hero Adapa's appearance before the divine assembly. His patron god, Ea, causes him to "take the road to heaven," and Adapa has the opportunity to gaze from that vantagepoint "from the horizon of heaven to the zenith of heaven."

8:3-16. temple complex topography. The rectangular temple structure (facing east) is surrounded by a walled inner courtyard. Outside of this wall is the outer courtyard. The wall is lined with chambers used for various purposes. Ezekiel first is set down in his vision outside the north gate leading from the outer courtyard into the inner court. From this outer courtyard, Ezekiel could look through the gate at the altar that dominated the inner courtyard. The gates leading into the temple precincts were added after Solomon's original construction of the temple (2 Kings 15:35). The hole near the gateway (v. 7) area may have led into one of those chambers lining the courtyard wall, perhaps a storage room that had been transformed into a shrine where the sev-

enty elders stood in their own separate niches and worshiped idolatrous images. The next scene (v. 14) is outside a gate in the same wall further to the west, where women would be allowed. Then at verse 16 Ezekiel is led into the inner court of the temple where he will view a further abomination in the area between the porch of the temple and the altar.

8:5. idol of jealousy. The image of Asherah that Manasseh set up in the temple complex is referred to in a similar way (2 Chron 33:7, 15). Though this should not be considered the same image, it could easily be another Asherah. This is further suggested by the fact that the word used for "image" here is an unusual one that is thought to be a loan word from Phoenician or Canaanite. According to the second commandment of the Decalogue, any image that was the object of worship would provoke Yahweh's jealousy.

8:10. wall decorations as objects of worship. The text specifies these as images carved in relief on the walls. This art form was well known in Assyria and Babylon. Verse 12 additionally suggests that each of the seventy was worshiping in front of a separate niche where an image was engraved. The fact that these carvings were of animals suggests some connection to Egyptian mortuary practices. Animals were not typically the objects of worship in Canaanite or Mesopotamian practice. But the Egyptians used apotropaic rituals to ward off various creatures from the tombs of their ancestors, and incense was used throughout the ancient Near East in apotropaic contexts. The decoration of the walls of houses in Mesopotamia with images of ants and cockroaches may also have been apotropaic.

8:14. mourning for Tammuz. Like other fertility-oriented "dying gods," the Sumerian demigod Tammuz spent part of the year in the underworld (representing the dry, unproductive seasons) and then came back to life during the time of rains, planting and harvesting. The Mesopotamian ritual that formed part of his worship begged the gods to restore Tammuz and the land's fertility. It included a series of laments (based on those initiated in the epic story by his wife Inanna and his mother and sister). The women who performed these laments would wail and shed tears (a symbolic gesture of the need for rain). The fact that Ezekiel describes women performing this ritual before the gates of the temple in Jerusalem may reflect either the adoption of this fertility god as a substitute for Yahweh or wailing for Yahweh as a dying and rising fertility god using Tammuz lamentation liturgy. This adds a Mesopotamian heresy to the Canaanite- and Egyptian-style heresies in the two previous scenes.

8:16. sun worship. Evidence of official sun worship in ancient Israel seems to be tied primarily to the reign of Manasseh**.** The horses and chariots of the sun that he set up were destroyed by Josiah when he attempted to cleanse the temple complex of foreign religious influence (see comment on 2 Kings 23:11). Place names such as Beth Shemesh, Ein Shemesh and Mount Heres (Josh 15:7; Judg 1:35) also attest to the popularity of sun worship. Perhaps it is not coincidental that the chapter is dated to the time of the autumn equinox when the sun would be at the angle to shine directly into the temple at sunrise. While Egypt, Canaan and Mesopotamia all had sun gods (Amun-Re, Shemesh and Shamash respectively), it is more likely that this is syncretistic worship of Yahweh as a sun god. This would complete the series of scenes that portrayed Canaanite worship (v. 5), Egyptian worship (v. 10-11), Mesopotamian worship (v. 14) and syncretistic worship of Yahweh (v.16).

8:17. branch to the nose. There is an Akkadian expression *(laban appi)* that refers to a gesture of humility used to come contritely before deity with a petition. When this act is portrayed in art, the worshiper has his hand positioned in front of his nose and mouth, and is sometimes shown with a short cylindrical object in his hand. From the Sumerian tale called *Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living* there is some evidence that what is held is a small branch cut off a living tree. This would suggest that in Ezekiel the people are putting on a show of humility. It must be admitted, however, that these connections are very hazy and the significance may lie somewhere else entirely.

9:2. six slaughterers. While there is an obvious parallel between this vision of divinely directed executioners and the "Destroyer" in the Passover narrative (Ex 12:23), the motif of seven destroyers is best exemplified in the eighth-century Neo-Babylonian *Myth of Erra and Ishum.* In this ancient poem the god Anu begets seven deities (Sebitti, associated with Pleiades) and gives them to Erra to serve "as his fierce weapons." These merciless beings spare no one, killing all in their directed path and thus functioning as the tools of chaos and violence. The poem, like Ezekiel's vision, provides a religious explanation for the destruction and humiliation of a major city (Babylon), but here there are only six rather than seven, the seventh having been replaced by a scribe (see next entry).

9:2. record-keeper. The motif of a divine

record-keeper is found in the Gilgamesh Epic where Belet-Seri kneels before Ereshkigal (the queen of the underworld in Akkadian belief) and reads out the names of mortals who will die. But the scribal writing kit carried by the man here would evoke the image of Nabu, the god of scribes and scribe of the gods. Nabu was one of the most popular Babylonian gods of the period, as is demonstrated by his appearance in many of the names (e.g., Nebuchadnezzar). He is the one who keeps the accounts on the tablet of life, just as the scribal personage here in Ezekiel is doing.

9:2. writing kit. The ancient scribe typically carried a writing case that would serve as a palette when he was writing and also stored his pens and containers of ink (usually both black and red ink). In this passage, the term used for the writing kit included an Egyptian loan word *(qeset)* that identified it as a particular style of palette, with slots for the pens and two hollowed-out places to store ink. These palettes appear in numerous Egyptian tomb paintings. The pen was a rush or reed cut to a point that could serve as brush or point depending on the shape of the letter being drawn. Ink was made from a mixture of carbon and gum. Red ink had iron oxide added to produce the color needed for rubrics or the lines on the scroll. Completing his kit would be a knife to sharpen his pens (Jer 36:23).

9:2. bronze altar. The bronze altar was part of the furnishings of the original temple complex created by Solomon (see comment on 2 Chron 4:1). It had sat in front of the temple "between the new altar and the temple," and had then been moved to the north side to make room for the idolatrous altar erected by Ahaz (2 Kings 16:14).

9:3. glory of the Lord above the cherubim. There is an association between God's "glory" and the ark of the covenant as early as the Samuel narratives (see comment on 1 Sam 4:3-4). In Ezekiel God's presence is tied to the "glory"—a physical manifestation that also plays on the image presented of the ark of God enthroned between the wings of the cherubim (for the iconography of the ark, see comment on Ex 25:10-22).

9:4. marks on the forehead. The action of the scribe conjures up several parallels. The mark is the Hebrew letter *taw,* the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which was used as a signature in some periods of Israelite history (Job 31:35). In the script used during Old Testament times it was either an X shape or a + shape. It may represent God's ownership of the remnant of the people who deserved to survive the coming destruction (a sentiment also expressed in the Egyptian *Visions of Neferti*). Jewish tradition continued to employ this sign as a mark of the righteous from the Dead Sea Scrolls, through the intertestamental period and into rabbinic traditions. Certainly, marking those who will survive God's wrath is comparable to the blood on the doorpost during the Exodus event (Ex 12:11). The same mark used in Ezekiel was early associated with the blood mark on the doorposts at Passover, but its resemblance to a cross made that connection unpopular among the rabbis in the post-Christian era.

10:1. throne of sapphire (lapis lazuli). The mention of God's throne is a reiteration of 1:26. At least since Roman times, based on the writings of Pliny, *sapphire* has actually denoted lapis lazuli. It remained common until the end of the medieval period to employ the term *sapphire* when referring to the deep blue of lapis lazuli. The word *sapphire* comes from the Sanskrit and was borrowed into Latin. Lapis lazuli, a combination of minerals including felspathoid, sodalite and lazurite, comes from the mountains of Afghanistan. It is a brittle stone and has been used for jewelry, in mosaics and to decorate furniture. Its sparkling character, a desirable quality for decorative purposes, is the result of pyrite fragments blended with the stone. In Akkadian texts this stone was commonly associated with the dwelling place of the high god.

10:1. cherubim. See the comment on Exodus 25:18-20 and 26:1-6 for the decorative appearance of cherubim in the tabernacle and on the lid of the ark of the covenant. In the Jerusalem temple two cherubim were made from olive-wood and overlaid with gold (see 1 Kings 6:23-28). The significance of the iconography in each of these instances is to be found in the idea of God's presence being upheld on the wings of the cherubim. The close association of God and the cherubim may be related to the image of Canaanite and Mesopotamian gods riding or standing on the backs of animals (i.e., Baal astride a bull). It should also be noted that the winged beasts of Assyrian art may have also had some influence on the biblical depiction of the cherubim (see the comment on Ezek 1:5). In chapter 1 these creatures were not identified as cherubim, but here they are placed in that category. This is logical since cherubim were most commonly portrayed as the guardians of divine property or presence.

10:2. wheels. See comment on 1:15-18.

10:4. radiance of the glory of the Lord. See the comments on Ezekiel 1:4 and 1:26-28 for discussion of the *kabod* or "glory" of God and how it compares to the concept of *melammu*,

"divine brilliance," that appears in Mesopotamian literature. For a comparison with Egyptian and Akkadian religious texts dealing with the radiance of the gods and the danger to humans who see this divine light, see the comments on Exodus 13:21-22 and 33:18-23.

10:9. chrysolite. As in 1:16 the semiprecious stone mentioned is *tarshish.* Most interpreters identify it as either beryl or topaz, both of which would have reflected the light and provided the sense of translucent brilliance in this text.

10:12. full of eyes. See comment on 1:15-18 for the discussion of the wheels "full of eyes."

10:14. four faces. See comment on 1:6.

10:15. Kebar River. See comment on 1:1.

10:18. importance of the threshold. Entranceways have great symbolic significance in the biblical world. They serve as a place of judgment (Deut 22:20-21) as well as a legal site where acts of submission and worship may take place (1 Sam 5:4; Ezek 46:1-2). They also mark the point of entry and exit from a private home or, as in Ezekiel, from the realm of sacred space to the secular world.

10:19. east gate. This would be the gate of the outer court of the temple. While the temple complex had an east-west orientation, it is unclear how closely tied to this sacred precincts were the buildings and courtyards of the royal palace. It is possible that the gate Ezekiel is referring to in this case is one of those that connected temple and palace. If this is the case, then its significance is heightened as Yahweh prepares to abandon both the religious community and the secular authorities to their fate.

11:1. leaders. All of these names appear on seals from this period, but with the exception of Pelatiah, it is unlikely that the seals should be related to the individuals named in this verse. The Pelatiah seal possibly refers to this individual, but there can be no certainty. For more about seals and persons named on them, see the sidebar in Jeremiah 32.

11:3, 7, 11. metaphor of cooking pot and meat. Ezekiel refutes the claims of Jerusalem's new rulers that they have created a safe haven in the city for the people. He turns this around, transforming the pot (Jerusalem) from a tightly sealed storage jar into a cooking pot in which the people (see Mic 3:3) and their false rulers will be broiled over the flame of Yahweh's anger (compare Ezek 22:18-22).

11:18. images and idols. See the comments on images in 8:5 and 8:10.

11:19. heart of stone. The concept of a heart of stone would have had a couple of associations in the ancient world, mostly from Egypt. First of all, in Egyptian beliefs it was the heart that was weighed in judgment to determine whether or not the afterlife could be attained. If it was weighed down with guilt and sin, the results could be disastrous (see comment on Ex 8:11). A heart of stone would be a heavy heart. More important is the imagery connected to the mummification process. From New Kingdom times on, the heart was removed from the mummy and placed in a canopic jar, as the other important organs were. This was done because the Egyptians believed that the heart might betray the individual when he came to judgment and thereby jeopardize the afterlife. The heart was replaced with a stone carved in the shape of a dung beetle. In Egypt this insect was the symbol of eternal life. By transplanting it inside the mummy in place of the heart, they believed they were securing the renewal of the person's life and vitality. In contrast, Yahweh is going to bring his people back to life by returning to them hearts of flesh that will not betray them. The imagery of an unhardened heart would be apt in that verses 17-20 suggest a new exodus and a new covenant.

11:23. mountain east of the city. The mount to the east of the temple complex would be the Mount of Olives. From here one can look down on the temple mount and the city. From a vantagepoint in Jerusalem, this would be the limit of how far one could look to the east. Whether the implication is that God is going to sit outside the city and watch (compare Jon 4:5), or whether it is from here that he returns to heaven (it is the traditional site of the ascension of Christ as well, though New Testament support is slight).

12:1-28

Prophecy of the Exile

12:5. digging through the wall. As depicted in Assyrian reliefs, a number of different measures were used to breach the defenses of a city under siege. Among these was undermining or drilling through the city walls. Ezekiel, since he was digging from the outside of his wall inward, therefore took on the role of the Babylonians, who were working, at God's command, to break through into the city.

12:6. covering the face. There were occasions when the face was covered in mourning or shame, but those use a different verb than the one used here. It is likely that covering the face here symbolizes the fate of the king he is representing (vv. 12-13).

12:6. sign to Israel. Ezekiel's enacted prophecy provided God's sign of the coming destruc-

tion of Jerusalem and the exile of the people. By performing this set of actions, Ezekiel became the message. Sign-acts often go even further, as the prophet's life itself becomes a sign (see Is 8:18; Jer 16:2; Hos 1).

12:10. prince in Jerusalem. At the time Ezekiel was speaking, Zedekiah was the ruler of Jerusalem. He was the third son of Josiah to sit on the throne, although his power to rule was strictly curtailed and under the supervision of Nebuchadnezzar (see 2 Kings 24:15-17). The fact that Ezekiel refers to Zedekiah as "prince" (Hebrew *nasi')* instead of as king (Hebrew *melek)* is an indication that he does not consider him the true successor of David.

12:13. net, snare. The image of God snaring his enemies in a net is a common one in ancient Near Eastern art. Among the most graphic is the Stele of the Vultures, which depicts the Sumerian god Ningirsu holding a net of woven reeds in his left hand. Imprisoned within the net are the soldiers of Umma who had attacked Eannatum, the king of Lagash. Egyptian art from the reign of Necho II portrays the pharaoh gathering his foes in a gigantic net (see Hab 1:14-15).

12:13. land of Chaldeans. The Chaldeans are first mentioned in Mesopotamian sources in the ninth century B.C. Although related ethnically to the other Aramean tribes of southern Babylonia, they had a distinct tribal structure. As the Assyrian empire began to weaken, Chaldean leaders, including Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar, eventually gained their independence and established the Neo-Babylonian dynasty after 625 B.C. The areas that they controlled and within which they settled the exiles from Judah ranged from all of southern Mesopotamia to the region west of Haran on the upper reaches of the Euphrates River.

12:13. will not see it, there he will die. This statement was fulfilled in the blinding of King Zedekiah after the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's troops. Although he would be taken into the exile and would spend the rest of his life a prisoner, Zedekiah's eyes were destroyed after he was forced to witness the execution of his children (see 2 Kings 25:7). The practice of gouging out a prisoner's eyes appears in the Assyrian Annals of Ashurnasirpal II in the ninth century and those of Sargon II in the eighth century. This was simply one of several terror tactics employed to frighten and humiliate their enemies.

12:18. anxious eating and drinking. Since eating and drinking are the most basic activities of daily life, the mood at the table often reflects current conditions. At the Passover, the Israelites were to eat their meal "in haste" as a reflection of their readiness to leave. Here the anxiety betrays the threat they are living under.

12:24. flattering divinations. The task of the diviner was to determine the will of a god or gods through various ritualized actions—the examination of sheep entrails, consultation with the dead (1 Sam 28:8) or the study of the astrological configurations. All of these practices were forbidden by Israelite law (see the comment on Deut 18:10-13) because of their association with false gods and false religions. Naturally, a diviner would wish to please his paying clients and thus might be inclined to flatter or seduce them with his manner and statements (compare Prov 26:24-26). Such desirable predictions were out of place and to be considered similar to those condemned by Jeremiah (see Jer 27:9-10).

13:1-23

False Prophets

13:10. flimsy wall covered with whitewash. Ezekiel uses an analogy similar to that in Jeremiah 6:14 and 8:11. In both prophets reality is covered up and people delude themselves into believing that a wound is not serious or a wall is sturdy. It reflects the tendency to hide structural problems with cosmetic solutions. Mesopotamian law codes also deal with unscrupulous builders and homeowners who neglect repairs or attempt to hide unsafe workmanship (see both the Laws of Eshnunna and Hammurabi's Code).

13:11. God's destructive forces. The flimsy walls, held together by layers of plaster, cannot withstand the forces of nature unleashed by God. As in Isaiah 28:2 and 30:30, rain with accompanying high winds and destructive hailstones was to be considered God's voice, thundering out an answer and indictment on Judah. A similar image is found in the Sumerian *Lament over the Destruction of Ur.* In this recitation of misery, the poet describes how the god Enlil withheld the gentle winds that bring the rains needed for their crops. In their place were the desert winds (sirocco) that evaporated all the moisture from the ground and raging storm winds that collapsed buildings and whistled alarmingly through the gates of abandoned cities.

13:14. foundation laid bare. God's wrath is so strong that the symbolic wall constructed of deceptive prophecy is to be totally razed to its bare foundations. Its foundation will be seen

for what it is: self-interest and self-advancement rather than the word of God. Foundations usually consisted of a few courses of stone laid in trenches.

13:18. sewing magic charms on wrists. The practice described here is a bit uncertain since the Hebrew term *kesatot* only appears in this chapter (vv. 18 and 20). It is possible that it is related to the Akkadian *kasitu,* "binding magic." Babylonian incantation texts describe how persons wishing to bind others to their will made bands that they wore on their arms or wrists, empowering them with an oath. Perhaps these false female prophets were employing something similar, or perhaps Ezekiel was simply comparing their influence to a practice known to him from Babylonia.

13:18. various length veils. Again, an Akkadian word, possibly *sapaḫu* ("to loosen"), may be the basis for the item mentioned here. If it is a parallel to the wristbands previously mentioned, then the "veil" might have been worn around the neck as another magic device to bind people to the woman's will. Certainly, a form of "attachment" is intended. Whatever paraphernalia are referred to in this verse, it is generally accepted that it indicates the presence of a familiar type of witchcraft that attempts to control its victims.

14:1-23
Judgment Against Idolatry

14:1-3. elders coming to inquire. The elders served as the authorities for the exiles. They came to Ezekiel as supplicants seeking counsel and an oracle. The gesture of sitting before him (at his feet) indicates his role as teacher and spokesperson for God. There is some question whether they sincerely accepted his authority or were simply curious about what he could offer as a word of God.

14:14. Noah, Daniel, Job. While Noah and Job are easily identified as righteous sages of antiquity, it has seemed unlikely to many interpreters that Ezekiel would place a contemporary prophet, Daniel, in this group. This chapter, however, likely dates from the late 590s. By that time Daniel had been in Babylon for almost fifteen years and would have been in his late twenties or early thirties. His success had come early (see comment on Dan 2:1), so he had been in a high position in the court for a decade. Nevertheless, Daniel does not mesh easily with the profile of the other two. First, both of them are non-Israelites. Noah lived during the flood and prior to Abraham. Job was from Uz, usually located around Edom. A Babylonian wisdom document that contains arguments on suffering similar to those in the book of Job suggests a long tradition for his character. Seeking a highly reputed character from antiquity, some interpreters have considered it possible that the Daniel mentioned here refers to Danil, the wise king of ancient Ugarit who was the father of the hero Aqhat. Like Deborah (Judg 4:5), Danil sat beneath a tree hearing the cases of his people, dispensing justice to widows and orphans. Since he is not associated with Yahweh worship, however, it would be difficult to envision Ezekiel giving Danil such an elevated status. As in the case of the marking of the innocents in Ezekiel 9, these three great wise men, known for their individual righteousness, could only save themselves during the coming catastrophe. The implication that a certain number of righteous persons is necessary to save a city from God's wrath (see Gen 18:23-32; Jer 5:1) is thus set aside in the face of Judah's violations of the covenant.

14:15. wild beasts as judgment. In the passage from verses 15-20, God posits a variety of means to punish the people of Judah for their crimes and thus cleanse the land of its impurity. With respect to using wild beasts as the instrument of God's wrath, see the comment on 5:17.

15:1-8
Analogy of the Vine

15:2-7. vine parables and metaphors. Like Isaiah in the "Song of the Vineyard" (Is 5:1-7), Ezekiel uses the vine as a metaphor for Judah (see also Ezek 17:5-10). In each case the uselessness of the vine versus a branch or a tree well rooted is the justification for its destruction. A similar image appears in an Egyptian wisdom piece, the *Instruction of Amenemope.* There too a plant that serves as the metaphor for fools who speak without thinking is uprooted, burned and destroyed because it soon withers and has no value once uprooted. The metaphor of a city as an unproductive plant is known from the *Myth of Erra and Ishum* (known copies date to the eighth century) in which Marduk laments Babylon. He says that he filled it with seeds like a pine cone, but no fruit came from it, and he planted it like an orchard but never tasted its fruit.

16:1-63
Analogy of the Discarded Woman

16:3. ancestry in land of Canaanites. Biblical references to Jerusalem describe it originally as a Jebusite city (Josh 18:28). David captured

it and transformed it into the Israelite capital (2 Sam 5:6-10). Mention of Jerusalem is also found in nineteenth- and eighteen-century B.C. execration documents from Egypt and the fourteenth-century El Amarna texts. By making this identification, Ezekiel attempts to set aside the people's pride in Jerusalem as their city as God begins to lay out the indictment against Judah.

16:3. father an Amorite, mother a Hittite. This passage operates on two levels. First, it is correct to tie Jerusalem, at least the Jebusite city, to Amorite and North Syrian Hittite political origins. This is established by its mention in the El Amarna texts. However, on a symbolic level, in confronting Jerusalem with its mixed ancestry (tying it to three of the seven major inhabitant groups of Canaan listed in Ex 3:8), God identifies the place and the people as utterly corrupt. When the land was conquered, it was the responsibility of the Israelites to purify it of its idolatrous traditions (Deut 7:1-5), but instead the people became just like the nations they were supposed to displace.

16:4. treatment of a newborn. All of the actions described here would ordinarily be those of the midwife. She would cut and tie off the umbilical cord, rinse the placenta off the newborn, clean the baby's skin with salt water and finally wrap it in a blanket. The child would then be presented to the parents to be named. However, in this case the child is not accepted as a member of the household and instead is abandoned in a field, where its fate is left up to God. In the ancient world the role of the midwife in preparing the birthing room and caring for the newborn is often attributed to deity, especially in metaphors. In a segment of the Babylonian *Atrahasis Epic* the fertility goddess Mami is the midwife of the gods who brings humanity into being. In the Egyptian *Hymn to the Aten,* the sun god presides as midwife over the lands of Egypt each morning. The midwife rituals involved provide for the physical needs of the child as well as making a symbolic transference from the realm of the womb to the living world.

16:5. child exposure. Both classical and ancient Near Eastern sources make mention of infanticide. Graphic evidence of this from the Roman-Byzantine period has been found in recent excavations at Ashkelon, where the remains of a hundred infants who had been disposed of in a sewer drain were uncovered. Infanticide was usually employed to get rid of female or malformed children. This was done as a means of either population control or economic necessity, since many villages were barely able to feed and care for healthy children and adults. The fact that the infant's parents "cast it out" into a field has legal implications as well. They are renouncing all legal claims to the child and leaving it up to God and/or another person to "adopt" and thus save the child's life. Among the examples of this practice are Moses' exposure in the Nile (though this was not total abandonment; his sister was instructed to watch and see what would happen; Ex 2:1-10) and the birth legend of Sargon of Akkad.

16:8. covering nakedness with corner of garment. This is a legal and symbolic gesture by the husband that he intends to provide for the needs of his wife. It is further confirmed by the taking of an oath *(berît).* Another example of the practice is Boaz's expansive covering of Ruth on the threshing floor when he agrees to serve as her advocate before the village elders (Ruth 3:9).

16:9. ointments. As part of the marriage ritual, a "day of bathing" and anointing occurred that symbolized the transference of care of the young woman from her parents to her husband. Old Babylonian documents attest to this ceremony, and it may also be at the heart of a Middle Assyrian law in which a man pours oil over the head of a woman who is about to become a part of his household. This gesture stands in stark contrast to the lack of care given the infant child in Ezekiel 16:4.

16:10. embroidered dress. Among the bridal gifts is embroidered cloth for her gown. Only the finest cloth was embroidered, and it was considered a prize in war (Judg 5:30) as well as a luxury item suitable for trade with other countries (Ezek 27:16). On a more practical level, both Hammurabi's Code and the Lipit Ishtar Code from Mesopotamia list oil, grain and clothing as the items that husbands are required to supply their wives.

16:10. leather sandals. Ordinary sandals were made from woven fibrous material, secured with leather thongs (Is 5:27). For footwear to be entirely made of leather would be a luxury and a signifier of both wealth and power. Fine leather sandals are represented on Shalmaneser III's Black Obelisk panels (ninth century B.C.) and on wall paintings from the time of the Assyrian king Sargon II (721-705 B.C.).

16:11-12. jewelry. The full array of jewelry provided by the husband consists of many of the types of jewelry regularly used to adorn a woman's body and head (compare the more complete list in Is 3:18-23). Like the bride gifts for Rebekah (Gen 24:22), there are arm bracelets, possibly with animal heads at each end. The necklace may have been a strand of beads or linked metal rings similar to those in Assyr-

ian reliefs or the Nimrud ivories depicting royal Assyrian women. The nose ring again follow the style of Rebekah's adornment (Gen 24:22), and the earrings were probably ovoid loops inserted into pieced ears. Most striking of all is the golden crown or tiara that completes the ensemble of a ruler's wife and has parallels in both Egyptian and Assyrian art.

16:13. fine foods. Just as Yahweh has provided the Israelites with food throughout their history, now, in this marriage metaphor, Yahweh as the bridegroom and husband provides Jerusalem the bride and wife with the very best quality flour, honey and olive oil. These staples are listed in the Mesopotamian law codes as the items due a wife for her daily maintenance. In this case, however, special provision is made to insure that she receives the very best with which to make her bread—something that will then serve as a charge against her when she offers these items to other gods (Ezek 16:19).

16:15. prostitution in the ancient world. In ancient Mesopotamia a distinction can be drawn between commercial prostitution and "sacral sexual service" (as G. Lerner terms it). The term *ḫarimtu* is used for both in cuneiform texts (for instance it is a *ḫarimtu* who "civilizes" Enkidu in the Gilgamesh Epic), but there is a difference in social status as well as purpose. The sacral sexual service provided at the temple was tied into the sacred marriage ritual that insured fertility for the land. There were various levels of priestesses, from the high priestess, who represented the goddess Ishtar/Inanna and was said to be "visited" by the god Marduk each night, to cloistered female orders and more public figures like the *naditu,* who could own property, conduct business and even marry. The fact that commercial prostitution occurred near temples is based on the same considerations that brought prostitutes to frequent taverns and the city gate—high traffic areas mean more customers. Both temple sacral servants and prostitutes accepted payment, but the former were expected to dedicate these offerings to the gods. What is particularly incongruous about the bride Jerusalem is that she is said to pay her lovers for their favors, an obvious reference to idolatry and the rejection of the covenant with Yahweh. For further discussion see comment on Deuteronomy 23:17-18.

16:16. garments used to make high places. Once again the double meaning in the text refers both to the high places *(bamôt)* where idolatrous worship took place as well as to the gaudily decorated beds of prostitutes on raised platforms. Similarly, Isaiah 57:7 describes making one's bed on a lofty hill where sacrifice is made to idols. Proverbs 7:16-17 warns that the harlot's bed is covered with enticingly colorful and expensive garments (compare Ezek 23:17)—choice colored linens like those that God had given to the bride Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16:10.

16:17. male idols. Mesopotamian sacred texts contain exact descriptions for fashioning an image of the god. There were additional rituals, including the "opening of the mouth" ceremony, which animated the image so that it could serve as a repository of the god's power and presence. Since this is specifically a male idol in Ezekiel, it is possible that an exact replica of a god is meant (usually featuring a crown or raised spear). However, it is also possible that a bull (compare the golden calf in Ex 32:2-4) or a phallic symbol was created. Using precious metals to create an idol is also found in the story of Micah in Judges 17:4-5.

16:20. human sacrifice. For previous discussion of child sacrifice to Molech, see the comments on Leviticus 18:21 and Deuteronomy 18:10. In this instance, children, the gift of Yahweh as part of the covenantal agreement, are being "fed" to the gods who have become Jerusalem's "lovers." This follows the line of reasoning that had begun with creating the image, dressing and anointing it, and then providing it with meals. All of these rituals have Mesopotamian counterparts in descriptions of their temple service, where two meals a day were served to the images of the gods. It was more specifically Phoenician and Canaanite practice, however, to offer children as sacrifices to the gods.

16:24. built a mound. To demonstrate her desire to play the role of the prostitute, Jerusalem constructed mounds (Hebrew *geb)* in prominent places. These may have been stylized representations of the harlot's bed (see Prov 7:16-17) that served as the prostitute's "shingle," advertising her presence and her profession.

16:24-25. shrine in every square. The term employed here, *ramâ,* is not the usual one for shrine. It appears elsewhere as a platform (1 Sam 22:6), and like *geb,* may have simply been the symbol used to advertise the presence of a prostitute in that place. The fact that it is constructed in a public square simply makes good business sense. The woman would have wanted as high a traffic flow as possible in order to insure her commercial success. Taking it back to the metaphor of Jerusalem's idolatry recalls the multiple altars and shrines erected by Solomon for the

gods of his foreign wives (1 Kings 11:4-8). For shrines on every street corner see the comment on 2 Chronicles 28:24.

16:27. territory reduction. When the treaty obligations of an ally or vassal are not fulfilled, it is the prerogative of the overlord to take punitive action. For instance, when Hezekiah of Judah refused to pay his annual tribute to the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, the latter states in his Annals that Hezekiah's territory was reduced and given to other vassal kings to administer. In this passage, a double meaning is expressed in the use of the word *ḥoq* for "territory." It usually refers to a regular allotment of food (Prov 30:8), but here in a covenant context it connotes that portion which the nation assumes belongs to it but is in fact a gift of God.

16:26-29. Egypt, Assyrian, Babylonia. As Ezekiel expounds on the theme of the evil that comes from foreign entanglements, he cites, in chronological order, countries that have seduced Judah away from Yahweh. These alliances have subsequently brought ruin upon the nation. It was Egypt's political meddling that the Rabshakeh (NIV: "field commander") chided Hezekiah about in Isaiah 36:6. More recently, Zedekiah's apparent alliance with Psammeticus II had brought Nebuchadnezzar's armies to besiege Jerusalem (see the comment on Jer 37:5-8). The Assyrians had imposed vassalage on Judah, but Ahaz had freely submitted himself, providing even more political and social assistance to the Assyrian cause (see 2 Kings 16:3-9). Finally, in Ezekiel's time the king of Judah continued the long-standing relationship with the Chaldeans that had begun in Hezekiah's time with the envoys of Merodach-Baladan (2 Kings 20:12-19). The reference to a "land of merchants" may be Ezekiel's astute judgment that Judah once again was simply a pawn in the economic and political game of the Near Eastern superpowers.

16:36. children's blood. This is a reiteration of the charge made in verse 20 that Jerusalem has sacrificed her children on the altars to other gods. As is noted in Psalm 106:38-39, not only is this considered an abomination, but it also would be considered the shedding of "innocent blood," one of the worst possible sins (see 2 Kings 21:16; Jer 26:15).

16:45. father an Amorite, mother a Hittite. See the comment on Ezekiel 16:3. Ezekiel's reference is not only to these Canaanite peoples but also to the intermarriage that must have taken place over the centuries between them and the Israelites.

16:46. Samaria and Sodom. The warning is quite clear here. Both Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, and Sodom were destroyed, having been judged corrupt by God (see Gen 19:12-25 and 2 Kings 17:5-18). The reference to Samaria as the older or "big" sister may refer to its relative importance as the capital of ten tribes. It was constructed by Omri (1 Kings 16:24) in the ninth century and thus was much "younger" than even David's Jerusalem. God may have chosen Sodom simply because of the tradition of its destruction (Amos 4:11). As a city, it probably predated Jerusalem's founding, but it was probably smaller in terms of size, given the ease with which it is said to have been captured in Genesis 14:8-11.

16:57. Edom and Philistia. Given the apparent alliance between the Edomites and the Chaldeans at the time of Jerusalem's siege (see Ps 137:7), they would be in a position to gloat over or even loot Judah once the Babylonians had conquered the capital (see the comment on Jer 49:7). Philistia during the seventh century vacillated between antagonism and alliance with the Babylonians. Ashkelon, for instance, was sacked and burned by Nebuchadnezzar in 604 B.C. In any case, Jerusalem's capture in 597 and destruction in 587 would have been the basis upon which other states could chide the people of Jerusalem, considering that city to be the new Sodom and evidence of God's righteous anger against a corrupt and disobedient nation.

17:1-24
Eagles and the Vine

17:1. allegories and parables in ancient world. It was a common rhetorical device in ancient storytelling to use allegories and parables to make a point or create an image that would be more understandable or expressive to the audience. This is especially true in ancient wisdom literature and in prophetic texts. For instance, in the twentieth-century B.C. Egyptian *Dispute Between a Man and His Ba* a despondent man's soul tells him a parable about death and its unpredictability. Another Egyptian text, the *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy* (eighth century B.C.), uses a vacant house and an unmarried woman as allegories for waste. The Egyptian Love Songs (thirteenth century B.C.) are filled with allegories comparing the various attributes of a beautiful woman to a lush marsh, a lotus bud and mandrake blossoms. In the prophetic visions of the Egyptian sage Neferti (twentieth century B.C.), he describes the invasion of Egypt as marked by the nest of a "strange bird" in the marsh and the

appearance of desert herds drinking from the Nile. The images conjured up by these short tales and wordplays enhance enjoyment and drive home the author's point.

17:3. animal and tree fables. Among the most popular types of fables were those in which an animal talks (see the comment on Num 22:28-31) or trees have a conversation or perform some action (see comment on Judg 9:8). There are several examples of this in ancient Near Eastern literature. For example, there is a dialogue between a thorn bush and a pomegranate tree in the Assyrian *Words of Ahiqar* (eighth century B.C.) over their relative merits. In the thirteenth-century Egyptian *Tale of Two Brothers* his cows warn the younger brother, Anubis, that his jealous brother Bata planned to kill him.

17:4. land of merchants. See Ezekiel 16:29 for the previous reference to the "land of merchants" as equivalent to Babylonia. King Jehoiachin, perhaps the "topmost shoot" in this allegory, had been taken into exile in 597 along with his royal court. Babylonian ration lists show that they were held under house arrest in the city of Nippur.

17:4. city of traders. Although the Phoenicians are more often associated with trade, their role was actually more as "middlemen," while the bankers and merchants who supplied the goods for transport were based in the cities of Mesopotamia (see Is 23:8). It was the Chaldean commercial empire that had, through the military efforts of the king, been able to absorb all aspects of business into their control. This is a theme that is found in many Mesopotamian annals in which a king makes an expedition "to the sea" and gains control of the "Cedars of Lebanon."

17:6-7. vine parables. See the comment on Ezekiel 15:2-7. The initial efforts of the gardener to care for his vine, planting it near abundant water in fertile soil, are rewarded by lush growth. However, at the appearance of the second eagle, the vine seems to reject the gardener's attentions and loses its purpose. It sends out tendrils toward the second bird as if seeking another, unnecessary, water source. This failure to respond as expected makes the parable similar to the "Song of the Vineyard" in Isaiah 5:1-7.

17:12. deportation of king and nobles. The interpretation of the parable of the eagle and the vine is the taking of Jehoiachin and his royal court as hostages by Nebuchadnezzar after the city of Jerusalem was captured in 597 B.C. (2 Kings 24:6-17). Like the well-cultivated vine, Jehoiachin is treated with dignity, and the ration lists from Nebuchadnezzar's official records prove that he was well fed. If the model of Daniel and his three friends could be used here, it seems likely that Jehoiachin and his advisers were being assimilated into Babylonian culture so that they could eventually be restored to Jerusalem to serve as the king's loyal administrators (Dan 1:3-5).

17:13. member of royal family. After capturing Jerusalem in 597 B.C., the Babylonian Chronicle records that Nebuchadnezzar took King Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, as his hostage. Nebuchadnezzar then installed Jehoiachin's uncle, the third son of Josiah, on the throne of Judah. His name was originally Mattaniah, but the Babylonian king renamed him Zedekiah as a gesture demonstrating his puppet status (2 Kings 24:17).

17:15. Zedekiah's rebellion and deal with Egypt. Despite the example of 597 and the deportation of Jehoiachin, Zedekiah entertained ideas of rebellion against the Babylonians. He met with envoys from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon early in his reign (Jer 27:3) and apparently had dealings with Pharaoh Psammeticus II (see the comment on Jer 34:21). See the comment on Jeremiah 37:5-8 for discussion of the troop movements of the Egyptians. Pharaoh Apries made at least a brief response to Zedekiah's plea for help, but it did not prevent the fall of Jerusalem.

17:17. ramps and siege works. Although the portion of the Babylonian Chronicle that has survived does not contain a description of the siege of Jerusalem (see 2 Kings 25:1), a similar operation is described in Sennacherib's Assyrian Annals from 701 B.C. It may be assumed that plans were laid for a long siege, since a great deal of time-consuming labor went into the construction of ramps and towers. See the comments on Jeremiah 6:6 and Ezekiel 4:2 for discussion of siege technology.

17:18. oath and covenant. Zedekiah's fate is attributed to his failure to honor his oath or treaty obligations. Treaties between nations typically contained a list of curses that will be inflicted on the party that violates the covenant between them. These treaties were signed under oath to the respective deities. That way, if the treaty were violated, it would become the responsibility of the country's own god(s) to punish the oath-breaker.

17:22. planting a cedar sprig. Just as the great eagle first plucked the topmost shoot from the cedar in verse 4, now Yahweh (identified as the eagle) will take a tender sprig and plant it on a high mountain. Following this line of reasoning, the Davidic house will be allowed to continue through the line of Jehoiachin. Similar horticultural metaphors for the revival of

the Davidic House are found in Isaiah 11:1 and Jeremiah 23:5.

17:23. cosmic tree where animals find shelter. The concept of the cosmic tree or the "one tree" is common to many peoples and traditions. It stands as a representation of beauty and fertility, drawing its sustenance from the waters of the earth and providing shelter and food to all creatures that shelter under its bows. In ancient Near Eastern sources its symmetry and stability provide a check against death and a promise of the continuance of existence. Thus in Assyrian art is found a stylized tree of life that may have represented the role of the king to care for his people (see comment on Dan 4:10-12).

18:1-32

Responsibility for Sin

18:5-9. negative confession from the Book of the Dead. Since the soul or *ka* of the dead Egyptian was to be examined by Osiris, the god of the underworld, a primer to prepare a person for this "final exam" was created, entitled the Book of the Dead. Its form, often painted on or carved into tomb walls, has its origins in early dynastic periods (2500 B.C.), and it continued to be refined at least until 500 B.C. One of the most popular sections was a declaration of innocence in the form of a negative confession. Examples include "I have not sinned against my neighbors" and "I have not mistreated cattle." A similar document appears in Job 31.

18:6. eating at mountain shrines. Presumably this is a charge of idolatry at local high places *(bamôt).* However, there is no parallel from biblical or ancient Near Eastern law to help illumine this practice. It might be compared to the giving of Jerusalem's children as food to the gods in 16:20 and to the charge that the people of Judah are willing to "worship on every high hill" throughout the land. A similar condemnation of the use of hilltop shrines can be found in Hosea 4:13.

18:6. idols of the house of Israel. It would appear that Ezekiel is using a stock phrase coined during the late monarchy or perhaps during the exile to refer to the extreme impurity associated with idol worship. His language is intentionally vulgar and characterizes the idols in the crudest possible way—they are best likened to feces or stools of excrement.

18:8. usury in ancient Near East. Consistent with biblical law, Ezekiel considers the practice of charging interest on a loan an unrighteous act. See the comment on Exodus 22:25 for further explanation of money lending practices in the ancient Near East and the comment on Deuteronomy 15:1-11 for discussion of the financial systems that existed in these areas of the ancient world.

18:20. individual responsibility in the ancient Near East. While the social structure of the ancient Near East was primarily oriented toward the group (tribe, clan, family), there is a strand of individual responsibility that appears in literary and philosophical works. Among the examples of this is a statement in the Gilgamesh Epic. The Mesopotamian god Ea berates the chief god Enlil for bringing on the great flood without just cause: "On the sinner impose his sin, on the transgressor impose his transgression."

18:31. new heart, new spirit. See comment on 11:19.

19:1-14

Lament over the Princes of Israel

19:1. laments in ancient Near East. Laments may be personal statements of despair, such as that found in Psalm 22:1-21, dirges following the death of an important person (David's elegy for Saul in 2 Sam 1:17—27) or communal cries in times of crisis, such as Psalm 137. The most famous lament from ancient Mesopotamia is the *Lament over the Destruction of Ur,* which commemorates the capture of the city in 2004 B.C. by the Elamite king Kindattu. It contains eleven stanzas, each describing a facet of the city's demise and the end of the ruling dynasty (compare Lam 2:9). Subsequently the work would have been employed prior to and during the rebuilding of the city's walls and public buildings. For more information see the sidebar in the book of Lamentations.

19:1-9. lion hunting, lion symbolism. Because of the many references in Israelite (Is 5:29; Nah 2:11-12), Egyptian and Assyrian texts to the royal associations of lions, it is not surprising to find Ezekiel employing this image. There are numerous examples of lion hunting. It was a royal sport as well as a necessity when a beast became a man-eater (as on the ninth-century Assyrian plaque of Ashurnasirpal II depicting a Nubian being devoured) or a threat to villages (as in one Mari text, where a pit was used to trap the animal). The symbolism in this "lament" refers to two of the last kings of Judah (most likely Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim). This is probably a play on Jacob's blessing of his son Judah in Genesis 49:8-12, in which he refers to him as a "lion cub."

19:10-14. vineyard analogy. There is a strong parallel between this symbol in Ezekiel and

the "Song of the Vineyard" in Isaiah 5:1-7. In both instances God's wrath against the vineyard is the result of failed expectations. Neither plant performed its proper role. Isaiah's vineyard produced "bad fruit," while Ezekiel's vineyard grew "high above the thick foliage," but there is little mention of fruit. All of its energy had gone to extending its branches farther and farther, a symbol for the hubris of the nation of Judah and her kings (Jehoiachin and Zedekiah). The fate is the same for these vineyards. They both become wastelands, dried by the winds, broken down with no root or branch remaining. Ezekiel in this way provides the basis for a lament over the end of the nation's independence and the setting aside of God's covenant with the House of David. See the comment on Ezekiel 15:2-7.

20:1-49
Indictment, Judgment and Restoration

20:1. chronology. Based on the year in which Jehoiachin and his court were taken into Babylonian exile, this date formula would correlate to August 15, 591 B.C. It is possible that it could refer to 593 if one were counting from the beginning of the year when Jehoiachin became king in Jerusalem.

20:1. inquiring through a prophet. Oracles were sought in troubled times. In Babylonian religious practice the occurrence of an omen might lead someone to go to a prophet or priest to ask for an interpretation. At other times a historical event would have made it desirable to have a word from God. It may be that the elders hoped to demonstrate their trust in Yahweh by this act. However, there is also evidence in Jeremiah of representatives of the king (Jer 21:1-2) seeking out the prophet and virtually ordering him to speak an oracle of salvation for Jerusalem. There is no indication in the text of what may have motivated this visit to the prophet. Since the speech of Ezekiel goes back to the wilderness situation and makes frequent reference to Israel's early history with Egypt, it may well be a potential agreement between Egypt's pharaoh, Psammeticus II, and Judean king Zedekiah that prompted concern among the elders. It is believed that Psammeticus made overtures to Zedekiah in 592.

20:5. swearing with uplifted hand. There are many references in the Bible to taking an oath by raising up a hand to heaven (see Deut 32:40; Dan 12:7). Ezekiel uses the phrase ten times, with God being the one to take an oath by raising the hand. Among the extrabiblical examples of this gesture are Mari texts that refer to "touching the throat" and an eighth-century Aramaic inscription of Panammu I in which an accused person is commanded to take an oath and lift both hands up to god.

20:6. milk and honey. This description goes back to Exodus narratives and refers to the bounty of the Promised Land for a pastoral lifestyle, but not necessarily in terms of agriculture. Milk is the product of herds, while honey represents a natural resource, probably the syrup of the date rather than bees' honey. Egyptian texts as early as the Story of Sinuhe describe the land of Canaan as rich in natural resources as well as in cultivated produce.

20:12. Sabbaths as a sign. While the individual's sign of participation in the covenant was circumcision, the sign of Israel's corporate participation in the covenant was the keeping of the Sabbath. Like circumcision, the keeping of the Sabbath was a continuous obligation required of each generation. Unlike circumcision, it was not an individual's one-time act but an attitude to be consistently maintained and periodically expressed in action. Instead of repeating the reasoning of the ten commandments—the Sabbath was to be celebrated as a commemoration of God's creation—the Sabbaths (the plural perhaps signifying all of the sacred holidays of Israel) are here cited to remind the people that they are the chosen. No other people have received this sign, and thus, with the laws, they become both gift and insignia of membership in the covenant community as established in Exodus 31:13.

20:25. statutes and laws that were not good. The Hebrew terms used here are extremely important to a proper understanding of Ezekiel's controversial statement. This is not a reference to the Law given at Sinai, and the word "Torah" is not used. The word NIV translates as "statutes" is the same word that in verse 24 is translated "decrees," except that there it is feminine (as usual) rather than masculine (as here). The word NIV translates "laws" is the word for God's judicial decisions. The consequence of Israel's unfaithfulness, then, was that God decreed events that were not in their favor, and he made judicial decisions that threatened their survival. This resulted in God's use of forces that devastated Israel, such as war, famine, plague and foreign armies.

20:26. sacrifice of firstborn. Following Ezekiel's theme of the indisputable power of God to command creation, the decree to sacrifice the firstborn here plays off of the statement in Exodus 13:2 that all firstborns, human and animal, belong to God. This is

demonstrated by the tenth plague in Egypt (Ex 13:14-16) but is mitigated or "redeemed" through sacrifice (Ex 34:20) and by the sacrificial act of circumcision (Gen 17:9-14; Ex 22:29). Within Phoenician and Canaanite religion, however, the sacrifice of the firstborn is a common practice (see the comment on "passing children through fire" as part of Molech worship in Deut 18:10). Closer to Ezekiel's time, kings Ahaz and Manasseh are both accused of child sacrifice (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). Since these men as descendants of David and participants in the "everlasting covenant" with Yahweh (2 Sam 23:5) were the guardians of the Law and the enforcers of divine and civil decree, their detestable actions in this regard could easily fit the image of "bad laws" in Ezekiel 20:25.

20:28-29. illicit worship. Ezekiel continues to contrast God's adherence to the covenant promise of "land and children" with the Israelites misuse of these gifts. Each of the four worship practices listed here, with the possible exception of offering libations, reflects activities associated with Yahweh worship. However, they are described as illicit because they clearly are aimed at "feeding" other gods, a regular aspect of Mesopotamian and Canaanite religion. Instead of making offerings that create a "pleasing aroma" (see Gen 8:21) and demonstrate proper action toward God, this food and drink is tied to the belief that the gods require regular meals (seen in the famished gods in the Gilgamesh flood epic). See the comments on Ezekiel 6:13 for other condemnations of idolatrous worship practices and the use of high places and sacred groves.

20:32. serving wood and stone. The prophets regularly taunt other nations as well as the Israelites for serving gods made of metal, wood and stone (see Jer 51:17-18; Hos 8:4). Archaeologists have discovered stone molds in which molten metals were poured to mass-produce idols. The assumption is that these images then took on the presence of the gods they represented through rituals such as the "opening of the mouth" incantation found in Babylonian religious texts.

20:46. forest of the southland. The term for south or southland used here is *Negev,* usually associated with the desert region to the south of Judah. In this case, Ezekiel seems to simply be using it as a direction marker (see Ezek 40:2; 46:9 for other examples of this). Since the area of the Negev is unforested, the suggestion that the "forest" mentioned here is Jerusalem makes good sense.

21:1-32

Yahweh's Sword: Babylon

21:3. enemy armies as divine punishment. As early as the end of the third millennium, the invasion of armies is interpreted as the intentional actions of a patron deity who has been angered by the behavior of the people (the Gutian invasion that brought an end to the empire of Agade in the *Curse of Agade).* In Mesopotamia this traditional theology is represented also in Cyrus's rhetoric concerning the overthrow of the Babylonians because of Marduk's displeasure with Nabonidus.

21:18-20. roads to Rabbah and Jerusalem. The movements of the Babylonian army are discussed in this command to draw a map in the sand. Ezekiel traces the troop movements to a crossroads, most likely Damascus, and from there the decision has to be made on whether to divide the army into two groups or proceed together. If the omens suggest it, they will travel south on the King's Highway (Num 20:17) to the Ammonite capital city of Rabbah (twenty-three miles east of the Jordan River). Given other portents, they may turn west through the Golan region north of the Sea of Galilee. The army may travel south to Beth Shan, then west through the Valley of Jezreel to Megiddo and then south along the coastal highway. Or they may take a more direct route south along the Jordan River to Jericho before turning west into the Judean Hill Country to besiege Jerusalem.

21:21. travel omens. Given the gravity of the situation, Nebuchadnezzar's decision to seek guidance from the gods is easily understood. Standing at the crossroads, a significant spot for divine action (see Jer 6:16), he employs various means of divination, casting lots to determine which enemy city (Rabbah or Jerusalem) should be attacked first. Each technique is designed to determine the god's will. One remarkable parallel appears in a Mari text in which an inquiry is made to determine which of three routes should be taken.

21:21. arrow omens and liver omens. Nebuchadnezzar employs belomancy, shaking up a group of arrows and then choosing one. He also consults the images of the household gods that he has brought with the army. The text here refers to *teraphim,* which are now considered to be images of the ancestors rather than images of deities (see comment on Gen 31:19). Finally, he has his diviner priests examine a sheep liver (hepatoscopy). This practice was so common that clay models of the livers were created as teaching tools by apprentice priests.

21:22. battering rams, ramps and siege works. See the comment on Ezekiel 4:2 for the use of these engines and methods of siege warfare.

21:26. king's headgear. Based on descriptions in Mesopotamian texts and artistic renderings on Assyrian palace walls, it seems that the "crown" of a king was in fact more like a turban. A cloth was wound around the head several times, and it in turn was encrusted with jewels and golden ornaments and elaborately embroidered with symbols of the king's majesty. Ezekiel, in calling for Zedekiah to remove his headgear, is commanding the king to relinquish his primary symbol of power because he no longer deserves to wear it.

21:28. Ammonites. Like Judah, Ammon had been engaging in anti-Babylonian activities, probably at the urging of the Egyptians. The omen mentioned in 21:20 directed Nebuchadnezzar to attack Jerusalem first instead of the Ammonite capital of Rabbah, modern Jebel Qal'a. It presently is in the middle of the modern city of Amman but has been surveyed and partially excavated. Occupation at the site and in its vicinity goes back to Paleolithic times. Although it was occasionally subjected to Israelite rule (see 2 Sam 12:26-31), the Ammonites attempted to expand their rule northward after the destruction of Jerusalem. Josephus notes that five years after the destruction of Jerusalem, in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (582/581 B.C.), the Babylonian king campaigned in Transjordan, subjecting both Moab and Ammon to his rule. Since hardly any of the Babylonian Chronicles are preserved beyond 594, this cannot be confirmed at this time.

22:1-31

Indictment Against Jerusalem

22:6-12. list of crimes. The bill of indictment read by Ezekiel condemns the people of Judah and their leaders for a set of crimes that violate the basic elements of the Holiness Code in Leviticus 18—20. These range from failure to honor one's parents to profaning the Sabbath and exhibiting various lewd behaviors. Lists such as this are also found in Jeremiah's temple sermon (Jer 7:6-11) and in Amos's oracle against the nation of Israel (Amos 2:6-12). This theme of moral and religious corruption also is found the twentieth-century B.C. Egyptian *Dispute Between a Man and His Ba*, which charges that "everyone is a thief, there is no love among neighbors . . . everyone chooses evil." Many similar offenses also occur in the listing in Babylonian absolution rituals *(shurpu).*

22:18. dross in the furnace. In the smelting process, silver is separated from lead and other alloyed metals (copper, tin and iron) through a two-stage process. During the second stage, after all vestiges of sulfur have been removed, the silver is liquefied, while the lead dross floats on the surface and can be skimmed off. Ezekiel's metaphor suggests a further purification of Judah is necessary (the exilic experience) so that the dross of its lawless, covenant-breaking nature can be removed by God's hot wrath (see Mal 3:1-4). See comment on Jeremiah 6:28.

22:20. metallurgy. The refining process continues with God placing several metals, including the silver that represents Judah, into the furnace. Divine breath is used instead of bellows to increase the oxygen level and thus the heat of the fire. The fact that the blacksmith does not always use bellows can be seen in an Egyptian painting depicting a metalworker blowing air through a pipe into a furnace. While each metal is in the furnace, it, like the exiles, exists in an intermediate state, being transformed, purified or alloyed with another metal. The furnace here and elsewhere is thus a crucible of social and religious change designed to be God's vehicle to purify a wayward nation. For more information about furnaces of this period see comment on Daniel 3:6.

22:28. false visions and lying divinations. As in his previous condemnation of the false prophets (Ezek 13:6-9), Ezekiel charges them with fabricating visions and divinatory revelations for their own purposes. Jeremiah makes the same indictment of prophets who prophesy lies in Yahweh's name (Jer 29:8-9). See the comment on Ezekiel 13:10 for another example of prophets "whitewashing" the truth with their false statements. Babylonian *baru* priests were in charge of reading omens, but they could be shamed or dismissed for making a false prediction. Failures, however, could also be blamed on failure to follow proper ritual procedures.

23:1-49

Lewd Sisters

23:3. prostitution in the ancient Near East. See the comment on Ezekiel 16:15 for discussion of prostitution in the ancient world. The comment on Deuteronomy 23:17-18 provides a fuller description of cultic prostitution. Ezekiel's references, however, are to the idolatry of Israel and Judah, as they took "lovers" (i.e., other gods) in Egypt and from the Assyrians (compare Hosea's marriage metaphor

with his wife Gomer in Hos 1-3).

23:3-5. Egypt and Assyria historical references. The political jockeying for power between Egypt and Assyria meant that both Israel and Judah had to maintain contacts with these superpowers. The flirtations that Ezekiel condemned were reflections of the political accommodations forced on the smaller states. There were numerous contacts between Israel, Judah and the pharaohs of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty in Egypt, including diplomatic exchanges and possible alliances (such as the one that temporarily brought Egyptian troops to the aid of besieged Jerusalem in 597). Evidence of Israel's ties with Assyria can be found in the portrayal of Jehu bowing before Shalmaneser III on the Black Obelisk and an inscription from the annals of Tiglath-Pileser III in which Menahem pays tribute. Judah also had to submit to Assyrian power, as in Ahaz's cry for help during the Syro-Ephraimitic War (2 Kings 16:7-9) and Hezekiah's ransoming of Jerusalem from Sennacherib's army (2 Kings 18:13-16). Additionally, most of Manasseh's fifty-plus years of reign were spent in submission to Assyrian overlords.

23:6. clothed in blue. Archaeological evidence has demonstrated that the murex snail was collected in great quantities off the coast of Phoenicia as a source of a prized purple dye (see Ezek 27:7). Since large numbers of snails were necessary to extract enough dye from their hypobranchial glands to make it a commercial enterprise, the cost of the dye would have been high (for more information see comment on Num 4:6). Thus the fact that these military officers were clothed in blue suggests both high rank and wealth.

23:6. mounted horsemen. Cavalry units were employed by the armies of Assyria and Babylonia (mentioned in the ninth-century Assyrian annals of Tukulti-Ninurta II). However, the Hebrew term used here is more suggestive of charioteers because of its parallel Akkadian word (Heb. *parašim* and Akk. *Paraššannu).* Note the contribution of King Ahab's two thousand chariots to the force that met the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III at the Battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C.

23:14. men portrayed on a wall. One of the standard means of decorating the walls of Mesopotamian palace gates and walls was with the figures of soldiers, kings and symbolic beasts (such as the dragons on the Ishtar Gate in Babylon). For instance, the Assyrian palace in Nineveh has preserved scenes of siege warfare, hunting and royal and divine figures. Much of what we know about the appearance and clothing of the soldiers and military techniques and weapons come from these reliefs. Although much of the paint has now worn away, it is evident that these figures were once brightly colored, in some cases larger than life, and undoubtedly intimidating to subject peoples. Such power by association might have also been enticing to the leaders of Judah, as Ezekiel suggests.

23:14-15. Chaldean dress. It is unfortunate that most of the wall paintings and reliefs are either Assyrian or Persian, thereby leaving us less informed on the details of Babylonian dress. Working from the drawings we do have, these men must have been clothed in embroidered and ornamented belts (see Is 5:27). Babylonian soldiers are portrayed with caps or headbands with long tassels at the ends.

23:15. chariot officers. Assyrian and Babylonian chariots generally carried three men: a driver, the commander who wielded bow and spear, and a shield bearer, who also handed weapons to the commander as needed. The Akkadian term for this individual was *šalšu,* and this may be a cognate for the Hebrew *šalîšîm* used here (the Hebrew root makes it likely that there is some connection to "three"). An alternative suggestion has been that the term refers to an officer of the third rank.

23:15. Chaldea. Babylon during the sixth century was ruled by a non-native dynasty of Chaldeans. They had first appeared in the ninth century in the areas south of Babylonia. While their tribal structure was similar to that of the neighboring Arameans, they were a distinct group. By the time of Ezekiel, to name a person a Chaldean *(kasdim)* was to acknowledge that person's high social status.

23:23. Pekod, Shoa and Koa. While these ethnic names refer to Babylonian allies inhabiting the Trans-Tigris region, they also have a chilling meaning: "Punishment, War Cry and Shriek." Pekod is an Aramean tribe (see Jer 50:21) mentioned in Tiglath-Pileser III's annals. Shoa probably refers to the Suti, prominent as a difficult tribe to manage for the Amorite kings of Mari. Koa is presently unknown, although some equate them with the Guti.

23:24. armor and equipment. Charioteers, as portrayed in Assyrian reliefs, wore pointed helmets or turbans and chain mail over their upper torso, and were protected by round shields. Infantry, while not as heavily armored due to the need for greater flexibility and speed, carried large round shields. Their clothing was girded with a cross belt and they protected their heads with conical-shaped hel-

mets. Each warrior fought with spears, swords, axes or maces (see the list for Uzziah's infantry in 2 Chron 26:14).

23:25. face disfigurement. While it was not uncommon for conquerors to disfigure some of their captives, it is also possible that the marriage metaphor is extended here to the punishment for the unfaithful Oholibah/Jerusalem. Ezekiel may have been familiar with the Middle Assyrian Law Code or some similar legislation regarding the husband's rights to punish his wife. According to these Assyrian laws, the husband may cut off his wife's nose and mutilate the adulterer's face and turn him into a eunuch.

23:37. child sacrifice as food. On this charge of human sacrifice, see the comment on Ezekiel 16:20.

23:38. defiling sanctuary. Child sacrifice, the shedding of innocent blood, had defiled the hands of the people of Jerusalem and yet they have the temerity make these offerings to other gods and then enter Yahweh's sanctuary (compare Jer 7:9-11). Sanctuary defilement was a very serious charge. It brought jeopardy to the individual and the city (since they risked destruction by an offended deity), but more significantly, it could drive the deity away. By bringing their impurity there they have defiled God's holiness, making it impossible for the divine presence to remain (see Ezek 10).

23:38. desecrated sabbaths. See the comment on Ezekiel 20:12 on the significance of the sabbaths as a sign of the covenant relationship. Just as the violation of the temple's sacred space could result in the loss of God's presence, the violation of sacred times could jeopardize the equilibrium that God's presence maintained. The temple was the place for God to take up his repose. It was a place of perfect equilibrium. The sabbath of the people was set aside for them to mirror this equilibrium in their lives and reflect on the source of this equilibrium. To fail to keep the sabbath was to threaten to undo the equilibrium and move toward chaos. Desecration of these holy days and events violates the heart of the covenant agreement and, as with any treaty in the ancient Near East, makes the penalty or curse clause operative.

23:40. painted eyes. Women throughout the ancient Near East regularly enlarged and darkened their eyes with a mixture compounded of olive oil mixed with malachite (green) or galena (black; see comment on 2 Kings 9:30). Babylonian sources mention eye paint that included stibnite, antimony trisulphide. Decorated palettes were used to grind the ore and mix it for application. These palettes have been found at many Iron II sites in Israel, including Megiddo.

23:41. elegant couch. The adulteress Jerusalem is portrayed in much the same light as the prostitute in Proverbs 7:10-23. Both seduce their lovers with an inviting couch, incense and persuasive words. Prior to the Hellenistic period, all references to the couch are associated with a sleeping chamber (see 2 Sam 4:7; Ps 6:6), not the banqueting room.

23:41. incense and oil on table. As part of the anticipated sexual activity, the adulteress Jerusalem has perfumed her bedchamber with incense (see Song 1:3; 4:10) and has sweet-smelling oils at hand for anointing her hair and bodies (Esther 2:12). Similar images are found in the Egyptian love songs discovered by archaeologists in the Karnak temple complex in Luxor.

23:42. Sabeans. Whether the text refers to the Arabian tribal group known as the Sabeans (see Job 1:14-15; Joel 3:8), or to drunk leaders of small nomadic tribes, the point is to highlight the indignity of an adulteress whose lovers are ruffians and foreigners.

24:1-27

The Cooking Pot

24:1. chronology. Basing his dating scheme on the accession year for Zedekiah (596 B.C.), then the date for the beginning of siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's army would be January 5, 587 B.C. (the tenth day of the tenth month [Tebet] of Zedekiah's ninth year; alternatively, this has been reckoned at January 15, 588).

24:3. cooking pot. The pot is usually a wide-mouthed ceramic jar, though here it is made of copper (v. 11). When manufactured for temple use, the vessel would be made of silver or gold. Available in various sizes, they could be used over a fire if placed on a platform or tripod of stones as in the narrative in 2 Kings 4:38. For the use of a cooking pot as part of a prophetic oracle, see Jeremiah's "boiling pot" in Jeremiah 1:13.

24:6. pot and the lots. Ezekiel probably describes the contents of the pot (choice pieces of meat, v. 4), rather than the pot itself, as tainted or diseased. The casting of the lot would be done to decide which pieces would be reserved for special use (perhaps to be gifts to the temple). But in this analogy, though they were choice pieces of meat, they had gone bad and were not eligible for holy use.

24:7. pouring out blood. Because blood was the essence of life, it was not to be consumed

by the Israelites. See comments on Deuteronomy 12:16 and Leviticus 17:11,12. Here, however, the issue is not the consumption of blood, but the exposure of blood. When the blood of an animal was shed and poured out, it was to be covered with earth (Lev 17:13). Exposed blood would "cry out" for vengeance (Gen 37:26).

24:10. spices. In recipes from eighteenth-century B.C. Babylonia, seasonings for meat dishes and stews included salt as well as onions, leeks, mint and garlic. In these ancient preparations, the cooks added distinctive flavor with anise, coriander, cumin and dill. Given the metaphorical nature of this meal, the well-cooked meat may even refer to bodies being prepared for burial with spices.

24:10. charring bones. The meat is cooked so thoroughly that it easily comes off the bones. The bones then are broken so that the marrow will mix with the other ingredients and add flavor to the broth. Once this has been poured off, what remains is a virtually useless mass of carbonized bits. For easy disposal they will be burnt so completely that they literally fall apart and can be scattered over the refuge heap (compare Ezek 22:15). A thorough job of purification or destruction could be drawn from this metaphor.

24:17. acts of mourning. For other examples of mourning practices, see the comments on Leviticus 19:28 and Deuteronomy 14:1-2. Like Jeremiah (Jer 16:5-7), Ezekiel is commanded not to engage in the usual expressions of mourning. In fact, he is told to put on a festive turban and wear his sandals as if nothing unusual had happened.

25:1-7

Oracle Concerning Ammon

25:1. oracles against foreign nations. See comment on Jeremiah 46:1.

25:2. Ammonites in early sixth century. Although Ammon felt free to taunt Jerusalem over its siege and destruction (see Ezek 21:28), Nebuchadnezzar did eventually turn his forces against this Transjordanian kingdom. According to Herodotus, the campaign against Ammon occurred in 582 B.C. and resulted in widespread devastation of the area. Whether there was a significant deportation of its population has now come into question because of the discovery of seal impressions dating to the Persian period. They indicate a continuity of the Ammonite culture and political existence as late as the fourth century B.C. See the comment on Jeremiah 49:2.

25:4. people of the East. As in Jeremiah 49:28, this nomadic group is associated with the peoples of the Midianite desert region (see Judg 6:3). Their caravans carried goods from the various states of Transjordanian and Palestine, and they were a target of invading armies (Is 11:14). In this case, however, these tribal people will now inhabit the lands of the Ammonites. This is reminiscent of the Egyptian *Visions of Neferti*, which also mentions "desert herders" settling in formerly populated areas.

25:4. fruit and milk. The standard benediction is that one should enjoy the fruit of one's own labors/vineyards (Ps 128:2; Is 3:10). In this case, however, what has been worked for will become the property of invaders (compare Ezek 23:29). Both agricultural and herding products will be confiscated and the full range of the economy shattered.

25:5. Rabbah. See comments on Jeremiah 49:2 and Ezekiel 21:18-20.

25:8-11

Oracle Concerning Moab

25:8. Moab in the early sixth century. Moab was among the states represented at Zedekiah's strategy meeting in 597 B.C. (Jer 27:3). Although it apparently survived and served as a place of refuge for Judeans fleeing Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem in 587, its role as a potential troublemaker in the region was not forgotten. Josephus records a later campaign by the Babylonian king in 582-581 to reduce both Ammon and Moab. There is not sufficient evidence to demonstrate how effective this campaign actually was, but, like Ammon, the nation of Moab probably survived to become a part of the Persian empire at the end of the sixth century.

25:9. towns. Each of these towns were part of Moab's western line of defense. Beth Jeshimoth (Tell 'Azeimeh) lies in the Shittim Valley north of the Dead Sea. Baal Meon, mentioned in the Mesha Stele, is generally identified with Khirbet Ma'in, four miles southwest of Madaba and thirteen miles southeast of Beth Jeshimoth. Kiriathaim is also listed in the Mesha Stele and presumably is located on the Moabite Plateau (Josh 13:19). It has been identified with several sites, including el-Qereiyat and Jalul, but there is no consensus on its location.

25:12-14

Oracle Concerning Edom

25:12. Edom in the early sixth century. Edom apparently stayed neutral or pro-Babylonian (Ps 137:7) during the conflicts that led to the

destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah 40:11 indicates that Edom did accept Judean refugees after 587 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar apparently did not extend his Transjordanian campaign of 582 as far as Edom, but his successor, Nabonidus recorded in his Chronicle a siege of the Edomite city of Bozrah in 552 B.C. Archaeological excavations at Buseira and at Tell el-Kheleifeh indicate destruction levels during this period followed by a quick rebuilding and a resumption of economic activity along the southern range of the King's Highway.

25:13. Teman and Dedan. For descriptions of these cities see comments on Jeremiah 49:7 and 49:8.

25:15-17

Oracle Concerning Philistia

25:15. Philistia in the early sixth century. The omission of the cities of Philistia from the list of states represented at Zedekiah's meeting in 597 (Jer 27:3) suggests that this area was firmly in the control of the Babylonians at that time. This region had been badly weakened by the late-seventh-century campaigns of Pharaoh Psammeticus I as Assyrian control waned there (see Jer 25:20; Zeph 2:4). The sons of the king of Ashkelon are recorded in Babylonian ration lists dating to 592, indicating their hostage status. When the Philistine states joined in the Judean revolt of 588, Nebuchadnezzar deported them and apparently settled them near Nippur. By the Persian period, little of the indigenous Philistine population remained in Philistia.

25:16. Kerethites. Ezekiel creates a poetic parallelism between Philistines and Kerethites, while it is still unclear whether these two peoples are actually related ethnically or historically. The Kerethites are most often associated with the island of Crete, and it would appear these people became mercenaries shortly after their migration to the southern coast of Palestine near Gaza (see 1 Sam 30:14; 2 Sam 8:18).

26:1—28:19

Lament and Oracles Concerning Tyre

26:3. Tyre in the early sixth century. After Egypt's defeat in 605 B.C., Tyre was the main foe of Babylon in western Asia. It was the leading city in Phoenicia and renowned for its maritime trade. Standing out from the coast approximately six hundred yards from the mainland, the island city of Tyre and its harbor were secure from anything but a sustained siege. The waters were also deep enough to allow for heavily laden ships to approach and offload their cargoes. Dedicated to commercial activity, Tyre was supplied with food and other essentials by its sister city of Ushu. Tyrian fleets established colonies around the Mediterranean, including those on Cyprus and the North African city of Carthage, to draw on the resources of these areas, especially metals, and to funnel goods back and forth between the eastern and western Mediterranean. Throughout this region there is archaeological evidence of Phoenician metalwork and pottery, indicating the extent and longevity of trade relations. The principal exports were cedar wood, fabrics and dyes, and glasswork. According to Josephus, Tyre and its king, Ethbaal III, were involved in numerous coalitions and conspiracies against the Babylonians.

26:7. Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre. According to Josephus the Babylonian siege of Tyre lasted thirteen years (c. 586-573 B.C.). A Babylonian text claims that Nebuchadnezzar was present during the siege. Apparently the long siege ended with a treaty stipulating that the Tyrian royal house was to be deported to Babylon. Although the king of Tyre was allowed to stay, he was under the control of a Babylonian commissioner. Tyre's power was effectively exhausted by the long siege.

26:8. siege works and ramps. The writer has an intimate knowledge of siege warfare. One constructed siege mounds and ramps up against the city wall of the city to be besieged. There is plentiful evidence of siege ramps on Assyrian wall reliefs, and a siege ramp has been uncovered at the city of Lachish that was used by the Assyrians in their successful conquest of the Judean fortress. Tyre was especially difficult to conquer because much of the city was on an island near the coast.

26:8. raising shields. A roof of shields was constructed over the battering ram to protect the attackers when the ram was brought up to the city walls.

26:9. battering rams. Battering rams were often depicted by the Assyrians as large wooden wheeled machines used to break apart the city gates.

26:10. Babylonian use of cavalry and chariotry. The Chaldeans were renown for their use of cavalry and chariotry, inheriting the use of both from the Assyrians (see comment on Jer 6:23). The Assyrians often depicted horse-drawn chariots in the midst of battle on wall reliefs.

26:11. strong pillars. The strong pillars are probably a symbolic expression signifying the end of resistance. However, Herodotus mentioned emerald and gold pillars that adorned

the Heracles (Melqart) temple at Tyre. Assyrian wall reliefs depict two external pillars on a Tyre temple.

27:3. Tyre's merchant city status. Tyre had two major sea ports, a natural harbor to the north and an artificial one to the south. By this time, Tyre served as a middleman for the Mediterranean world, transferring products to and from distant ports for at least half a millennium.

27:5. pine trees from Senir. The type of the tree mentioned is probably of the juniper variety, the eastern savin. According to Deuteronomy 3:9, Mount Senir was the Amorite name for Mount Hermon in the southern portion of the Anti-Lebanon range east of the Baka Valley. The Assyrians called it Saniru.

27:5-7. shipbuilding materials. The shipbuilding materials listed here were of the highest quality in the eastern Mediterranean. Pine and fir were preferred by the Egyptians for masts and yards. The hardwood oars lining both sides of the Phoenician biremes (ships with two racks of oarpullers on each side) were of the most durable wood. Inlaid ivory came from Kittion on the island of Cyprus. Variegated linens from Egypt were in high demand throughout the region. The dyes used for the awnings were the most expensive.

27:7. Elishah. The location of the islands of Elishah is uncertain. Elishah was a son of Javan (Gen 10:4). The name was applied to a Tyrian colony famous for its dyes. Elishah is probably the Alashiya of the Amarna tablets, usually designated as Cyprus. Seven Amarna tablets mention a king of Alashiya, who wrote letters to the Egyptian monarchs in the thirteenth century B.C.

27:8. Sidon and Arvad. Sidon and Arvad were Phoenician cities that lay on the Mediterranean coast north of Tyre. Arvad was about 110 miles north, while Sidon was about 25. They appear at this time to have been subordinate to Tyre. Both cities were often mentioned in the Amarna letters and Assyrian annals.

27:9. Gebal. Like Sidon and Arvad, Gebal (or Byblos) was a Phoenician city on the Mediterranean coast north of Tyre, about sixty miles away. It was apparently in a subordinate position to its southern neighbor. Byblos was a trading partner with Egypt in the third millennium B.C. and figured prominently in the Amarna texts and Assyrian annals.

27:10. Persia, Lydia, Put. In listing Persia, Lydia and Put, Ezekiel was signifying the peoples living at the outermost parts of the known world. Persia was in western Iran and Lydia in central Turkey, while Put may referred to the Libyans west of Egypt.

27:11. Arvad, Helech, Gammad. The city of Arvad has already been encountered in verse 8. *Helech* (Hebrew, "your army") is unattested elsewhere in the Old Testament as a toponym. It has, however, been associated with Hilakku (Cilicia in southeastern Turkey) in the Assyrian annals. The location of Gammad is uncertain, but it may be equated with Qumidi in the Amarna tablets, possibly north of Tyre on the Mediterranean coast.

27:12. Tarshish. Tarshish was associated with metal industries. The annals of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon associate a place called Tarsisi with Cyprus and other islands. There was also a Tartessus mentioned in classical sources as a Phoenician colony in western Spain.

27:13. Greece, Tubal, Meschech. Javan (or Ionians) was the biblical designation for the Greek world. Tubal (Taballu) was the Assyrian designation for a central Anatolian kingdom. Like Tubal, Meschech (Mushku) was listed as a central Anatolian kingdom in the Assyrian annals. Both Anatolian states had bad relations with Assyria.

27:14. Beth Togarmah. Beth Togarmah was most likely the capital city of Kammanu, a central Anatolian kingdom. It was known in Hittite sources as Tegaramara, and in Assyrian sources as Til-Garimmu.

27:15. Rhodes. The mention of Rhodes here is problematic in the earliest manuscripts of the Old Testament. Others read Danuna, a region north of Tyre mentioned in the Amarna letters.

27:16. Aram. Aram refers to the Syrian hinterland from Upper Mesopotamia in the north to Damascus in the south.

27:17. Minnith. Minnith was an Ammonite region in the Transjordan mentioned in Judges 11:33. Eusebius, the fourth-century A.D. church historian, identified it with the town Maanith, four miles from Heshbon.

27:18. Helbon, Zahar. Helbon is identified with the Assyrian Hilbinu, modern Helbun, ten miles north of Damascus. Zahar (or Sahar) was probably the wilderness of es-Sahra, northwest of Damascus.

27:19. Greeks from Uzal. Uzal is probably equated with Izalla, a site in the Anatolian foothills of Cilicia. Greeks (or Ionians) may have had a relationship with the town, but this is otherwise unattested.

27:19. Cassia and Calamus. The city of Damascus traded in *qiddu* (probably cassia), a costly perfume native to east Asia. Calamus was an aromatic grass used in perfume, cosmetics, flavoring and medicine. This particular type of calamus probably came from India.

27:20. Dedan. Dedan was a central Arabian oasis where Tyre received its special riding gear. It is identified with the modern site of al-Ula, which is situated on the frankincense road from Yemen to Palestine.

27:20. saddle blankets. The term here translated as "saddle blankets" is probably derived from an Akkadian root referring to "a covering for a horse."

27:21. Kedar. See comment on Isaiah 42:11.

27:22. Sheba and Raamah. For Sheba, see comment on Isaiah 60:6. Raamah is mentioned in the Old Testament only in conjunction with Sheba. It may be associated with Rgmt (the vowels of the ancient name are not certain), a city in the district of Najran in central Arabia.

27:23. Haran, Canneh, Eden, Sheba, Ashur, Kilmad. All these areas were to the north and east of Tyre. Haran was situated on the Balikh River in Upper Mesopotamia. Canneh is probably Assyrian Kannu, the location of which is unknown. Eden is Bit Adini, an Aramean state west of the Balikh River in Syria. Ashur was the name of the old capital city of Assyria, as well as the name of the primary god of Assyria. Kilmad is otherwise unknown.

27:24. merchandise. The merchandise listed here is very rare and exotic. Many of the words are *hapax legomena,* that is, words that occur only here in Scripture. Cognates with Akkadian have helped somewhat in shedding light on their meaning. The "choice garments" are specially crafted garments of some type. They are accompanied by expensive blue-purple and embroidered cloaks. They are followed by a coat or mantle, woolen garments, and a multicolored coat.

27:25. ships of Tarshish. Although verse 12 denotes a specific region for Tarshish (i.e., Spain), the designation "ships of Tarshish" seems to imply a Phoenician provenance similar to what is found in Isaiah 23:1-18. Thus they may have been ships bound for Tarshish.

28:2. ruler of Tyre. The king of Tyre at this time was Ethbaal III, although nothing in this oracle is known to be specifically about him. The text claims that the prince is claiming equality with the patron deity of Tyre, Melqart, a fact unattested in extrabiblical literature.

28:3. Daniel. Some perceive this person to be a famous extrabiblical character known from the Ugaritic Epic of Keret. But the Ugaritic Danil was not particularly known for great wisdom. The biblical Daniel was probably well known to Ezekiel because of his exceptional gifts. For more information see the comment on 14:14.

28:12. lament. There are numerous laments or funeral dirges in the Old Testament and in ancient Near Eastern literature. They are often directed towards cities or nations, but there are also laments concerning the death of individuals. In this case the "lament" is a sarcastic piece of mocking literature. See comment on 19:1.

28:12. seal of perfection. Assyrian royal epithets included the titles "perfect man" and "perfect king." The term was also used in divine attributes. Here the king is likened to a finely carved stamp seal (see sidebar in Jer 32). These were often made from semiprecious stones and served both as a mark of identity and a protective amulet.

28:13. list of precious stones. In Exodus 28:17-20 and 39:10-13 the high priest's breastplate contains twelve precious stones, many of which are repeated here. A gem-studded garment would be a very clear indication of his grandeur, but there is no indication here that a breastplate is intended. Kings sometimes wore gem-encrusted headbands. Jeweled pectorals or breastplates are known from the ancient world as well. The identification of a number of these gemstones is problematic. Thus modern translations have not agreed on the nature of the nine gems. Carnelian is preferable to ruby; topaz is possibly the yellow-green olivine called peridot; the third is not diamond (NASB) or emerald (NIV), but it is a hard stone of some sort; the fourth is likely a yellow stone (D. Block suggests Spanish gold topaz); for the fifth, onyx is normal and probable; the sixth is commonly regarded as some sort of jasper; the seventh is lapis lazuli (with the NIV note); the eighth is very uncertain; and the last is believed by most to be emerald.

28:14. cherub. The term *cherub(im)* occurs over ninety times in the Old Testament in reference to heavenly creatures. They appear to be winged beings but are greatly varied. There are examples of cherubim with many faces, bovine faces, aquiline faces and human faces. They are described in a way to correspond to various forms of composite beasts depicted in ancient Near Eastern art, especially in Assyria. Because of their composite animal and human features, they were apt symbols of divine presence, both in Israel and in surrounding regions. Here it is undoubtedly a reference to the guardian of the tree of life in Genesis 3:24 (see comment there). Likening the prince of Tyre to a cherub suggests that he was entrusted with the stewardship of divine property. The natural resources of this region, especially the cedar forests, were often considered the property of the gods in Mesopotamian sources (for instance, the Gilgamesh Epic). Artifacts

also support the picture presented here. Cherubim are frequently depicted on the carved ivories of this period, and at times the king is portrayed as a cherub. The carvings can be jewel-studded, and decorations feature flowers and mountains. For more information on cherubim, see comments on 10:1 and Exodus 25:18-20.

28:14. holy mountain. The concept of holy mountains was common in the ancient world. Ancient Near Eastern thought, not unlike that familiar from Greek mythology, visualized a mountain height as the dwelling place of deity. There would have been little difference in their minds between the tops of mountains and the heavens. Baal's home was purported in Ugaritic literature to be Mount Zaphon. In Israelite terms the two most significant sacred mountains were Mount Sinai and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. While there is no parallel in ancient Near Eastern thinking suggesting a paradise on a mountain, the garden of Eden functions as a paradise largely because it is the place of God's presence, a cosmic Holy of Holies. The holy mountain is then very appropriate as a parallel to Eden, for both concern God's presence. In Ezekiel 31:16 the forests of Lebanon and the garden of Eden are again associated.

28:14. fiery stones. There are numerous connections possible for understanding the "fiery stones." In the realm of iconography they are represented as the decorative ornamentation on some of the ivory pieces (see comment on "cherubim" above). In mythology, it should be noted that there is a palace of fused gemstones described in Ugaritic texts. In legend, Gilgamesh encounters on his journeys a grove where the trees and bushes are full of precious stones. Any of these could offer a context for the picture given here by the text.

28:16-17. Satan connection. From early on in church history there has been an interpretive tradition understanding this passage as an account of the fall of Satan. Though this same type of interpretation in Isaiah 14 was fervently denied by well-respected exegetes such as John Calvin (who bluntly ridiculed it), it has persisted into modern times. From a background standpoint, it must be noted that Satan is never portrayed as either being a cherub or being with the cherub in the garden in any passage of Scripture. Furthermore, Israel's understanding of Satan was far more limited than that found in the New Testament. Even in Job, Satan is not a personal name but a function (see comment on Job 1:6). "Satan" does not become identified as the personal name of the chief of demons until about the second century B.C., and he does not take up his position as the source and cause of all evil until the unfolding of Christian doctrine. Consequently, the Israelites could not have understood this passage in this way, and no New Testament passage offers a basis for departing from the Israelite understanding of it. In the context, it is a metaphorical description of the high stewardship entrusted to the prince of Tyre (as significant as the cherub's role in the garden). Rather than treating this sacred trust with reverence and awe, he exploited it to his own benefit—as if the cherub of the garden had opened a roadside fruit stand. He was therefore discharged from his position, relieved of his trust and publicly humiliated.

28:18. desecrated sanctuaries. In Ezekiel, the temple of Israel is desecrated when it is despoiled by the Babylonians (Ezek 7:21-22). Something can also be "desecrated" by failing to treat it as holy. Since it is unlikely that Ezekiel would consider the sanctuaries of Tyre as holy, it is more likely that in this passage the prince is charged with pillaging sanctuary treasuries or misappropriating temple funds.

28:20-26

Oracle Concerning Sidon

28:21. Sidon in the early sixth century. The great trading city of Sidon had been defeated by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 B.C., who deposed Luli for joining an anti-Assyrian coalition. Under Abdimilikutti, Sidon again revolted against Esarhaddon of Assyria in 677 B.C. The city was destroyed to its foundations and its king was beheaded. The Assyrians rebuilt the city and named it Kar-Asarhaddon, and it became the center of Assyria's administration of the area. In Jeremiah 27:3 envoys from Sidon were included in the conspirators that met in Jerusalem in 594. A few years later Sidon was forced to submit to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and many of its people were deported. There is no account of the details, but some Sidonian exiles are known from the city of Uruk in Babylonia in this period. Herodotus reports that in 588 the Egyptians fought against Sidon in an attempt to gain control of the Phoenician coast, but it is likely that Sidon was already a Babylonian vassal at this time.

29:1—32:32

Oracles and Laments Concerning Egypt

29:1. chronology. Though compared to the date given in 24:1 this appears to be one year later, it has often been concluded by commen-

tators that the notation in 24:1 was made in accordance with an nonaccession year system rather than an accession year system (see comments on 24:1; Jer 26:1; and Dan 2:1). If this is so, this oracle was given only two days after the siege of Jerusalem began. This is more likely, because the Egyptian response to the siege took place that first summer.

29:2. Egypt in the early sixth century. In the early sixth century B.C. Egypt was under the Saite or Twenty-Sixth dynasty. With the fall of Assyria, Egypt attempted to control the Levant as it had done in previous centuries. However, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was able to fill the power vacuum in the area, decisively defeating Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. The Egyptian pharaoh Psammeticus II (595-589) had spent much of his reign attempting to regain the territory in Phoenicia and Palestine that Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from Necho II (610-596) at Carchemish. Apries (Hophra) came to the throne in 589. During the early summer of the first year of the siege of Jerusalem, he dispatched an army into Palestine. This required the Babylonians to temporarily lift their siege. This, plus an Egyptian fleet that sailed to Tyre and quickly took control there (mentioned by the Greek historian Herodotus), forced Nebuchadnezzar to withdraw from Jerusalem. The Egyptians, however, were quickly defeated (possibly near Gaza) and the siege resumed by late summer.

29:3. identity of pharaoh. The reigning monarch in Egypt at this time was Apries (Hophra), who ruled 589-570 B.C. However, Ezekiel is most likely addressing the office of pharaoh in general, rather than any particular monarch.

29:3. monster among the streams. For the metaphor of Egypt as a monster of chaos see comment on Isaiah 30:7. More concretely, the word used here could easily be used in reference to a crocodile. There are probably elements of both intended here.

29:4. fish metaphor. The Greek historian Herodotus described the procedure of catching crocodiles in the Nile. The hunter baited a hook with pork, letting it float in the middle of the river. On the banks of the river, the hunter began to beat a live pig. Upon hearing the cries of the pig, the crocodile went after the sound, meeting the pork, which it swallowed. In the meantime the hunter pulled the line, which included the hook and crocodile.

29:6. staff of reed metaphor. Whether used as a cane or a crutch, the reed will only collapse and cause physical damage rather than offering reliable support. The Assyrians claimed the same about Pharaoh in Isaiah 36:6. The prominence of reeds in Egypt made this a very apt metaphor for depending on Egypt. More specifically, the pharaoh held several scepters that represented his power and office. The *was* scepter was forked at the bottom, and the top handle was carved in the shape of a dog's head. The *heqa* scepter was shaped like a shepherd's crook. Though these were generally not made of reed, tomb discoveries have confirmed that at least in one instance a reed staff was included among the staffs of Pharaoh.

29:10. Migdol to Aswan. Migdol ("tower") was the name of several military stations in Egypt's northeastern frontier. Although we cannot be certain just which one is mentioned here, the term marks the northeastern border of Egypt. Syene (modern Aswan) was just north of the first cataract of the Nile, the traditional southern border of Egypt (the border of Cush/Nubia). Thus, Migdol to Aswan was the entire length of Egypt.

29:11-12. forty-year desolation and exile. Forty years was the period in which one generation flourished and died off. Thus it was a period of temporary national punishment. In a Moabite inscription, Mesha of Moab claimed that Israel occupied his land for forty years. There is some evidence of Nebuchadnezzar undertaking an invasion of Egypt in his thirty-seventh year (568), but there is no information concerning what success he might have had or whether there was any deportation of the population. Memphis was captured by the Persian king Cambyses in 525, and Pharaoh Psammeticus II was taken captive. Egypt then came under Persian control through most of the Achaemenid empire, with a brief period of revolt and independence around 460.

29:14. Upper Egypt. Upper Egypt (or the land of Pathros) designated all of Egypt south of Memphis. An ancient Egyptian tradition asserted that the nation had originated in the south in Upper Egypt. Esarhaddon of Assyria claimed to be the king of Musur (north Egypt) and Paturisi (Pathros).

29:14-15. lowly and weak kingdom. The term "lowly and weak kingdom" appears to denote that Egypt will be relegated to vassal status. Although we are not told to whom the nation will be subject, the historical record is clear enough. Conquered by Cambyses in 525, Egypt became a Persian vassal for the next two centuries.

29:17. chronology. The date is April 26, 571, one or two years after the end of the siege of Tyre.

29:18. Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre. See comment on 26:7.

29:18. head rubbed bare, shoulder raw. Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers will have bare heads and raw shoulders because of the burdens put upon them in order to throw up earthworks to attack the city of Tyre. The siege ramps used to build a slope up to the walls required tons of dirt. Additionally, there was an attempt to build a causeway out to the island portion of the city. Dirt would have been carried in baskets on the head and on the shoulder.

29:18. no reward. Soldiers usually received booty in the form of persons, animals and possessions. However, Tyre was able to get an exemption from destruction by yielding to Babylon. Thus there was no pillaging of the city.

29:19. Nebuchadnezzar and Egypt. It was inevitable that Nebuchadnezzar would eventually have to invade and attempt to conquer Egypt. The Medes had united the territory east of the Tigris, effectively cutting Babylon off from direct trade with the east, and the Egyptians, with their Phoenician allies, were constantly causing political and commercial problems in the west and along the Arabian trade routes. An extended (thirteen-year according to the fourth-century Greek historian Menander) siege bottled up Tyre and devastated much of Phoenicia (584-571). A fragmentary portion of Nebuchadnezzar's annals from his thirty-seventh year, Herodotus and Ezekiel 29:19-21 refer to the invasion of Egypt in 568, but no details are given other than victories over desert tribes. It is likely that some Babylonian garrisons were installed in the fortresses of the Sinai following this campaign.

29:21. horn metaphor. The horns of an animal were considered tokens of their power and thus were a figure of strength. Many of the deities of Mesopotamia were depicted with horns. Thus, making a horn to sprout signifies a return of Israel's power. Additionally, it must be noted that the crowns of kings also often featured horns, and a horn could therefore refer more specifically to a king (see comment on Dan 7:7).

30:4. Egypt connected to Cush. Cush, the neighboring country to the south of Egypt, known as Nubia, had had relations with its northern neighbor since the beginning of recorded history. Egypt had a dominant trading relationship with Cush for many centuries and occasionally conquered the area. By the mid-eighth century, however, the Cushites had been successful in conquering Egypt, and they ruled the land for nearly a century.

30:5. geography. The first three areas listed (Cush, Put and Lud) are also mentioned in Ezekiel 27:10. Cush (Nubia) was adjacent to Egypt on the south; Put (Lybia) was adjacent to the west. Lydia was to the north across the Mediterranean and was a frequent ally of Egyptians against various enemies to the east. Arabia could refer to the Arabian peninsula to the southeast, but it would be unusual for this Hebrew word to be used that way. It is more frequently used to refer to a mixed assortment of ethnic groups. It is known that the Egyptians during this period used mercenaries from throughout western Asia and the eastern Mediterranean. Kub (NIV: Libya) is an unknown area probably also within modern Libya. The "land of the covenant" is a reference to soldiers of an unnamed country, probably Judah, which had a military relationship with Egypt at this time and probably supplied mercenaries, as did all of these other lands. Jeremiah is aware of a Jewish settlement in Egypt (see comment on Jer 44:1).

30:6. Migdol to Aswan. See comment on 29:10.

30:9. messengers to Cush in ships. The term here for "ships" (an Egyptian loan word) refers to military boats rather than reed boats or merchant ships. Nubia felt that having Egypt as a buffer zone offered a certain amount of protection from any of the powers from the east that would arise. Though the Egyptian pharaoh Psammeticus II campaigned against Nubia in 593, it is not attack from Egypt that is threatened in this passage. The Persian king Cambyses invaded Nubia in 525, and from that time it was counted as part of the empire. Nubians served as mercenaries in the Persian army.

30:10-11. Nebuchadnezzar and Egypt. See comment on 29:19.

30:12. sell land. In the ancient world the concept of selling something did not emphasize "getting money" as it might in today's economy. Rather the emphasis was on the transfer of ownership. In Akkadian the word for sell is also the word for give. Ruth 4:3-5 shows that flexibility in the Hebrew term used here as well. As a result, it is not pertinent to ask what Yahweh is receiving in return. That is not the issue. He is transferring possession of the land from Egypt to Babylon.

30:13. images of Memphis. Memphis was the royal residence during this period and the center of the cult of the god Ptah. It was the city in which kings were enthroned. Ptah was one of the few deities that did not have an animal head. He was a creator deity and patron of the craft guilds.

30:14. Pathros. This is a reference to Upper Egypt; see comment on 29:14.

30:14. Zoan. Zoan (Hellenized as Tanis) was a town in the eastern Nile Delta, an important administrative center in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.

30:14. Thebes. Thebes (or No-Amon in Egyptian) was the main city of Upper Egypt and had been the capital of the nation for centuries during the New Kingdom. It was surrounded by a spectacular array of monumental sacred precincts.

30:15. Pelusium. Sin was an important fortress town in the northeast frontier of the Delta region usually identified with Pelusium. It held a strategic position in Egypt's defense against invaders from Western Asia.

30:17. Heliopolis. Aven (Hellenized as Heliopolis, "city of the sun god") was at the apex of the Nile Delta region, just north of the city of Cairo. It normally appears in Hebrew as On (see Gen 41:45, 50).

30:17. Bubastis. Pi-Beset (Hellenized as Bubastis) was a town in the Nile Delta region. It is modern Tell Basta, located thirty-five miles north of Cairo on the Tanitic branch of the Nile. It was the residence of Sheshonq (Shiskak), a powerful monarch of the Twenty-Second Dynasty in the tenth century B.C.

30:18. Tahpanhes. Tahpanhes was an outpost in the eastern Delta region of the Nile, bordering the Sinai. It was later known as Daphne by the Greeks, who inhabited the outpost as mercenaries by the seventh century B.C. The Greek historian Herodotus states that Daphne was one of three outposts set up by the Egyptians to stop the Assyrian invasion. The Israelites in flight from the Babylonians may have stopped there in the early sixth century B.C.

30:20. chronology. The date is April 29, 587 B.C., just a few months after the date given in 29:1. The Egyptian interference is imminent, but Ezekiel warns that nothing will come of it.

30:21. the arm of Pharaoh. In Scripture the arm is the symbol of aggressive power, and thus the breaking of the arm signifies that the individual in question has been rendered impotent (see Ps 10:15; 37:17). The image of an outstretched or mighty hand or arm is common in Egyptian inscriptions to describe the power of Pharaoh. It is used throughout the Exodus narratives to describe God's power over Pharaoh. In the fourteenth-century B.C. Amarna letters, Abdi-Heba, the governor of Jerusalem, refers to "the strong arm of the king" as the basis for his government appointment. Similarly, the Eighteenth-Dynasty Hymn to Osiris equates his growing to majority with the phrase "when his arm was strong," and Haremhab's Hymn to Thoth describes the moon god as guiding the divine bark through the sky with "arms outstretched."

30:23. scattering Egyptians. See comment on 29:11-12.

31:1. chronology. The date is June 21, 587 B.C., nearly two months after the date mentioned in Ezekiel 30:20. Since there is no firm information concerning the date of the Egyptian interference, it is difficult to relate this oracle to the timing of the event.

31:2. identity of Pharaoh. As in 29:3 Ezekiel is probably addressing the office of pharaoh in general. Hophra was the reigning monarch in 587 B.C. (see the note on 29:3).

31:3-17. extent, duration and power of Assyria. The power of the Assyrian state waxed and waned for nearly three centuries (c. 900-612 B.C.). At its height its geographic range was enormous, ranging from Iran in the east to central Egypt, central Anatolia and Cyprus in the west. It covered much of the Arabian desert in the south and ranged as far north as modern Armenia. In Ezekiel's time it had passed off the scene rather recently (about twenty years earlier), so it served as a perfect image of a long-standing superpower that had crumbled to nothing.

31:3-14. tree metaphor. The tree used for the metaphor here is the cedar, a well-known ancient Near Eastern symbol of majesty. It was used for the construction of many important palaces and temples. Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian kings all recount how they cut down the cedars of Lebanon in order to construct their mighty edifices. The myth of a cosmic tree is also found in Mesopotamian contexts. Its roots are fed by the great subterranean ocean, and its top merges with the clouds, so that it binds together the heavens, the earth and the netherworld. The Sumerian account of the Epic of Gilgamesh has a motif of a great tree offering shelter to animals. The Sumerian goddess Inanna discovered the sacred cosmic tree on the banks of the Euphrates and transplanted it into her sacred garden at Uruk (biblical Erech), where it attracted the mythical Anzu (a bird deity), a snake and Lilith (an evil demon). In the *Myth of Erra and Ishum,* Marduk speaks of the *meshu* tree whose roots reach down through the oceans to the netherworld and whose top is above the heavens. In Assyrian contexts the motif of a sacred tree is also well known. Some have called it a tree of life, and some also associate it with this world tree. It is often flanked by animals or by human or divine figures. A winged disk is typically centrally located over the top of the tree. The king is represented as the human personification of this tree. The tree is thought

to represent the divine world order, but textual discussion of it is lacking. As is often the case in Ezekiel, this mythical motif is transformed to a political image.

31:8-9. garden of God. The garden of God in Ezekiel is identified as Eden. Here, however, it is not invoking the image of a utopian home from which humans have been driven. Unlike the paradise motif in the Bible, the Mesopotamian garden of the gods was the beautiful protected property of the gods that humans trespassed at their peril. Such was the cedar forest to which Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu gained access when they defeated the divinely appointed guardian of the forest, Huwawa. These gardens, like the royal gardens of this period, were wooded parks featuring beautiful and exotic trees. This description is also appropriate for the biblical Eden.

31:12. Assyria's fall. The Assyrian empire was at its height in the early seventh century B.C., as it was successful in conquering Egypt. However, a great civil war in 652-648 B.C. showed the inherent weakness of the huge state. After the devastation of the civil war Assyria quickly weakened. By the end of Ashurbanipal's reign (either 631 or 627 B.C.) all economic and other textual sources disappear from Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. By 626 B.C. the Chaldeans of Babylonia had declared their independence. Within fourteen years all of the major Assyrian cities had been destroyed, the monarchy had fled to Harran in Syria, and the army was in chaos. The Assyrians may have participated in the Battle of Carchemish against Nebuchadnezzar, but they were never heard from again. Thus in the forty or so years after the great civil war, Assyria had been consigned to oblivion.

31:16. comparison of Eden to Lebanon. This comparison draws together the biblical motif of Eden as the protected property of Yahweh and the Mesopotamian motif of the cedar forest as the protected property of the gods. See comment on 31:8-9.

31:18. uncircumcised. There is evidence that Egypt's priests and kings endured some form of circumcision. In general, the Israelites disdained the uncircumcised, and possibly the Egyptian royalty felt the same way. Contempt of the uncircumcised appears in both the Egyptian and Israelite practice of cutting off the uncircumcised penises of enemies.

32:1. chronology. The date is March 3, 585 B.C., a few months after the report of the fall of Jerusalem had reached Ezekiel.

32:2. monster in the seas. The monster in this case is not located in the Nile River but "in the seas." This reference is probably to the cosmic monsters destroyed by God (see Is 51:9-10; Ps 74:13). In the Bible as well as in the ancient Near East, the sea represents chaos and disorder, as do the sea monsters that live there. The obvious physical struggle between the sea and the land as well as the fierce, seemingly unstoppable energy displayed by the savage sea gave rise to cosmic myths in the ancient Near East. The *Enuma Elish* creation epic from Babylon describes how Marduk vanquished Tiamat while this goddess of watery chaos was in the form of a dragon. Much of the cycle of stories about Baal in Ugaritic legend involves Baal's struggle against his rival Yamm, the god of the sea. Similarly, the Ugaritic epic has both Anat and Baal claim to have conquered Litan, the seven-headed dragon, and thus gained mastery over the seas. In Psalm 104:26, Yahweh is said to play with Leviathan, and in Job 41:1-11, God challenges Job to show his control over Leviathan as God does. The kingdoms represented by these beasts are therefore associated with the forces of chaos that bring disorder to God's world and need to be overcome (see comments on Dan 7).

32:2. lion/monster. The parallel between lion and monster (dragon) seems strange to us but was not at all unusual in Ezekiel's world. The famous Ishtar Gate in Babylon and the procession way leading up to it used glazed bricks to create alternating images of lions and dragons. Additionally, in the mythological traditions of Mesopotamia a composite creature that combined lion and dragon features was common. This is especially true of Labbu in the Labbu Myth. From as early as the beginning of the second millennium, kings used lion and dragon in parallel to describe themselves.

32:2. churning, muddying waters. This description indicates a typical mythical scene in which the churning of the cosmic ocean disturbs the creatures (often sea monsters) who represent the forces of chaos and disorder. In *Enuma Elish* the sky god, Anu, creates the four winds that stir up the deep and its goddess, Tiamat. Here it is the monster who churns up the sea with the threat that chaos will bring disorder to the world.

32:3. capture with net. In both the Erra Epic and *Enuma Elish* the creature representing the forces of chaos (Anzu and Tiamat respectively) is captured in a net.

32:4. huge carcass devoured by birds and beasts. In the Labbu Myth, Labbu is described as a monster fifty miles long and a mile wide.

32:6. drenched with blood. In the Labbu Myth the blood of the slain monster is said to flow for three years and three months.

32:7-8. cosmic effects. These cosmic effects reflect the world-upside-down motif that is well known in the ancient world (see comment on Jer 4:23-26). It additionally strikes at the heart of the Egyptian religion, which featured the sun god most prominently.

32:11. sword of the king of Babylon. See comment on 29:19.

32:14. streams flowing like oil. The muddy waters have settled at the bottom of the river and have given way to clear, smoothly flowing rivers that run like oil. Similar phraseology ("heavens raining down oil") is found in the Ugaritic Baal texts, but there, as elsewhere in the Bible, it is an image of prosperity. In the contrast presented here, flowing like oil means that it is undisturbed, and it is undisturbed because the land is desolate.

32:17. chronology. The date is March 17, 585 B.C., two weeks later than the date mentioned in 32:1.

32:21-22. Assyria with her dead in Sheol. The nations listed in 22-30 all suffered significant devastation. Ezekiel probably has in mind the final defeat and destruction of the Assyrian empire at the end of the sixth century B.C. Her armies were probably finally destroyed at the battle of Carchemish, where Egypt (and probably Assyria) was decisively defeated by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Thus, the imagery sees that the final end of Assyria is in Sheol, the abode of the dead.

32:24. Elam. Elam was an important state in southwestern Iran (modern Khuzistan). Its main city was Susa, which had a very ancient history and is mentioned in Sumerian and proto-Elamite records from the outset of the third millennium B.C. Elam was devastated by the Assyrians in the late seventh century B.C. It was invaded by Nebuchadnezzar in 596 and was taken over by the Medo-Persians later in the sixth century B.C.

32:26 Meschech and Tubal. At the end of the eighth century, these two Anatolian kingdoms were ravaged by internal warfare, conquered by Sargon II of Assyria and invaded by the Cimmerians from southern Russia. Unfortunately, little of their history survives from the seventh and early sixth centuries. It is thought that they were incorporated under Lydian control after the conclusion of the Cimmerian wars. In the spring of 585 the Lydians are at war with the Medes (see chronology in v. 1 above and comment on 38:1). They are mentioned again in the Persian period as separate ethnic identities. They are known to the Assyrians as Mushku (central Anatolia) and Tabal (eastern Anatolia), and to Herodotus as the Moschi and Tibarenoi (subject states of the Persian empire). At the end of the eighth century the king of Mushku was Mita, known to the Greeks as Midas, the king with the golden touch. His tomb has been identified at Gordion and excavated.

32:29. Edom. Edom was a Semitic-speaking neighbor of Judah, south and east of the Dead Sea. In the eighth century B.C. Edom fell under the control of the Assyrians, as noted in the annals of Tiglath-Pileser III (r. 745-727 B.C.), and continued under their rule until the death of Ashurbanipal a century later. During that time the Edomites were often conscripted into the Assyrian armies and thus figure often in the annals. During the Babylonian period Edom evidently sided with the great empire, although there are no extrabiblical records to verifying this. It is likely that they submitted themselves to Nebuchadnezzar's rule in 605 B.C. Although some Judean refugees may have found shelter in Edom, it apparently remained passive as Jerusalem was destroyed (see Ps 137:7 and Obad 11). The Babylonian campaign against Ammon and Moab in 594 seems not to have affected Edom. It is likely that they remained unscathed until the time of Nabonidus's campaign in 552 B.C.

32:30. princes of the north. The princes of the north are most likely Aramean rulers or sheiks. There were a number of hostile Aramean kingdoms north of Israel/Judah, the largest centered in Damascus.

32:30. Sidonians. See the comment on 28:21.

33:1-20

Ezekiel's Role as a Watchman

33:2-6. role of watchman. The watchman stood at the place in the city where he would have the most strategic view of the surroundings and watched for any approaching enemy army. He reported either by word of mouth or by trumpet. His task was simply to sound the alarm of the approaching enemy. He was absolved of responsibility if the city dwellers refused to heed his call. The watchman is found throughout the ancient Near East. The spiritual sense used here is not found in the ancient Near East but is picked up (probably from Ezekiel) in the Dead Sea Scrolls sectarian documents, where the leader of the community is on the lookout for the judgment of God.

33:3. trumpet signal. The trumpet here is the ram's horn, which had a limited musical range. The term (Hebrew, *shopar)* is likely be related to Akkadian *shapparu,* which is in turn a loan word from Sumerian denoting a wild goat or ibex. It was significant not only for its

use in war (to proclaim victory, announce the disbanding of the army and call troops to arms) but also for the cultic rites of Israel (see Ps 81:4 and Lev 25:9). In fact, it is the most frequently named musical instrument in the Old Testament. For more information see comment on Joshua 6:4-5.

33:7. prophet as watchman. Ezekiel's portrayal of himself as prophetic watchman is similar to the charge given to Isaiah (21:6-9) and Jeremiah (6:17). Though no similar label has been found attached to prophets in the ancient Near East, the concept is familiar enough. The prophets were expected to warn the king of impending situations (in military or cultic realms) that might jeopardize his person or the stability of his kingdom.

33:15. pledge for loan. Pledges for loans were customary throughout the ancient Near East. Thousands of loan contracts uncovered from Mesopotamia show that it was quite an ordinary procedure. For example, at Terqa in Middle Bronze Age Syria, a certain Puzurum made a loan at the local temple of the sun god Shamash. He retained one-half of a cuneiform contract, while the temple (functioning in this case as a bank) retained the other. Thus the two halves functioned as a receipt. When Puzurum paid off the loan, the temple returned to him the remaining portion of the contract. The return of a pledge by a repentant wicked person suggests that an oppressive debt situation was resolved with the debt being forgiven.

33:21-33

Jerusalem's Fate

33:21. chronology. The date is January 19, 585 B.C. It is about five months after the fall of Jerusalem. Most commentaries agree that this is not a fugitive or even a refugee, but one of the survivors who has been brought captive to Babylon with the first wave of exiles from the destruction.

33:25. eating meat with blood. The phrase literally is "eating over blood." Leviticus 19:26 associates this with banned forms of divination. Medieval rabbinical texts identified this with a practice of the Sabians, a north Arabian sect that had a communal meal in which humans ate meat whose blood was poured on the ground to attract spirit beings. Similar practices were done throughout the entire Near East. The land of Israel was understood theologically as the camp that surrounded the temple. The violations listed are the sort that would result in the person being sent outside the camp.

33:27. wild animals as punishment. Wild beasts were a constant source of fear for city dwellers throughout the ancient Near East. In Assyrian texts and reliefs of this period the kings are seen hunting lions to symbolically rid the city of the scourge of wild beasts. It has been suggested that the killing of eighteen lions represents the eighteen gates of Nineveh and the roads leading out of them. See comment on 5:17.

33:32. love songs for entertainment. Love (or erotic) songs had long been sources of entertainment for city dwellers. The itinerant singer of songs traveled from town to town, entertaining the people. Many of these songs were written down in the cuneiform record. For example, portions of the Epic of Gilgamesh may well have been sung to the city dwellers in Sumer in much the same way that Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were sung by traveling poets before being written down centuries later. Love songs are connected to Ritual Marriage texts (the Tammuz liturgy) in Sumerian times and were popular in Egypt during the second half of the second millennium (Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties). It is a severe indictment that the people have reduced the role of the messenger of God to mere entertainment.

34:1-31

Oracle to the Shepherds

34:3. perquisites of leaders. The three staple byproducts of sheep and goats (goats' milk/curds, sheep's wool, meat) are used here to extend the metaphor of the leaders gleaning all the benefits but not fulfilling their responsibilities. Royal and priestly administrations were of necessity supported by the population through taxations of various sorts, but it was expected that the population would in turn benefit rather than be exploited.

34:3-4. shepherd tasks. As the previous metaphor concerned the privileges of the shepherd, attention now turns to the neglected responsibilities. The metaphor goes beyond the normal responsibilities of making sure that the sheep were protected and fed. Instead it focuses on the remedial duties, caring for the sick and finding the lost. These would equate to the need for kings to bring about justice for alienated and disenfranchised people (such as the widow and orphan).

34:7-16. shepherd/king metaphor in ancient Near East. The ideology of the king as a shepherd to his people is found with Lugalzagessi of Sumer as early as around 2450 B.C. The contemporary king Urukagina of Lagash claimed

that the god Ningirsu owned his state and that the king had been chosen as a shepherd to administer the city on behalf of the gods and the people. Gods responsible for maintaining justice (Shamash in Mesopotamia, Amun in Egypt) are likewise represented in this way. This ideology continued in the ancient Near East into the monarchy period, occurring in reference to Ashurbanipal of Assyria (seventh century) and Nebuchadnezzar (sixth century).

35:1-15

Oracle Concerning Edom

35:2. Mount Seir. Mount Seir was the ancient name of the mountainous region south of the Dead Sea on both sides of the Rift Valley running south to the Gulf of Aqaba. The name Seir is found in the Amarna texts from Egypt in the fourteenth century B.C. According to Scripture the mountains of Seir were occupied first by the Horites (Deut 2:12, 22), who were later displaced by the Edomites. Seir became synonymous with the entire country of Edom.

35:5. Edom's role in fall of Jerusalem. This verse addresses the long-standing dissension between Edom and Israel. We are told elsewhere in Scripture that the Edomites cheered when Nebuchadnezzar II destroyed Jerusalem (e.g., Ps 137; Joel 3:19; Obad 1-14). This is the only text that implies that they played an active role in the conquest.

36:1-38

Oracle of Restoration

36:5. Edom's conduct. See comment on 35:5.

36:25. sprinkled with clean water. While sprinkling with water for purification was a part of the ritual ablutions used by the priests, the term "clean water" is not used anywhere else in the Old Testament.

36:26. metaphors. The heart was considered the seat of the mind and its will, or inclinations. For more information concerning a heart of stone or a heavy heart see comments on 11:19; Isaiah 6:9-10; and Exodus 8:11.

37:1-28

Valley of Dry Bones

37:1. transported in visions. See comment on 8:3.

37:2. valley full of bones. The large amount of bones described here implies that this was the scene of a major catastrophe. The depiction of a large number of corpses that had been denied a proper burial is reminiscent of many battle scenes and descriptions of battle scenes found in the earliest periods of Mesopotamian and Egyptian history. Furthermore, the Assyrian annals describe the destruction of their enemies in similar terms. A typical ancient Near Eastern curse has the corpse of the cursed victim exposed to the elements.

37:12-13. resurrection in ancient Near East. The concept of resurrection was known in some parts of the ancient Near East. The Egyptians believed that some of the deceased rose as stars and took their place in the heavens. However, in general the only awakening that was part of the ancient worldview was the calling up of spirits of the dead (which is not permanent and not a bodily presence) or the awakening of the fertility gods of nature cycles. These died annually when the agricultural cycle came to an end and "wintered" in the netherworld. Then they were ritually awakened in the spring. None of this bears any resemblance to a theological doctrine of resurrection. Occasional revivifications or indications of national return to life as found in this passage are not representative of a doctrine of resurrection. See comment on Isaiah 26:19. Some have suggested that there is a greater likelihood that Ezekiel is transported east this time. Zoroastrian practice was to leave bodies unburied with the hope that they would someday be reassembled and revived. A drawback to this is that the spread of Persian culture and ideas dates to some decades after Ezekiel, and Zoroastrianism does not take hold in the Persian empire until the end of the sixth century.

38:15-16. writing on wood. It is likely, since this wood is being written on, that Ezekiel is using two wooden tablets. It was a common practice to use wooden boards coated with a beeswax concoction for the writing of messages that were formal but did not need to be archived and preserved.

38:1—39:29

Gog and Magog

38:2. Gog. The identification of Gog has perplexed commentators for centuries. The most likely explanation is that the name is a derivative of Gyges, who was a Lydian king mentioned in Assyrian and Greek sources. In the former he is called Gugu and he rules over *mat Gugu,* which is Akkadian for the "land of Gugu." His reign, however, is fifty or more years prior to the time of Ezekiel, so some have argued that the name became a dynastic title used by his royal descendants. The king of Lydia at the time of Ezekiel is Alyattes. There is no evidence that Lydia ever threatened Judah, but the Lydians were involved in

a serious war against Cyaxares and the Medes in 585. Gog looks similar to the names Agag and Og, two famous enemies of Israel.

38:2. Magog. Magog is likely a Hebrew form of Akkadian Mat Gugu, "the land of Gog," which Josephus identified as Lydia in western Anatolia.

38:2. Meschech and Tubal. At the end of the eighth century, these two Anatolian kingdoms were ravaged by internal warfare, conquered by Sargon II of Assyria and invaded by the Cimmerians from southern Russia. Unfortunately, little of their history survives from the seventh and early sixth centuries. It is thought that they were incorporated under Lydian control after the conclusion of the Cimmerian wars. In the spring of 585 the Lydians were at war with the Medes. They are mentioned again in the Persian period as separate ethnic identities. They are known to the Assyrians as Mushku (central Anatolia) and Tabal (eastern Anatolia), and to Herodotus as the Moschi and Tibarenoi (subject states of the Persian empire). At the end of the eighth century the king of Mushku was Mita, known to the Greeks as Midas, the king with the golden touch. His tomb has been identified at Gordion and excavated.

38:4. hooks in your jaws. The Assyrians typically put hooks in the jaws of defeated enemies, either for the purposes of humiliation or to deport them to other lands. This practice is often described in their annals and graphically depicted in their wall reliefs. Esarhaddon is depicted on a stele from Zinjirli in Syria as leading Baal of Tyre and Tirhakah of Egypt by a rope tied to a ring through their lips. Ashurbanipal claims to have pierced the cheeks of Uate' (king of Ishmael) with a sharp-edged tool and put a ring in his jaw.

38:4. large and small shields. These were body shields and hand shields respectively. See comment on 23:24.

38:5. Persia, Cush and Put. See comment on 27:10.

38:6. Gomer. Gomer has been equated with the Gimirrai of the Assyrian annals and the Cimmerians of Greek sources. In Homer's *Odyssey* they lived on the north shore of the Black Sea. They attacked the kingdom of Urartu from the north and caused problems for the Assyrians in the eighth century. Sargon died in battle against them in Tubal. They appear to have been driven through the Caucasus mountains into Anatolia according to Herodotus. They came to be involved with the Anatolian kingdom of Lydia in the seventh century B.C. They overran the Phrygians and sacked the capital at Gordion, the royal seat of the famous King Midas, in 676. In 644 they overthrew Sardis, the capital of the Lydian state. This was when Gyges met his death. During Ezekiel's time the Cimmerians had been driven out of Lydia by Alyattes. They later came under the control of the Medes.

38:6. Beth Togarmah. Beth Togarmah was most likely the capital city of Kammanu, a central Anatolian kingdom. It was known in Hittite sources as Tegaramara and in Assyrian sources as Til-Garimmu.

38:11. unwalled villages. The unwalled villages (mentioned here and in Zech 2:8 and Esther 9:19) have normally been defined as rural settlements without walls, bars or gates, in contrast to fortified cities. They were defenseless and vulnerable.

38:13. Sheba and Dedan. The kingdom of Sheba was a great trading center in southwestern Arabia that exported precious stones, gold and incense. This kingdom is known as Saba in native sources and in the Assyrian annals. It had a very advanced urban civilization in the first millennium B.C. For more information see 2 Chronicles 9:1. Dedan was a central Arabian oasis where Tyre received its special riding gear. It is identified with the modern site of al-Ula, which is situated on the frankincense road from Yemen to Palestine.

38:13. merchants of Tarshish. In this context the merchants of Tarshish appear to represent merchant peoples who did their trade on the overland routes across the Arabian Desert to Sheba and Dedan, and on to the Mediterranean Sea.

38:14. Gog. See comment on 38:2

38:19. earthquakes in Israel. This appears to be a cosmic earthquake, similar to ones described in Exodus 19; Judges 5:4-5; Isaiah 30:27-28; Habakkuk 3:3-7; and Psalms 68:8-9 and 114 (see comment on 1 Sam 14:15). This type of imagery is also found in the annals of Esarhaddon of Assyria. The Levant was prone to earthquakes, but Israel is on the edge of the zone that has its center in Anatolia. The well-known historical quakes occurred in 760 and 31 B.C. In the Christian era the region has averaged about one major quake per century.

38:22. hailstones and burning sulfur. The occurrence of hailstones as divine judgment in conquest accounts is not unique. In a letter to his god (Ashur), Sargon of Assyria reports that in his campaign against Urartu (714 B.C.) the god Adad stormed against his enemies with "stones from heaven" and so annihilated them. This battle included a coalition that fled through the passes and valleys pursued by Sargon, with the enemy king hiding at last in the clefts of his mountain. Burning sulfur

("brimstone") is a yellow crystalline substance that ignites in air, often found in volcanic regions. It has no connection with hailstones except they were both calamities that would befall the area.

39:1. Gog. See comment on 38:2.

39:4. food to the birds and wild animals. To be left unburied, vulnerable to the elements and beasts, was the worst curse imaginable. Furthermore, as there was no clear distinction between body and soul in the Hebrew mentality, death was not regarded as the separation of those two elements. Thus one who had no burial was still believed to be conscious (in some form) of his fate. In the ancient Near East those who were left unburied were thought restless until a proper burial had been performed.

39:6. Magog. See comment on 38:2.

39:9. weapons used for fuel. Passages that speak of the destruction of weapons of war usually focus on using them for practical and beneficial purposes. The wooden parts could be burned in place of firewood as here (this sometimes extended even to the clothing, as in Is 9:5), and the metal parts could be recycled into agricultural use (Is 2:4 and Mic 4:3).

39:11. burial place. The burial place *('oberim)* has defied an absolute identification. Scholars have identified it as the "Valley of Travelers" or, based upon an Ugaritic parallel, "those who have passed on." The latter makes more sense. Gog has desired to be identified with the great kings of old, and now he is, since they are all dead. Ugaritic texts refer to a group called the Rephaim, who are beings of the netherworld (see comment on Is 14:9-11).

40:1—48:35
Restored Temple and Land

40:1. tenth day of the first month. The time of the year is described as the "head of the year," similar to an Akkadian equivalent. The present vision is thus dated to 10 Nisan in the twenty-fifth year of the exile or April 28, 573 B.C. In the Israelite calendar this was the beginning of Passover activities. The lamb was to be chosen on this day and slaughtered on the fourteenth.

40:3. linen cord and measuring rod. The linen cord may be similar to the measuring line that was used in Zechariah 2:1 to measure the city. It appears that it was used for extremely long distances. The measuring rod was for short distances. Some have argued that the stele of Ur-Nammu of the Sumerian city of Ur shows a similar representation.

40:5. long cubit, length of rod. The normal cubit (six handbreadths) has been estimated at 17.6 inches and the long cubit here at about 20.5 inches. The rod mentioned by Ezekiel was about six cubits or ten feet long.

40:6. significance of east gate. The east gate was the gate through which Yahweh's glory would make its entry (Ezek 43:1-5). God's glory had left the temple through the same gate (10:19). Since temples tended to be oriented toward the east, this would be the most important gate.

40:7-16. gate architecture. The size and design of the gateway show its great importance in the temple complex. The jambs were decorated with palm fronds, presumably similar to those in the Solomonic temple (1 Kings 6:29-36). These types of fortified installations were built for military and not religious purposes. Later in Ezekiel we are told that the gates were to be manned by the Levites, who guarded the sacred places in the temple. The overall design of the gatehouse is typical of a number of preexilic Palestinian city gates from Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer. While these gates are typical of city gates, they are much more extensive than would be usually found with temples.

40:7-16. measurements compared to archaeologically known gates. This structure is clearly a guardhouse and measures fifty by twenty-five cubits (eighty-six by forty-three feet). It compares to the guardrooms of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 14:28), although their size is not mentioned. Of nearly twenty Iron Age gate systems excavated in Israel, this would be larger than most. The gates at Dan, Megiddo and Lachish were between eighty and one hundred feet wide (compared to the forty-three feet of this gate). But they are larger than most, and the average runs closer to the width of the gate described here. The depth of this gate, however (eighty-six feet), is on the large size. One of the deepest excavated gates is at Lachish, which is nearly eighty-two feet. The descriptions and measurements of the chambers are comparable to Iron Age gates.

40:17-19. outer court description and size. With the addition of information from Ezekiel 42:6 the outer court had a group of rooms that may have been used by worshipers as eating and meeting places during the periods of religious events. The rooms were pillared porticos. The number of rooms and their size is not given. The area did contain a raised pavement of about one hundred cubits. The term for pavement is a rare word. In Esther 1:6 the term represents a mosaic floor inlaid with precious stones.

40:20-27. north and south gate dimensions and description compared to east gate. The north and south gates have the same features as the east gate: recesses, jambs, niches, a vestibule and palm decorations. The measurements of the three gates are also identical.

40:26. palm tree decorations. The palm tree decorations were not only artistically beautiful but were reminiscent of the Solomonic temple (1 Kings 6:29-36). These types of decorations were common in Iron Age Palestine, particularly in connection with temple facades.

40:28-37. inner court gates (and absence of west gates). The inner court gates were mirror images of the outer gates. The inner courtyard backs up to the wall on the western side, with a structure between the wall and the back of the temple. That is why there were no western gates.

40:39. offerings. For discussion of the various types of offerings, see the comments in the early chapters of Leviticus.

40:43. function of double pronged hooks. The double-pronged hooks on the walls have traditionally been interpreted as being used to hang utensils. A more recent interpretation argues that they were niches or ledges for the storage of the utensils, much like what is described in the Temple Scroll (30:13).

40:47. inner court size. The inner court was a perfect square, one hundred cubits, or about 170 feet, on each side. This is about two-thirds of an acre.

41:1. outer sanctuary description and size. The outer sanctuary shows vague Babylonian influences and specific parallels to the older city gates of Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer, structures which may have been built by Solomon (1 Kings 9:15). For example, the north gate at Megiddo had in the passageway of the gate the identical three gate recesses described in Ezekiel. Here in 41:1 is described the great hall, the room between the vestibule and the Holy of Holies. Numerous Mesopotamian temples were constructed with this model (see comments on Ex 26 and 1 Kings 7).

41:5-11. architectural design. Ezekiel describes here the auxiliary structures of the temple. There are a number of technical architectural expressions discussed in this section, many of which have uncertain meanings. Much of the description, however, is reminiscent of that found in 1 Kings 6:5-8 concerning the Solomonic temple. Although Ezekiel sketches the auxiliary structures around the temple, he does not describe their function, nor does the author of 1 Kings. Similar single and multistoried rooms from Egyptian religious centers imply that they were used as storehouses for temple treasures. For example, temples built by Merenptah and Rameses II (thirteenth century B.C.) had storage spaces three to four times larger than the temple itself. This was also common in Mesopotamia.

41:13-14. dimensions compared to Solomon's temple. Both the Solomonic temple and the temple of Ezekiel consisted of three rooms. The dimensions of the holy room and the great hall in both temples are identical.

41:15. identification of second building and galleries. The identification and function of the second building mentioned here is primarily determined by understanding the obscure term used for "galleries" or "ledges." These galleries appeared on the outside of the structure. They either came in threes or were three levels. They could be seen from both the inner and outer courts. Some have concluded that these functioned as galleries or walkways (or both).

41:16. narrow windows. The narrow windows were probably set high in the walls above the level of the annex rooms, similar to Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:29-35). They correspond to the triple rabbeted design in the "Lady at the Window" carving found at the Assyrian site of Nimrud, dating to the early first millennium B.C.

41:17-20. palm and cherub imagery. The palm and cherub imagery is clearly reminiscent of the Solomonic temple (1 Kings 29-36). However, these cherubim have only a human and a lion head, unlike the four for the Solomonic temple. These were no longer free-standing structures but were carved into the walls, which is most likely why there were fewer heads. The figures were flanked by the palm imagery, a common motif on ivories and other art forms. The same imagery is seen on ivory carvings from Arslan Tash in first millennium B.C. Syria and on a scene painted on storage jars from Iron Age Kuntillet 'Arjud in Palestine.

42:13-14. provision of priest's rooms in temple. Though little is known of priest's rooms in the Solomonic temple, they were well known in Babylonia. The *bit pirishti* was a room in the Babylonian temple complex in which the priestly vestments and the costly garments of the statues of deities were stored.

42:14. holy garments. The Babylonian *bit pirishti* was associated with the wardrobe of the priests, at least during the Seleucid era (after 330 B.C.). These vestments were highly valued because of the gold and silver objects used to decorate the garments. Goldsmiths received official permission to enter into these rooms in

order to work on the vestments of the priests and the divine images.

43:3. Kebar River. See comment on 1:1.

43:7. lifeless idols of kings. These "lifeless idols" are probably not corpses but refer to a pagan cult of the dead, similar to that of Leviticus 26:30. Ezekiel probably had in mind a veneration of the spirits of Israel's royal ancestors, much like a cult of the royal dead at Ugarit. Whether the kings were considered deified at either place is not clear.

43:8. thresholds and doorposts. The statement here in verse 8 corresponds with the description of the Solomonic temple in 1 Kings 6—7. The original temple was built as one element of the entire Solomonic palace complex. Only a wall separated the temple and palace, and they bordered "threshold to threshold, and doorpost to doorpost."

43:13. long cubit. See comment on 40:5.

43:13-17. altar architecture. Although the technical vocabulary for the altar is similar to that found in Akkadian, the altar of Ezekiel is most similar to the Solomonic Temple (2 Chron 4:1; 1 Kings 2:28). The length of the sides is similar in both cases, while horns were a common motif in altars in the Levant. Though the altar is large, it is not as large as Solomon's and is comparable to those uncovered by archaeologists.

43:19. family of Zadok. Zadok was the representative of Aaron's line who served as high priest during the reigns of David and Solomon. In the postexilic community the sons of Zadok had the altar duties reserved for them, while the Levites had less significant duties than before. The Zadokites held the high priesthood until the time of the Greek ruler Antiochus IV (175-163 B.C.). In fact, some have supposed that the Dead Sea community may have been formed in response to the end of the Zadokite priesthood.

43:24. salt. The reference here is to a "covenant of salt" (see comments on Lev 2:13 and Num 18:19). The preservative qualities of salt made it a symbol of the permanence of the covenant relationship. Thus, the addition of salt was a reminder of God's covenant.

43:25-26. seven-day dedication. In the ancient Near East generally and in Israel particularly, seven-day installation and dedication services were the norm.

44:1-2. east gate permanently shut. The Sacred Gate of the city of Babylon was the gate through which the procession of Marduk (the primary god of the city) and other deities passed and returned again. Like the east gate described by Ezekiel, the Sacred Gate was apparently opened for the deity to pass through and was shut at all other times.

44:3. prince. The prince in this context is a religious figure who is responsible for eating his sacrificial meals before the Lord in the sacred gate. Earlier in Ezekiel the term was used for a Davidic figure (e.g., 34:24; 37:25). Here he has no royal or political role to play, only a role inside the temple precincts. He has no access through the east gate that is reserved for divine use; he only has an act to perform there. It is clear that he is not serving a priestly function, for he is not allowed to actually step inside the inner court.

44:3. portico of the gateway. The prince was able to enter the gate structure through the portico (or vestibule) of the gateway, meaning that he had already come into the courtyard through another gate and entered the eastern gateway from the inside. He stood by the post of the gate, which enabled him to see the cultic activity of the priests.

44:8. others in charge. Foreigners had been recruited for temple service probably as temple guards perhaps since the time of Manasseh and Amon. Furthermore, Neo-Babylonian and Phoenician records appear to affirm the probability of the installation of foreigners in this type of temple service.

44:14. duties of the temple. The duty of guarding the gates of the house implies more than just the temple but the entire temple complex. The Levites were also responsible for caring for the temple and grounds, and supervised activities on the temple grounds. For more information on the importance of this task see the comment on 1 Chronicles 9:22-27.

44:17. linen, not wool. One possible reason for the prohibition of wool may be a practical one. Wool was more likely to cause one to sweat. Since many bodily excretions caused defilement, steps needed to be taken to prevent their occurrence in the temple complex. This appears also to be the case in Egypt, where, according to Herodotus and the Roman writer Lucian, linen was used in the material for priestly garments. Herodotus adds that the Egyptian priests were constantly washing their linen garments.

44:19. sacred rooms. See comment on 42:14.

44:20. hair regulations. Shaving the head bald or letting the hair grow very long was most likely forbidden because of the pagan customs associating it with Canaanite cults of the dead. The taboo has its inspiration in Leviticus 21:5 (see comment there).

44:21. wine prohibition. This prohibition has its parallel in Leviticus 10:9. Though ritualized intoxication was well known, for example, from the Babylonian creation epic, *Enuma*

Elish, it is most likely that the prohibition was to make sure that the priest had control of his faculties (see comment on Is 28:7).

44:22. marriage regulations. The explicit prohibition concerning the priest and marriage comes from Leviticus 21:7, 10-14 (see comments there). There, it appears that the concern was for maintaining the purity of the priestly line, although Ezekiel does not mention the reason for the prohibition.

44:29-30. priest's portions. Although these verses provide the physical sustenance for the priests, there is more. The priests were actually invited to eat Yahweh's food. For more information see comments on Numbers 18:12-19. They were also authorized to eat the *ḥerem* or "every irredeemable devoted thing." These items were evidently those designated for any use, except that which was prescribed for the cult.

45:1. concept of sacred district. The sacred district was land reserved for use by the God of the temple area. Ezekiel portrays the land as a gift that was returned to the divine benefactor. As early as the early fourth millennium B.C., the city of Uruk in southern Mesopotamia had sacred districts in the center of its town. In ancient Mesopotamia either the sacred districts were separated by retaining walls for the structure, or a large citadel wall surrounded the entire sacred precinct. Access to sacred precincts was limited, and strict standards were maintained regarding who could enter and on what occasions. This is a continuation of the sacred compass idea that was established in Israel when the tabernacle was set up in the wilderness period (see comments on Lev 10:10 and Num 18:1-7).

45:2-6. dimensions of sacred district. The larger consecrated area was about eight miles long and six and a half miles wide, an area of over 50 square miles. This could be compared to the approximately 620 square miles of the entire district of Yehud under Persian rule. One half of this area was reserved for the priests and sanctuary, which was in the center of this area. One other area, eight miles by more than three miles, was reserved for the city, which was most likely Jerusalem, although the name is not given. If this design were superimposed on the land of Israel, it would encompass a large central segment of the tribal allotment of Judah. The territorial scheme shows the relative importance of the officials of the state, depending upon their placement near the center where there was the closest access to God.

45:7. prince. See comment on 44:3.

45:10. accurate scales. In an economy that did not have standardized weights and measures, traders were often tempted to cheat by falsifying the balances and measurements, often by using improper weights and false bottoms and other ways to alter the sizes of vessels.

45:10-12. measures. The two-armed balance scales were used to weigh out goods in Israel. The ephah was a dry standard used in measuring grain and equaled about half a bushel. The bath was a liquid measure of about six gallons. It was used for the measure of oil, wine and water. Both an ephah and a bath are one-tenth of a homer.

45:17. prince's contributions. Here the prince is seen in a royal role. Typically in the ancient Near East the king was the one who provided the sacrifices for the festival rituals. This can be observed in biblical texts as well as in the nations surrounding Israel. At the large public festivals the general population often played the role of audience, while the leaders of the people (court and temple) took center stage. The pageantry could be grandiose, and the largesse of the king was made evident.

45:18-20. inaugural festival. The ritual described here has all the earmarks of a purification ceremony to dedicate the new sanctuary. These were typically seven-day affairs that ensured that the holy place and holy objects were ready for use. It marked the beginning of the operation of the sanctuary.

45:21-25. new Passover. In Ezekiel's formulation, Passover takes on a different look than the traditional observance established in Exodus 11—12. Originally it had been established as a family-oriented festival in which the head of the household served a priestly role and the home was the location of the festivities. The related Feast of Unleavened Bread had gradually merged with Passover, as is indicated here as well. In the Passover celebrations carried out by Hezekiah (2 Chron 30) and Josiah (2 Chron 35), there was a more national and centralized aspect to the observance, but that is even more the case here in Ezekiel.

46:1. New Moon significance. Keyed to their use of a lunar calendar, ancient Israel marked the first day of the month, with its "new moon" phase, as a festival day (every twenty-nine or thirty days). As on the Sabbath, all work was to cease (see Amos 8:5), and there were sacrifices to be made (Num 28:11-15). In the monarchy period the king became a prominent figure in these celebrations. The festival continued to be observed in the postexilic period (Ezra 3:5; Neh 10:33). New Moon festivals were also prominent in Mesopotamia from late in the third millennium down to the Neo-Babylonian period in the middle of the

first millennium B.C. The cult of the moon was widespread throughout the ancient Near East, and the moon deities figured prominently in mythological texts. Although the Israelites were forbidden to worship any heavenly bodies (including the lunar cult: e.g., Deut 23:5, and Jer 8:2), they were allowed to celebrate the first of the month with trumpets and burnt offerings.

46:2. prince's entrance. See comment on 44:3.

46:3. worship on the sabbath at the gateway. This is one of the few explicit references in the Old Testament to worship on the sabbath, which is usually only spoken of in terms of prohibited activities. Many of Israel's festivals featured "holy convocations," but such are never mandated for the Sabbath. Here it is also interesting to note that the temple is the focal point for this Sabbath worship. Temples served as gathering places when public sacred rituals were being performed (at events designated as holy convocations). One must be careful not to associate too closely our worship in church on Sunday with Israel's acts of worship at the temple on the Sabbath. The differences are both profuse and profound.

46:9. entrance and exit by opposite gates. This prohibition appears to simply regulate the congestion on occasions of great crowds in the temple and ensuring the orderly flow of people. The temple area is to represent the epitome of orderliness, including even the traffic pattern. Anything that is uncontrolled or reflects confusion has no place.

46:19-24. kitchens for offering preparation. A good number of temples in the ancient Near East were attached to kitchens. These have been found at Ur, Tell Asmar and Terqa in Mesopotamia, and at Karnak in Egypt. Many of the kitchen complexes were larger than the temple it serviced. Second Chronicles 35:11-13 implies the existence of kitchens associated with the Solomonic temple.

47:1. water flowing out of temple. The association between ancient Near Eastern temples and spring waters is well attested. In fact, some temples in Mesopotamia, Egypt and in the Ugaritic myth of Baal were considered to have been founded upon springs (likened to the primeval waters), which sometimes flowed from the building itself. Thus, the symbolic cosmic mountain (temple) stood upon the symbolic primeval waters (spring).

47:8. sea water becoming fresh. The seawater in the Dead Sea becoming fresh is a miraculous transformation. The Dead Sea is 1,296 feet below sea level, the lowest point on earth. The high mineral content of the Dead Sea is a result of the fact that it has no outlet. Waters flow in through a number of sources carrying their various minerals at a rate of seven million tons per day. Then the water evaporates, leaving the minerals behind. Total salinity is 26-35 percent (compared to 18 percent for the Great Salt Lake in Utah and 3.5 percent for the average ocean salinity).

47:15-17. north border. Although the north border is described in great detail, none of the place names can be identified with any certainty. Thus, it is not possible to draw any boundary lines for Israel's northern frontier. There are, however, some affinities with the list in Numbers 34:7-9, a border that coincided with the northern limits of the land of Canaan, which was the name of the Egyptian controlled area of Syro-Palestine. Ezekiel uses general terms here to describe a territory rather than a boundary line.

47:18. east border. Like Numbers 34:10-12 Ezekiel excludes in his description of the east border the Transjordanian regions that had been occupied by Gad, Reuben, and one-half of Manasseh. Thus, the main border was the Jordan River running south from the Sea of Galilee until the Dead Sea.

47:19. south border. The southern border begins at Tamar, the final point of the eastern boundary, to Mount Halak to Meribah Kadesh, or Kadesh Barnea (modern 'Ain el-Qudeirat), a fertile oasis on the southern border of the desert of Zin. From there, the border line follows the Wadi of Egypt (not the Nile), which drained the northern Sinai Desert and formed a natural boundary between Egypt and Palestine.

47:20. west border. The western border, as in Numbers 34:6, is the Mediterranean Sea.

48:1-7. tribal allotments compared to historical. Israel's tribal allotments here in Ezekiel follow the premonarchical order of excluding the Levites and cutting the tribe of Joseph in half (Ephraim and Manasseh) in order to keep the number of allotments of twelve. However, they show little concern for historical realities. As with Ezekiel 47 the territory east of the Jordan is overlooked. Further, the east-west boundaries run in contrast to the natural physical landscape, which is defined by north-south lines. The tribal allotments are identical to one another in size and also respect the traditional genealogical relationships among the tribes, discriminating between the descendants of Jacob's wives and handmaidens. Judah and Benjamin, however, retain their close proximity to the sanctuary.

48:9-14. size of allotment for priests and Levites. The portion of land for the Levites has become smaller, showing their decline in im-

portance. Both the Zadokite and Levitical priests receive identical plots of about eight by three-plus miles.

48:15-20. size of allotment for the people. The city is given walled space of about one and a half miles square. It is flanked on either side by open rectangular spaces of about five square miles each.

48:21-22. prince's allotment. The prince's land lies on either side of the central square. The width of both is twenty-five thousand cubits (about eight miles), and the land is considered separate from the public and the Levites.

48:23-28. remaining tribal allotments compared to historical. See comment on 48:1-7.

48:31. gates named after tribes. In cities of the ancient world such as Babylon the gates were often named after the gods. It was not unusual, however, for gates to be named for where they led to. This was the more common practice in Israel.

DANIEL

1:1-21

Daniel and His Friends Arrive at Nebuchadnezzar's Court

1:1. Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 605-562 B.C.) was the second ruler of the Chaldean kingdom centered at Babylon that ruled the ancient Near East for nearly a century. He was the son of Nabopolassar, a Chaldean who declared independence from Assyria in 626 B.C. In his forty-three-year reign, Nebuchadnezzar pacified Egypt (though he was unsuccessful in conquering it) and literally rebuilt Babylon. In fact, most of the city of Babylon that has been uncovered by modern excavators dates from Nebuchadnezzar's reign. Thus the Chaldean kingdom was primarily his creation, and it crumbled only a generation after his death. This great king was remembered in many cultural traditions, including sources from Greece (who knew him as a great builder), and Israel (not only the biblical material, but later rabbinic sources).

1:1-2. chronology. The third year of Jehoiakim was 606-605 B.C. (calculating on a Tishri calendar, see comment on Jer 32:1, and an accession year system, see comment on 2:1). At this point Nebuchadnezzar is still crown prince conducting campaigns for his father, Nabopolassar, who dies in mid-August this same year. Early in the summer of 605, Nebuchadnezzar, along with his allies, the Medes, conquered the last bastion of Assyrian strength at Carchemish. The Babylonians and the Medes then proceeded to divide up the Assyrian empire between them. Nebuchadnezzar staked a claim to Syria and set up his base at Riblah (see comment on 2 Kings 23:33), where he began to collect tribute from his new subjects. Judah fell within the territory allotted to the Babylonians, and Nebuchadnezzar was back in the area at the end of 604. There is no record of any direct siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians until 597, but the language in this verse is general enough to admit a number of possibilities.

1:1-2. Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was a son of Josiah who was put on the throne by the Egyptian pharaoh, Necho, as he attempted to exercise control over Syria-Palestine. When Josiah was killed in battle, the people had enthroned his son, Jehoahaz, who represented an anti-Egyptian faction. This situation lasted for three months (while Necho was busy at Haran). Then Necho deposed Jehoahaz and sent him off as a captive to Egypt. Pro-Egyptian Jehoiakim was then placed on the throne with the expectation that he would be a loyal Egyptian vassal. The situation changed dramatically when Nebuchadnezzar gained control of the region following the fall of Carchemish. Jehoiakim played the role of reluctant Babylonian vassal for several years, but after Nebuchadnezzar's failure to invade Egypt in 601, he again broke with Babylon and sought the support of Egypt in his rebellion. This disloyalty eventually proved fatal and led to the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 597 (see comment on 2 Kings 24:10-11).

1:2. articles from the temple. These articles would have been attractive booty not only because they were made of precious metals, but because they had been dedicated to the God Yahweh for use in the rituals of the temple. Power was demonstrated over the deity by taking those things that were most significant to him. For descriptions of some of these articles see comments in 2 Chronicles 4.

1:2. carried off to temple. As we know from

references in the Mari texts as well as the Cyrus Cylinder, sacred objects, including idols and the many types of vessels used in worship, were taken hostage when a people was conquered. A way of demonstrating the power of one's own god over the gods of conquered peoples was to desecrate their sacred objects or place them in a position of submission.

1:2. his god. Marduk was the chief god of Babylon, its patron deity and the head of the pantheon. The Babylonian creation epic, *Enuma Elish,* is actually a myth recounting his elevation to that position, believed to have taken place at the end of the second millennium. He was considered to be the son of one of the members of the most august ancient triad, Enki, the patron of Eridu. Though we often see Baal in the Bible as the principal rival of Yahweh, no deity in the first millennium had the political clout that was connected to Marduk. His renowned temple, Esagila, along with its ziggurat, Etemenanki, were the most dominant buildings in the beautiful city of Babylon.

1:3. Ashpenaz's office. The title translated "chief of the court officials" is also assigned to one of the three representatives of Sennacherib who are sent to confront Hezekiah (see comment on 2 Kings 18:17). The Hebrew term translated "court official" sometimes refers to eunuchs (see comment on Is 56:4-5), though it is difficult to tell when it is that specific.

1:4-5. serving in king's palace. The training the young men were scheduled to receive was intended to prepare them for royal service. As courtiers, they might serve as scribes, advisors, sages, diplomats, provincial governors or attendants to members of the royal household. In seventh-century letters to Assyrian kings the five principal classes of scholarly experts serving the king are mentioned as being astrologer/scribe, diviner, exorcist (this term is used to describe those compared to Daniel and his friends in v. 20), physician and chanter of lamentations. It would not be unusual for an individual to be trained in a number of these disciplines. Training foreigners for these positions was expected to result in the assimilation of the best and brightest of the next generation. Their skills would then benefit the Babylonians rather than their enemies.

1:4. language of Babylonians (Chaldeans). The traditional language of Babylon was Akkadian, a complex and ancient language written by means of a cuneiform script (using a stylus to make wedge-shaped characters), in which each symbol represented a syllable. Much of the canonical literature of the Babylonians was written in Akkadian. Scholars therefore had to receive training in that language. Additionally, there were numerous dialects of Akkadian, though perhaps many of the ancient documents had been reworked into the current dialect. The reigning dynasty, however, was not native Babylonian, but ethnically Chaldean (see comment on Is 13:19). Their language and the diplomatic language of the time was Aramaic. This used an alphabetic script similar to that used by Hebrew. The widespread use of Aramaic in the world of this time makes it possible that Daniel and his friends already had some fluency in it. Alternatively, it is possible that in referring to the language of the Chaldeans, the text is not speaking of the ethnic Chaldeans but of the priestly guild of diviners who, at some point, had become known as the Chaldeans. In the book of Daniel the term is used both ways (ethnic group and professional guild).

1:4. literature of Babylonians (Chaldeans). It is difficult to be certain whether the training involved a wide range of literature, as scribal training and general education would, or whether the training focused on the specialized literature used by the diviners. The diviners' principal literature was embodied in the omen texts. The credentials listed for various scholars indicates that they have mastered the omen series. This literature represented over a millennium of observations of various phenomena along with the favorable or unfavorable events they portended. In addition there are instruction manuals and correspondence in which the reports of these specialists are given to the king. Some of the recorded omens, such as dreams or astronomical observations, are simply observed and preserved in writing. Other times some mechanism might be used to generate the omen (divination by means of the entrails of sacrificed animals) or a human medium may be involved. The omens themselves began to be collected as early as the Old Babylonian period (early second millennium) and were generally presented in an "if-then" form. The exorcists (see comment on 1:20), with whom Daniel appears to be classified and compared, had their special literature as well. These professionals specialized in recognizing the danger of various portents (astronomical happenings, dreams, birth anomalies) and providing the rituals to protect against them. The literature of this defensive magic is represented in the *namburbu* texts.

1:5. rations from king's table. There were many individuals who were given the right to receive rations from the king's table. The classification does not suggest enjoying the privi-

lege of cozy, intimate soirees with the king, but simply that they were made dependents of the state. Those who received such rations in the Neo-Babylonian period included certain ranking members of the administration, craftsmen, artisans (native or foreign), diplomats, businessmen and entertainers, as well as political refugees and members of royal families who had been deported to, or were being held hostage in, Babylon. Depending on their status, these individuals could receive barley and oil rations or much more luxurious fare. Clothing and housing could also be included in their maintenance.

1:5. royal food. The term *(patbag)* used here (and throughout the chapter) is known in Persian and is thought to be a loan word. It refers to food portions sent by the king to friends of the crown. There is no reason to think of it as a meat dish. When later Greeks referred to descriptions of this fare in the Persian literature they had available to them, it is identified as a baked bread product made of barley and wheat, accompanied by wine.

1:5. three-year training. The normal training period for a scribe was three years. In the literature available from the Old Babylonian period, training included the language and literature areas mentioned above as well as mathematics and music. It is probable that the training period for a diviner was longer, but precise indications in the literature are lacking.

1:7. new names. To change someone's name is to exercise authority over them and their destiny. Foreign rulers showed this propensity throughout the biblical period. Since assimilation was ostensibly one of the objectives of the whole procedure in which Daniel was involved, a Babylonian name would be appropriate. Likewise, since names often made statements about deity, Babylonian names would impose at least a subtle level of acknowledgment of the Babylonian gods on the young men.

1:8. defilement from royal food. There have been extensive discussions and a variety of suggestions regarding the reasons why Daniel and his friends refused the king's food. Most work on the assumption that the contrast is between meat and vegetables (see comments on 1:5 and 1:12 for the problems). It is true that sharing the king's food implied some level of allegiance to the king, but that would hold no matter what the young men ate. Jewish dietary laws (kosher) would likely have rendered meat unclean, but improper storage or preparation could render other food unclean as well. Furthermore, the Jewish dietary laws did not prohibit wine. The finest meats were undoubtedly supplied to the palace from the temples, where they had been offered before idols (and the wine poured out in libations before the gods), but any food could easily have come through the same route. The decision certainly has nothing to do with vegetarianism or avoidance of rich foods for nutritional purposes (see 10:3). There are numerous examples in intertestamental literature of Jews seeing the necessity of refraining from the food served by Gentiles (Tobit, Judith, Jubilees). It is not so much something in the food that defiles as much as it is the total program of assimilation. At this point the Babylonian government is exercising control over every aspect of their lives. They have little means to resist the forces of assimilation that are controlling them. They seize on one of the few areas where they can still exercise choice as an opportunity to preserve their distinct identity.

1:12. vegetables. The word used here generally refers to the seeds used for animal feed, fodder or planting. In neither Akkadian nor Hebrew is it used to describe human food. But the text does not suggest that they are being provided with a restaurant-style prepared and served meal. As explained above (1:5), to eat from the king's table meant only that they were provided rations at the expense of the royal budget. Military rations, for example, consisted of measured amounts of grain that the soldiers then used to prepare their meals. Cereal grains could be ground, mashed and cooked in water to produce a porridge. This could therefore involve the same amount of ration as referred to in 1:5 but prepared by themselves rather than in the king's kitchens.

1:17. visions and dreams. Dreams were believed to have importance for revealing the work of the gods as early as the third millennium B.C. They were considered to be communications brought from the gods by a spirit messenger. In Akkadian this messenger was named Zaqiqu. Sometimes information was sought through dreams (see comment on 2 Chron 1:7-12).

1:20. magicians and enchanters. The first term used here refers to Egyptian dream interpreters. It is the same word used in Genesis 41:8 and Exodus 7:11. The Babylonians were known to include Egyptian dream interpreters among their court advisors. The second term refers to the Mesopotamian specialist in exorcism: defending against threatening messages in the omens or in dreams. The latter's skills include identifying the threatening sign, determining a course of action to avert the evil, and performing apotropaic rituals and

reciting incantations to turn aside the danger. Sickness was often included in the group of threatening signs, so the exorcist was counted among the "health care professionals" of Babylonian society. The use of the two terms clarifies that Daniel's skills exceeded those of the foreign specialists as well as the native practitioners.

1:21. first year of Cyrus. This is most likely a reference to the first year of Cyrus' reign over Babylon, which began in October 539 B.C. This would mean that Daniel's tenure of service extended over a sixty-five-year period.

2:1-49

A Troubling Dream

2:1. chronology. In Babylonian reckoning, from the time the king took the throne until New Year's Day (in Nisan, March-April) was counted as an "accession year." His first year began with the start of the first full year. Nebuchadnezzar came to the throne on September 6, 605. His first year was from spring 604 to spring 603. The dream of this chapter, then, would have taken place sometime between spring 603 and spring 602. The Babylonian Chronicle for this year is broken in crucial places but is sufficient to show that Nebuchadnezzar faced some significant military challenges. His fourth year brought the famous, though unsuccessful, attempt to invade Egypt.

2:1. assortment of advisors. Akkadian literature refers to this general class of experts as *ummanu mudu,* masters of esoteric knowledge. The first two terms are the same as those used in 1:20. The third term is used in the Old Testament as a general term for the practice of magic and for practitioners labeled "sorcerers." In Babylonian usage the term refers specifically to those who cast spells. The fourth term, "astrologers," is the word usually rendered "Chaldeans" and here refers to the priestly guild of diviners. In later times they specialized in astrology.

2:1. dreams that trouble. See comment on 1:17. Since dreams were considered to be messages from the gods, they often caused concern, if not alarm. The very nature of the king's dream would have suggested that the news was not good news. He feels the type of apprehension that an employee feels being called in to the boss's office when reorganization is taking place in the company.

2:4. Aramaic. It is normal that the experts would address the king in Aramaic, because that was the language of the realm. From this point in the text through the end of chapter seven, the book of Daniel is in Aramaic rather than Hebrew. The two languages use the same letters, so the page in the original languages would look no different to the English reader.

2:4. dream interpretation. Dream interpretations were usually carried out by experts who had been trained in the available dream literature. More information is available from Mesopotamia than from Egypt. Both the Egyptians and the Babylonians compiled what we call dream books. They contained sample dreams along with the key to their interpretation. Since dreams often depended on symbolism, the interpreter would have had to have access to these documents that preserved the empirical data concerning past dreams and interpretations. Typically, however, it was only the central theme of the dream that was significant for interpretation, rather than all the details. Interpretation of dreams included identifying the meaning of the symbols in the dream, declaring its meaning, consequences and the timing of the events it addresses, and composing an appropriate response to the dream. The response could include apotropaic rituals to defend against the portents or actions that the king should take.

2:5-9. the king's demand. If the king had forgotten the dream, he would not want to admit it, because forgetting a dream was a bad omen indicating that his god was angry with him. Furthermore, such forgetfulness would logically result in the request that the gods send the dream again. Important dreams were often repeated two or three times (notice that v. 1 suggests more than one dream by the use of the plural). An alternative is that Nebuchadnezzar felt that the dream was so ominous that it could too easily be used as a mechanism for subversion against the throne. Divine utterances had long served the purposes of conspirators and usurpers (see 2 Kings 8:8-15 and comment on 2 Kings 9:6-10). He sought evidence that the interpretation represented the gods' message rather than human agenda by requiring that the gods reveal the dream to the interpreter.

2:11. the wise men's claim. It was believed that the gods communicated through dreams, and the experts believed that the gods would reveal to them the interpretation of the dreams through their use of the resources available to them. There was nothing in their resources that would enable them to discern what the dream was. There was no precedent for the gods revealing that sort of information.

2:12. annihilation of the wise men. The annihilation of entire groups suspected of conspiracy or incompetence is all too familiar in the

ancient world. Herodotus records a couple of instances during the Persian period. One involves the magi, one of whom had actually usurped the throne, being executed by Darius I. A second is the execution by Xerxes of the engineers who had built a bridge that collapsed in a storm. A biblical example occurs during the reign of Saul, who almost wiped out the priesthood when he suspected them of collusion with David (1 Sam 22:13-19).

2:14. commander of the king's guard. This is the official title of an important functionary whose duties were sometimes unsavory. When Jerusalem fell at the hands of the Babylonians, the commander in charge of methodically destroying and dismantling the city and disposing of captives either by execution or deportation carried this title. It is similar to the title held by Potiphar in Genesis 37:36. The terminology suggests something like "chief cook," but like some of our government titles (such as "party whip") the office must be understood by examining its function, not its title.

2:19. "God of heaven." This became a popular title for deity in the sixth century. In Persian documents it was commonly used for Ahura Mazda, the chief deity of Zoroastrianism (see comments on Ezra 1:2 and Neh 1:4). The Israelites also found it a usable title for their God, Yahweh.

2:31. statue in a dream. The Egyptian pharaoh Merenptah (thirteenth century B.C.) reports seeing a huge image of the god Ptah in a dream. The god gave him permission to go to war against the Libyans. In a dream reported during the reign of Ashurbanipal, an inscription on the base of a statue of the god, Sin, forecast the failure of the rebellion in Babylon.

2:32. statues of mixed elements. Statues of mixed elements were not uncommon. Since the images of the gods were generally clothed, more care and expense was afforded to the portions that would show. So, for instance, in a mid-second millennium Hittite prayer a promise is made to supply a life-sized statue of the king with head, hands and feet of gold, the rest of silver. Another example of how various metals could be used is the small bronze calf figurine found at Ashkelon. After the body was cast in bronze, forged copper was used for some of the extremities, and the whole image was overlaid with silver. Numerous second-millennium divine images have been uncovered that are likewise made of bronze and covered with gold or silver. Even small figurines were often not cast in one piece but made in parts and joined together with tenons or rivets. Most of the features in the dream are realistic, not surreal. The head is the most important part of the image and would logically have gold plating over the bronze cast. Parts of the arms and chest would at times be visible, thus silver overlay would be appropriate. The torso would need no overlay attached to the bronze, since it was always covered. Iron was not yet being cast at this period, though one Egyptian papyrus mentions iron statues (probably wrought iron). The only way of actually mixing clay with iron would be if the clay were being used as a flux, but the word used in the text for the clay favors baked clay. One suggestion has been that the iron feet would have featured terra cotta inlays. Statuary from both the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods is nearly nonexistent, and no major divine images from first-millennium Mesopotamia have been recovered. The Assyrian king Esarhaddon boasted of a statue that he had made of himself of silver, gold and copper that was to be placed before the gods to present petitions on his behalf.

2:34-35. rock not cut by human hands. The only incidence of anything even vaguely similar to this appears in the Gilgamesh Epic. Gilgamesh reports a dream about the coming of Enkidu in which Enkidu is represented as a meteor that lands at Gilgamesh's feet. But here there is no destruction by means of the rock.

2:36-40. four kingdoms. The kingdoms are not identified in the text except for the equation that Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold. Some have suggested a sequence of Babylon, Media, (Medo-)Persian, Greek, while others prefer Babylon, (Medo-)Persian, Greek, Roman. Most of the evidence that would point to one scheme over another comes from Daniel 7 and is examined there.

2:36-40. four-kingdom patterns. The idea of presenting history in terms of four empires or ages has several parallels in ancient and classical literature. In Akkadian literature the *Dynastic Prophecy* (Seleucid period, third century B.C.?) refers to four successive kingdoms (Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek) in a very broken text. The *Sibylline Oracles* (whose source dates to the second century B.C.) contain a four-empire scheme (Assyrians, Medes, Persians, Macedonians; a number of examples in the Roman period add Rome to the list to make five empires). The fifth-century A.D. Roman author Servius says that Sibyl portrayed the ages by comparing them to metals, but no such comparison is preserved in currently known Sibylline Oracles. The characterization of ages by metals has been thought to cor-

respond to the Zoroastrian representation of four periods of human history. Zoroastrian Avestan texts identify ages (not empires), sometimes as branches on a tree respectively of gold, silver, steel and iron-mixed (an obscure designation). The texts in which this material is recorded are late but preserve material that some believe date back to the second or third century B.C. Perhaps the most significant comparison of ages to metals is found in the early Greek author Hesiod (*Works and Days*, eighth century B.C.), who identifies five ages, four of which are represented by metals (gold, silver, bronze and iron).

2:44. kingdom enduring forever. In a work known as the *Uruk Prophecy* from the twelfth century B.C., there are four kings who arise and do poorly, followed by a king who will restore the statue of Ishtar to Uruk from Babylon. The prophecy says that his son will succeed him and that his kingdom will be established forever (an alternative interpretation dates it to the seventh century and identifies the son as Nebuchadnezzar).

2:46. Nebuchadnezzar's treatment of Daniel. The verb NIV translates "presented" is usually used in Hebrew for pouring out libations. But neither the (grain) offering nor the incense that are mentioned here can be poured out in libations. The text here, however, continues to be in Aramaic, in which the verb means "to provide." This makes Nebuchadnezzar's treatment of Daniel a bit more understandable, as he provides Daniel with the materials with which Daniel can make an appropriate offering to his God.

2:47. revealer of mysteries. The role as a "revealer of mysteries" is highlighted here as Daniel has exceeded what could normally be accomplished by the wise men of Babylon. The gods were believed to have revealed themselves when omens (such as dreams) were given, and they were believed to offer revelation of the interpretation of the omens through the interpretive wisdom they provided to the sage as he used the resources and literature at his disposal. But Daniel had received the additional revelation of the contents of the dream, enhancing his reputation.

2:48. ruler over province of Babylon. The empire was divided into provinces, or satrapies, of which Babylon was one. Daniel is exalted to high office in the province, but that vague description finds definition in the next statement that clarifies the nature of this high office: he is made prefect over the wise men. This is more likely ranking within his guild rather than a administrative position in the civil government.

3:1-30

The Fiery Furnace

3:1. image of what. The image is never positively identified as the image of a deity, though verse 28 could easily suggest it. If the image were a divine image, it would be odd for the name of the deity not to be given and even more unusual for it to be set up in an open area rather than associated with a temple. Part of the care of the gods was to house and feed them, and such maintenance could not easily be kept up in an open location. If it is not the image of a god, it becomes more difficult to understand the three friends' refusal to participate (for an understanding of the thrust of the second commandment see comment on Ex 20:4). The other main alternative is to see it as an image of the king. But there was no prohibition against bowing down before kings as an act of respect. Additionally, images of kings during the Assyrian and Babylonian periods were usually made to be put in temples to stand before the deity requesting the well-being of the king. Typically, then, they represented the king to the god, not to the people.

Perhaps the best alternative is to understand the event in the context of the Assyrian practice of erecting stelae or statues (often in inaccessible places) that commemorated their rulers. While these were intended to exalt the king, the reliefs on the Balawat gates demonstrate that offerings were made before these representations. In the scene portrayed on the gates the king himself is present, but the offerings are made to the stele. In this way the king is given the honors that are generally given to the gods, but by personally distancing himself he avoids making himself equal to the gods. Such rituals were used as occasions for provincial territories to take a loyalty oath. This would make sense here in light of the suggestion in the dream of Daniel 2 that the Babylonian kingdom would have a limited time of rule. In Assyrian practice the weapon of Ashur (perhaps even a battle standard) was set up for ceremonies in which vassal kings entered into loyalty oaths. Failure to participate would suggest insubordination, whereas participation would signify the acceptance of the deity's (and king's) sovereignty. The three friends are not being asked to worship a deity, but they are being asked to participate in rituals that honor the king in ways similar to how the gods were treated, even though the king is not being viewed as a deity. Daniel's absence could be explained easily by the occasion's setting in only a single province.

3:1. dimensions. Herodotus describes two large statues in Marduk's temple in Babylon, both of solid gold. One is Bel seated on a golden throne. The image and the golden table next to it were reported to have used twenty-two tons of gold. The second is described as the statue of a man. Herodotus says it is fifteen feet high, though other accounts put it at eighteen feet. The Persian king, Xerxes, melted it down in 482 B.C., and the resulting bullion weighed eight hundred pounds. The Colossus at Rhodes was reported to be just over one hundred feet tall, so a ninety-foot-tall statue is not out of the realm of possibility, though it is also possible that the ninety feet includes a pedestal. The unusual thing is that the width is only ten percent of the height. The width of a properly proportioned human figure would normally be about twenty-five percent of the height. If this statue is human shaped and nine feet wide, we would expect the statue to be thirty-five or forty feet tall. This would then require a pedestal of fifty-plus feet. Even so, imagine the instability of something ten stories tall and only nine feet wide.

3:1. Dura. There are several towns named Der, and Dura (=walled area) is a common element in place names (e.g., Dur-Kurashu, Dur-Sharruken, Dur-Kurigalzu, Dur-Katlimmu). It is therefore impossible at present to locate this plain with certainty (the reference is as unclear as talking about a place named "San" in California).

3:2. occasion. As mentioned in 3:1, it is likely that the occasion for this gathering was the taking of a loyalty oath. A century earlier it is known that Assyrian king Ashurbanipal gathered his chief officials together in Babylon to take a loyalty oath. A letter has been preserved from one of the officials who was out of town and therefore made arrangements to take the oath in the presence of the palace overseer. The letter specifically mentions that when he took the oath he was surrounded by the images of the gods.

3:2. attendees. The list of officials includes two Semitic titles (prefect, governor), with the remaining five being Persian titles. The list appears to be in rank order. The first three terms are well enough known, the first being a Persian term borrowed into Aramaic as early as the sixth century for the ruler of the province. The next two are good Semitic terms for the next two levels of subordinates. The last four are Persian loan words whose translation is very tentative.

3:5. musical instruments. The names of several of these instruments are Greek, but there had been enough contact with Greece by the sixth century that this is not unusual. Nebuchadnezzar was known to make use of foreign musicians, as shown in the rations lists. These lists also attest to the presence of some Greeks in Babylon. The first two instruments are wind instruments. Judging by the word used for the horn, it is an animal's horn rather than a metal trumpet. The flute is of the variety that is played by blowing through the end. The next three in the list are stringed instruments. Two of them have names borrowed from Greek, and the middle one occurs as a foreign word in Greek. The first is known from Homer's writings (eighth century B.C.) and is a type of lyre. There were a wide variety of lyres in the ancient world, but no early attestations of the zither or dulcimer. The second in the list is probably a harp, and the third is most likely a different style of lyre. The last is the most difficult. Suggestions have ranged from bagpipes to double flute to percussion. It is a Greek loan word into Aramaic, and it happens also to come into English as "symphony."

3:6. furnace. Furnaces were used for baking pottery or bricks for construction projects, as well as for metalwork (forging, smelting and casting). There is not a lot of information about furnaces in the ancient Near East, but many early furnaces were enclosed and domed with side doors for ventilation. They were built of clay or brick, though the inside chamber was often lined with specially selected types of stone. It is logical to assume that the furnace was in this location serving a purpose (perhaps in the manufacture of the image) rather than having been set up to use as an instrument of punishment. There is little in the ancient literature to suggest that furnaces were specifically used for punishment. One possible exception is from around 1800 B.C., when Rim-Sin ruled that someone who had pushed a slave into a kiln should have one of his slaves thrown into a furnace. In general, however, burning was used as a form of execution as early as the Hammurabi Code. In fifth-century Persia (during the reign of Darius II, son of Artaxerxes), and in the second century (2 Macc 13:4-8), there are examples of execution by pushing into a bin of ashes.

3:19. seven times hotter. Blast air from a bellows was usually used to raise the temperature in the furnace. "Seven times hotter" is just an expression. Depending on what the furnace was being used for, the temperature would be maintained at between nine hundred and eleven hundred degrees centigrade. With their technology they were not able to exceed fifteen hundred degrees centigrade.

3:25. son of the gods. This phrase comes from Nebuchadnezzar's lips, so we do not expect him to be representing any deep insight or sophisticated theology. The phrase "son of the gods" represents a common Semitic expression for identifying a supernatural being.

4:1-37

The King's Illness

4:1-2. royal proclamations. A proclamation such as this would typically be recorded on a stele and set up in a prominent place. Sometimes copies would be made to be circulated, as was done with Darius' Behistun Inscription. Many of the elements of this proclamation are common to royal inscriptions or to Aramaic letters, though it is unusual for a king to be so vulnerable as here.

4:10-12. world tree. The concept of the cosmic tree in the center of the world is a common motif in the ancient Near East. It is also used in Ezekiel 31. The roots of the tree are fed by the great subterranean ocean, and its top merges with the clouds, thus binding together the heavens, the earth and the netherworld. In the *Myth of Erra and Ishum* Marduk speaks of the *meshu* tree whose roots reach down through the oceans to the netherworld and whose top is above the heavens. In the Sumerian epic *Lugalbanda and Enmerkar* the "eagle-tree" has a similar role. In Assyrian contexts the motif of a sacred tree is also well known. Some have called it a tree of life, and some also associate it with this world tree. It is often flanked by animals or by human or divine figures. A winged disk is typically centrally located over the top of the tree. The king is represented as the human personification of this tree. The tree is thought to represent the divine world order, but textual discussion of it is lacking.

4:13. watchers. The watchers are a well-known class of supernatural being in a wide range of the intertestamental literature, especially the books of *Enoch,* as well as in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Though the term is often used in that literature in reference to fallen angels, it is not limited to that group. There is so far no attestation of the term being used in this specialized way prior to the third century B.C., but the Mesopotamians did recognize a variety of protecting spirits and demons. Perhaps the closest parallel would be found in the occasional references to the seven ancient sages as watchers. Additionally, they are sometimes portrayed as caretakers of the sacred tree, so they would fit well in this context.

4:15. binding a stump. It is difficult to determine whether it is a part of the tree that is bound with iron, or whether it is the king. If it is the tree, the text indicates that its taproot should be bound (not the stump). While trees are sometimes gilded with metal bands in ancient Mesopotamia, there is no case of treating a stump that way, much less a taproot.

4:15. dew of heaven. In Babylonian texts, dew was considered to come down from the stars of heaven and was sometimes seen as the mechanism by which the stars brought either sickness or healing.

4:16. seven times. It should not be assumed that the condition lasts for seven years. The Aramaic word "times" is interesting here. The cognate in Akkadian means "specified periods" and can refer to stages of a disease or to periodic sequences. When omens occurred, they often had a set time over which their effects could take place. Some "times" such as phases of the moon, or favorable days, might occur monthly. Others occur annually. Still others, such as equinoxes or solstices, occur a couple of times a year. Many possibilities exist here.

4:16. the king's malady. See comment on 4:33.

4:29. royal palace of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's building projects in Babylon were magnificent. The Euphrates was channeled into a number of canals that passed through the city. His palace, on the north side of the city near the Ishtar Gate, was luxuriously appointed with all the finest materials. The palace gardens were terraced and gained international reputation, eventually being named one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was a parklike enclosure with an arboretum of exotic trees. Additional building projects included the temples and the streets.

4:33. Nebuchadnezzar's condition. Interpreters seeking illnesses to which these symptoms might apply have identified conditions such as lycanthropy, a depressive illness in which the patient thinks of himself as a beast. But the characteristics also coincide with the typical description of primitive or primordial man, who lacks good sense (compare NIV: "sanity" vv. 34, 36) and has an animal-like nature and habits (v. 16). In older myths this condition is characteristic of precivilized man. It later is applied to Enkidu, the uncivilized creature of the Gilgamesh Epic. It is then used of those who are driven away from civilization after their city has been destroyed. From the early texts about the Sumerian adventurer Lugalbanda to the late texts concerning the Assyrian courtier Ahiqar, individuals are also described as having developed some of these

characteristics while cut off from society. As a result, it is possible that at least some of Nebuchadnezzar's symptoms describe not a psychological illness but exile from civilization (only food gathered wild, no home, no personal hygiene). A fragmentary cuneiform text suggests the possibility that Nebuchadnezzar had some problem that caused him to become disengaged from his responsibilities for a time, during which his son, Amel-Marduk, was perhaps in control. But the text is too uncertain to draw any firm conclusions.

4:34. Prayer of Nabonidus. One of the documents found at Qumran (4Q242 or 4QPrNab) is entitled The Prayer of Nabonidus. In this piece it is the last king of Babylon, Nabonidus, rather than his more famous predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, who is afflicted. Similarities include the seven-year illness and restoration by a Jewish diviner (unnamed). A dream is involved and worship of the correct deity is the result. The scroll preserves no mention of comparison to a beast, though some interpreters have reconstructed a line to include such a reference. The scroll connects the seven-year illness with Nabonidus's well-known stay in Teima.

5:1-31

Belshazzar's Feast

5:1. Belshazzar. Belshazzar was the son and coregent of Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon. Nabonidus spent ten years in Teima while his son was carrying out all the royal duties in Babylon. A number of documents have been found that mention him by name. About thirty years have passed since the last chapter. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562, and the banquet of this chapter takes place in October 539.

5:1. the banquet. The banquet is taking place in mid-October (15 Tashritu) 539. In the past few days the Persians have taken the city of Opis (fifty miles north on the Tigris) in a bloody battle and then crossed over to the Euphrates, where the city of Sippar surrendered without a fight on the fourteenth of Tashritu. It is likely that Babylon has received word of these events and that Belshazzar knows that the Persian army is on the march toward Babylon. Nabonidus had been with the army at Opis and fled when the city fell. When he was captured, it was in Babylon, but the texts are unclear about when he arrived. Berossus (third-century B.C. Chaldean historian, quoted by Josephus) claims that he was trapped in the city of Borsippa (about seventeen miles south of Babylon). In light of all of this, it appears that the banquet represents one final gathering before the momentous events that are about to transpire. Herodotus refers to a festival celebration that was taking place when the city fell. There is no reason to think, however, that the banquet reflects Belshazzar's pessimism about the outcome. Babylon was a defensible city, and they believed their gods to be strong.

5:2. vessels from Jerusalem. See comment on 1:2. Everyone in the ancient world understood the significance of sacred vessels. The fact that these had not been melted down suggests that they had been preserved because of their sacred character. Since the god of Babylon was seen as the conqueror, the things that belonged to the "conquered" gods would have been taken as booty into the temple of Marduk. Perhaps the use of the vessels was a way of calling to remembrance the god's previous victories (see comment on 5:4).

5:2. relation to Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar was known to be the son of Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon, with whom he was coregent. Nabonidus has no firmly established relationship to Nebuchadnezzar. As early as Herodotus (fifth century B.C., see sidebar at Esther 1), Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus had the same name (Labynetos) and were at times confused. Additionally, however, in the ancient world, successive monarchs were often identified as sons of famous predecessors even when there was no dynastic or genealogical connections. So, for instance, on the black obelisk of Shalmaneser III, Jehu, king of Israel, is identified as "son of Omri," even though he had been responsible for wiping out the line of Omri and was no relation (a fact probably well known to the Assyrians).

5:4. praised the gods. Belshazzar and his administration are well aware that the empire hangs by a thread and that the next several days will be of utmost significance. They are hoping that their gods will bring victory for them as they had in the days of Nebuchadnezzar's great conquests. To that end they are "toasting the gods" and celebrating their past victories. It is also possible, though not explicitly stated, that libations were poured out to the gods from these vessels. They are not only making their supplications to Marduk, the patron of Babylon, but to the gods of other cities of the region whose images had been gathered into Babylon during these troubled times.

5:5. the hand. A lifeless, detached hand would have suggested a defeated enemy. Casualty counts were made by cutting off the right hands of all of the dead (recall the broken-off hands of Dagan in 1 Sam 5:3-4). By drinking from the vessels the Babylonians were recall-

ing the defeat of Yahweh (perhaps along with other gods and nations), but this is no lifeless, severed hand of a dead god at all. It is quite animated and has a message to give. The effect might be similar if the head of a decapitated victim began to speak.

5:5. location of the writing. The statement that the writing was on the plaster wall near the lampstand is a curious detail since one might have expected plaster all around the room, which would be illuminated by many lampstands. The excavation of the throne room in Babylon can offer some explanation. It was a 170-by-55-foot hall entered through three spacious courtyards that led from the entrance just inside the Ishtar Gate. Some of the wall space was covered with blue enameled brick, while other parts were plaster. The word used for lampstand is an unusual one and may be a Persian loan word. As such it likely represents a distinct, singular lampstand, perhaps of a special type.

5:7. rewards offered. The purple clothing was made using expensive dye (see comment on Num 4:6 and Esther 8:15) and was worn only by royalty. The gold chain would have been an insignia of office. These are seen as royal gifts in Herodotus, where Cambyses sends them to the Ethiopian king. Being made third in the kingdom may be intended to rank Daniel only behind Belshazzar and his father, Nabonidus.

5:8. could not read the writing. Though some have suggested that the inscription was written in an obscure language (such as Old Persian cuneiform), there is no indication in the text that it is written in anything other than the native Aramaic. Aramaic, like Hebrew, is written without vowels and at times without word divisions, yielding מנאתקלפרס *(mnʾtqlprs).* Confusion over where to make the word divisions and which vowels to supply was sufficient to undermine their confidence in reading the words and offering an interpretation. In another case of an inscribed and perhaps cryptic message, the seventh-century Lydian king Gyges saw the name "Ashurbanipal" written out in a dream that was accompanied by a voice urging him to battle against the Cimmerians.

5:10. queen mother. Nabonidus's mother, Adad-Guppi, was a very influential person and the quintessential queen mother. Her 104 years, however, had come to a close about 546, so she was no longer alive at this time. Nabonidus's wife, Belshazzar's mother, identified by Herodotus as Nitocris, is more likely referred to here.

5:25-28. the inscription. The words can be taken as verbs for weighing and assessing, or as nouns for the various weights that are used with the balance scales that were the ancient cash registers—necessary at every place of business. Archaeologists have discovered many such weights, sometimes inscribed with these Aramaic labels. Scales and weights were also used to depict divine evaluation and judgment (as in the Egyptian Book of the Dead). Daniel appears to have used both noun and verb forms in his interpretation. Wordplay was a common means used to interpret omens in this period. An example of this is Nabonidus's interpretation of a lunar eclipse as a directive to install his daughter as a priestess.

5:27. scales. A. Wolters has pointed out that the imagery of the scales may also find an astronomical connection to the constellation Libra, represented in Babylonian astronomy as scales. Babylon fell on the sixteenth of Tashritu (September-October), October 12 or 13, 539, so the banquet took place the evening of Tashritu 15/October 11 or 12. The Babylonians traditionally related the month of Tashritu to the constellation Libra, and the annual rising of Libra was associated in the manuals with the fifteenth of that month. This would have been well known to the astrologers of Babylon's court, specialists in celestial divination, who were counted among the wise men. This would have importance since the Babylonians often sought linkage between classes of omens to confirm a message.

5:30. fall of Babylon. There are several ancient traditions concerning the fall of Babylon represented in Persian and Greek sources. Herodotus (see sidebar on Esther 1) tells of a siege of Babylon by the Persians that ended when Cyrus diverted the Euphrates and sent a company inside the wall where the river had flowed through. Cyrus's account in the Cyrus Cylinder reports that Marduk allowed him to enter Babylon without a battle, where he was received as a liberator. The *Chronicle of Nabonidus,* a pro-Persian contemporary account, offers a similar view.

6:1-28

Daniel and the Lions

6:1. Darius the Mede. There is no known historical character named Darius prior to Darius the Great, who is too late to fit in here. Since Cyrus became ruler when Babylon fell, some have identified Darius the Mede and Cyrus as one and the same (see 6:28). Others suggest that Darius is an alternate name (or a throne name) for Ugbaru, the commander who led

the Persian army into Babylon. He was governor of the Gutium and thus could easily be connected with the Medes (though he died just three weeks after the fall of Babylon). One named Gubaru was appointed the governor of Babylon and is also named by some as a candidate. There is reason to question that anyone but Cyrus could be called the king (v. 6), and he was about sixty-two when Babylon fell. But Cyrus was a Persian, not a Mede, and was the son of Cambyses (not Ahasuerus, see 9:1). Further information will need to become available before a firm identification can be made.

6:1. 120 satraps. The primary administrative geographical division in the Persian empire was the satrapy. The number of these varied between twenty and thirty-one, so the text must be referring to lower-level administrative governors (for whom this term is used in Greek historical sources).

6:7. the king's edict. Persian kings were not at all inclined toward self-deification. Furthermore, the gods were considered too important to be ignored. Even in the traditional Iranian religion, prayer three times a day was the norm, and Zoroastrianism increased it to five. Alternatively, it is likely that Darius was persuaded to issue the decree to address some religious/political problem without ever intending to prohibit what Daniel (and most of the population of the empire) was doing. Herodotus describes Persian ritual by reporting that no altar nor fire is used. Most importantly, he says that when the offering is made, the worshiper is not permitted to pray for anything personal but can only invoke blessings on the king or community.

6:7,17. lions' den. It is known that lions were captured and kept in cages so that they could be released for hunting, but there are no examples in currently known Persian literature that feature the punishment of being thrown into a den of lions. In earlier Assyrian texts, oath-breakers were put into cages of wild animals set up in the city square to be publicly devoured. Additionally, in seventh-century Assyrian literature, the lions' pit occurs as a metaphor for vicious and antagonistic courtiers of the king. In one piece of Babylonian wisdom literature, Marduk metaphorically closes (muzzles) the mouth of the lion (the oppressor) to put an end to his devouring tactics.

6:8. laws of the Medes and Persians. No concept of "laws of the Medes and Persians that cannot be changed" has been documented outside of the books of Daniel and Esther. Nonetheless, a tradition at least as early as the time of Hammurabi (eighteenth century B.C.) recognized that a judge could not change a decision that had been made. In this sense we may be dealing with a ruling rather than a law. Greek sources conflict with one another, as Herodotus indicates significant freedom on the part of Persian kings to change their minds, while Diodorus Siculus cites an instance where Darius III could not. Certainly no lower official could countermand the decrees of the Persian king, and the king himself may have thought it humiliating to go back and reconsider something he had already decreed. Royal code of honor would have made it out of the question for the king to rescind an order.

6:10. prayer three times a day toward Jerusalem. Prayer toward Jerusalem had been established practice as early as the building of the temple by Solomon (1 Kings 8:35). The frequency of prayer in Israelite practice had not been established in law. Neither the Old Testament nor the Dead Sea Scrolls show any norms other than the pattern established by the morning and evening sacrifice regularly offered in the temple. As mentioned in the comment on 6:7, normal Persian practice called for three or five daily prayers.

6:17. signet ring. Current evidence suggests that the early Persian kings used cylinder seals for empire business and stamp seals or signet rings for personal business, though the latter were growing in usage through this period. A signet ring held the official seal of the king by which he authorized the business of the empire. Only a few of these have been found by archaeologists. The seals were typically made of chalcedony and featured pictures of the king doing heroic acts (like killing beasts) under the protection of the winged sun disk (representing Ahura Mazda). Many of the Persepolis fortification tablets contained stamp seal impressions.

6:19-23. innocence by ordeal. "Ordeal" describes a judicial situation in which the accused is placed in the hand of God using some mechanism, generally one that will put the accused in jeopardy. If the deity intervenes to protect the accused from harm, the verdict is innocent. Most trials by ordeal in the ancient Near East involved dangers such as water, fire or poison. When the accused was exposed to these threats, he or she was in effect being assumed guilty until the deity declared otherwise.

6:24. wives and children included in punishment. This is more severe than any of the legislation found in the legal collections in Mesopotamia. In the Old Testament when the family is included in the punishment, it usual-

ly reflects that the family line is being wiped out. This extends the punishment beyond life to legacy (see comment on Josh 7:25). Herodotus tells how during the reign of Darius, a high-ranking official and close associate of the king was judged to be involved in a revolt. As a result most of his family was executed.

6:28. Darius/Cyrus. For those who identify these two as the same, the translation "the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian" is acceptable (see comment on 6:1).

7:1-28

Vision of the Four Beasts

7:1. chronology. This vision takes place before the events of both chapters five and six. It is difficult to tell what the first year of Belshazzar was. It should not be equated with the first year of his father, Nabonidus (556), but more likely with the beginning of his coregency when Nabonidus set up his royal residency in Teima (552). It is unknown, however, whether Belshazzar was immediately made coregent. The Nabonidus Chronicle first notes Belshazzar's coregency in Nabonidus's seventh year (549), but the Chronicles for years four, five and half of six are not available. It is in Nabonidus's sixth year, 550, that the empire succession takes shape as Cyrus defeats the Medes and the Medo-Persian empire is formed. As a tangential note of interest, a dream text of Nabonidus is preserved from *his* first year, in which it was foretold that Cyrus would conquer the Medes.

7:2. winds of heaven on the great sea. This description indicates a typical mythical scene in which the churning of the cosmic ocean disturbs the creatures (often sea monsters) who represent the forces of chaos and disorder. In *Enuma Elish* the sky god, Anu, creates the four winds that stir up the deep and its goddess, Tiamat. There, as here, it is a disruptive wind bringing unrest.

7:3. beasts with odd characteristics. In the Babylonian omen series called *Shumma Izbu*, with which Daniel would have been well acquainted from his training, various birth abnormalities are recorded along with what sort of event they forecast. Several of the descriptions of the beasts in Daniel's visions can also be found in the *Shumma Izbu* series. Some of the common elements in the descriptions include the creature being raised up on one side and having multiple heads or multiple horns. Most of the observations of abnormalities were made of domesticated species, a large proportion being sheep and goats. Some of the abnormalities are described by comparison to various wild beasts. There are examples of sheep giving birth to lambs that (in some way) resemble a wolf, a fox, a tiger, a lion, a bear or a leopard. In this chapter, Daniel is not observing these abnormalities in reality but in a dream, thus combining two important omen mechanisms (dreams and odd births). The dream books often feature ominological information (celestial or extispicy omens) being viewed in dreams and carrying the same significance as if they were viewed in reality. Being familiar with both literatures, Daniel would have been inclined to interpret the dream along the lines suggested in the *izbu* omens. The omen interpretations often concerned political events such as "the prince will take the land of his enemy." Nevertheless, Daniel's dream goes well beyond the *izbu* omens. The descriptions suggest that he does see fearsome chaos beasts rather than simply sheep or goats with odd characteristics. Additionally, many of the features of Daniel's beasts are neither found nor expected in *izbu* omens, like wings and iron teeth. For this reason it is also important to understand the nature of some of the mythological imagery that pertains to the dream.

7:3. beast imagery. A number of different mythological sources offer similarities to the beast imagery used by Daniel. A seventh-century Akkadian piece called *A Vision of the Netherworld* includes fifteen divine beings in the form of various hybrid beasts. Following that, Nergal, king of the netherworld, is seen seated on his throne, and identifies himself as the son of the king of the gods. There are many significant differences between this vision and Daniel's, but the similarities in imagery are helpful background.

7:3. out of the sea. In the Bible as well as in the ancient Near East, the sea represents chaos and disorder, as do the sea monsters that live there. The obvious physical struggle between the sea and the land as well as the fierce, seemingly unstoppable energy displayed by the savage sea gave rise to cosmic myths in the ancient Near East. The *Enuma Elish* creation epic from Babylon describes how Marduk vanquished Tiamat, goddess of watery chaos, while she was in the form of a dragon. Much of the cycle of stories about Baal in Ugaritic legend involve Baal's struggle against his rival Yamm, the god of the sea. Similarly, the Ugaritic epic has both Anat and Baal claim to have conquered Litan, the seven-headed dragon, and thus gained mastery over the seas. In Psalm 104:26 Yahweh is said to play with Leviathan, and in Job 41:1-11 God challenges Job to show the same control over

Leviathan that God has. The kingdoms represented by these beasts are therefore associated with the forces of chaos that bring disorder to God's world and need to be overcome.

7:4. symbol of lion with wings. Winged figures are common in the art and sculpture of Mesopotamia. The winged bulls and winged lions, both with human heads, flanked thrones and entryways in Assyria, Babylon and Persia. Winged human figures (wearing headdresses with horns) are known as early as the eighth century and stood guard at Cyrus's palace in Pasargadae. Winged creatures also figure in dreams. Herodotus reports a dream that Cyrus had just a few days before his death, in which he saw Darius (then a young man) with wings that overshadowed Asia and Europe. In the *Anzu Myth* (see next entry), Anzu is defeated by having his wings plucked. This motif is also significant in the story of Etana, who helps an eagle whose wings have been plucked.

7:7. the fourth beast. In the *Anzu Myth* a composite creature (Anzu) steals the Tablet of Destinies, which comprised a sort of constitution of the cosmos. The goddess Mami is called forth, who created all the gods, the most ancient of deities. She is asked to send her son, Ninurta, to battle Anzu. The god Ninurta defeats the monster and recovers the tablet. Ninurta (who is also known for his defeat of other beasts such as the bull-man in the sea, the six-headed ram and the seven-headed serpent), is then granted dominion and glory. There are certainly many differences with Daniel 7, and there should be no thought that the *Anzu Myth* figures prominently here. Those who would have been familiar with the *Anzu Myth,* however, would likely have seen echoes of it in this vision. The tale has roots as early as the beginning of the second millennium but is principally known from mid-first millennium Babylonian texts. One ninth-century relief inscription from Nimrud pictures Ninurta fighting a beast with lion's legs but standing upright on eagle's feet. It is feathered and has two wings, lion paws for hands with sharp, extended claws, a gaping mouth with fierce teeth and two horns. It is thought to be a depiction of Anzu.

7:7. ten horns. It was common in Mesopotamia for kings and gods to wear crowns featuring protruding or embossed horns. Sometimes the sets of horns were stacked one upon another in tiers. The winged lion from Ashurnasirpal's palace has a conical crown on its human head with three pairs of tiered horns embossed on it. Another interesting connection is that in *Enuma Elish* Tiamat is the fearsome beast that the hero of the gods has to defeat. To help her she creates eleven monsters that must also be defeated. Here also the fourth beast is associated with eleven horns (the ten plus the little horn).

7:9. Ancient of Days. In Canaanite mythology the head of the pantheon is El, an aged deity addressed by the title "father of years." In the Mesopotamian *Anzu Myth* the ancient one is a goddess, Mami, whose son defeats the monster (Anzu) and is granted dominion.

7:9. throne with wheels. A wheeled throne flaming with fire is also described in Ezekiel's throne vision (Ezek 1, 10). The prototypes of wheeled thrones go back to the end of the third millennium as pictured on cylinder seals. These were simply chariots or carts used for processions for the image of the deity. Some seal impressions even picture composite creatures drawing the vehicle. Continued use of thrones with wheels can be seen in reliefs down into the ninth and eighth centuries.

7:10. books opened. Every royal court in the ancient world kept records of day-to-day activities and detailed accounts of the events that transpired. The actions of the beast/king would have been logged, and that record is now brought out to provide evidence as he is brought before the divine court for judgment.

7:13-14. son of man. The phrase "son of man" is simply a common Semitic expression to describe someone or something as human or, at least, humanlike. In Israelite theology, Yahweh is the high God and also is portrayed as the rider on the clouds. In Canaanite mythology, the roles described here are filled by the god El, the high god of great age (see comment on 7:9) and his son, Baal, the rider on the clouds. In one of the Baal myths, Yamm, who represents the chaos of the sea, is defeated, and Baal is declared king and granted everlasting dominion. In the cosmic conflict myths of Mesopotamia (such as *Enuma Elish* or the *Anzu Myth)* a deity (Marduk and Ninurta respectively) defeats the threatening chaos and regains authority and dominion for the gods and for himself. Daniel has been trained in such literature, and his revelations build on that familiarity, though the common motifs are entirely repackaged. Intertestamental literature such as the book of *1 Enoch* as well as New Testament and early Christian literature identifies the son of man with the Messiah.

7:16. one standing there. Interpreting angels were present in Ezekiel and Zechariah, and are common in apocalyptic literature from the Old Testament period on. No such figure is known in Mesopotamian literature.

7:17. the four kingdoms. For information on

the four-kingdom pattern in ancient literature, see comment on 2:36-40. The identification of the four kingdoms has occasioned much controversy. The text offers no interpretation of any of the characteristics of the dream beasts, except that the horns are kings. It is difficult to know whether the characteristics (e.g., three ribs in the mouth) symbolize historical events or whether they serve another purpose, such as offering omen insight (see comment on 7:3). Alternatively, they may serve only to give flavor to the imagery. If they do represent historical realities, still only speculation can suggest associations. Are the three ribs in the mouth of the second beast representative of Lydia, Babylon and Egypt, the three major conquests of the Medo-Persian empire? Or are they the Urartians, Manneans and Scythians conquered by the Medes (Jer 51:27-29)? Are the four heads and wings of the third beast the four generals who divided Alexander's empire among them? Or are they the four kings of Persia alluded to in Daniel 11:2? Are the ten horns of the fourth beast a kingdom still future? Or are they the ten independent states that Alexander's empire becomes by the end of the third century B.C.? The text does not answer these questions, nor can background information resolve them.

7:18. saints. The text refers to "holy ones" who are not only the eventual recipients of the kingdom (vv. 18, 22, 27) but also the victims of the oppression (vv. 21, 25). While many interpreters think this refers to godly people, the term is most frequently used to describe supernatural beings (this is also true in the use of the equivalent term in Ugaritic and Aramaic, as well as in the Dead Sea Scrolls literature). This would receive further support since it is the host of heaven that is under assault in the related vision of next chapter (8:10).

7:24. the ten kings. At least on this point the text makes it clear that the ten horns represent ten kingdoms/kings. The ten kingdoms that spring from Alexander's empire are Ptolemaic Egypt, Seleucia, Macedon, Pergamum, Pontus, Bithynia, Cappadocia, Armenia, Parthia and Bactria. Yet others believe that the ten are successors to the Roman empire and as such, may be still future.

7:25. change set times and laws. In Mesopotamian thinking the times and laws are governed by the cosmic decrees embodied in the Tablet of Destinies. They are normally entrusted to either the assembly of the gods or to the head of the pantheon. In a number of ancient tales they are misappropriated. In *Enuma Elish* Kingu, Tiamat's sidekick, has them. In the *Anzu Myth* (see comment on 7:7) a monster (Anzu) stole them and threatened to wield them, thus putting everything in the cosmos in jeopardy.

7:25. time, times and half a time. The word "time" used here is the same as that used in 4:16 (see comment there). The word "times" is simply a plural and does not necessarily suggest two times. The Babylonians were very sophisticated mathematicians, and early on the gods had been represented numerically (Sin = 30; Ishtar = 15). Furthermore, the gods, with their numerical valuations and planetary associations, figured in the astronomical terminology by which the cyclic movements in the heavens were used in calendrical calculations. All of these factors make it very difficult to unpack the significance of this phrase.

8:1-27

Vision of the Goat and the Ram

8:1. chronology. Determination of what year this refers to shares the same difficulties as mentioned in the comment on 7:1. Belshazzar's third year is likely either 550 or 547. In the vision of chapter seven, only one empire (Babylon) was identified by name. Now, two years later, two more empires are named.

8:2. geography. The Ulai Canal is in the vicinity of Susa, the capital of the territory of Elam, some two hundred miles from Babylon. The city will later become the royal residence of the Achaemenid kings of Persia, so it is a suitable locale for the vision. The canal is an artificial one on the north side of the city that was closely associated with Susa both in cuneiform and classical sources. Daniel could have actually made the journey, but it is more likely that he is transported in a vision as Ezekiel sometimes experiences.

8:3. ram as astral sign of Persia. In later literature (first several centuries A.D.), the signs of the zodiac are associated with countries, and the ram is associated with Persia. There is no evidence, however, that such an association was made as early as the book of Daniel. The concept of the zodiac has its origin in the intertestamental period.

8:9. small horn. This appears to be a reference to the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, whose activities in the second century will be detailed in the next several entries.

8:9. Beautiful Land. From 11:16, 41, it is clear that this is a reference to the land of Israel. Antiochus III marched east against Parthia, Armenia and Bactria from 212 to 205, and in 200 gained control of Palestine at the Battle of Panium. Both he and his son, Antiochus IV, were

frustrated in their attempts to gain control of Egypt (to the south). Antiochus IV also had campaigns to the east (against Armenia and Elam) and was well known for his actions against Judah and Jerusalem (see comments on below and on 11:21-39).

8:10. starry host overthrown. The host of heaven in the ancient Near East referred to the assembly of the gods, many of whom were represented by celestial bodies (whether planets or stars). The Bible sometimes uses the phrase to refer to the illegitimate worship of these deities (see comment on Deut 4:19). On other occasions, the phrase is used for Yahweh's angelic council (see comment on 2 Chron 18:18). A third type of usage treats the term as a reference to rebel angels (perhaps in Is 24:21; commonly in the intertestamental literature). Finally, it can refer simply to the stars with no personalities behind them (Is 40:26). In the destruction described in *Erra and Ishum*, Erra says that he will make planets shed their splendor and will wrench stars from the sky. Here the starry host represents one side in the cosmic battle and falls temporarily victim to the evil horn, thus suggesting they are some of God's minions.

8:11. daily sacrifice. The daily sacrifice was a burnt offering occurring every morning and evening (see comments on Ex 29:38 and Num 28:1-8). It represented the most basic maintenance of the sanctuary and was foundational for preserving the presence of Yahweh in their midst.

8:14. 2,300 evenings and mornings until reconsecration. If 2,300 sacrifices will be missed, and two are offered each day, 1,150 days will pass (roughly three years and two months). Antiochus IV Epiphanes instituted sacrifices to his gods in the temple on the twenty-fifth of Kislev (December) in the year 167 B.C., but he had put a stop to the Jewish rituals some time earlier that year (reported in 1 Macc 1:44-51), and the exact date of the proclamation and its enforcement is not known. The rededication of the temple in the aftermath of the Maccabean revolt took place three years to the day after the desecration on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, 164.

8:16. Gabriel. This is the first reference to the name of an angel in the Bible. The only other angel named in the Bible is Michael (see 10:13). In intertestamental literature *(1 Enoch)* Gabriel is in charge of Paradise. In the War Scroll from Qumran he is one of the archangels who surround the throne of God. He is the one who brings the message to Mary of the impending birth of Jesus (Luke 1:19). Angels not only delivered messages from deity, but they explained those messages and answered questions concerning them. Thus Gabriel is seen here as one who can interpret the vision. In the ancient world's polytheistic context, the messengers of the gods were generally gods themselves (of lower rank). In Mesopotamia we find individuals such as Nuska and Kakka, while Hermes serves the function in Greek mythology. In a dream of Nabonidus a young man appears to offer an interpretation of a celestial omen that has been observed.

8:22. the kingdoms. The king represented by the large horn is undisputed: Alexander the Great, whose Greek army swept away the Persian Empire between 335 and 331 B.C. When Alexander died suddenly in 323 at the age of 33, the two who could claim ancestral rights to the kingdom (his illegitimate half-brother, Philip Arrideus, and the son of Alexander and Roxane, Alexander IV, born two months after his father's death) were installed as figureheads while the operation of the kingdom was entrusted to three experienced officers, Antipater (viceroy of Macedon), Perdiccas (head of the armies) and Craterus (in charge of the treasury and advisor to Arrideus). By 321 these three regents had sufficiently antagonized one another that a battle was instigated by a fourth player, Ptolemy, who had been given a position of authority in Egypt. Craterus was killed in battle, and Perdiccas was assassinated in a mutiny by several of his generals, one of whom was Seleucus. Meanwhile Antipater took the lead and placed a friend, Antigonus, in Perdiccas's position. In 319 Antipater died an old man, and despite his appointment of another, within two years his son, Cassander, had gained control of Macedonia and most of the territory of Greece. In the summer of 317, those opposing Cassander executed Philip Arrideus. Alexander IV and his mother Roxane were placed under house arrest and effectively deposed, though they were not executed until 310. The three who ruled were now Cassander in the west, Ptolemy in Egypt and Antigonus in the east. As Antigonus sought to solidify his control of the east, he attempted to dominate Seleucus (now governor of Babylon), who in 315 exposed Antigonus's schemes for power to the other leaders, Ptolemy, Cassander and Lysimachus (governor of Thrace). Battles continued to be fought until 311 when Antigonus parleyed for peace with Ptolemy, Cassander and Lysimachus, leaving Seleucus isolated but in control of Babylonia. By 309 Ptolemy decided to move against Antigonus but pushed too far and ended up in 306 under the attack of Antigonus and his son, Demetrius. Antigonus's invasion of

Egypt failed, and in 305 Ptolemy, along with Cassander, Seleucus and Lysimachus (most likely to be identified as the four horns), declared themselves the successor kings to Alexander. Yet it was still four more years until Antigonus was killed in the Battle of Ipsus, 301. Cassander died only three years later (298), and Demetrius continued to cause trouble, but the division of the empire into four parts represents the fallout of this twenty-year succession struggle.

8:25. stern-faced king. The description in verse 23-25 pertains to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who reigned from 175 to 164 B.C. His wisdom was corrupted for use in hypocrisy, intrigue, double-crossing and treachery. For summary of his actions see comments on 11:21-39.

8:26. seal up the vision. See comment on 12:4.

9:1-27
Seventy-Sevens

9:1. chronology. Assuming Darius the Mede's reign coincides with that of Cyrus, his first year would be 539. Again, the timing is significant as a major change of empires is in process (see comment on 7:1).

9:2. Jeremiah's prophecy. In 597 the prophet Jeremiah wrote a letter to the exiles (Jer 29) informing them that the length of the exile would be seventy years. This is most likely the subject of Daniel's interest as he ponders whether the time might be right for the return.

9:3. fasting, sackcloth and ashes. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with making a request before God. The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and humbling oneself before God (Ps 69:10). The practice of putting dirt, dust or ashes on one's head was a typical sign of mourning throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament period. It is a practice also known from Mesopotamia and Canaan. Many mourning rites originated as a means for the living to identify with the dead. It is easy to see how dust on the head and torn clothes would be symbolic representations of burial and decay. Sackcloth was made of goat or camel hair and was coarse and uncomfortable. In many cases the sackcloth was only a loin covering.

9:17-18. desolation of city and sanctuary. The city of Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 and was little more than a desolate ruin. Fifty years had come and gone since the temple had been dismantled and razed.

9:21. Gabriel. See comment on 8:16.

9:21. swift flight. In Isaiah 6 the creatures called seraphim fly, and in Zechariah 5 there is a vision of women with wings who fly, but this is the only occasion when a being identified as an angel flies. Though other supernatural creatures (the ones listed earlier, as well as cherubim) are portrayed with wings, angels (messengers) are not, despite the artistic renditions of the past fifteen hundred years. In Mesopotamian art protective genies are portrayed with wings, as are a variety of demons. In intertestamental literature the earliest reference to flying angels is in *1 Enoch* 61:1 (though cherubim and seraphim are by then included in the category). The Hebrew construction used is a complex one, and many commentators have concluded (with good cause) that the text expresses weariness (*y'p)* rather than flight (*'wp).*

9:21. time of the evening sacrifice. From the Israelite perspective the day ended about six o'clock in the evening (rather than our midnight). As a result the evening sacrifice was offered late in the afternoon, between three and four o'clock.

9:24. seventy sevens. A period of seven years was the sabbatical year cycle (see especially Lev 26:34-35 and the reference to it in 2 Chron 36:21). Seven sabbatical year cycles constituted a Jubilee cycle, at the end of which slaves were set free and land was returned to its proper owner (Lev 25). Seventy sabbatical cycles equal ten Jubilee cycles. The first Jubilee cycle is distinguished here (seven sevens in v. 25), and the last sabbatical cycle is distinguished (the seventieth week). It is clear, then, that these numbers are laden with theological significance that give them a schematic appearance. In Mesopotamia the numbers seven and seventy represent a full measure of time. Schematic usage of the term "weeks" can be seen in Jewish literature in the book of *1 Enoch* (in the Apocalypse of Weeks), and the period of seventy weeks is also found at Qumran. The schematic use of time has been referred to as "chronography," which is to be differentiated from "chronology."

9:24. seal up vision and prophecy. See comment on 12:4. Sealing concerns authentication. The authentication of Jeremiah's prophecy and Daniel's vision will only be accomplished when the designated period of time passes.

9:24. anoint the most holy. The consecration ceremony that involves anointing and purification of the Holy of Holies in Exodus 29 (es-

pecially vv. 36-37) is sufficient background for understanding this statement. The desecration of the holy place requires its purification. Assyrian temple inscriptions also refer to the anointing of a temple that is to be repaired and restored by a future prince.

9:25. word to restore and rebuild. The NIV translates this as "decree," but in its note indicates that it is a "word"—and this usually refers to a prophetic oracle, not a royal decree. In fact the same combination of verb and noun ("word going out") has just been used in verse 23. This identification of the "word" is even more likely in light of the fact that Daniel is reflecting on the writing of Jeremiah, who proclaimed the prophetic oracle concerning return and restoration in his letter to the exiles (see comment on 9:2). Notice especially Jeremiah 29:10. The "going forth" of this word would then be dated to sometime between 597 and 594.

9:25-26. anointed one. It is important to note that the noun here is indefinite, thus *a* messiah (*an* anointed one, as in the NIV note), rather than *the* Messiah. The prophetic literature had not yet adopted this term as a technical term for the ideal, future Davidic king (besides this chapter, the term is used only in the prophets in Is 45:1, referring to Cyrus, and Hab 3:13, in a generic way). Priests and kings were both anointed to their tasks in Israel. Some have maintained that the two references to anointed individuals require two different anointed individuals: one after the first cycle of forty-nine years (plausibly Cyrus, since he has already been given anointed status in the prophets, though leaders of the return such as Zerubbabel or Joshua would not be impossible); the second to be cut off before the last week. This view is favored by the Hebrew punctuation that suggests a period should be placed between the two numbers (as reflected in the RSV) rather than after the sixty-two sevens. It was forty-nine years between the fall of Jerusalem (586) and the decree of Cyrus (538).

9:25. streets and a trench. "Streets" refers to the city squares and plazas that are the major features of city planning. This is where the public functions of the city take place, from government to merchant activities. "Trench" can only refer to the dry moat that was a common element of a city's defenses. The combination indicates that Jerusalem will again be a place of security and prosperity, providing all of the civic functions of a smoothly operating urban center.

9:26. anointed one cut off. The most common identification of the cut off anointed one is Onias III, the high priest murdered by Antiochus Epiphanes in 171 (referred to in 11:22). Many find this an irresistible option because it initiated a seven-year period of persecution in Jerusalem that included the desecration of the temple in 167.

9:27. abomination of desolation. The consistent use of the noun translated "desolation" (*shmm,* see also 8:13) is quite intentional. The Syrian Baal Shamem ("Lord of Heaven") was the deity whose worship was instituted in the temple on the altar of sacrifice by the Syrian citizens who were brought into Jerusalem by Antiochus and his military commander, Apollonius. Antiochus worshiped this deity as Olympian Zeus. This desecration perpetrated by Antiochus served as a prototype for all future desecrations. Even in the sixth century, however, this concept had precedent. In a work called *The Verse Account of Nabonidus* the priests of Marduk list the offenses of Nabonidus that purportedly led Marduk to dethrone him in favor of the Persian king Cyrus. Among the accusations are that he built an abomination, a work of unholiness (a statue of the god Nanna placed in the temple of Marduk), and ordered an end to the most important rituals.

10:1-21

The Final Vision

10:1. chronology. The third year of Cyrus's rule in Babylon was 537/536. This is very close to the time when the first wave of Jews are returning from captivity and beginning the rebuilding of the temple (recorded in the first chapter of Ezra). Verse 4 indicates that the vision took place on the twenty-fourth day of the first month (Nisan). This would be in early April. The celebration of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (14-21 Nisan) would have come and gone during Daniel's three weeks of preparation.

10:1. Cyrus. Cyrus of Persia was one of the greatest conquerors in world history. He inherited the throne of Persia from his father, Cambyses I, in 559. In 556 the Babylonian king, Nabonidus, motivated by a dream, abandoned the treaty that his country had maintained with the Medes for over half a century and made a treaty with Cyrus. This gave Cyrus the freedom to move against the Medes (ruled by his grandfather, Astyges), whom he conquered in 550. The new Medo-Persian empire was thus formed, with control over the entirety of Iran. By 546 he defeated the Anatolian kingdom of Lydia and Ionia. For the next five years he consolidated his control over the tribes in northeastern Iran.

All of this paved the way for his crowning achievement, the conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C. The whole of the Near East (excluding Egypt) was under control of the Persians when Cyrus was killed in battle in 530. For more information see comments in Ezra 1.

10:3. choice food. In extrabiblical Jewish apocalyptic literature, fasting is often essential preparation for receiving a vision. Daniel is not undertaking a total fast but abstaining from pastry, meat and wine—thus returning to a more spartan diet. It should be noted that while this verse does not use the same terminology as the text at 1:5, it is now clear that Daniel had not made a lifelong commitment to bland food.

10:3. lotions. In the absence of showers and deodorants, personal grooming involved the use of perfumed oils. Inattention to such amenities was characteristic of mourning (2 Sam 12:20; 14:2).

10:5-6. description. White linen is the typical clothing for priests as well as for supernatural operatives (Ezek 9-10). The gold waistband is lavishly impressive, but most of the description focuses on the physical features of the man (usually identified as Gabriel). The five features described ([1] body/chrysolite; [2] face/lightning; [3] eyes/torches; [4] limbs/bronze; [5] voice/multitude) can also be found in the descriptions of the creatures that bear the chariot throne in Ezekiel 1. The general appearance of the vehicle is compared to a torch and lightning, the wheels by which the creatures stand are compared to chrysolite, and the legs of the creatures are like burnished bronze. All of the same Hebrew terms are used. In Ezekiel 1 the sound of the creatures' wings was like an army, whereas the angel in Daniel has a voice that sounds like a multitude. Daniel is clear, however, that his visitor had the appearance of a man rather than the composite beasts seen by Ezekiel. In the Babylonian wisdom composition entitled *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi* the sufferer, after a long period of suffering and mourning, has a dream in which he sees an impressive young man (both in physique and attire) standing over him, resulting in his body being numbed. The individual's message is not preserved, but it is generally assumed that it had to do with approaching deliverance.

10:13. prince of the Persian kingdom. The context demands that this antagonist be considered a supernatural being rather than a royal human individual. The literature from Qumran also uses the title "prince" as a reference to chief angels. There is no clearer evidence than this chapter on the biblical concept that conflicts in human history are paralleled by conflicts in the supernatural realm. Indications of this concept are already evident in the concept of the divine warrior (see comments on 1 Sam 5:2; 17:37; 17:45-47). Just as the Israelites had a divine assembly filled with angels instead of gods, so they eventually exchanged the concept of national patron deities for a concept of supernatural creatures who represented the interests of a nation. This reflects the ongoing process of emptying the heavens of competing deities while retaining a supernaturalist view of reality.

10:13. Michael. As indicated with the name Gabriel (see comment on 8:16), there are no names given for angels in earlier literature. Michael becomes a much more familiar figure in the Qumran literature and in the intertestamental literature, primarily the book of *Enoch.* He is considered the guardian of the people of Israel.

10:20. Persia, Greece. As in chapter 8, reference is made here to the sequence of empires in which the Greek empire of Alexander will supersede the Persian empire.

10:21. Book of Truth. This book has been compared to the Babylonian Tablet of Destinies, which was considered to contain and dictate the course of history and the cosmos (see comment on 7:25). This not only fits with the nature of the material that is revealed in chapter 11, but it accords with the introduction to that material in 11:2, where the information is specifically categorized as "the truth."

11:1-45

Kings of North and South

11:2. four Persian kings. Cyrus is already king when this is taking place, so he would not be counted among the four. His immediate successors were Cambyses, Smerdis (Bardiya/Gaumata), Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes. Seven more kings followed in the royal line before Alexander the Great brought about the fall of the empire. The last was Darius III. Xerxes was arguably the richest of the kings and was the one who was most involved with battles against the Greeks. This spans about seventy years of Persian history.

11:3. mighty king. The mighty king is none other than Alexander the Great. The text skips about 130 years from the end of Xerxes' reign to 336, when Alexander took the throne of Macedon. Within five years his military prowess had toppled the Persian empire and ushered in the Greek.

11:4. division to four winds. Alexander died in 323, and a twenty-year struggle for succes-

sion ensued that eventually led to a four-way division of the empire (see comment on 8:22). Two of those divisions were in the Aegean region (Cassander had Greece and Macedonia; Lysimachus had Thrace), while the other two divided up the Near East (Ptolemy had Egypt and Palestine; Seleucus had Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia). The Ptolemaic line is going to represented by "the king of the South," while the Seleucid line will be represented by "the king of the North."

11:5. Ptolemy I Soter (305-285). The text will now focus on the two kingdoms (Ptolemaic Egypt and Seleucia) that flanked Palestine. Ptolemy was a power broker and instigator during much of the twenty-year succession struggle (playing a significant role as early as 321), but Seleucus emerged as the stronger party with the largest kingdom. Ptolemy's military action in 321 broke up the original group that had assumed power after Alexander's death. One of his few failures came in 309, when he attempted to move against Antigonus (Seleucus's predecessor). By 306 it was clear that he had overextended himself, and he had to fall back and regroup. Still in 306 he was able to declare himself king of Egypt.

11:5. Seleucus I Nicator (312-280). After Alexander died, Perdiccas became head of the armies, and Seleucus was one of his generals. He was among the group that assassinated Perdiccas. Seleucus briefly gained control of Babylon, but was forced to flee when Perdiccas's successor, Antigonus, moved against him in 316. He then served as a general for Ptolemy from 316 to 312. They fought together against Antigonus at the Battle of Gaza. After Antigonus's defeat at Gaza, Seleucus regained control of Babylon, which became the center of his power. Verses four and five cover the period from Alexander's death through the reigns of the first kings of the two empires, about forty years.

11:6. failed alliance of Ptolemies and Seleucids (246). The text now moves forward about forty years. These years had witnessed the first and second Syrian wars (274-271; 260-253), mostly over the control of the trade routes, ports and natural resources of Syria. In the aftermath of the second war there was interest in peace, and the text now focuses on this pivotal moment in history. About 252, Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246) sent his daughter, Berenice, with her entourage to marry the Seleucid king, Antiochus II Theos (261-246), and thereby to establish an alliance between their kingdoms. The alliance would give Ptolemy control of Syria and Antiochus control of Asia Minor. The fragile relationship held for a couple of years, and Berenice had a child, but a former wife of Antiochus, Laodice, whose sons had been cut off from succession, allegedly poisoned Antiochus and consequently had Berenice and her son (along with many from her entourage) murdered. Ptolemy II also had died in that year. Needless to say, the alliance crumbled and the next fifty years are full of tumultuous warfare between the two kingdoms.

11:7. Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-221). Upon hearing of the death of Antiochus, Berenice summoned her brother (who had acceded to the throne in Egypt) to intervene in Syria in order to support her son's claims to the throne. He was unable to secure control of Syria before the murder of his nephew and sister. In 245 (Third Syrian War) he pressed his invasion of Seleucia and successfully attacked the Syrian capitals of Antioch (on the Orontes) and Seleucia (this is Seleucia Pieria in Syria) and took much plunder. The cities were quickly recovered by Seleucus II after Ptolemy re-

AKKADIAN APOCALYPSES

In Akkadian literature there are a few pieces (dating from the twelfth century to the third or fourth century) that have been labeled apocalypses (the Marduk Prophecy, the Shulgi Prophecy, the Uruk Prophecy, the Dynastic Prophecy, and Text A). It has been demonstrated that there is a literary relationship between some of these works and the (astrological) omen texts, thereby placing them in Daniel's area of specialty. One prominent feature of these is that they ostensibly predict a series of unnamed kings who will arise, summarizing a couple of their deeds. Often these deeds are of a negative sort and the intention of the literature is to condemn those kings. Invariably the sequence ends with a king who will arise and set things right (the Dynastic Prophecy may be an exception, but the end is so fragmentary that it is difficult to be certain). These have been recognized as pieces of propaganda composed during the reign of the last king listed, who is using this genre to indict his predecessors and legitimate his own reign. As such they could be called "pseudoprophecies," because their "predictions" in actuality occur after the fact. Chapter 11 of Daniel undeniably shares some common characteristics with this genre as it presents a sequence of unnamed kings and a summary of some of the events of their reign. Daniel, however, has no king at the end of the sequence to promote. The opposite is true, as the last, Antiochus Epiphanes, is the worst of the lot. As throughout the book, then, Daniel uses a recognized motif but totally repackages it for his own distinctive use. For more information on apocalyptic literature in general see the sidebar at Zechariah 1.

turned to Egypt.

11:9. Seleucus II Callinicus (246-226). Laodice's son, Seleucus II, emerged the beneficiary of all of the treachery and intrigue of his mother. In 243 he attempted to gain control of southern Syria and Palestine. Not only was he unsuccessful, but the momentum turned against him and he ended up losing territory.

11:10. Seleucus III (226-223). For the last fifteen years of his reign, Seleucus II was engaged in an ongoing struggle with his brother, Antiochus Hierax. Both died about the same time, and Seleucus III came to the throne. Verse ten telescopes the events of the next ten years. Seleucus III was killed in a campaign against Pergamum in Asia Minor. He was succeeded by his brother, Antiochus III, who began mustering troops for the Fourth Syrian War (221-217) against Ptolemy IV.

11:10. Antiochus III the Great (223-187). The next nine verses are occupied with the deeds of Antiochus III and cover about thirty years. His reign is considered significant for the text of Daniel because he is responsible for taking Palestine out of Ptolemaic control and incorporating it into the Seleucid kingdom, ending a century of Ptolemaic rule over Israel. This began in 218, when he successfully penetrated Galilee and Samaria.

11:11. Ptolemy IV Philopator (221-203). For most of the years of the Fourth Syrian War, Ptolemy IV had little success militarily against Antiochus the Great and only forestalled his progress south through repeated diplomatic initiatives. Many of Antiochus's successes were carried out with the help of traitors rather than through military power or genius. In fact his lackadaisical tactics allowed Ptolemy to gather, train and field a significant armed force by 217.

11:11-13. Fourth and Fifth Syrian Wars. In 217 Ptolemy IV engaged Antiochus III at the Battle of Raphia for what would turn out to be the climactic battle of the Fourth Syrian War. Raphia was a traditional dividing line between Palestine and Egypt, about twenty miles southwest of Gaza on the Mediterranean coast. Antiochus claimed an army of seventy thousand, but even with the superior size of his armies he was beaten badly by the Egyptians. This victory restored Syro-Palestine to the control of the Ptolemies. This status was maintained until the death of Ptolemy IV in 204. The suspicious circumstances of the death of Ptolemy IV (still in his thirties) brought his six-year-old son, Ptolemy V Epiphanes (204-180), to the throne of Egypt. Antiochus took the opportunity of conflict over who was in charge to initiate the Fifth Syrian War (202-200), allied with Philip V of Macedon.

11:14-16. Antiochus III's occupation of Palestine. The Battle of Gaza in 201 gained Antiochus temporary control of Palestine, but he was pushed back again by Egyptian forces under the command of Scopas. In the next year, however, at the Battle of Panion (at one of the sources of the Jordan; the New Testament Caesarea Philippi, modern Banias), Antiochus defeated the Egyptians and took control of Palestine from them for the last time. At the same time, the Romans were getting a foothold in Greece in the Second Macedonian War.

11:14. violent men. The book of 3 Maccabees records a visit of Ptolemy IV to Jerusalem after the Battle of Raphia in which he was treated very badly when he wished to enter the temple. There is a question concerning the historicity of the account. There were pro-Seleucid (led by Onias II, the high priest) and pro-Ptolemaic factions (from the powerful Tobiad family, competitors for the office of high priest) within Judea at this period. Sources do not provide enough information to determine which party might be alluded to in this verse.

11:17-19. Antiochus III's defeat by Rome, Scipio (191, 190). The increasing Roman control in Greece was established by a peace accord in 196. The Greeks who were unhappy with this new state of affairs made contact with Antiochus, urging him to come to their aid. By this time, Antiochus, anticipating that he would need to neutralize Egypt, had entered a marriage alliance, sending his daughter, Cleopatra, to be Ptolemy V's bride. He expected her to also be a useful spy, but in this he was disappointed as her loyalties turned to her new husband. Nevertheless, he made his move toward Greece in 192. Constantly shifting alliances eventually worked against him, and he lost a large portion of his ten thousand troops at Thermopylae in 191. Antiochus then resorted to sea battle to try to keep the Romans out of Asia Minor but was again unsuccessful. By 190 the larger Seleucid army of seventy-thousand men had arrived to reinforce Antiochus's positions. Roman troops under Scipio were only half this strength when the forces met at Magnesia (about fifty miles north of Ephesus). Yet due to lack of training and tactical errors on the part of the Seleucid army, Antiochus was defeated and much of his army slaughtered. The terms of surrender were humiliating, devastating and accepted without argument.

11:20. Seleucus IV Philopator (187-175). This son of Antiochus III had a relatively peaceful reign and appeared to have maintained favor-

able relations with Jerusalem. The exception alluded to in this verse was when he dispatched one of his chief officials, Heliodorus, to Jerusalem to seize funds that were reported to be either in excess of what was needed or hoarded by anti-Seleucid factions. Before the high priest, Onias III, could get to Antioch to appeal the decision and offer explanation, Seleucus was assassinated in a plot carried out by Heliodorus, with Antiochus IV suspected by historians of complicity.

11:21. Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164). Antiochus IV, the brother of Seleucus, had been in Rome as a political hostage and was just returning (he had got as far as Athens) when the assassination of his brother took place. His goals included converting Jerusalem into a center for Greek culture and helping the Jews to make the transition to becoming Greek citizens with Greek ways. The intrigues that he became involved in were many, but certainly the main one concerning Jerusalem was how he handled the high priesthood (see next entry). The text calls him contemptible, and indeed he was. His title "Epiphanes" means "god manifest"—but the people preferred "Epimanes"—"madman." While he was certainly a member of the royal line, the throne should have gone to Seleucus's son, Demetrius (who instead was taking Antiochus's place as hostage in Rome). Another intrigue concerned the throne. He set up a coregency with his nephew (a minor), who a few years later was murdered.

11:22. prince of the covenant. Onias III was detained by Antiochus, and in the interim Jason, his brother, conspired to usurp his position. He paid a considerable sum to Antiochus and offered to be cooperative in the Hellenization of Judea (promotion of Greek culture at the expense of Jewish practices). Three years later Menelaus, with the probable support of the Tobiads, paid a larger sum and, the precedent having been established, was awarded the office over Jason. According to 2 Maccabees, Onias was murdered about 171. Many identify him as the prince of the covenant referred to in this verse, but others attach that title to Ptolemy VI (see below). The overwhelming army in some way represents the opponents to Antiochus's reign. This could include internal political opponents, Jewish antagonists or foreign opposition such as that which develops in Egypt.

11:25. First Egyptian War, 169. Antiochus's dreams of adding Egypt to his kingdom were finally acted on in 169. His invasion was prompted by Egypt's growing animosity and may even have been in response to Egypt's military action, since the first encounter (November 170) was between Pelusium and Gaza. Nonetheless, Antiochus succeeded in capturing the city of Memphis and securing the surrender of Ptolemy VI.

11:26-28. Ptolemy VI Philometor (181-146). Ptolemy VI was young when he came to the throne and was aided by two officials, Eulaeus and Lenaeus, who stirred up antagonism against Syria. The humiliation of Ptolemy in the First Egyptian War is thought to have been the result of bad advice given by his two advisors with the intention of undermining him.

11:27. unsuccessful siege of Alexandria. After his successful siege of Memphis, the citizens of Alexandria defied him by making Ptolemy's younger brother king. Antiochus took immediate steps to break their revolt but was unable to take the city. As soon as he had returned to Syria, Ptolemy VI disavowed any loyalty to Antiochus and his coregency with his brother was reinstated.

11:28. action against the holy covenant. Roman, Greek and Jewish sources differ with regards to the details at this point. There is no question that on his return from Egypt, Antiochus raided the temple treasury, most likely to secure additional funds for his continuing military activities. The sources disagree about whether this incident took place after the First Egyptian War (September 169) or after the Second.

11:29-30. Second Egyptian War, 168. In the spring of 168 Antiochus again had to besiege Memphis, and he did so successfully, taking control of lower Egypt. As he again prepared to lay siege against a weakened Alexandria, he actually had himself crowned king of Egypt. But there was a difference this time. Egypt had appealed to Rome for help, and their ships arrived as he approached Alexandria. Roman consul Gaius Popillius Laenas met him by the walls of Alexandria and commanded Antiochus to leave Egypt. When Antiochus replied that he had to consult with his advisors, the Roman consul drew a circle in the dirt around the king and insisted that he give his answer before stepping out of the circle. A humiliated Antiochus conceded to Roman authority and straggled toward home looking for a way to vent his misery. This was probably in July 168.

11:30. fury against the holy covenant. There was a rumor in Jerusalem that Antiochus had been killed in battle. Jason, who had been ousted as high priest, took the opportunity to lead a rebellion against Menelaus, who at this time was high priest (see comment on 11:22). When Antiochus heard of trouble, he may

have come himself to Jerusalem to put down the rebellion. In the process tens of thousands of Jews were massacred, and the temple was looted (Menelaus apparently cooperating in the plundering). Another report (perhaps of a subsequent action) says that Apollonius with a contingent of soldiers was sent by Antiochus to subjugate the riotous citizens of Jerusalem. According to the books of Maccabees this was accomplished through pretending to be peaceful but then slaughtering many. This may be a separate occasion, and the relationship of these events to those reported in the comment on 11:28 are difficult to determine. It is probably at this time that a citadel (the Akra) of Syrian soldiers was set up at the edge of the Temple Mount.

11:31. desecration of sanctuary. According to the book of Maccabees, an individual named Geron was sent by Antiochus to dismantle Jewish religious practice. It is possible that the Syrian military contingent, seeking accommodation for their own worship practice, was partially responsible for some of the changes described in the temple. In December 167 a systematic program of instituting Greek religious practices at the expense of Jewish ones began in earnest. The sacrificial system and the Sabbath and festival observances were halted. Worship sites were set up around the country and circumcision was forbidden. The temple was consecrated to Zeus and became a center of polytheism and prostitution.

11:31. abomination of desolation. This is usually taken as an idol of Olympian Zeus that was set up in the temple. Antiochus had identified this favorite god of his with the Syrian Baal Shamem, the chief deity of the Syrian portion of the population (see comment on 9:27).

11:32. flattery of covenant breakers. There were many Jews who favored the Hellenization process and therefore, if promised personal benefit, would gladly side with the new policies. Foremost among these was Menelaus, the high priest, who was totally dependent on Antiochus for his lucrative office.

11:32-35. Judas Maccabeus. In contrast, many of the Jews fought vigorously against the Hellenization of Judea—with many suffering martyrs' deaths. The major organized revolt was led by the Hasmonean family, initiated by its patriarch, Mattathias, a priest. In early 166 when Antiochus's envoy came to their town to enforce the new regulations, Mattathias and his five sons, John, Simon, Judas, Eleazar and Jonathan, responded with armed force and killed him. The family then fled the town and the rebellion was begun. With Judas as the military commander, they began seizing control of small towns, intending thereby to cut off all the roads to Jerusalem. This created an effective blockade that eventuated in the retaking of Jerusalem and the purifying of the temple in December 164, exactly three years after the desecration, but Daniel 11 does not report this event. There is continued controversy over whether in this section the Maccabeans are referred to favorably or unfavorably.

11:36-39. If Antiochus IV is still in sight in these verses, they offer a general description of the difficult period surrounding the desecration. References to Antiochus's arrogance, his lavish support of some temples and his redistribution of land to those who support him are easily recognized as characteristic of this period.

11:37. the gods. Antiochus's Seleucid predecessors had elevated the god Apollo, while the Ptolemies had shown preference for Adonis (possibly referred to here as the one desired by women). Antiochus neglects them (though by no means rejects them) in favor of Olympian Zeus. The fact that he designated himself as God Manifest on his coins is sufficient to explain the comment in this verse.

11:38. god of fortresses. The fortress referred to here is usually considered to be the Akra, the garrison for Syrian soldiers that was adjoined to the Temple Mount.

11:40-45. final battle. There is no known historical sequence corresponding to that which is laid out in these verses. Antiochus IV was killed in battle in Persia in December 164. Many interpreters of Daniel consider this section (perhaps starting as early as v. 36) to contain a reference to a much more distant future.

12:1-13
Hope for the End

12:1. Michael. See comment on 10:13.

12:1. the book. This appears to be a reference to the book of life. In Exodus 32:32-34 Moses is willing to be blotted out of the book, an action that would result in his death. Yahweh replies that the one who sins is wiped out from the book. The metaphor is of a ledger that contains a list of the living. This is comparable to the book that contains the names of those destined for death that Enkidu sees in his dream of the netherworld. When someone's sins mandate judgment, their name is blotted out, thus leading to their death. This draws a connection between the book of life and the book of judgment (see comment on 7:10). Here the book still pertains to continued life, because those recorded will be delivered from the per-

secution. It is not yet conceived of as a book of eternal life.

12:2. resurrection in the ancient Near East. There are several different concepts of afterlife that are evidenced in the ancient Near East. The most fundamental concept is continued existence in a gravelike netherworld where there is no differentiation in the treatment of the righteous and wicked. The Israelites called this place Sheol (see comments on Is 14:9), and they believed that it allowed for no interaction with God. In Canaan and Mesopotamia netherworld deities governed this realm. In Egypt the netherworld existence is more congenial for those who pass the judgment and enter its confines. Those who are not approved are devoured. None of these concepts include the idea of resurrection out of the netherworld. In general, in the ancient worldview the only awakening that took place was the calling up of spirits of the dead (which was not permanent and not a bodily presence) or the awakening of the fertility gods of nature cycles. These died annually when the agricultural cycle came to an end and "wintered" in the netherworld. Then they were ritually awakened in the spring. None of this bears any resemblance to a theological doctrine of resurrection. Likewise not comparable are the occasional revivifications (when an individual is restored to life) or the indications of national return to life (Ezekiel's dry bones). A fully developed doctrine of resurrection in the modern sense includes six elements: (1) it is individual, not national; (2) it is material, not spiritual; (3) it is universal, not isolated; (4) it takes place outside the netherworld; (5) it leads to permanent immortality; and (6) it involves distinctions between the righteous and the wicked. Zoroastrianism appears to have all of these elements, but the nature of the sources makes it difficult to determine how early the Persians developed these concepts (for further discussion see comment on Is 26:19).

12:3. shining like the stars. Stars and angels are associated by the fact that both are referred to as the host of heaven (see comment on 8:10). Contemporary Greek thinking and intertestamental apocalyptic literature indicated that the righteous become stars or angels. Daniel only speaks of comparison, not identification.

12:4. seal the words. Already in the eighth century Assyrian texts of an esoteric nature were being preserved. The scribal notations (called colophons) at the ends of such works indicated that they contained secret lore to be shared only with those who were initiates. Scrolls could be sealed either by tying a string around them and sealing the knot with clay, or by placing them in a jar and sealing the cover. The clay or the seal around the lid would be impressed with the owner's seal. Mesopotamia used cylinder seals, Egypt used scarab seals, and Syria-Palestine used stamp seals. Tablets would be sealed inside a clay envelope, which would be impressed with the owner's seal. The seals were intended to vouchsafe the integrity of the contents. They warned against tampering and, if intact, attested to the authenticity of the document. For more information see Nehemiah 9:38.

12:7. time, times, half a time. See comment on 7:25.

12:11-12. 1,290/1,335 days. A lunar calendar was in use through most of the ancient world that resulted in years of 354 days. It had long been recognized that the solar year was 365 days, so periodic adjustments were made by adding months of a determined number of days. Greek practice used standardized thirty-day months that were also regularly adjusted to the solar cycle. Twelve hundred and ninety days is three years and seven months of thirty-day months.

HOSEA

1:1-11
Hosea's Family

1:1. chronology. Hosea's prophecies span the eighth century, from the beginning of Uzziah's reign in Judah to the completion of Hezekiah's. The only king of Israel in this superscription is Jeroboam II, who roughly covers the first half of that century. Most of Hosea's message deals primarily with events in the chaotic period after Jeroboam's death when there are a whole succession of weak and ineffective kings just prior to the Assyrian conquest of Israel and the destruc-

tion of Samaria in 721 B.C.

1:2. divine command to take wife. Marriage by divine command is a metaphor for Israel's covenant with Yahweh. Ezekiel demonstrated this in his oracle of the "foundling child" (Israel) who eventually became Yahweh's unfaithful wife (Ezek 16:1-43). An extrabiblical example of a marriage commanded by a god is found in the Hittite Annals of Hattusilis, many centuries before Hosea. Hattusilis declared that the goddess Ishtar appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to take Puduhepa, a daughter of Ishtar's priest, as his wife. This divine endorsement would have silenced any critics of this match and given the wife a right to participate in cultic as well as royal activities.

1:4. Jehu's massacre at Jezreel. Elisha had originally sanctioned the political revolution that brought Jehu to the throne (see 2 Kings 9:6-10). The speech made by the "son of the prophet" who anoints Jehu calls on him to avenge the blood of slain prophets by exterminating Ahab's entire house, including his wife Jezebel. Jehu does this, first killing King Joram in battle (2 Kings 9:24) as well as King Ahaziah of Judah (2 Kings 9:27). After marching on the city of Jezreel, he calls on the populace to choose sides, and Jezebel is thrown from a balcony to her death (2 Kings 9:32-33). A general purge of Ahab's "house," which is a euphemism for his political supporters and government officials, then takes place. At Jehu's orders the terrified officials in Jezreel behead seventy "sons of the house of Ahab" (2 Kings 10:6-8). The next day Jehu publicly denied any responsibility for the deaths of these seventy men and used this as a pretext to have all of the officials executed (2 Kings 10:9-11). It is this mass bloodletting, which swept away the dynasty and supporters of Ahab, that is the basis for the symbolic name for Hosea's first son. The name thereby becomes a reminder to the current ruler, a descendant of Jehu, that his dynasty will be held accountable for Jehu's murderous activities. It may also be forecasting a similar bloody end to that dynasty in the face of Syrian encroachment and the expansion of Assyrian hegemony in the region.

1:5. Valley of Jezreel. This extremely fertile (the name means "God sows") and strategic valley allows for movement east and west through the hill country of northern Samaria and the lower Galilee from Beth Shan on the east to Acco on the Mediterranean coast. Omri and Ahab had established a second capital at Jezreel because of its strategic and economic importance. Naturally the valley also became the battleground for armies that wished to control the region. A number of famous battles were fought here, the first of which is recorded in the annals of Pharaoh Thutmose III (1504-1450). For more information see comment on Judges 6:33.

2:1-23

Israel as Wife and Mother

2:3. stripped naked and turned out. Several documents, including wills found in the town of Nuzi, refer to this type of treatment of a wife who abandons her husband to live with another man. It is typically the children who perform this legal act. It is intended to humiliate and perhaps served as an instrument of divorce, though in cases where the husband has already died, it is related to property rights.

2:5, 8. staple products and fertility. Both Hammurabi's Code and the Middle Assyrian Law Code contain lists of items that a husband must by law supply his wife for her daily maintenance. These include grain, oil, wool and clothing. These staples formed the basis of the economy of the ancient Near East and were the symbols of fertility granted to the people by God (see Jer 31:12). Thus within the marriage metaphor employed by Hosea, the providing of these items represented God's fulfillment of the covenant agreement. However, Israel's choice is to take "lovers" (other gods), worship them and give them presents of gold and silver instead of acknowledging Yahweh's gifts (compare Ezek 16:13-19). Israel credited the fertility gods such as Baal for the provision of these needs.

2:8. Israel's Baal worship. Agricultural villages, whose produce fed themselves and the urban centers like Jerusalem, dominated the world of ancient Israel. The Mediterranean climate brought rain only during the winter and early spring months (October—April), and a drought meant that their fragile hold on life was severely threatened. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Canaanite storm god Baal was so pervasive a figure in ancient worship as well as in the ancient religious texts from Ugarit and Phoenicia. Rain meant life, fertility, economic prosperity and power for those blessed by it. The task for the Israelite prophets thus became an effort to demonstrate that Yahweh was the provider of fertility, including rainfall, and that Baal was a false god (see Jer 2:8; 23:13). More often than not, however, local villagers chose to combine Yahweh and Baal worship in order to maximize their chances of a good harvest (see Judg 2:11; 6:25-32). Similarly, the kings of Israel, like Ahab, in making diplomatic marriages, ac-

cepted the introduction of Baal and Asherah alongside Yahweh in the official worship centers (see 1 Kings 16:31-33). Only after the exile would Baal worship be supplanted by faithful Yahweh-only worship among the Israelites.

2:11. festival functions and Baal. The syncretistic religious practices of the Israelites are exposed here as they revel (part of the metaphor of Gomer's unfaithful behavior) in worship of Baal during the harvest and new moon festivals (see the similar list of cultic celebrations in Ezek 45:17). Passover, the Feast of Booths and the Feast of Weeks were the annual celebrations marking the agricultural year (see the comments on Ex 12:19 and 23:15-16 for a description of these festivals). The New Moon festivities seemed to be tied to the sabbaths in the sense that family celebrations occurred (see 1 Sam 20:5), and there was a cessation of work (see Amos 8:5). There was no distinction drawn between the gifts of Yahweh and the supposed gifts of the Canaanite god of fertility and rain, Baal. As a result, the true provider of their bounty would now withdraw his largesse so that the Israelites could see their error.

2:12. vine and fig payment from lovers. The Egyptian love songs of Papyrus Harris 500 mention the giving of a jug of sweet mandrake wine as a lover's present. Such gifts would have been common as an expression of endearment or affection, but the term for pay here is the one used to mean the fee of a prostitute rather than the offering to a lover. This draws the metaphor of Israel/Gomer's infidelity back into focus. The use of vines and fig trees also strikes at another source of wealth and festivity in ancient Israel. There could be no celebration without these important products that were harvested in August and September. God's threat to turn the place into a wilderness is similar to that expressed in Isaiah 5:6.

2:12. punishment by wild animals. The eighth-century Aramaic inscription from Deir'Alla that contains the prophecy of Balaam and the twentieth-century Egyptian *Visions of Neferti* both describe an abandoned land in which strange and ravenous animals forage for food. Ravaging wild beasts were considered one of the typical scourges that deity would send as punishment. As early as the Gilgamesh Epic in Mesopotamia (c. 2000) the god Ea had reprimanded Enlil for not sending lions to ravage the people rather than using something as dramatic as a flood. The gods used wild beasts along with disease, drought and famine to reduce the human population. A common threat connected to negative omens in the Assyrian period was that lions and wolves would rage through the land. In like manner devastation by wild animals was one of the curses invoked for treaty violation The image here is one of chaos when civilization falls apart. See the comment on Deuteronomy 32:23-25 for another example of God cursing the land and its produce.

2:13. incense to Baal. Given the large number of small incense altars discovered by archaeologists, such as those from Lachish and Tel-Miqne/Ekron, it is apparent that burning incense as an offering to Yahweh or other gods was common in individual homes as well as in official cultic settings (see Is 17:8; Jer 19:13). The Israelites had been commanded to burn incense before Yahweh's altar (Ex 30:7-8), but that proper form of worship was corrupted when the offering was made to Baal instead. Incense was typically used to accompany petition.

2:15. Valley of Achor. When Achan violated the *ḥerem* during the capture of Jericho, he and his entire family were stoned to death in what came to be known as the Valley of Achor (Josh 7:25-26). The site is located on Judah's northern tribal border (Josh 15:7), modern El Buquê'ah. Hosea's mention of the "Valley of Trouble" is an attempt to demonstrate that if even such an ill-fated place can be transformed, then so can Gomer/Israel's relationship with Hosea/Yahweh.

3:1-5

Hosea Reclaims His Wife

3:1. sacred raisin cakes. See the comment on Jeremiah 44:19 for the offering of sweet cakes (made from figs or dates) to the gods of Mesopotamia. There is some uncertainty in translating the Hebrew word here. Some commentators suggest that jars of wine are meant rather than compressed cakes of grapes or raisins. In either case it is the produce of the grape harvest that is being used as an offering.

3:2. purchase price details. Given the value of the barley added to the fifteen shekels of silver, one estimate would make Hosea's total outlay approximately thirty shekels. This amount is equal to the amount due as compensation for the loss of a slave in Exodus 21:32. Since Gomer's situation is unclear, it is not possible to make a definite determination of why Hosea would pay out this amount. Based on Middle Assyrian Law, however, he may be redeeming her from a legal situation from which she could not extricate herself (such as paying a debt she owed).

3:4. sacrifice or sacred stones. See the com-

ments on Exodus 23:24 and Deuteronomy 7:5 for the use of sacred stones and Asherah poles as part of Canaanite worship and Israel's idolatrous practices. Sacred stones did serve as a legitimate part of Yahweh worship, at least through the time of the divided monarchy (see Is 19:19). In the time of destruction to come, however, these cultic symbols as well as the kings will receive no word or support from Yahweh (see Deut 16:22).

3:4. ephod or idol. Sacrifice and sacred stones represent means of worshiping the deity; ephod and idol refer to means of consulting the deity. An ephod was part of the priestly wardrobe (see comment on Ex 28:6-14) and in both Egypt and Mesopotamia was reserved for clothing images of deity and for high-ranking priests. See the comment on Exodus 28:6-14 for a description of the appearance and use of the ephod as a device for divining God's will. People who wanted to ask information of deity would come (pay their fee) and receive an answer (through the mediation of the specialists. The teraphim idols referred to here (see comment on Gen 31:19) were among the tools or surrogates for consulting the gods in the ancient Near East. As with the pillars and sacrifices, however, God would not provide these diviners with any answers.

4:1-19
Indictment of Israel's Unfaithfulness

4:10, 14. prostitution. In ancient Mesopotamia a distinction can be drawn between commercial prostitution and sexual service for the temple. The term *ḫarimtu* is used for both in cuneiform texts (for instance it is a *ḫarimtu* who "civilizes" Enkidu in the Gilgamesh Epic), but there is a difference in social status as well as purpose. The sacral sexual service provided at the temple was tied into the sacred marriage ritual that insured fertility for the land. There were various levels of priestesses, from the high priestess who represented the goddess Ishtar/Inanna and was said to be "visited" by the god Marduk each night, to cloistered female orders and more public figures like the *naditu*, who could own property, conduct business and even marry. The fact that commercial prostitution occurred near temples was based on the same considerations that brought prostitutes to frequent taverns and the city gate—high traffic areas meant more customers. Both temple sacral servants and prostitutes accepted payment, but the former were expected to dedicate these offerings to the gods. Additionally a distinction could be made between "sacred" prostitution and "cultic" prostitution. In "sacred" prostitution, as just mentioned, the proceeds go to the temple. It was quite possible for prostitutes to be employed by temples as a means of raising funds without their having any official status as priestesses. In "cultic" prostitution, the intent was to insure fertility through sexual ritual. We must also differentiate between occasional sacred/cultic prostitution (as in Gen 38) and professional sacred/cultic prostitution (as in 2 Kings 23:7). The evidence for cultic prostitution in ancient Israel or elsewhere in the ancient Near East is not conclusive. Canaanite texts list prostitutes among the temple personnel, and Akkadian literature attests those who were dedicated for life to serve the temple in this way. Furthermore, since women often did not have personal assets, sometimes the only way of earning money by which to pay a vow appeared to be prostitution. The injunction against bringing the wages of a prostitute to the temple may, however, be a reaction against practices like that of the Ishtar temple in the Neo-Babylonian period to hire out female members of their community as prostitutes.

4:11. old wine, new wine. The terms used for wine in this instance are in parallel, but they represent different degrees of fermentation. In the Ugaritic Tale of Aqhat (VI:7-8) the same terms are used in parallel, but the text is very broken and offers no further information. The sense of the phrase is to demonstrate how overindulgence in drinking wine befuddles the mind. These people's minds are clouded by their false religious practices as those of drunkards are by their wine (see comment on Is 28:7).

4:12. wooden idol. Although it is possible that Hosea is referring to the practice of rhabdomancy (divining the will of the gods by casting rods or wands; see the comment on Ezek 21:21 for a variety of forms of divination), this is more likely a reference to sacred groves or Asherah poles (see Ex 34:13). Idols were often carved from wood (see Jer 10:3-5; Hab 2:18-19), and this practice was so common in Mesopotamia that Sumerian texts refer to certain types of wood as the "flesh of the gods."

4:13. worship on mountains. High places and mountaintops have long been associated with divine worship (see the comment on 1 Sam 9:12). For instance, some of the most important events in Israelite history are associated with mountains (Moses at Mount Sinai; Elijah at Mount Carmel). Likewise, Mount Zaphon was identified as the home or seat of power

for the Canaanite gods Baal and El in the Ugaritic epics. Since the Israelites seemed so prone to blending Yahweh worship with that of other gods, Hosea condemned the sacrificial activities at these outdoor shrines (just as they are condemned in Deut 12:2-3), seeing them as breeding grounds for corrupting succeeding generations.

4:13. sacred trees. From earliest times, trees have served as landmarks and have been associated with popular justice and religious activity (see the comment on Gen 35:4). Among the references to sacred or significant trees are Deborah's palm in Judges 4:5 and the tree under which the Ugaritic king Danil heard the cases of his people. These individual trees or sacred groves were also associated with the worship of Asherah (see the comment on Deut 12:3), and as such were a trap for the Israelites. Asherah is pictured in Israelite iconography as a stylized tree.

4:15. Gilgal. The exact location of this site near Jericho has yet to be determined (see Josh 4:19). Among the most likely suggestions, based on Iron Age deposits uncovered in survey work, are sites near Khirbet el-Mefjir, a little over a mile northeast of Jericho. Its name, meaning "ring of stones," suggests its importance as a cultic center. Both Amos (4:4; 5:5) and Hosea (9:15; 12:11) condemn Gilgal for the religious transgressions and inappropriate sacrifices made there. The nature of these religious activities is not spelled out, but it may be presumed that they involved the worship of gods other than Yahweh.

4:15. Beth Aven. Although it is not possible to determine whether Hosea himself was a Levite, his knowledge of wisdom themes and priestly matters at least suggests close ties with a Levite family. This may explain his ridicule of the royal sanctuary at Bethel and this pun on the place name (see Amos 5:5). He refers to the Ephraimite city of Bethel ("house of God") as Beth Aven ("house of wickedness"), pronouncing it an illegitimate place of worship and a source of evil within Israelite society (compare his usage in 5:8).

5:1-15
Continued Indictment

5:1. snare and net. The very familiar image of fowlers trapping birds in nets and snares may be the origin of this common metaphor (see Josh 23:13; Ps 69:22; Is 8:14). There are numerous examples of this activity from Egyptian tomb paintings, and it also provides the basis for the Sumerian Stele of the Vultures (see the comment on Ezek 12:13).

5:7. New Moons. While Hosea may be referring once again to the New Moon festivals that had become corrupted by Baal worship (see Hos 2:11), the term used here can simply mean the arrival of a new phase of month in the cycle of the year. It is therefore possible that the prophet is denouncing in general terms the continuous (cycle to cycle) self-destructiveness of the Israelites.

5:8. Gibeah, Ramah, Beth Aven. There is an allusion here to a military confrontation between the northern and southern kingdoms (Ephraim and Judah) concerning the border between the two. The reference to the three cities in Benjamin (Gibeah = Jeba'; Ramah = Er-Ram; Beth Aven = Khirbet el-'Askar) suggests either that they are being invaded by Ephraim (perhaps the beginning of an attack on Jerusalem) or that their men are being called to battle by Judah (perhaps to invade Ephraim). Each of these sites guards the northern track to Judah's capital. The alarm being raised is most likely associated with a phase of the Syro-Ephraimitic War of the 730s (see comments on 2 Chron 28:5 and Is 7:1).

5:10. moving boundary stones. See the comment on Deuteronomy 19:14 for discussion of this crime.

5:13. Ephraim turned to Assyria. The destructive effects of the Syro-Ephraimitic War will leave both Israel (Ephraim) and Judah exhausted and even more vulnerable to the political hegemony of the Assyrians. Realizing that their status as vassals was deteriorating, two Israelite kings— Menahem in 738 (2 Kings 15:19-20) and Hoshea in 732—were forced to pay large sums to keep the Assyrians from further ravaging their country. The Assyrian Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III record these tribute payments, along with those of many other small nations being economically drained by the empire's need for funds.

6:1—7:16
Turning Away from Repentance and Restoration

6:3. winter rains, spring rains. Based on the Mediterranean climate of the Middle East, Israel receives its rains twice during the year. The "winter" rains fall from December to February. As noted in the tenth-century Gezer calendar, this moisture softens the earth and prepares it for plowing and sowing of wheat, barley and oats. The "spring" rains come during March and April and provide the life-giving water needed for the sowing of millet and vegetable crops. It is the timing of these rains that makes the difference between a good har-

vest and famine. Tying Yahweh to the rains supersedes Baal's role as the rain and fertility god, and tying him to the sun supersedes the sun gods who were often associated with justice.

6:7. Adam. Since the end of the verse suggests a place ("there") and since there is a parallel to Gilead, most modern commentators assume this refers to a city rather than the first man. This site is generally identified with Tell ed-Damiyeh in Transjordan just south of the Jabbok River and north of the Wadi Far'ah, at a point that dominates the fords of the Jordan River. It is mentioned as one of the cities captured by Pharaoh Shishak during his tenth-century campaign into the region.

6:8-9. violence at Gilead and Shechem. The event chronicled here may be Pekah's rebellion against the Israelite king Pekahiah in 736 (2 Kings 15:25). Apparently the fighting began at Adam with the aid of a group of Gileadites and spread west along the Wadi Far'ah road into Israel as far as the city of Shechem. Apparently Pekah's supporters were aided by priests from Bethel in their efforts to eliminate the king's officials.

7:4-8. baking metaphors. In the light of the tumultuous nature of Israel's political scene in the 730s, these baking metaphors are quite apt. The oven depicted here was made of clay and was cylindrical in shape. Examples of this device have been excavated at Taanach and Megiddo. It may have been embedded into the floor or lay on it. The domed roof had a large hole covered by a door through which the baker would first add fuel (wood, dried grass, dung or cakes made from olive residue). Flames would escape through the hole until a hot bed of coals remained. The heat would be captured as the door was closed and would remain for many hours (enough for the bread to be kneaded and allowed to rise). Then the baker would place the slightly raised flat bread on the inner walls of the oven or amongst the coals. The metaphor plays on these mundane tasks and well-known images. The rebel forces of Pekah fiercely "flamed" within the oven of Israel's political affairs and destroyed Pekahiah's regime in 735. The resentment caused by this action smoldered like an oven holding its heat and waiting to burn those in charge. Then in 732 Hoshea assassinated Pekah and immediately reversed Israel's political alliances (2 Kings 15:30), shifting to Assyria for help and then three years later once again seeking an Egyptian alliance (see Hos 7:11). This muddled policy left Israel "half-baked," like a loaf left on the wall of the oven that had never been turned. It was burnt on one side and doughy on the other.

7:11. dove behavior. The vacillating political policy of the kings of Israel is compared to the gullibility (see Prov 14:15 for this applied to fools) of doves, who are an easy prey for the fowler's net. In addition, the dove's lack of concern over lost chicks may be compared to Israel's political amnesia with regard to Assyrian policies (see Hos 5:13).

7:11. Egypt/Assyria. Throughout much of his brief reign, Pekah practiced an anti-Assyrian policy and sought aid from the Egyptians. This had led to the campaign of Tiglath-Pileser III described in 2 Kings 15:29 that resulted in the capture of much of the Galilee region and a deportation of Israelites to Assyria (see the comment on 2 Kings 15:25-31). Once Hoshea had come to the throne, he initially had to pay tribute to the Assyrians, but then sent envoys to Egypt (see the comment on 2 Kings 17:4). Such duplicity enraged the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V, and he besieged Samaria for three years. His successor, Sargon II, then took the city in 721 and deported much of the Israelite population (see the comment on 2 Kings 17:6).

7:12. bird hunting. There were a number of different techniques used to snare birds. Although hunters might simply use a sling, throwing stick (as in the Beni Hasan tomb painting) or a bow to take down individual fowl, the majority of instances in the biblical text and in ancient art depict large flocks of birds being captured in nets or cages. For instance, the tomb of Ka-Gemmi at Saqqarah (Sixth Dynasty Egypt) portrays the fowler using a net. Apparently some fowlers also used decoys in their snares to attract the birds along with bait food (attested in Ecclus 11:30). Clearly, Israel's kings have been snared in the net of political ambitions cast by both of the ancient super powers, Egypt and Assyria.

7:16. faulty bow. The composite bow, made from a combination of wood, horn and animal tendons (indicated in the Ugaritic Tale of Aqhat), was subject to changes in weather and humidity. If it was not kept in a case, it could loose its strength and be described as unreliable or slack (see Ps 78:57). The Assyrian wisdom sayings of Ahiqar speak of the arrows of the wicked being turned back on them, and this may also be part of Hosea's condemnation of the Israel's leaders (see Ps 64:2-7).

8:1-14

Continued Indictment

8:1. trumpet signals. As in Hosea 5:8, the sounding of the trumpet or ram's horn is a

signal of approaching danger. This would have set the people in motion, driving their animals into the protection of city walls (see Amos 3:6). For more information concerning trumpet signals see comments on Numbers 31:6 and Joshua 6:4-5.

8:1. eagle (vulture). Hosea employs an image of a bird of prey swooping down on its victim. It seems most likely that he is referring to Assyria, once again being used as a tool of God's wrath. The hunting eagle or vulture would have been a familiar sight, and they were often used in Near Eastern epic and myth (as in the Ugaritic Tale of Aqhat and the Akkadian myth of Etana; see comment on Deut 32:11).

8:5-6. calf idol. There is ample evidence of the association of Baal worship with bovine cult images or pictures of bulls (such as the zoomorphic depiction from Tell el-Asch'ari). See the comments on 1 Kings 12:28-30 for a full discussion of King Jeroboam's attempts to create his own shrines at Dan and Bethel as rivals to Jerusalem, with golden calves serving as representations of God's throne. Hosea now condemns the golden calves placed in these shrines as a source of false worship and a reflection of the syncretism of Baal and Yahweh worship in Israel. By Hosea's time only Bethel remained, since Tiglath-Pileser III had conquered Dan in 733 and presumably destroyed the shrine there.

8:6. calf of Samaria. The use of Samaria instead of Bethel as the site of the calf is a euphemism for all of Israel (see Hos 10:5). It was common practice in the Assyrian Annals to refer to an entire province by listing the name of its capital city (see 2 Kings 23:19).

8:14. palaces. The Hebrew term *hêkal,* perhaps a cognate of Akkadian *ekallu* (from Sumerian *E.GAL),* "big house," may mean either temple or palace. At least during Jeroboam II's early reign there was an effort to build fortified cities and monumental buildings in Samaria and other major cities (see 2 Chron 26:9-10 for similar construction in Judah). Efforts such as these can be taken as a symbol of royal power and thus worthy of Hosea's charge that they had "forgotten" God (see Deut 32:15-18).

9:1—10:15
Judgment on Israel

9:1. prostitute at threshing floor. One of the essential installations within the farming areas of Israel was the threshing floor. Harvested grain was brought here for processing and distribution (see Ruth 3:2, 7). It would also be the likely site for public gatherings (see the confrontation in 1 Kings 22:10) and for harvest celebrations (Deut 16:13). However, Israel is enjoined to rejoice no longer since the people have demonstrated their infidelity by expressing their faith in Baal's ability to provide their abundance (see Hos 2:7-8). Apparently common prostitutes as well as cult prostitutes frequented the areas where harvest and shearing festivals took place (see the comment on Gen 38:15-23). Thus Israel plays the prostitute amidst the grain, taking her hire from those gods she credited with the harvest rather than acknowledging Yahweh's role.

9:4. bread of mourners. A house in mourning, having had contact with the dead, was considered unclean for seven days and had to be ritually purified in order to resume normal social and religious activity (see the comment on Num 19:11). During the period of their impurity, all their food, by extension, was equally contaminated. While it could be used to nourish their bodies, these meals were joyless and none of the food was to be offered as a sacrifice to God (see Jer 16:7; Ezek 24:17). This is how Hosea characterizes life in the coming exile.

9:6. Memphis. During much of Egypt's history, Memphis (modern Mitrahineh) served as the capital of Lower Egypt. It was located about thirteen miles south of modern Cairo on the west bank of the Nile River.

9:7. prophet a maniac. There was sometimes a very fine line drawn between a person invested with the Spirit of God (1 Sam 9:6) and one considered to simply be insane (see 1 Sam 21:13-15; 2 Kings 9:11). In this case, however, Hosea's enemies attempt to discredit him by claiming his prophecies are actually just the ravings of a madman (compare the similar charges made in Amos 7:10 and Jer 29:25-28).

9:9. days of Gibeah. For a description of the heinous events that took place at Gibeah see the comments on Judges 19:12-14 and 19:25. Clearly this story was well known in Hosea's day, since he merely has to mention the name of the city to raise the specter of lawless and scandalous behavior.

9:10. fruit metaphors. There is a sense of unexpected pleasure to be found in grapes growing in the desert or ripe figs in the early part of the summer. Evidence of "grape cairns" in the Negeb indicate that viticulture is possible here and the small bunches are said to be particularly sweet. This is also the case of the small figs that ripen in May-June. They are considered such a delicacy that they are to be eaten immediately after picking (see Is 28:4; Nahum 3:12).

9:10. Baal Peor. See the comments on Numbers 25:1-18 for the incident at Baal Peor when

the Israelite men were tempted into idolatry by the women of Moab near Shittim.

9:13. children to the slayer. It is possible that this is an allusion to the political turmoil in which the leaders of Israel have embroiled the people and thus laid their families open to the rampaging Assyrian armies (see the comment on Hos 7:11). The Sumerian *Lament over the Destruction of Ur* describes similar events during times of siege when parents abandon their children. Another possibility is that the "slayer of children" is a demon. Among the Babylonian demons was Pashittu, who was considered a baby snatcher. This would be another way of referring to child exposure. For more information on child exposure, see comment on Ezekiel 16:5.

9:15. wickedness in Gilgal. See the comment on Hosea 4:15. While Hosea's condemnation may be based on events during the conquest period or at the time of Saul's inauguration as king (1 Sam 11:12-15), it is also possible that he is referring to a contemporary event that is not recorded elsewhere and is now unknown.

10:1. sacred stones. See comment on 3:4.

10:4. poisonous weeds. The Hebrew term *rosh* may be in this instance the veined henbane *(Hyoscyamus reticulatus),* which occurs in plowed fields, especially those near steppe and desert regions. It grows to a height of two feet, with hairy foliage and a yellowish, pink-veined flower. Another candidate is the Syrian scabious *(Cephalaria syriaca),* which has poisonous seeds. Shallow planting actually helps spread these plants, since only the stalks are cut while their deep roots lie untouched (see Job 31:40).

10:5. Samaria, Beth Aven. See comment on 4:15.

10:11. threshing, plowing metaphor. It may be that young oxen were first trained to accept the yoke by putting them to work on the threshing floor. This relatively simple task, during which they had the opportunity of the reward of grazing (Deut 25:4), made them more docile (see Jer 50:11). Once they had achieved the stage when direction was easy, then a sledge could be added that would get the animals used to pulling a load (2 Sam 24:22). This in turn prepared them for the more disciplined task of plowing a furrow in a virgin field (1 Kings 19:19; Jer 4:3). In like manner, God chooses to use the docile and strong Israel to fulfill the divine plan.

10:14. Shalman at Beth Arbel. This event is unknown to modern historians. Hosea uses it as the measure of total destruction in much the same way that Jeremiah directs the people's attention to Shiloh (Jer 7:12-14; 26:6). There have been several suggestions made on the name Shalman, including either Shalmaneser III, who may have campaigned as far as Israel during his 841 excursion against the Syrian capital of Damascus, or Shalmaneser V, who besieged Samaria in 722. Another possibility is the ancient Moabite king Salmanu, who is listed as one of the petty monarchs paying tribute to the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III in the mid-eighth century. The mention of Moabite raiding parties in Israel in 2 Kings 13:20 may bolster this identification. As for Beth Arbel, the site of this horrendous destruction, it has been identified with Irbid, near the Decapolis city of Pella and just across the Jordan River from Beth Shan.

11:1-11

God's Historical Love for Israel

11:6. bars of gates. Two gate doors were generally set into stone sockets buried just under the ground. The posts flanked the gate on either side. They were made of wood and joined to the wall. The Iron Age outer gate excavated at Tell en-Nasebeh has slots in the stone beside the gate, where bars would have been placed. They would lock the gates by sliding the bars into sockets in the wall.

11:8. Admah and Zeboiim. These two cities, neither of which have been positively identified by archaeologists, are traditionally tied to Sodom and Gomorrah as sites of utter destruction and evidence of God's judgment (see comment on Gen 19:1). These cities are generally located in the Jordan Valley southeast of the Dead Sea. Among the more prominent sites discovered in this area are the Early Bronze cities of Bab edh Dra' and Numeira.

12:1-14

Continued Indictment

12:1. Assyria treaty. Like his predecessor Menahem, Hoshea was initially forced to pay tribute to the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III. The Assyrian Annals even boast that when Hoshea assassinated Pekah to take the throne of Israel that the Assyrian king "placed Hoshea as king over them." It also notes that Hoshea paid "ten talents of gold [and] a thousand (?) talents of silver" as tribute, probably to confirm his position as king in 732.

12:1. oil tribute to Egypt. Shortly after Hoshea had accepted the role of Assyrian vassal king in Israel, he then shifted his allegiance by sending a large quantity of olive oil (one of Israel's major forms of wealth) to Egypt. This would have been a valuable commodity, espe-

cially in Egypt where olives were not grown. Playing to both superpowers and their factions, however, would soon draw Assyrian ire and lead in 722 to the invasion of Israel by Shalmaneser V.

12:4. struggled with angel. See several comments on Jacob's wrestling match with an angel in Genesis 32 (though the term for angel is clearly used here, it does not occur in Gen 32). Hosea recounts the patriarch's reputation for ambition and deceit. It is clear that the prophet believes Jacob overstepped the bounds that humans are supposed to have when dealing with God. This theme of placing limits on human behavior can also be seen in the story of Adapa, an ancient Sumerian hero and priest of the god Ea. He is brought before the divine assembly because he had had the effrontery to break the wing of the south wind and thus cause a drought.

12:7. dishonest scales. This same charge is made against unscrupulous merchants in Amos 8:5. The word translated "merchant" is the Hebrew word "Canaan," which at least evokes the idea of Canaanite influence. The indictment seems to be based on the idea that Israel and its economic community have been corrupted by the immoral practices of its neighbors. In an economy that did not have standardized weights and measures, traders were often tempted to cheat by falsifying the balances and measurements, often by using improper weights and false bottoms and other ways to alter the sizes of vessels.

12:10. prophets' parables. One of the ways that the prophet is able to convey God's message is through the use of analogies or comparative stories. The parable thus can provide a dual meaning, using scenes or images from everyday life and then providing an interpretation of God's will or judgment. For examples of this, see the comment on Isaiah 5:1-2 and Nathan's parable of the ewe lamb in the comment on 2 Samuel 12:2-4.

12:11. Gilead, Gilgal. For Gilead's association with Pekah's revolt see comment on 6:8-9. For an cultic activities at Gilgal see comment on 4:15.

12:11. altars as stone piles on plowed land. The piles of stones haphazardly scattered on the plowed fields could offer a picture of altars that have been knocked down. But since it is in the middle of an indictment, the context might rather lead to the picture of altars as numerous as piles of stones in a plowed field. There is additionally a play on words here in that the Hebrew word translated "piles" is *gallim,* sounding similar to elements in both city names.

12:12. Jacob's flight. Hosea returns to a theme he first used at the beginning of chapter 12, drawing on the traditions about Jacob and using them to parallel the nation of Israel's coming plight and possible redemption. So, just as the unscrupulous Jacob was forced to flee from Palestine to Haran to escape Esau's wrath (see the comments on Gen 27—28), now Israel will once again be forced to "live in tents" (Hos 12:9). The new life and family Jacob/Israel finds in Aram, however, led him back to Palestine and served as the origin of the Israelite people.

13:1-16

God's Anger

13:2. idol manufacture skills. See the comments on Judges 17:3; Isaiah 40:19; 44:17-18 for discussion of the manufacturing techniques employed in the creation of idols in the ancient Near East. The acquisition and use of the skills necessary to fashion these images is simply a further example, according to Hosea, of Israel's intent to syncretize or corrupt its worship with false gods.

13:2. kiss calf idols. On the black stele of Shalmaneser III the Israelite king Jehu is portrayed kissing the ground before the Assyrian king. In *Enuma Elish* the tribunal of gods kisses the feet of Marduk after he has put down the rebellion and established himself as head of the pantheon. This was the common act of submission offered to kings and gods. Likewise the kissing of the idol involved kissing its feet in an act of homage, submission and allegiance. In the Mari letters the governor of Terqa, Kibri-Dagan, advises Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, to come to Terqa to kiss the feet of the statue of the god Dagan.

13:3. chaff on threshing floor. Once again Hosea uses a series of images that would easily conjure up pictures in his audience's minds—scenes from everyday life. Among them is the threshing floor where farmers bring their grain to be crushed under the feet of the oxen or by a threshing sledge (see the comment on Hos 10:11). The worthless residue that remained on the surface of this installation would swirl about as the winds blew it about. This illustration, combined with the morning mist and wisps of smoke, speaks of the short-term aspects of life—an apt comparison between the eternity of Yahweh and the ephemeral character of other gods and their idols.

13:7. leopard. The idea of the leopard as a silent, stalking hunter fits God's role as the destroyer of the unprepared and the unvigilant Israel (see Jer 5:6). The cunning leopard ap-

pears in wisdom literature as well. For instance, there is a short fable about the leopard in the Assyrian *Words of Ahiqar.* In it the leopard attempts to trick a goat by offering to lend the goat his coat to shelter itself from the cold. The goat escapes and calls back that the leopard was merely hoping for its hide. Leopards still inhabit some regions of Israel (En Gedi) but in antiquity were not as common as lions.

13:16. gruesome punishments. Hosea forecasts that the warfare to come will destroy the town and villages of the Israelites, and not even women and children will be spared from the rampaging army as it pillages and rapes. It would appear that this phrase is a standard description of warfare's devastation. Ninth-century Assyrian conquest accounts speak of burning the young boys and girls. The practice of ripping open pregnant women is mentioned very rarely. It is a practice attributed to Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (about 1100) in a hymn praising his conquests. It is also referred to in passing in a Neo-Babylonian lament.

14:1-9
Offer of Hope

14:5-6. plant metaphors. Yahweh's relationship with Israel is likened to dew that provides the only moisture available to flowers and trees during the dry months of summer (see Is 26:19). The lily is not common in Palestine today, though it can be found in some areas. There is dispute whether it was more common in antiquity or not. In addition, God's life-giving essence insures the fertility and virility of the nation so that it continues to grow and expand, like the massive root system of the olive tree. Comparison is also made to the great cedars of Lebanon—considered the most useful of the large growth trees in the ancient Near East. It was prized for its lumber (1 Kings 6:9-10), a source for construction and a symbol of wealth in Mesopotamian literature, including the Gilgamesh Epic and the annals of many kings from the Sumerians through the Assyrians.

JOEL

1:1-12
Locust Invasion

1:2. address to elders. The fact that elders are addressed here has led many interpreters to infer that there was no king at this time. Some have therefore dated the book to the middle of the ninth century, when Judah was ruled by wicked queen Athaliah (see comments on 2 Chron 22—23), and the righteous of the land would have refused to recognize the legitimacy of her reign. The problem with this view is that the book of Joel clearly represents classical prophecy, which did not begin until the eighth century (see comment on 2 Kings 14:27). If the address to elders indeed does suggest there was no king, it is likely that the book should be dated to the postexilic period. This is further supported by 3:3, which speaks of the dispersion in the past tense. Nonetheless, the dating of the book is very controversial and complicated.

1:4. locust swarms. Locusts were all too common in the ancient Near East and were notorious for the devastation and havoc they brought. The locusts breed in the region of the Sudan. Their migration would strike in February or March and would follow the prevailing winds either to Egypt or Palestine. A locust will consume its own weight each day. Locust swarms have been known to cover as many as four hundred square miles, and even one square mile could teem with over 100 million insects. If the locusts laid their eggs before being blown out to sea, the problem would recur in cycles. A single female laying her eggs in June could potentially result in eighteen million offspring within four months.

1:4. locust terms. Since locusts were very familiar to the agricultural economy of the Near East, the various languages are full of precise vocabulary. The four different terms in this verse (nine terms in the entire Old Testament) pale beside the eighteen terms known from Akkadian. Interpreters are divided on whether these four words refer to four different stages of development in the life cycle of the locust ([1] larval stage: black, hopping, wingless; [2] black and yellow with wings and jaws; [3] yellow and fully developed; [4] sexually mature adult), or whether they refer to different species *(gregaria* and *solitaria).*

1:6. locust metaphors. It is not uncommon in ancient Near Eastern literature for armies to be pictured as locusts. Such metaphors are found in Sumerian texts such as the curse of Akkad, in Ugaritic in the Tale of Aqhat, in Nineteenth-Dynasty Egyptian texts, and in Neo-Assyrian texts. Here it is the other way around as the locust swarm is metaphorically described as an invading army (as becomes clear in 2:4-5). The comparison to a lion is common in ancient Near Eastern literature because of the coloring of the locust and the shape of its face and mouth.

1:7. vine and fig. Locusts do not favor the trees mentioned here, so they only attack them when everything else is gone. This is an indication of the extent of the damage. Additionally, the vine and fig are signs of security and prosperity, so their devastation is symbolic of the mood among the population. The idyllic image of peace and prosperity in the ancient Near East was to be able to sit under one's own vine and fig tree. Egyptian tomb paintings, Assyrian reliefs and the biblical writers commonly use the phrase to refer to a people who control their own lives, without foreign interference, and are able to cultivate the land which the gods/God has given to them (1 Kings 4:25; Is 36:16). The vine and fig provided some shade as well as fruit, and enjoying them indicated some long-term prospects as each took several years to become productive.

1:7. stripping of bark. Locusts are known not only to devour plant life but also to break off branches and strip off bark. If there is significant damage to the bark the tree may not survive, and even if it does, the healing process will greatly reduce its fruitfulness.

1:8. virgin metaphor. The word translated "virgin" here refers to a woman who has not yet officially left the house of her father. She may have a "husband" by contract if the bride price has been paid, even if the marriage has not yet been consummated. The metaphor here then refers to the mourning of a woman who had been betrothed and very close to marriage when she lost her husband.

1:9. offerings cut off. An Assyrian hymn from the time of Sargon II (end of the eighth century) asks the deity (Nanaya) to bring an end to a locust plague. Like Joel, the prayer mentions several categories of locusts and laments that they are cutting off the offerings of the gods.

1:10-12. impact of army invasion on agriculture. The ecological destruction could cripple the economy for years. Sometimes fields would be so damaged as to have greatly reduced fertility. The destruction of trees would have even more devastating effects on the ecological balance. Not only would shade and wood supply be lost, but topsoil erosion would increase and the loss of forestation's contribution to the environment would accelerate the development of wasteland conditions. Some fruit trees (such as the date palm) take twenty years of growth before they become productive. Agricultural devastation and deforestation were typical tactics of invading armies seeking to punish those they conquered and as an attempt to hasten their surrender. The Assyrian records and reliefs detail punitive measures that include felling trees, devastating meadowlands and destroying canal systems used for irrigation.

DAY OF YAHWEH

Each year in Mesopotamia (often twice a year) there was an enthronement festival for the king of the gods. During the course of this *akitu* festival, the deity determined the destiny of his subjects and reestablished order, as he had done long ago when he defeated the forces of chaos. In fact, the creation account *Enuma Elish* that recounts Marduk's defeat of Tiamat and his elevation to the head of the pantheon was read during the course of the festival. Though the texts never refer to the *akitu* festival as the "Day of Marduk" there are some similarities. The Day of Yahweh refers to the occasion on which Yahweh will ascend to his throne with the purpose of binding chaos and bringing justice to the world order. The destinies of his subjects will be determined as the righteous are rewarded and the wicked suffer the consequences of their rebellion and sin. For Israel there is no firm evidence that this was represented in a regular ritual, but it is rather reflected in a historical expectation. As is often the case, then, to the extent that there is a connection, Israel appears to have historicized that which elsewhere is in the realm of myth and ritual. The Day of the Lord also has elements of theophany, usually connected with the divine warrior who defeats the disruptive powers (see comment on 1 Sam 4:3-7). Such theophanies often are accompanied by cosmic effects (see comment on 1 Kings 19:11-13). The cosmic effects often depict a world upside down (see comment on Jer 4:23-26). The Day of Yahweh was a momentous day, and these are the kinds of occurrences that characteristically accompany momentous days. All of this helps our understanding of the Day of Yahweh by showing us that Israelite thinking and the prophets' communication intersected with a wide spectrum of ideas current in the culture. The originality in the Israelite literature is not that whole new matrices are being created but that known ideas are being combined and applied in unique ways.

1:13-20

Call to Repentance

1:13. sackcloth. Sackcloth is made of goat or camel hair, and was coarse and uncomfortable. In many cases the sackcloth was only a loin covering. The sarcophagus of Ahiram depicts mourning women with what is likely sackcloth wrapped around their hips over their skirts.

1:14. holy fast. Fasting is little attested in the ancient Near East outside of the Bible. It generally occurs in the context of mourning. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with making a request before God. The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and humbling oneself before God (Ps 69:10). In connection with the call to repentance, Joel calls for a fast in order to remove any sin or other obstacle that may have led to the devastation they have suffered.

1:14. sacred assembly. Sacred assemblies were occasions for corporate worship. They often accompanied regular annual festivals but could be called for in times of need. In this context it appears to be a convocation of the elders and perhaps involved some decision-making as well as ritual acts.

2:1-27

Locust Army and Repentance

2:17. between the temple porch and the altar. The area between the porch and the altar is a place of limited access. Only the priest would have reason to proceed beyond the altar toward the temple. But it was also used to stage important public acts. In Ezekiel 8:16 this is the area where syncretistic sun worship was being carried out by twenty-five men. In 2 Chronicles 24:21 this is the area in which the prophet Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, was stoned to death (see Mt 23:35).

2:20. northern army. The north was often a symbol of dark powers. Enemies often had little choice but to come at Jerusalem from the north because of the way the major routes went.

2:20. eastern and western sea. The eastern sea would be the Dead Sea that served as a border on the east side of the land. The boundary on the west side was the Mediterranean.

2:23. autumn and spring rains. Israel has a rainy season (winter months) and a dry season (summer months). The rainy season begins with the autumn rains ("early rains," October-November) and ends with the spring rains ("latter rains," early April). These are important for what they contribute to the overall moisture levels in the earth and for softening the ground for plowing. Grain is harvested in the spring (barley in May, wheat in June), and the summer months (July and August) are for threshing and winnowing. Grapes are harvested in the fall, while the olive harvest stretches into the winter.

2:28-32

The Day of the Lord

2:28. pouring out of the Spirit resulting in prophecy, dreams and visions. In Israelite practice anointing was a sign of election and often closely related to endowment by the Spirit. Therefore one could speak of being anointed with the Spirit, or the Spirit being poured out. In Mesopotamia the king was seen as being endowed with the *melammu* of the gods (the visible representation of the glory of deity). In Hebrew the word for spirit can also mean wind. In the ancient Near East the word for wind/spirit was used in connection with dreams and visions as early as Sumerian times. The god of dreams was named "the winds." In Akkadian the name of the god who brought dreams was Zaqiqu, which is derived from the word for wind/spirit. Thus there is a long tradition of association between spirit and revelation through dreams and visions that often leads to prophecy.

2:30. blood, fire, billows of smoke. These are the normal accompaniment of the horrors of war. Blood flows in the streets, houses burn, and smoke rises from the city that can be seen for miles. These are the signs of crisis and judgment on earth just as the next verse speaks of the signs of crisis and judgment in the heavens.

2:31. sun dark, moon to blood. This is the description of solar and lunar eclipses. In a solar eclipse the sun is darkened as the moon passes between it and the earth. This can only occur at the phase of the new moon. In a lunar eclipse the moon is obscured by the earth passing between the sun and the moon. In a total lunar eclipse the moment of the most complete interference results in all but the red spectrum of light being blocked so that the moon glows with an eerie red-orange color rather than being blackened. This can occur only in the full moon phase.

2:31. eclipses in the ancient Near East. In Neo-Assyrian times, eclipses represented the

most powerful and deadly omens, being considered the "prime revealer." They were the most frequent cause for the substitute king ritual being invoked (see comment on Is 53:4-10). The nature of the threat they signified was judged by the precise time of their occurrence, the position in the sky at the time of the eclipse and the direction from which the eclipse took place. The combination of signs in heaven and on earth would bring further confirmation of the sign and would suggest a more drastic consequence.

3:1-21

God's Judgment and Blessing

3:2. Valley of Jehoshaphat. There is no valley with this name known in Israel from the Bible or from other sources, or even from tradition. The alternatives are (1) that reference is being made to a valley that had something to do with the ninth-century king of Judah by the name of Jehoshaphat (the only mention of a valley in his account is in 2 Kings 3); or (2) that the valley's name accords with what takes place there (the name Jehoshaphat means "Yahweh judges"). If the latter is the case, as many commentators have concluded, the location would likely be one of the valleys surrounding Jerusalem.

3:3. slave trade. One of the most lucrative aspects of warfare and border raiding was the slave trade. Captives were sold to dealers, who would transport them far from their homeland. The actual number of such persons does not compare to the huge numbers of slaves found in Greek and Roman cities. The slave trade existed from earliest times in the ancient Near East. Slaves were generally war captives or persons taken in raids. Traders often accepted slaves, which they transported to new areas and sold. These persons seldom obtained their freedom. The vast majority of persons who ended up on the slave block were either sold to the slavers by their own families or were prisoners of war.

3:4. Tyre, Sidon, Philistia as oppressors. These coastal regions of the eastern Mediterranean provided the ports through which sea trade passed. From the next few verses one might infer that these cities acted as middlemen for handling captives (in this case from Judah) who were to be sold as slaves. A certain percentage of those taken in battle may have been considered not worth the trouble or expense of deporting. A quick solution was to pass them on to slave traders, who would handle all the details.

3:6. Greeks. The Hebrew term used here, "Javan," was probably the Greek name Ionia, the Greek region of the western coast of Turkey and the Aegean islands. Ionian Greeks settled this area just before the first millennium B.C. There is evidence of contact between them and the Assyrians by the eighth century B.C.

3:8. Sabeans. There are three groups of Sabeans in Scripture. One group is from Sheba, present-day Yemen, an area which was highly urbanized and had achieved a complex degree of civilization by this period (1 Kings 10). Many inscriptions have been found from the Sabeans in this area. There are also Sabeans in Ethiopia (Is 43:3). In Job 6:19 the Sabeans are equated with Tema in north Arabia and are probably identified with the Saba of the Assyrian inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II in the late eighth century. It is difficult to determine which is referred to here, though most commentators favor the first option.

3:10. conversion of metals. Rather than "plowshares" that turn over the dirt as they plow, this may refer to the metal tip of the plow that breaks up the earth and scratches out a furrow. This tip is about seven inches long. However, this same Hebrew word is used in 2 Kings 6:5, where it appears to refer to some sort of axe. Pruning hooks are the small knives used to remove leaves and new shoots from the grapevines. Archaeological samples found are simply thin, short pieces of metal with a curved hook at the end sharpened on the inside edge, as a sickle would be. The shape is reminiscent of the tang type spearheads that had been popular during the Bronze Age. These farm implements could be melted down in time of war and reforged for weapons.

3:15. sun, moon and stars darkened. By declaring that on the day of Yahweh the heavens and all of its celestial bodies would be damped out, Isaiah had claimed that the glory of Yahweh would outshine and mask the brilliance of all other supposed gods (Is 13:10; see also the language of Ps 104:19-22, in which Yahweh controls the moon and sun). Since Assyria and Egypt both worshiped the sun god (Shamash and Amon respectively) as their primary deity, and the moon god Sin was of great importance in Babylonia, the prophet targets these gods and these arrogant enemy nations. Such portents of darkness, as in the Deir 'Alla inscription of Balaam, generally forecast a time of great disaster.

3:18. hills flowing with milk. This parallel of wine with milk is unique. The well-known combination of milk and honey is one way to speak of the potential of the region to support

a herding economy (see comment on Ex 3:7-10). The word used for wine here refers to freshly squeezed and newly fermented fruit juice. Amos 9:13 also pictures it flowing from the hills, which is logical since vineyards were often planted on the slopes of hills.

3:18. fountain flowing from temple. The association between ancient Near Eastern temples and spring waters is well attested. In fact, some temples in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Ugaritic myth of Baal were considered to have been founded upon springs (likened to the primeval waters), which sometimes flowed from the building itself. Thus the symbolic cosmic mountain (temple) stood upon the symbolic primeval waters (spring).

3:18. valley of acacias. Acacias typically grow in dry, wilderness conditions. The wadi that goes from the Valley of Kidron on the east side of Jerusalem to the Dead Sea is still characterized by its acacias, making that the logical choice.

3:19. Egypt and Edom as oppressors. Both of these nations were prominent enemies of Israel in both ancient times and in the events surrounding the exile. Edom had become an Assyrian vassal state in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III and continued under their rule until the death of Ashurbanipal a century later. It is likely that they submitted themselves to Nebuchadnezzar's rule in 605. Although some Judean refugees may have found shelter in Edom, they apparently remained passive as Jerusalem was destroyed (see Ps 137:7 and Obad 11). Both countries are objects of judgment oracles in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

AMOS

1:1—2:5
Judgment on the Nations

1:1. Tekoa. The farming village of Tekoa has been identified with Khirbet Tequ'a, about seven miles south of Jerusalem and five miles south of Bethlehem. Because of its location on the edge of arable land, its inhabitants presumably had to work very hard to maintain their existence as farmers and shepherds (see 2 Chron 20:20). For additional information on this small village in the Judean hill country see the comment on 2 Samuel 14:2.

1:1. earthquakes. Seismic activity in Syro-Palestine is a common occurrence. The region lies over the Jordan Rift, which stretches from Damascus to the Gulf of Aqabah, and is therefore subject to periodic shifts of the earth. There is evidence of a sizeable earthquake in the stratum 6 excavations at Hazor, dating to approximately 760 B.C. It is possible that this is the one referred to here, but additional corroborating evidence needs to be sought at other sites, especially Bethel and Samaria. The fact that this earthquake is used to date both Amos's prophetic activity and the reign of King Uzziah (see Zech 14:4-5) suggests that it must have been massive and therefore an event that would have stuck in the minds of the people. If Amos actually predicted the earthquake (as is suggested by Amos 9:1), then it would have authenticated his role as a true prophet of Yahweh.

1:1. chronology. The kings named in Amos's date formula provide a range of time for his prophetic mission. Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel ruled for most of the first half of the eighth century B.C. The earthquake cited here may be the same as that attested by excavations at Hazor (stratum 6) dating to approximately 760. Since Amos claims not to be a professional prophet, many interpreters believe that the oracles of this book would have covered a short span of time rather than stretching over several decades.

1:2. top of Carmel. Mount Carmel overlooked the Mediterranean from the northern coast of Israel. The sea breeze and an annual rainfall of twenty-eight inches made it one of the most flourishing sections of the country. In antiquity its lush slopes were covered with olive trees, vineyards and rich pastureland (see Jer 46:18). Amos and other prophets create a contrasting image with this area's normal fertility and the drought brought on by God's wrath. The prophet also provides a sense of the geographic extent of the disaster, spreading from Jerusalem in the south to Carmel in the north.

1:3. oracles against foreign nations. For this common theme in the prophets see the comment on Jeremiah 46:1.

1:3. Damascus in early eighth century. The eighth century began disastrously for the kingdom of Aram and its capital city of Da-

mascus. The Assyrian king Adad-Nirari III successfully besieged Damascus in 796. Accord-ing to the Assyrian Annals the Syrian king Bir-Hadad (Mar'i in Assyrian) was forced into vassalage. He was also required to make a huge tribute payment, including twenty-three hundred talents of silver and five thousand talents of iron, to save the city. There is even some suggestion that the weakened Syrian monarchy and its territory were subject to the Israelite king Jeroboam II during the mid-eighth century (see 2 Kings 14:28).

1:3. threshing Gilead. The Assyrian Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III give a thorough description of how another nation was defeated and left as though it had been run over by a "threshing sledge." The event mentioned here by Amos may relate to the mid-ninth century invasion of Gilead and the Galilee region by the Syrian king Hazael (see 2 Kings 8:12 and the recently discovered Hazael inscription from Tel Dan). For other examples of the use of a threshing sledge, see the comments on Deuteronomy 25:4; 2 Samuel 24:22; and Isaiah 28:28.

1:4. house of Hazael. Because of his achievements in the ninth century (see 2 Kings 10:32-33), the royal dynasty of Aram/Syria became known as the "house of Hazael." This phrase appears in the annals of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 B.C.), who reigned a century later than Hazael. Thus Amos is not referring to a specific king but rather to the dynasty and by extension to the country of Aram itself.

1:4. fortresses of Ben-Hadad. See the comment on Jeremiah 49:27.

1:5. Valley of Aven. Because *aven* means "wickedness" or "idolatry" in Hebrew, it is quite likely that this is not a city site but rather a region where Baal was worshiped (compare Beth-Aven = Bethel in Hos 10:8). It is possible that the fertile Beqa' Valley is the target of the prophet's barb.

1:5. Beth Eden. Ninth-century Assyrian annals from the time of Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III both mention Beth Eden (Bit Adini) as a rebellious Aramean kingdom located about two hundred miles northeast of Palestine, between the Euphrates and the Balikh rivers. Since it was subjugated and renamed in the reign of Shalmaneser III, the appearance of Beth Eden in the eighth-century prophecies of Amos raises the question of whether this is the same place. However, Tiglath-Pileser III's annals continue to use Beth Eden for an area containing Syrian cities, and Amos may just be using that tradition geographic designation. The ruler at the time of Amos was Shamshi-Ilu.

1:5. Kir. See the comments on Isaiah 22:6 and Amos 9:7 for this site designated as the homeland of the Arameans. It is also mentioned in 2 Kings 16:9.

1:6. Gaza in early eighth century. Since Amos uses Gaza as the synonym for all of the Philistine city-states, it was presumably the most prominent at that time. Because of its alliances with the Arab tribes that controlled the trade routes south to Arabia, Gaza was a major commercial competitor of Judah during the reign of King Jehoram (see 2 Chron 21:16-17). After the Assyrians began to expand their influence into Syro-Palestine, however, the political situation became more complicated. Amaziah and Uzziah were able to defeat the Edomites and regain control over the major port on the Gulf of Aqabah (Elath) in the beginning decades of the century (see 2 Kings 14:7, 22). Uzziah also gained victories over the Philistine cities and the Arabs during this time (2 Chron 26:6-7). It is possible that Amos is reflecting on the enmity between Gaza and Judah in this oracle. In any case, the Assyrian Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III (734 campaign against the Philistines) show that as the century wore on the city of Gaza was forced to pay heavy tribute and serve as an Assyrian vassal state.

1:6. selling captives. One of the most lucrative aspects of warfare and border raiding was the slave trade. Captives were easily sold to dealers, who would transport them far from their homeland (see Ezek 27:13; Joel 3:6-7). Note that Mesopotamian administrative texts as far back as pre-Sargonic times (early third millennium) contain ration lists describing persons "belonging to" or "attached to" households or establishments (weaving shops). The actual number of such persons, who are perhaps better described as serfs or service laborers, is not large. Certainly it does not compare to the huge numbers of slaves found in Greek and Roman cities.

1:8. Ashdod in early eighth century. The size of the lower city and its fortifications, built during the tenth century in the Solomonic style found at Gezer and Hazor, suggests prosperity for this Philistine city-state during the ninth and eighth centuries. Excavations in stratum 9 demonstrate that the huge city gate of Ashdod was partially destroyed around 760. This may be attributed to the campaign of Judah's king Uzziah against the Philistines (2 Chron 26:6-7). Prior to Assyrian control over Syro-Palestine, the smaller states of Philistia, Judah, Israel and Transjordan vied for control of trade routes and periodically staged military campaigns as a means of gaining political

hegemony in the region. After 750, however, Assyria and Egypt will use these smaller states as part of their own political maneuvering.

1:8. Ashkelon in early eighth century. Like Ashdod, Ashkelon was one of the five major Philistine city-states (see the comments on Judg 1:18 and 14:19). Most of what we know of the site during the eighth century comes from Assyrian Annals and tribute lists. However, there is not much mention of Ashkelon until the time of Tiglath-Pileser III's 734 campaign. The exotic nature of some of the tribute paid by Ashkelon to the Assyrian ruler (including roles of papyrus and elephantine hides) suggests it had commercial links with Arabia and Egypt.

1:8. Ekron in early eighth century. The site of Ekron shrank in size during the first two centuries of the first millennium. This may be due to Israel's domination of Philistia starting in the reign of Solomon. Some new construction does take place in the eighth century, including a fortress tower, suggesting a resurgence during the period when Judah's king Hezekiah controlled the region (2 Kings 18:8). Excavations have not demonstrated any remarkable wealth or prosperity during the early eighth century, and it may be that its name in this oracle is simply part of the usual listing of Philistine cities (see Jer 25:20).

1:9. Tyre in early eighth century. During the first quarter of the eighth century, King Pygmalion ruled Tyre. This was a time of great prosperity for the Phoenicians, who controlled most of the commercial activity in the Mediterranean. They had just expanded their colonial presence by founding Carthage in North Africa in 815. Interestingly, the Assyrian tribute list of Adad-Nirari III from this period includes the king of Sidon, but not that of Tyre. Apparently Tyre, like a prosperous Israel (see Amos 3:15; 6:4), was able to avoid Assyrian entanglements for the time being.

1:11. Edom in early eighth century. After being added to David's kingdom (2 Sam 8:11-13), Edom eventually rebelled and gained its independence from Judah during the reign of Jehoram (2 Kings 8:20-22). Amaziah was able to recapture at least a portion of Edom's territory (2 Kings 14:7) at the battle of Sela (= es-Sela on Edom's northern border), and by the reign of the Israelite king Jeroboam II (789-749) border clashes and tension continued to exist between Edom and its neighbors.

1:12. Teman, Bozrah. See the comments on Jeremiah 49:7 and 49:13 respectively for these Edomite sites.

1:13. Ammon in early eighth century. Like Edom, the Transjordanian nation of Ammon periodically rebelled against Israelite rule (2 Chron 20:1) and during the eighth century was forced to pay tribute to Judah (in Uzziah's reign, see 2 Chron 26:8). The shift in political fortunes is evidenced in one Assyrian source that refers to Ammonite ambassadors coming to Calah (Nimrud) in the eighth century to present tribute. However, the first king of Ammon to be listed in the Assyrian texts is Shobi, son of Hahash (Tiglath-Pileser III's 733 list).

1:13. treatment of pregnant women. The practice of ripping open pregnant women is mentioned very rarely. It is attributed to Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (about 1100) in a hymn praising his conquests. It is also referred to in passing in a Neo-Babylonian lament.

1:14. Rabbah. See the comment on Jeremiah 49:2 for this city, which served as Ammon's capital.

2:1. Moab in early eighth century. The mid-ninth-century Moabite inscription of Mesha is the only extrabiblical documentary evidence (compare 2 Kings 3:4-27) currently available about this Transjordanian nation prior to Tiglath-Pileser's campaign into the area in 734. The hostilities that may have existed between Moab and the nations of Judah and Israel can be speculated on, but there is no concrete evidence. The crime of desecrating the bones of the king of Edom may be an indicator of Edom's alliance with Judah. However, without a historical context within which to place the event, it remains a mystery.

2:1. burning bones. The outrageous nature of this act centers not only on defiling the graves of the kings of Edom, but also on the further step of burning their bones to make lime (see Is 33:12). In this way all honor and respect is removed from the bodies, and the Moabites could actually point to walls or houses that had been painted with the resulting lime mixture. On the exhumation of human remains see the comment on 2 Kings 23:16.

2:2. Kerioth. Also mentioned in the Mesha inscription as a city where the Moabite god Chemosh had a shrine, this Moabite city has been identified with el-Qereiyat and Khirbet Aleiyan (see Jer 48:41).

2:6-16

Sins of Israel

2:8. nature of irony. The great irony in Amos's charges against the rich is that they display their excesses before sacred altars in a shrine dedicated to God. It is possible that

they were within their legal rights to seize a garment in default of debt or to purchase wine with funds that had been generated by fining the poor for some offense. However, Yahweh had said (Ex 22:25-26) that the outraged cries of the poor would be heard, "for I am compassionate." As in the case of the worker in the Yavneh Yam inscription, the creditor is to not only obey the law but also take into consideration what seizure of property will do to prevent the debtor from earning a living (see Hammurabi's Code, which forbids seizure of a debtor's ox).

2:9. destroyed Amorite. Israel is reminded of the deeds of the Divine Warrior. Prior to the beginning of the conquest, Yahweh had given the Israelites a victory over the Amorite kings Sihon and Og (see the comments on Num 21:21; 21:24-30). Subsequently, the name Amorites becomes synonymous with the inhabitants of Canaan (see Judg 1:34-36 and 7:14).

2:9. fruit above, roots below. Amos uses a literary device known as a merism—paired polar opposites—to depict the total destruction of the Amorites. This is a common practice in prophetic speech (see Is 37:31; Hos 9:6). It is also found in a Phoenician curse formula (fifth-century *Eshmun 'asor* inscription): "May they have no trunk below nor boughs above."

2:11. Nazirites. See the comments on Numbers 6:1-21 for this special class of Israelites who impose on themselves an oath of purification.

3:1-15

Legal Case Against Israel

3:2. choosing family. The verb used in the Hebrew text is "know." The same idiom of a god knowing a family is used in Akkadian texts to describe the care that family gods provide for their worshipers.

3:4. lion behavior. During the hunt a lion will roar to freeze its prey with fear as the lion makes its rush. Following a successful hunt a lion may drag a portion of the kill back to its den to be eaten later. It may growl while lying there as a sign of pleasure at its success or as a warning to other predators to stay away. See similar examples of lion behavior in Isaiah 5:29 and Ezekiel 22:25.

3:5. bird hunting. See the comment on Hosea 7:12 for the details of ancient bird hunting with traps and snares. It has been persuasively set forth by S. Paul that the word NIV translates "snare" should be rendered "bait," thus establishing what everyone knows, that the bird must be lured into the trap.

3:9. mountains of Samaria. Although the city of Samaria was located on a single hill, it was surrounded by a group of hills that were actually higher than the capital city (see the comment on 1 Kings 16:24). If the prophet is talking about affording a vantage point from which to see the ultimate destruction of Samaria, then these hills would be appropriate.

ECONOMIC CHANGES AND SOCIAL CLASSES IN EIGHTH-CENTURY ISRAEL

In the light of the political changes that took place at the beginning of the eighth century (Assyrian expansion and the capture of Damascus), Israel was able to widen its economic interests and restore its hegemony over a greater area of the Transjordan. In addition, both Israel and Judah were ruled during the first half of the century by strong kings (Jeroboam II and Uzziah respectively) with long reigns. This made it easier to establish a comprehensive economic policy that concentrated on the mass production of export items such as grain, olive oil and wine. Large areas of the Shephelah and the lowland valleys had already been given over to wheat production (2 Chron 26:10). Now, in the eighth century, the elite were able to impose this economic policy on the small hill country farms and villages. As a result, previous agricultural strategies that attempted to distribute potential risks between herding and farming were overturned, and the land was given over to specific cash crops. The smaller holdings of the peasant farmers, overburdened with debts, were enclosed into large estates. This very efficient use of the land, however, eliminated the mixed crops that had formerly been grown in the village culture and more quickly exhausted the soil. Leaving fields fallow and grazing animals on harvested fields would have been eliminated or rigidly controlled. Under this new policy, an attempt was made to increase exports to the extent that there was a real hunger problem for the peasant class, while the nobility and merchant-class were able to indulge in the luxury goods supplied by their Phoenician trading partners. Thus in addition to facing rising prices at home on basic goods, such as wheat and barley, the impoverished peasant farmers now found themselves forced into debt servitude or day labor. Seeing them ground under the heel of exploiting employers and cheated by greedy merchants who sold them adulterated or inferior grain for their meals, it is no wonder that Amos harangued the rich for their lack of concern for the poor. In such an atmosphere of social injustice, agricultural specialization and economic speculation, the prophet reminds the Israelites of their covenant obligations. Like the "eloquent peasant" of twentieth-century B.C. Egypt, Amos warns them that corrupt judges and dishonest businessmen can expect no mercy from an angry God.

3:11. time between prophecy and fulfillment. Amos, speaking in the 760s, may have assumed that the Assyrians would ultimately serve as God's instrument to punish Israel, but he does not state this explicitly. In any case, Samaria and the nation of Israel will fall to the Assyrian armies of Sargon II in 722, and much of the population will be deported to other portions of the Assyrian empire.

3:12. shepherd's responsibility. The legal codes of ancient Mesopotamia (including the Sumerian Law Code, Hammurabi's Code and the Hittite Laws) each contained a clause designed to aid shepherds who have lost an animal to a lion or other predator. The shepherd gave his testimony and took an oath before the gods. Presumably, if there was any physical evidence to display, such as "a piece of an ear," then this would also have been brought forward. In that way the shepherd would be above suspicion of theft. The pieces he brought did not suggest survival but were proof of destruction.

3:12. beds/couches. In the midst of the coming destruction the homes of the rich merchants and nobles of Samaria will be looted. The fleeing refugees will only be able to carry away with them fragments of their wealth. Amos satirizes their plight as they scavenge portions (the headboard and footpiece) of their beds. The irony of this is found in Amos 6:4, where the prophet condemns the rich for luxuriating on the ivory inlaid beds and couches.

3:14. altars of Bethel. See the comments on 1 Kings 12:29-30 for the establishment of Jeroboam's royal sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel at the time of the division of the kingdom. Despite Bethel's association with the altars of the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob (Gen 12:8; 35:7), it served as a rival to Jerusalem in Amos's time, and thus its altars are now to be condemned as part of Israel's apostasy.

3:14. cutting off horns of altars. The horns on the altar represented the place of sanctuary (Ex 21:13-14) and they were also associated with absolution and atonement (Lev 16:18). Cutting off these horns removed the altar's special qualities, desecrated it and transformed it into nothing more than a damaged stone. Israel is thus deprived of any hope for asylum or expiation for their sins in the face of the coming destruction.

3:15. winter and summer houses. One of the signs of luxury displayed by the rich of Samaria was two residences. A summer residence in Samaria took advantage of the cooler climate of the central hill country of Israel, and a winter home, possibly in the warm Valley of Jezreel, allowed residents to escape the extremes of weather and temperature. There are a number of examples of kings being able to indulge in climatic migration from one official residence to another, including the eighth-century Aramean king of Sam'al, Barrakub, and Cyrus, the king of Persia.

3:15. ivory adornment. Excavations at the site of ancient Samaria have revealed fairly large quantities of ivory that had been used to decorate furniture and the walls of the Omride palace (see the comment on 1 Kings 22:39). There are both Egyptian and Phoenician/Syrian decorative styles employed, including representations of the god Horus, lotus blossoms and the "lady in the window" motif. The Iron Age ivories differ from those of the Late Bronze (best represented by those found at Megiddo) with the addition of glass paste and inlaid semiprecious stones. It is possible that some of these ivories were carved and decorated by native Israelite craftsmen, but more likely they are expensive imports.

4:1-13

Judgments with No Effect

4:1. cows of Bashan. Once again demonstrating his background as a herdsman, Amos uses the finely bred cattle of Bashan as a metaphor. These prize animals grazed on the lush grass available in this region in Transjordan on either side of the Yarmuk River (see Deut 32:14). Amos compares these fine cows to the self-indulgent wives of the nobility and wealthy merchants of Samaria. Neither these cows nor these women are capable of seeing beyond their own personal needs and desires (compare Is 3:16). The women, like totally self-absorbed grazing cows, cannot even imagine that people may be starving while they call for another cup of wine or another extravagant meal. It is difficult to say for sure whether the reference is to domesticated pampered cattle or to undomesticated ferocious cattle. Both could be found in Bashan and either picture can make sense of the analogy.

4:1. upper-class women. The prosperity that had come to Israel's merchant class and nobility during the first half of the eighth century B.C. is the direct result of the spreading Assyrian hegemony. In 802 the Assyrian king Adad-Nirari III captured the city of Damascus and effectively removed Syria from its position as chief political and economic rival of Israel. For a brief time, therefore, the city of Samaria and the rest of Israel enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity that brought wealth and allowed for amazing self-indulgence in luxury goods and new construction projects.

Amos targets the wives of these prosperous individuals, singling them out as a base cause for the oppression of the poor. The covenant had placed obligations on the Israelites to care for the less privileged, but what Amos sees are persons who do not count the human cost that pays for their high living.

4:2. hooks, fishhooks. The Hebrew here is very uncertain. An attractive suggestion has been made that the verse describes not what fish are caught with but what they are transported in (baskets and pots). This metaphor is known from the prophetic literature of Mari, where the king's enemies are portrayed as wriggling like fish in a basket. Fishing in Mesopotamian streams and rivers was done with woven baskets (sometimes made from thorn bushes). In fact there is no evidence of the use of fishhooks in Mesopotamia after 3000. Amos's metaphor of the capture of the Israelites after the siege of Samaria may be better translated as "fish baskets." If hooks are in view, however, it is possible that he is referring to the grappling hooks that were used during the siege and that might have been used to impale and drag prisoners.

4:3. Harmon. Since this word occurs only here, there have been a number of suggestions on its meaning. Some scholars consider it a place name and thus the place where the captives are exiles. Among the suggestions here are Mount Minni in Assyria (see Jer 51:27) or Hermal near Kadesh on the Orontes River. For those who emend the text, the translation of "dung heap" for *hadmon* (exchanging a single letter for one that looks similar) is the most likely since it is a suitable place for the disposal of the bodies of prisoners.

4:4. cult sites at Bethel and Gilgal. Bethel has a long history of cultic activity, ranging back to the construction of an altar there by Abraham (Gen 12:8) and Jacob's dream there (Gen 28:10-22). It took on an ominous quality for Amos when it was designated as one of the two major cultic centers by Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:29-30). Cultic activity at Gilgal appears in the conquest narrative when the Israelites cross the Jordan and Joshua raises a memorial to commemorate the event (Josh 4:19-20). It is possible that after the division of the kingdoms, Gilgal was seen as a northern worship site because of its association with Saul (see 1 Sam 11:15 and 15:21). Hosea also condemns this place as corrupt (Hos 4:15 and 9:15).

4:4. three-year tithes. The better reading of the Hebrew here would be "on the third day" or "every three days" (instead of every three years, see NIV note). It is possible that Amos is satirizing an aspect of the northern kingdom's cultic practice. There is a possibility that free-will offerings and noncompulsory tithes (compare Gen 14:20) were given at the sanctuary shortly after arrival or were tied to some coming event or vow. To Amos, however, such frequency of offerings cannot replace true piety or obedience to the covenant.

4:9. blight and mildew. Farmers are only too aware of what the forces of nature can do to their crops. Here God attempts to get Israel's attention by destroying the harvest. First, the sirocco winds strip all of the moisture out of the air and the plant life. Then, too much rain falls and the crops turn yellowish-brown and wither in the fields. See the comment on curses in Deuteronomy 28:22.

4:9. locusts. Insects can also play havoc with growing crops as well as the leaves on olive and fig trees. For another example of locust swarms and their relation to God's anger see Joel 1:4-7. Akkadian Mari texts report that locusts descended on a town and another explains that the harvest could not be completed because of the swarm of insects. For information concerning the devastation caused by locusts see the comment on Exodus 10:1-20.

4:13. connection between wind and thoughts. In Hebrew the word translated "wind" is the word that is also often translated "spirit." It is not so much that the word had two different meanings but rather that in the ancient world they did not find it so easy to differentiate between wind and spirit. In Mesopotamian thought the gods gave revelation of their thoughts through dreams. The messenger who brought these dreams was named Zaqiqu. The common word *zaqiqu* refers to a ghost or a phantom. It derives from the verb *zaqu*, which refers to the blowing of the wind, or to the breath of a god.

5:1-27

Seeking the Lord

5:5. Bethel, Gilgal. See comment on 4:4.

5:5. shrine at Beersheba. The discovery of a large horned altar in the excavations of Tell es-Saba' dating to the Iron II period provides corroboration of cultic activity at this southern site. It is mentioned in the ancestral narratives (Gen 21:33) and is the site where Samuel's sons operated as judges (1 Sam 8:1-2). The destruction of shrines outside Jerusalem by King Hezekiah (Arad, Beersheba; 2 Kings 18:4) may be a reflection of Amos's condemnation of these sites.

5:8. Pleiades and Orion, constellations in ancient world. Textual evidence from Babylonia, including the "Venus tablet" of Ammisaduqa (c. 1650), indicates that astronomical studies

were conducted with skill and precision. Although astrology was also prevalent in late Egyptian periods and in Persian period Mesopotamia, it seems that this divinatory activity, interpreting omens (see Is 47:13) is only an extension of the work of a true science. There are records of the movement of the planets, placement of the major fixed stars and constellations, as well as descriptions of the phases of the moon and solar and lunar eclipses. Given the widespread knowledge of the stars and the planets in both Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures, it was important for the biblical writers and prophets to attribute these celestial bodies to Yahweh's creation (see Job 9:9). Mesopotamian constellations included animal figures such as a goat (Lyra) and snake (Hydra); objects such as an arrow (Sirius) and a wagon (Big Dipper); and characters such as Anu (Orion). The most popular of the constellations was Pleiades, often portrayed on seals even in Palestine and Syria. Neo-Assyrian texts preserve sketches of stars in constellations. A prayer to the gods of the night from about 1700 B.C. invokes the constellations by name, calling on them to give answers to the diviner seeking an omen.

5:11. stone mansions. This refers to houses using hewn stone (called "ashlar"), for many of the houses in Israel used rough fieldstones in construction. Often the foundation was stone while the superstructure was of sun-dried mud brick. Only the very wealthiest of the upper class would have been able to afford this carefully dressed masonry. The limestone used for this construction was quarried near Samaria. The curse used here is called a "futility curse" because it calls for their efforts and labor to become futile, and it can be compared to an inscription on a Babylonian boundary stone calling on the gods to see that anyone who builds a house on stolen land should have the house taken from them.

5:12. judicial bribes and oppression. One of Amos's principal themes is criticism of social injustice (see Ex 23:6-8; Deut 16:19; and Hammurabi's Code for laws against bribery). There is a long history of peasant or wisdom literature pleading for justice under the law and from kings and officials. For example, in a collection of Babylonian Wisdom sayings the "unscrupulous judge" is one who accepts a present "and yet lets justice miscarry." Similarly, the twenty-first century "eloquent peasant" in Egyptian literature charges that "lawmakers approve of robbery" and "the inspector condones corruption." The tenth-century Babylonian "Theodicy" decries people who "fill the storehouse of the oppressor with gold" while they "empty the larder of the beggar of its provisions."

5:20. day of the Lord. See sidebar at Joel 2.

5:21. religious feasts and assemblies. Amos's attack is addressed at the empty, mechanically celebrated *ḥagîm,* the technical term for the three major pilgrimage festivals (Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Harvest and Feast of Ingathering—see the comments on Ex 23:15-16). Religious festivals offered frequent opportunity for celebrations, communal meals and social gatherings. What had been designed as a means to praise and honor God, however, was not bringing any pleasure to him.

5:23. music in worship. Mesopotamia and Egypt have long histories of both popular and religious music that also must have been known to the Israelites. Professional musicians, like the *kalu* harp-player so well attested in ancient texts from Old Babylonian Mari and Sumerian Uruk, may well have been the model for the Levitical musicians in the Jerusalem temple as well as the musicians in the northern shrines of Dan and Bethel. The types of instruments, liturgical chants, penitential prayers and laments, and hymns of praise created by these ancient civilizations set a standard of style and composition for the Near East. Ancient Egyptian tomb paintings demonstrate the postures of dancers as well as a wide variety of musical instruments. One example of the technical expertise employed in sacred music is found in the Psalms associated with the recitation of the creation story—Psalms 8, 19, 104 and 139. They contain both the literary as well as the musical elements (based on the superscription rubrics, choral markers and assonances in the text) needed for a proper performance of music during worship and the enactment of sacred drama.

5:26. shrine of the king. Because of a mistaken belief that the god Sikkuth was not introduced until after the Assyrian conquest (see 2 Kings 17:30), there has been an attempt to emend the Hebrew so that the text is read "shrine" or "abode" of the king. In fact, Amos's statement probably reflects the degree of cultural influence exercised by Aramean merchants and other travelers on the Israelites. Sikkuth or ^{d}SAG.KUD is associated with Ninurta in Ugaritic sources and specifically with the planet Saturn.

5:26. pedestal of idols. This translation is also an attempt to remove the name of an astral deity from the text with an emendation of the word *kiyyun.* The Mesopotamian star god, Saturn, occurs as *kajamanu* in Akkadian texts and has the meaning "the steady one," an apt title

for the slow-moving orbit of the planet Saturn. The images of these astral deities were carried in procession on their festival days.

5:26. star of your god. Since both of the gods mentioned in this verse are associated with the planet Saturn, the phrase "star of your god" is actually a reference to the people's worship of astral deities. Sacred processions paraded the images and symbols of these gods through the city streets to their shrines, where sacrifices, sacred dancing and other cultic activities would take place. Amos, however, is satirizing these practices. Instead of simply describing what has been occurring, he now predicts a "final" procession, but this time the people carry these idols with them into exile (compare the carrying of burdensome idols in Is 46:1).

5:27. exile beyond Damascus. Since the Assyrians are never directly mentioned in Amos, it is unclear that this is what he meant when he spoke of the coming exile of the people of Israel. Using such an imprecise phrase as "beyond Damascus" is reminiscent of Jeremiah's threat "from the north" (Jer 1:14), and both simply indicate the direction of Mesopotamia as the source of the coming destruction.

6:1-14

Woe and Indictment Oracles

6:1. Mount Samaria. For Amos's parallelism to work most effectively, Mount Samaria would have to also contain a worship center just as Mount Zion does in Jerusalem. It is likely a reference to the acropolis section of the city where the temple and palace would be located. Considering Micah's condemnation of Samaria and its idols (Mic 1:6-7) and Isaiah's reference to "Samaria and her images" (Is 10:11), it seems likely that Israel's capital had a major shrine during the reign of Jeroboam II.

6:2. Calneh and Hamath. Although its exact location is still uncertain, Calneh, the capital of the ancient state of Unqi, was most likely situated in the Antioch plain, near Aleppo. Hamath (modern Hama, almost 100 miles south of Aleppo and about 130 miles north of Damascus) is located on the Orontes River. (for more information see the comments on Is 10:9). Though both suffered destruction at the hands of the Assyrians in 738, Israel was also paying tribute at that time too, so Amos cannot be that late. We know too little of the history of northern Syria in the decades preceding Amos to identify what else he may be referring to.

6:2. Gath. Gath has been tentatively identified as Tell es-Safi, five miles south of Tell Miqne/Ekron. Of the five major cities of the Philistines, it was the closest to Judah. There has been little excavation at the site, though it has been confirmed that there are Iron Age remains. The city was located by the Elah Valley, one of the principal passes from the coastal plain into the hill country surrounding Jerusalem. It was the target of an attack by Uzziah of Judah (referred to in 2 Chron 26:6) in the time of Amos.

6:4. beds inlaid with ivory. The idea of a bed made from some exotic or luxurious material is reminiscent of King Og's iron bed in Deuteronomy 3:11 (see also Solomon's ivory throne in 2 Chron 9:17-19). Sennacherib's Assyrian Annals mention that Judah's king Hezekiah included a couch inlaid with ivory among his tribute items. Ivory decor was very popular at this time for inlays in furniture and for wall panels. One of the principal sources of ivory was elephant tusks, which were imported from Aram (where Syrian elephants were not yet extinct at this time). Elephant hides and tusks, as well as live elephants, were at times included in tribute payments. Excavations at Ashurnasirpal's palace at Kalah produced some very fine ivory carvings decorating the walls. Over five hundred ivory fragments have also been found in the excavations at Samaria dating to the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. Many feature Egyptian and Phoenician artistic motifs.

6:4. choice lambs, fattened calves. For those who could afford it, the best quality meats came from specially bred sheep and cattle that were kept in stalls (see Mal 4:2) and fattened with barley prior to slaughter. Presumably, these ancient feed lots could command a higher price and were well known (see Jeremiah's metaphor for overfed mercenaries in Jer 46:21). Evidence of this breed of sheep (Akk. *kirru)* is found in Ur III economic texts dating to the twentieth-century B.C.

6:6. wine by the bowl. The term used for bowl here is one that is usually associated with cultic activity (see Ex 24:6-8; Num 7:13). That suggests that Amos is accusing them not only of drinking to excess in large bowls but perhaps also of profaning sacred objects. Note that archaeologists have found a number of golden drinking bowls in tombs at Nimrud dating to the late Assyrian period, some of which have the names of Assyrian queens engraved on their sides.

6:6. fine lotions. Banqueters in the ancient world were often treated by a generous host to fine oils that would be used to anoint their foreheads. This provided a glistening sheen to

their countenance and also would have added a fragrance to their persons and the room. For example, an Assyrian text from Esarhaddon's reign describes how he "drenched the foreheads" of his guests at a royal banquet with "choicest oils." Since Amos may be condemning the people for misusing cultic vessels in this verse, he may also be taking them to task for using the oils that would otherwise have been used as part of cultic practice (see Ex 30:31-32).

6:7. feasting. The word translated "feasting" here is a technical term for a funeral meal (more like a festal memorial meal; thus the use of vessels and oils usually connected with cultic rites). The term occurs only here and Jeremiah 16:5, although it is well known in many other Semitic traditions. Extrabiblical references to the funeral meal have been found in Ugaritic texts, in Aramaic texts from Elephantine (Egypt) and in inscriptions in Punic, Nabatean and Palmyrene. All of the elements listed in these verses are connected with these feasts: meat and wine, music, anointing and lounging.

6:10. burning the bodies. The burning of bodies was not a common practice (but see comments on 1 Sam 31:12 and 2 Chron 16:14), and the spelling of the verb is unusual. This has led a number of interpreters to an alternative reading such that the text does not suggest burning the body but embalming it with spices for burial.

6:10. not mentioning the Lord's name. God's wrath is such that the population of the city of Samaria is to be reduced to a tenth, and the survivors will be so frightened by what Yahweh has done that they will be afraid to mention God's name lest the angry deity take any further notice of them. In that sense then, the command "Hush!" is a sort of warding spell (like "God forbid" in English) to prevent the incautious from invoking God (compare Ex 23:13 and Josh 23:7). Assyrian royal documents from the reign of Enlil-Nirari (1326-1317) provide some light here. In one text the king calls out, "May the god by no means speak!" when the death of a member of the royal family is announced at court. His intent may be to ask that the god not act (speak) against anyone else.

6:13. Lo Debar. This site, one of those captured by Jeroboam II during his Transjordanian campaign (2 Kings 14:25), is most often identified with Tell 'el-Hammeh, just north of the Jabbok River, in what would have been Ammonite territory. Amos parodies this victory by revocalizing the city name to *Lo-dabar,* which means "nothing." He mocks their false pride in these flimsy accomplishments that are as nothing to God's victories.

6:13. Karnaim. This important site is located in Bashan at Tell es-Sa'ad, on a northern tributary of the Yarmuk River (see Gen 14:5 and 1 Macc 5:26). Tiglath-Pileser III made it the capital of the Assyrian province of Qarnina when he conquered the region in his 738-737 campaign.

6:14. Lebo Hamath to the Wadi Arabah. See the comment on 2 Kings 14:25 for King Jeroboam II's attempt to restore Israel's borders.

7:1–9

Punishment Alternatives

7:1. locusts. See comment on 4:9.

7:1. king's share. Although it is not mentioned elsewhere in the biblical text, this reference indicates that the king was entitled, as a form of tax, to a portion of the mown grass. This may have been a measure instituted to insure the king's chariot horses and cavalry had sufficient fodder. A reverse example of this is found in a land grant made by the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal to one of his officials. This decree exempted the official's new lands from being levied for straw, grain or a portion of his flocks.

7:7. plumb line. This traditional translation is no longer acceptable, based on the recognition that the Hebrew *'anak* is a cognate of the Akkadian *annaku,* meaning "tin." A plumb line would have a lead or iron weight attached in order to determine that a wall is perpendicular during construction. S. Paul suggests this stands for a tin wall, a symbol of how weak or fragile Israel's defenses are (compare the iron walls in Jer 1:18; Ezek 4:3). For now the exact meaning of this phrase remains uncertain.

7:10-17

Amaziah Confronts Amos

7:10. prophetic message as treason. Throughout the ancient world it was believed that prophets not only proclaimed the message of deity but in the process unleashed the divine action. In Assyrian king Esarhaddon's instructions to his vassals, he requires that they report any improper or negative statements made by anyone, specifically naming prophets, ecstatics and dream interpreters. It is no wonder, then, that a prophet negatively disposed toward a king had to be controlled lest he bring about all sorts of havoc. One can perhaps understand why a king would be inclined to imprison a prophet whose very words

might incite insurrection or impose doom.

7:13. king's sanctuary. Bethel was one of the two royal sanctuaries established by King Jeroboam to serve as alternative worship centers for the people of the northern kingdom (1 Kings 12:26-30). Amaziah's post was a political appointment since the priesthood at Bethel was established by the crown rather than being attached to tribal lineage as the Levites were (1 Kings 12:32). Naturally his loyalties were to the king, and he was very offended by any criticism of either the king or the shrine at Bethel. The state temple was one in which the king himself participated in the ritual activities.

7:14. shepherd. No village in Judah's central hill country could afford to engage in a single economic activity. Every household would have had their small fields of wheat and barley, as well as a small vineyard, a few fig trees and olive trees on their land. In this way they could hope that at least some of their agricultural endeavors paid off. In like manner, a few sheep, goats and cattle would have served as an economic hedge. It would have been easy enough to allow them to graze on the hillsides, accompanied by a boy (see David's occupation in 1 Sam 16:11). A Mesopotamian parallel to this practice is found in the Akkadian word *naqidu*, a term used for a breeder of cattle, sheep and goats.

7:14. caring for sycamore figs. The sycamore figs *(Ficus sycomorus L.)* originated in east central Africa and spread to Egypt and the Near East by the Iron Age. The trees are capable of as many as six crops per year. Since the fruit is inferior to that of the common fig *(Ficus carica L.)*, the poor principally consume it. Date gardens take up to twenty years to reach their full productive potential. They require much attention because they have to be pollinated by hand. The care of the sycamore fig requires that the fruit be gashed or pierced to encourage an increase in ethylene gas that speeds the ripening process. The knife used to gash the fruit is depicted in Egyptian tomb paintings in Thebes.

8:1-14

Ripe for Judgment

8:5. clash between economic and religious concerns. As Nehemiah discovered several centuries later in Persian-period Jerusalem, the desire of merchants to conduct business sometimes makes their compliance with religious law and Sabbath regulations a matter for complaint or even circumvention (see comment on Neh 10:31). There were religious festivals in surrounding cultures (see comment on Ex 20:8-11), but only Israel was commanded to obey the sabbath law and cease all work (see comment on Ex 31:12-17). This restriction on trade caused friction and apparently contributed to corrupt business practices as a way of "making up" the losses.

8:5. cheating in the market. Certainly, Amos's complaints against Israelite merchants are not unique. For instance, the charge made against merchants that they use false balances is found in the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope* and in a clause in the Babylonian wisdom literature. Similarly, Hammurabi's Code contains a statement about bankers who "use a light scale to measure the grain or the silver that they lend and a heavy scale to measure the grain or the silver that they collect."

8:6. sweepings with the wheat. In their efforts to squeeze as much profit as possible from their holdings, grain merchants were cheating the poor by selling the "husks" of the wheat. A similar charge is made in the Egyptian *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* against those who "substitute lesser for better goods." The word translated as "sweepings" occurs only here, but it is related to the word "to fall" and reflects the poorest quality or that which is left over.

8:8. rising like the Nile. There is a three-month inundation cycle in the flow of the Nile River (from August to October). The increase in volume is the result of monsoon rains in Ethiopia that swell the Nile and its tributaries. Although the height of the inundation is irregular, the Egyptians early in their history learned to make efficient use, through irrigation canals and other means, of whatever the rise of the Nile brought to them.

8:9. sun go down at noon. Since a lunar or solar eclipse was considered a portent of evil or the anger of the gods in the ancient Near East, there are many citations in the literature. Among them is the prediction by the prophet Balaam in the Deir 'Alla inscription that the divine assembly has decided to "bring darkness instead of light." Priests of the moon god Sin in Babylonian would wear torn garments and sing dirges during an eclipse, and there are numerous letters and omen texts in Babylonian and Assyrian records referring to eclipses. Many are written to kings either warning them of a coming eclipse or assuring the monarch that they will be kept informed of the likelihood of coming occurrences. For biblical examples see Joel 3:15 and Zechariah 14:6.

8:10. mourning practices. See comments on Genesis 37:34-35; Leviticus 19:28; and Deuteronomy 14:1-2.

8:12. sea to sea. In their staggering search for

water during the drought, the people will search from one end of the kingdom to the other. From "sea to sea" is used fairly often to distinguish east and west (from the Mediterranean in the west to the Dead Sea or Jordan River) by the biblical writers (see Ps 72:8; Zech 9:10). A similar expression occurs in the Karatepe inscription of the Aramean king Azitawada: "from sunrise to sunset" (see Is 45:6) for east to west or a sense of universality. Since it is combined here with "north to east," it is possible that it defines the southern latitudinal border of the northern kingdom.

8:12. north to east. The southern boundary has been defined in the previous line, and the western boundary is obvious. From Bethel one could still search to the Galilee region to the north, heading for places like Samaria or Dan, and to the east, whether Beth Shan or the Transjordan territory of Gilead.

8:14. shame/Ashima. While the uncertainty with this word has led to its being translated "shame," it seems most likely that it is a reference to the Syrian god Ashima (NIV note). This deity's title comes from the Aramaic for "the name" and thus is a shorthand for any number of the northwest Semitic gods and goddesses (Baal, Anat, Astarte). Although official introduction of the worship of Ashima does not occur until after 722, this does not preclude this god's being worshiped in Samaria before this time. Later evidence for worship of Ashima comes from the Elephantine letters.

8:14. god of Dan. Since Jeroboam I had instituted the worship of Yahweh at Dan by creating a royal sanctuary there (1 Kings 12:28-30), it is appropriate for Amos to refer to the god of Dan. He is probably also referring to the golden calf placed there by Jeroboam as a symbol of Yahweh and as a substitute for the ark of the covenant. Dan continued to have cultic significance for many centuries. Evidence of this is found in a late-third-century bilingual (Greek and Aramaic) inscription that contained the phrase "to the god who is in Dan."

8:14. god of Beersheba. Amos now completes his condemnation of false worship practices among the Israelites by a reference to the "way" of the "god" of Beersheba. "From Dan to Beersheba" is a common phrase for the full extent of the land (Judg 20:1; 1 Sam 3:20), and Amos uses it to demonstrate the universality of Israelite apostasy (see Amos 5:5).

9:1-15
Coming Destruction and Restoration

9:1. tops of the pillars. In order to describe how complete the coming destruction will be, Amos again employs a merism. This time his range is from the top to the bottom of the shrine at Bethel, from the capital that decorates the top of the pillars to the doorjamb (see Zeph 2:14). It is possible to compare these earth tremors to Isaiah's call narrative (Is 6:4), but there it is just a reflection of God's magisterial presence. Ancient Near Eastern examples of similar destruction mention walls, gates, doors or doorjambs being smashed or demolished (including the Gilgamesh Epic and the inscription of Tukulti-Ninurta I).

9:2. grave/heaven contrast. Amos employs a merism contrasting the cosmic distances between heaven and the depths of Sheol (see Ps 139:8). The boasting of Mot in the Ugaritic *Hymn to Baal and Anat* also provides this contrast to the powers of the underworld or death to that of heaven and life. In the ancient world, heaven and the netherworld were not considered to be "spiritual" places outside of the cosmos. Rather, they represented the extreme ends of the cosmos.

9:3. top of Carmel. As part of this series of phrases warning the Israelites that they cannot hide from God's wrath, Amos uses the image of the highest point within their nation. Mount Carmel stands eighteen hundred feet above sea level and is a commanding presence, with dense forests and many caves that some might presume to be excellent hideouts (see the comment on Amos 1:2).

9:3. serpent in the bottom of the sea. From the mountaintop to the bottom of the ocean, there is no place to hide. Even at these depths, God can command the sea serpent to do his biding (compare Jon 1:17). The Israelites knew well the tradition of Yahweh subduing the great sea creatures (see comment on Ps 74:14 and 104:26). Similar contests of strength are found in the Babylonian creation epic, *Enuma Elish,* and the Egyptian hymn to the sun god, Ra, who must repulse the dragon Apophis repeatedly in order to complete his circuit across the skies. For more information see comments on Genesis 1:20; Exodus 7:1; and Isaiah 27:1.

9:6. cosmic temple. Amos's attempt to express God's complete control over all creation begins with a multistoried or many-chambered sanctuary or palace in the heavens (compare Ps 78:69; Is 66:1). These "upper chambers" bind together the vaults of heaven while at the same time rest upon the waters (see Ps 104:3). A precedent for these lofty chambers is found in the *Enuma Elish.* It contains a description of the building of the Esagila temple to Marduk in Babylon in which the gods "built a

stage-tower as high as Apsu (waters above the heavens)." In the biblical and ancient Near Eastern view the cosmos was a temple and the temple was a microcosmos.

9:7. Cushites. See the comment on Numbers 12:1 for a description of these people from ancient Nubia in the Sudan south of Egypt.

9:7. Philistines from Caphtor. For a Philistine connection with Caphtor (Crete), see the comment on Jeremiah 47:4. Ezekiel 25:16 connects them with another of the Sea People groups, the Kerethites. See the comment on Deuteronomy 2:23 for their connection with the Avvites. The prophet uses the universalism theme to show God's concerns for all nations. The Philistines and Arameans, like the Israelites, had been brought to Palestine, but Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh now required them to be singled out for punishment.

9:7. Arameans from Kir. Amos refers to Kir as the homeland of the Aramean tribes here, but 2 Kings 16:9 speaks of Kir as the place where the conquering Assyrians exiled the Arameans after King Rezin was executed. Isaiah 22:6 seems to support this latter reference since it speaks of Kir in relation to Elam, south and east of the Tigris River. Assyrian records from the reign of Tiglath-Pileser I (1115-1107) speak of the migration of these tribes into Assyria during the twelfth century. What Amos may be doing here and in 1:5 is to point out that just as the Arameans had been sent back to their place of origin, God just as easily could dispatch the Israelites from the land of Canaan.

9:9. grain in a sieve. The work of processing harvested grain included crushing the stalks on the threshing floor with a sled, winnowing (see Jer 4:11) and finally using a sieve to separate the kernels of grain from small stones and other debris. The sieve mentioned here *(kebarah)* has large holes and works best when shaken sideways and in a circular motion. This ordinarily forces the debris to the sides and allows the kernels to fall to the ground where they can be collected (see Ecclus 27:4). The initial NIV translation of *ṣeror* was later corrected from "kernel" to "pebble" to reflect the true action of the sieve.

9:12. remnant of Edom. Amos employs the phrase "the remnant of" two other times (1:8 for the Philistines and 5:15 for Joseph). In this case he may be referring to a portion of the territory of Edom rather than to all of it. King Uzziah had captured the Edomite port at Elath (2 Kings 14:22), and it has subsequently been lost again in the reign of Ahaz (2 Kings 16:6) to the Syrians and Edomites. In this eventual restoration of the Davidic kingdom, Amos may have this valuable port city in mind.

OBADIAH

1. Edom. The principal theme of the book of Obadiah is an indictment of Edom for its crimes against Judah. This nation, located south and east of the Dead Sea, has a mixed tradition among the Israelites. Much as Jacob and Esau, the traditional founders of the two nations, had an ambivalent relationship, so Edom is at times seen as a friend and ally (Deut 2:2-6; 2 Kings 3:9) and on other occasions as a deadly enemy (Num 20:14-21; Amos 1:11-15). During the period of the Neo-Assyrian empire and the Neo-Babylonian empire (734-586) Edom had been a vassal state. Most likely Obadiah's complaint against Edom relates to its participation in the final destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its people by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 587-586 B.C., but records are unclear concerning the precise role that Edom played.

1. envoy building coalition. When nations went to war in the ancient Near East, it was necessary to call on all covenant partners and vassal states to send troops and supplies for a combined effort. Messengers would be sent to call on them to honor their treaty commitments and conscript the specified number of soldiers (seen in 1 Sam 11:3-4 and the reciprocal defense pact found in the treaty between Pharaoh Rameses II and the Hittite king Hattusilis III). The Mari texts even describe the practice of sending envoys to the temple of a god to inform the deity of the military situation and call on his aid in the coming conflict.

3. topography of Edom. The region of Edom is a mountainous land, dominated by ridges that extend from the Zered River south to the Aqaba. The area is filled with mountain peaks rising as much as fifty-seven hundred feet

above sea level, sharp crags, caves and clefts in which armies could hide. A number of Edomite cities were also located in these nearly inaccessible sites, such as Bosrah and the rocky peak known as Umm el-Biyara in Petra, which some identify with Sela.

5. significance of grapes. Edom was known for its fine mountain-side vineyards. The destruction of the country is likened to the double despoilings of thieves and gleaners. What the thieves or harvesters leave, the gleaners will take. All that will remain is the rotten and crushed fruit left on the ground.

6. Esau/Edom connection. The use of Esau interchangeably with Edom is based on the understanding of Esau as the ancestor of that nation in Genesis 36:31-39 (see Mal 1:2-3). There one finds a list of eight kings who reigned in Edom prior to the establishment of the Israelite monarchy.

6. hidden treasures. This phrase occurs only here in the Old Testament and cannot be adequately translated because of its unusual formation and the lack of additional use elsewhere to help supply a context. Similar words in Isaiah 45:3 and Jeremiah 49:10 provide the basis for the current translation. What is indicated by the text is the thoroughness of the plundering of Edom. Secret treasuries were known in the ancient world, but this was especially appropriate to Edom, where, because of the terrain, whole cities could be kept secret.

7. breaches of international etiquette. Treaties between nations, such as that between Egypt and the Hittite empire (Rameses II and Hattusilis III) or the Vassal Treaties of the seventh-century B.C. Assyrian king Esarhaddon, functioned as mutual defense pacts and required the signatories to provide arms, information and legal reciprocity. Edom is accused here of a total breach in these agreements: refugees have been forced back to their own borders without any relief; nonaggression clauses by covenant partners have been violated; and hospitality customs, in which eating a meal together is the basis of peace agreements (seen in Ps 41:9 and phrases in Mari and El Amarna texts referring to covenant meals), have been completely ignored. The breaking of treaty agreements when convenient or beneficial is well attested in the ancient world. Examples include Egypt's failure to supply needed troops to the Canaanite kings during the Amarna period and the Babylonian king, Nabonidus, breaking his treaty with the Medes in order to make one with the Persians, whom he considered a greater threat.

8. reputation of wisdom of Edom. The tradition of Edomite wisdom can be somewhat substantiated by the nation's association with Job (from Uz, which is considered by some to be in Edom) and with Job's friend Eliphaz the Temanite. Living on the fringe of the northern Arabian desert and benefitting from the caravan trade and accessible copper deposits, it may be that Edom was known for its business acumen or diplomatic shrewdness (see the parallel statement in Jer 49:7).

9. Teman. There is some difficulty in pinpointing the exact location of the tribal territory of Teman. Some scholars tie it to Bozrah, identified as its capital city after the eighth century B.C., and place Teman in the northern region of Edom. However, a number of others, using the references from the fourth-century A.D. historian Eusebius, locate Teman in the southern part of Edom and tie it to the ancient king Husham (Gen 36:34). The Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions also mention "Yahweh of Teman" and suggest a southern location for this region. In this passage it is synonymous with the nation of Edom.

10. violence against Jacob. The fraternal relationship between Edom/Esau and Jacob/Judah is common in Obadiah (see comment on v. 6) and thus does not have to denote a treaty arrangement. This adds to the shock and shame of violence done against a neighbor with traditional kin ties. The word used here for violence has a range of meaning, from murder and rape to wickedness and bloodshed. In this instance it serves as a "shock term" to emphasize the degree of damage inflicted and the justification for Edom's punishment. The Neo-Assyrian annals make similar statements expressing anger and amazement when a treaty partner revolts and military reprisal becomes necessary.

11. casting lots for Jerusalem. The practice of casting lots as part of the divination process in Babylonia and Assyria is described in the comment on Urim and Thummim in Exodus 28:30. The greed with which the invaders look upon Jerusalem suggests visions of looting and great wealth that will result from the city's destruction (see Is 17:14). Armies regularly established criteria for the division of spoils (seen in the penalties imposed on officers in the Mari texts who fail to share this wealth with their soldiers). Casting lots may have been one method for distribution of goods and slaves, since it implied divine intervention.

16. drinking on the holy hill. Edom initially drank in celebration of Jerusalem's fall along with her allies. Ultimately, however, it will be Edom, along with the nations who have par-

ticipated in Jerusalem's destruction, who will be forced to drink perpetually from Yahweh's "cup of wrath" (see Ps 75:8; Is 51:17; Jer 25:15-16).

19. territorial changes. What is envisioned here is both retribution against Israel's enemies and the reclamation of all of Israel's traditional territories. Thus the Negev, synonymous with the area around Beersheba and the lower portion of the Dead Sea, would take over the territory of Edom. The Shephelah, a narrow ridge of land between the coastal plain and the hill country, would expand into the Philistine city-states. Ephraim and Samaria, the region conquered by the Assyrians in 721, would be reclaimed by the people of Judah. And, finally, Gilead in Transjordan (stretching from the lower Galilee to the Arnon River) would once again be ruled by Benjamin (the tribal territory between Bethel and Jerusalem).

20. Zarephath. Located on the coastal highway between Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia, Zarephath is depicted as the restored Israel's northern border. A commercial center specializing in the processing of purple dye and manufacture of ceramics, this town is mentioned in Egyptian records from the thirteenth century and is included in the list of cities that surrendered to the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 (see 1 Kings 17:9).

20. Sepharad. Possible locations for this site range from Spain to the Hesperides to western Media. These identifications are based on place names and some textual evidence from the Neo-Assyrian period. However, the most likely site for Sepharad is Sardis in western Asia Minor. This was the Lydian capital during the Persian period, and a bilingual inscription found there names the city in Aramaic with the same consonants as the Hebrew name in Obadiah. This would be a very far distance for exiles from Jerusalem to travel, but the implication in the text is that even the most distant would return to reclaim a portion of the land.

JONAH

1:1-17
Jonah's Flight

1:1. chronology. Jonah is known from 1 Kings 14:25 as a prophet in the time of Jeroboam II who reigned in the first half of the eighth century B.C. (see comments on 2 Kings 14).

1:2. Nineveh. Nineveh is modern Tell Kuyunjik located on the Tigris River some six hundred miles upriver from the Persian Gulf in north Iraq. In the eighth century Nineveh had not yet entered its period of glory. At the beginning of the seventh century Sennacherib made this ancient cult center for the goddess Ishtar the capital city and beautified and enlarged it to nearly two thousand acres. Archaeologists have successfully excavated Sennacherib's famous "palace without rival," which features wall reliefs depicting Sennacherib's siege of Lachish in Judah. The temple of Ishtar that had been maintained by kings as early as 2400 B.C. has also been identified. At the time of Jonah it was one of the major metropolitan areas in Assyria with a circumference of a bit less than three miles.

1:2. Assyria and Israel in the first half of the eighth century. Assyria had posed a significant threat to Israel in the ninth century. Israel had been part of the western coalition that opposed Shalmaneser III's attempts to expand into the Mediterranean region (see comment on 1 Kings 22:1). In 841 the Israelite king Jehu accepted Assyrian control and paid tribute (see comment on 2 Kings 10:34). In the intervening decades, however, Assyria had weakened considerably, and by the time of Jeroboam II many decades had passed with no antagonism from Assyria.

1:3. Tarshish. Tarshish was the farthest known geographical point. While its exact location is unknown, most believe it was in southern Spain, though some have favored Carthage in north Africa. We can be certain that it was a port in the western Mediterranean known for its trade in exports.

1:3. Joppa. Joppa is located just south of modern Tel Aviv on the Mediterranean. This harbor town is mentioned in Egyptian and Phoenician texts as well as texts from Canaan (the Amarna tablets). During the monarchy period it was often under the control of the Philistine city Ashkelon.

1:3. ship. Merchant ships were of various sizes and averaged a speed of two to four knots. In Solomon's day the ships going to Tarshish

would not return for three years. A ship of this size would have had a crew of less than a dozen. Cargo typically consisted of grain, wine and olive oil.

1:3. fare. From the language used many have concluded that the fare Jonah paid hired the whole ship for his use. Whether or not this is the case, the fare would have been substantial.

1:5. each cried to his own god. Patron deities were rarely cosmic deities, so the sailors would not have thought that their personal or family gods had sent the storm. In the polytheistic context of the ancient world, one could generally identify divine activity with confidence, but it was another matter altogether to discover which god was acting and why. The sailors call out to their gods in the hope that one of their patron deities might be able to exert some influence on whichever god has become disturbed enough to send the storm. They are calling out for assistance, not in repentance. The more contacts made the better, so the captain awakes Jonah so that he could also call upon his patron deity.

1:7-10. lots. Although the casting of lots was sometimes used to allow the deity to communicate, in many instances they were considered more like flipping a coin or drawing straws. As a result the lots were not cast here to determine who was guilty, but to decide who would be first to volunteer information about themselves that might expose an offense against the gods. It is understandable that no one would be eager to go first. For the casting of lots, each individual brought an identifiable marker. The markers were placed in a container, which was shaken until one of the markers came out.

1:9. cosmic deity. Jonah's reply to their questions identifies only his ethnic association (Hebrew) and the God he serves. Most significant is his description of the Lord as a cosmic, creator deity—just the type of God who would be capable of sending such a storm.

1:10. he had already told them. He had told them earlier that he was fleeing from his God, but that had not concerned them—that was his problem and probably not all that uncommon. Their terror now increases as they realize that Jonah's flight from a cosmic deity has put them all in jeopardy of suffering the wrath of Jonah's god.

1:11-16. what shall we do? The sailors' next question concerns appeasement. In the religious thinking of the ancient world the people rarely thought in terms of repentance, because the motivations of the gods could not easily be discerned. Since the gods were neither moral nor consistent, their anger might be entirely whimsical and their acts of punishment arbitrary or childish. Therefore worshipers sought to appease the gods' anger. Different gods might be appeased in different ways, so Jonah is consulted.

1:12. throw me into the sea. The men are reluctant to follow Jonah's advice because they believed that deities were protective of the lives of their worshipers. Putting Jonah to death by throwing him in might expose them to the retributive vengeance of Jonah's God.

1:16. offered sacrifice. When the sea grows calm, the men respond with worship. The sacrifice was most likely a grain offering, probably not burnt on a wooden ship but perhaps thrown into the sea. Alternatively (since all the cargo had been jettisoned) the text may refer to a sacrifice that was made on their return to dry land (there would be no point in continuing on to Tarshish).

1:16. made vows. Vows in the Old Testament and in the ancient world typically concerned sacrifice. For instance, the sailors may have vowed to offer a memorial sacrifice of some sort to Yahweh each year on the anniversary of this event. The vows acknowledged that the sailors had experienced an act of divine power. The text in no way suggests that they had abandoned their gods and accepted the monotheistic faith in Yahweh. Acknowledging the power of one god did not preclude the worship of others.

1:17. great fish. Jonah was swallowed by what the text designates a "large fish"—probably the most general description that could be offered. There is nothing to settle the question of whether it was technically fish or mammal, because Hebrew would use this term for any sea creature. Species identification is therefore impossible. Although studies could be done on gullet sizes of various species that regularly inhabit the Mediterranean, the text's insistence on the Lord's direct involvement suggests that we should not expect that there was anything regular or ordinary about the fish. In the beliefs of the ancient world, large sea creatures represented the forces of chaos that were overcome by the creator deity in the act of creation. Here, as always, Yahweh is portrayed as in complete control of the sea creatures—this one is simply doing his bidding.

2:1-10

Jonah's Prayer of Thanksgiving

2:1-6. Jonah's prayer. This prayer may have been a well-known hymn or a piece adapted from known material. The fish is not men-

tioned and the threat of the waters is a common metaphor in hymnic material. The sea was considered a threatening realm of chaos, and only death could be expected there. However intimidating the fish may have been, Jonah understood it as the Lord's deliverance.

2:7-10. Jonah's relationship to the Lord. God's presence was in the temple, so Jonah's prayer reaches him there. Though Jonah is aware of his disobedience, he still considers himself loyal to the Lord. He has not taken up idol worship.

2:9. Jonah's vow. The prayer does not specify what it is that Jonah has vowed, but most vows in the ancient world concerned rituals to be performed. Leviticus speaks of vow offerings in its description of the various sacrifices (see comments on Lev 3:1-5 and 27:2-13). With no further specification of the nature of the vow, it is likely that Jonah would fulfill his vow with a sacrifice of thanksgiving. There is no indication that he vowed to obey by going willingly to Nineveh. In a hymn to Shamash the sun god is identified as the one who saves those who are surrounded by mighty waves and accepts libations in return.

3:1-10

Jonah and the Ninevites

3:1-4. went to Nineveh. The journey to Nineveh from Joppa (where we assume the fish left Jonah) was about 550 miles. Caravans usually traveled twenty to twenty-five miles a day to make the trip in about a month.

3:3. large city. The size of Nineveh is expressed in terms of the time that it would take Jonah to carry out his assignment. He is not circling the circumference of the walls but going to all the public places in the city to make his proclamation. His itinerary would have included many of the dozen gate areas as well as several of the temple areas. There would have been certain times during the day when significant announcements could be made.

3:4. Jonah's message. Jonah's message is one of impending judgment, as is common for a prophet. We should not confuse a prophetic role with a missionary role. The prophet in the ancient world had the task of conveying whatever message God gave him for a particular audience. The missionary has the task of conveying God's message of salvation given to everyone. The prophet's message was rarely as pleasant as the missionary's. In Jonah's message there is no hint of a call to repentance or a call to put away their false gods. There is no instruction concerning what God wants of them nor indictment of their evil deeds. There are no conditional offers made. The prophet in the ancient world did not come to deliver a comprehensive theology or to convert to a particular religious worldview. He came to deliver a message from God.

3:4. prophets in ancient Near East. Prophecy was well known in the ancient world, so this kind of situation would not be foreign to the Assyrians. There are a number of references to Assyrian prophets and their messages in documents from the time of Ashurbanipal about a century after Jonah. Prophets served as official or unofficial advisors to the king. In the prophecies preserved in the time of Ashurbanipal, the messages are consistently positive, affirming the king's actions, decisions and policies. Earlier examples from Mari in the eighteenth century B.C. were more often negative but still show the prophets as offering messages to the king.

3:5-10. believing prophecy. The Ninevites believed that Jonah's message was a message from a god who was likely to do as he threatened. That conclusion would have been reached by comparing Jonah's message to the message of the omens. Omens were observations made in the natural world that were believed to be related to what the gods were doing in the historical realm. One of the most common opportunities to observe omens was by examining the entrails of animals that were sacrificed daily. The configurations of organs such as the kidney or liver were believed to give favorable or unfavorable omens. Other omens were recorded from the behavior of animals, the flight of birds, the movements of the heavenly bodies and many other phenomena. If omens had been unfavorable for a few days or weeks prior to Jonah's proclamation, the people would have readily accepted the truth of his message. If sacrifices were offered and the entrails verified an impending doom, Jonah's word would be taken very seriously.

3:5. reception of foreigner's prophecy. It would not have mattered that Jonah was an outsider representing another country or another deity. The polytheistic beliefs of the ancient world allowed for hundreds of gods, any of whom might be capable of impacting their lives for good or ill. Foreign delegations would at times have included prophetic personnel so that the favor or disfavor of the major deities involved could be expressed concerning any negotiations. If the Ninevites' own divinations had supported Jonah's message, they would have had no reason to suspect treachery or hoax. The fact that he was a foreigner would have served as evidence of the truth of his message, for why would some-

one have traveled all this distance unless impelled by deity? Remember that Jonah did not ask them to change religions, nor did he seek to dethrone their national god.

3:5-10. response. The response of the Ninevites is both typical and atypical. It is atypical in that there is little evidence for fasting as a religious response in the practice of Assyrians or Babylonians. There are examples of the king donning sackcloth "as befitting a penitent sinner" (*Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal*). The usual approach would be to try to appease deity by the performance of certain rituals (sacrifices, libations, etc.) or by incantations to prevent the deity from acting. It is therefore likely that the Ninevites were trying an Israelite approach to responding to divine anger. What is typical is that they were trying to appease the angered deity. They had no idea what had angered Yahweh, but any inquiry into Israelite religion would have revealed that their God was interested in justice and that repentance of injustice featured fasting and sackcloth, which did regularly accompany mourning. Their rituals (sackcloth and fasting) and their ethical reforms show that they took Jonah seriously but do not offer evidence of conversion. The polytheism of Assyria would have had no conception of monotheism, covenant or law. The only conversion known in this system was the shuffling of the gods in the pantheon. The Ninevites did not get rid of their idols, nor did they show any inclination to replace their gods with Yahweh of Israel. To recognize a god's power was not the same as to accept him as your one and only god.

3:6. arose from his throne. In Assyria when an omen or prophecy suggested the king was in danger, it was common for a substitute king to be appointed. This individual would sit on the royal throne and wear the royal robes. Meanwhile, the king would engage in acts of purification. Often, after an appropriate time, the substitute king would be killed. It was hoped that this would divert the danger from the king. In this text there is no mention of a substitute, but the king's actions might reflect that this procedure was being used.

3:8. beasts covered with sackcloth. The dressing of the animals in sackcloth (a coarse material made of goat's hair) further expresses the Ninevites' lack of understanding of Israel's God. Even animals might offend deity, so they must be included in the appeasement ritual.

4:1-11

The Object Lesson

4:1-4. Jonah's anger. Jonah is angry that the Lord has so easily capitulated to the pagan tactics of appeasement. He is embarrassed and theologically scandalized that Yahweh should offer compassion so readily, for this suggests that Yahweh can be bought. The Ninevites would view him no differently from their own gods.

4:5-9. vine and worm. The plant that brings Jonah shade is described by a general term usually associated with the gourd family. As with the fish, the terminology does not allow a more specific identification. The insect that destroys the gourd plant is most likely of the aphid variety.

4:8. scorching east wind. The east wind here would not be a *ḥamsin* (or sirocco) because then the sun would not be a factor. The east wind was a problem in Palestine because of the desert to the east, but for Nineveh an east wind would often result in rain. Here it is a particular type of east wind (NIV: "scorching"), but this word is used only here so it is difficult to understand precisely.

4:11. population of Nineveh. Assyrian scholars have estimated the population of Nineveh (city and surrounding countryside) when it was the capital city at about three hundred thousand, so the hundred and twenty thousand here for an earlier period is not implausible.

MICAH

1:1-16

Judgment Coming to Samaria and Jerusalem

1:1. Moresheth. Located approximately six miles northeast of Lachish in the Shephelah, Moresheth (Tell el-Judeideh, about twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem) would have been one of the suburbs of the Philistine city of Gath (Tell es-Safi). After the establishment

of David's kingdom, it served, along with Lachish, Adullam and Mareshah, as a fortified center (2 Chron 11:8). All of these sites, along with "countless" villages, were destroyed by Sennacherib's Assyrian army in 701 B.C.

1:1. chronology. Since the editor gives us the names of the kings of Judah who reigned during Micah's ministry as a prophet, we can date this material to the last half of the eighth century. Micah's first oracle (Mic 1:2-7), which deals with Israel's northern capital of Samaria, would date to just prior to that city's destruction by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

1:3. treading the high places of the earth. The sense of majesty inherent to a theophany is magnified here by the impression of Yahweh "coming" from his "dwelling place." The power implicit in "treading on" is used very often of vanquishing enemies (Deut 33:29; Ps 108:13). However, in this case the image is of God displaying control over creation, using the earth's mountains as stepping stones (Amos 4:13). A similar image is created of the swift, mountain-hopping movements of the divine messengers in the Ugaritic *Epic of Baal and Anath*. Cities were typically built on hills because of their natural defensibility, and armies chose hills as strategic points of control. The metaphor of treading on the heights therefore also speaks of victory and security.

1:5. Samaria. It was Omri who built Samaria and established it as the capital of the northern kingdom, Israel, early in the ninth century. About twelve miles west of the previous capital, Tirzah, the city is located at an important crossroads with easy access to the Jezreel Valley to the north, Shechem to the southeast and the coast to the west. It is near both major north-south routes that run west of the Jordan. The excavations at the site have uncovered what is believed to be Omri's palace on the acropolis as well as parts of the wall separating the acropolis from the lower city. The wall was about five feet thick and built using the finest masonry of the day (ashlar stones set in a trench using headers and stretchers). Ahab improved the fortifications by adding a casemate wall over thirty feet thick.

1:6. the fall of Samaria. The Assyrian sources describe the "ravaging" of Samaria (c. 724-721 B.C.), which may have denoted the entire land. Some archaeological evidence for the destruction has been found at the Israelite city of Shechem. This accords with the typical Assyrian strategy of wasting the territory of a particular state and then surrounding the main city, which had now been cut off from its resources. Both Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar II used this policy against Jerusalem. The three-year siege of Samaria shows that it was heavily fortified, for the Assyrians were unmatched in siege warfare. The city fell in 722/721. Although Shalmaneser III is given credit for the conquest of Samaria in the Bible, his successor Sargon II claimed the very same in the Assyrian annals. Sargon also claims to have rebuilt the city.

1:6. pouring stones into the valley. The forcefulness of Yahweh's wrath against Samaria is compared to the destructiveness of earthquakes. Since cities were typically built on hills, the destruction of a city wall was accomplished by pulling down the stone walls into the valley around.

1:7. temple gifts. Many temple gifts would have been given in exchange for the services of the sacred prostitutes (see comments on Deut 23:17-18). These gifts could have been silver or gold (which could, in turn, be used in the manufacture of idols) or grain or animal gifts. Alternatively, however, Micah, like Hosea (Hos 4:10-15), may simply be equating idolatry with harlotry. Supporting the false worship at the idolatrous temples would be an act of unfaithfulness to Yahweh. The idols which have been worshiped in this shrine are to be destroyed along with their worshipers, and the looting of the temple will provide its conquerors with the wealth to continue their devastating path.

1:8. barefoot and naked. There are a number of mourning rituals employed in the ancient Near East. Some require sacrifices, like those attested in the Ebla tablets, and are part of the royal cult of the dead. In other cases, constant weeping and lamenting mark the acts of mourners (as evidenced in the Ugaritic Epic of Keret). When mourners tear (Lam 2:10) or strip away their clothing and footwear (compare Isaiah's enacted prophecy in Is 20:2), they are putting aside their former status, signifying defeat (compare the restriction against mourning in Ezek 24:17). In this way they acknowledge, as Job does, that they came into this world naked (Job 1:21).

1:8. jackal and owl. The choice of animal voices here are those often heard in the wilderness and wastelands (Is 34:13; Jer 50:39; "prophecy of Balaam" from Deir 'Alla). Both make a piercing sound that would chill the soul and hint of death (note the use of the jackal as an image for the Egyptian god Anubis, whose responsibilities were for the dead and for tombs).

1:10-15. itinerary. All of the sites listed in these verses are in western Judah, in the hill region known as the Shephelah. Sennacherib's report of his campaign offers detailed information

about the Philistine battles, but little about the Shephelah. In the Philistine account, Eltekeh, Timnah and Ekron are named. This would mean the army was poised just a few miles north of Gath as it prepared to go into Judah. If Micah 1 represents a line of march, it would suggest that the Assyrians came south through Gath and took the road that passes a couple of miles west of Lachish (the most prominent fortress of the region), then circled around to the south in order to come at Lachish from the southeast. After Lachish, the route heads northeast toward Jerusalem, with only Mareshah out of order. What is suggested is widespread devastation throughout the Shephelah region. Archaeological surveys have identified a reduction in the number of occupied sites in the region from nearly three hundred in the early eighth century to less than fifty in the seventh century. The population was likewise reduced to less than fifteen percent of what it had been. Gath is probably located at Tell es-Safi. Many of the city names are used for word play unique to this text: Beth Ophrah (meaning "dust"), Shaphir ("horn"; site unknown, though speculated to be Tell 'Eitun), Beth Ezel ("standing place"; location unknown), Zaanan ("she comes out"; possibly the Zenan of the Lachish area in Josh 15:37) and Maroth ("bitter"; site unknown). Lachish is the most important of the cities in this itinerary and will be discussed separately. Moresheth Gath is Micah's home village and is probably to be identified with Tell el-Judeideh (see comment on 1:1). It is in the center of a ten-mile radius in which all of these sites appear to be located. The pun on its name suggests the flight of its citizens. Aczib (possibly Tel el-Beida, northeast of Lachish) is compared to a "failed stream," which here equates with a fortress that failed to serve the king's defensive line. Mareshah, northeast of Lachish, is punned with the word meaning "heir," suggesting a country without a future. Adullam (Tell esh-Sheik Madhkur) similarly lacks a future in the face of the enemy assault.

1:13. Lachish. Dominating the Shephelah and western Judah, Lachish served as the center point of the defensive line of the kings of Judah. Located midway between Jerusalem and the Philistine city states, Lachish guarded the major roads from the coast inland. Its site, Tell ed-Duweir, shows evidence of occupation from the Chalcolithic Period, with massive construction of city defenses and an impressive city gate in the Middle Bronze II (as a major Canaanite city) and Iron II (as the western bastion established after the division of the kingdoms; 2 Chron 11:5-10). Despite its commanding position (a tell 150 feet high), the city fell after a siege by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 (Annals of Sennacherib; for more information see 2 Chron 32:9). Graphic evidence of the ferocity of this siege are found in Assyrian reliefs from the royal palace at Nineveh depicting the events and the remains of a massive siege ramp on the southwest corner of the tell. A mass burial, with approximately fifteen hundred bodies, may also be a result of the fall of the city. Written records of a later siege by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in 586 also exist in the form of twenty-one ostraca letters that were discovered in a guardroom in the city gate. They describe the desperate situation of the defenders as they take note of the extinguishing of the signal fires from neighboring towns.

1:16. shaved heads. There are several rituals associated with mourning, including tearing one's clothing, cutting oneself (see the comment on Lev 19:28), fasting (see the comment on 2 Sam 12:16) and casting dirt or ashes in one's hair (see the comment on 2 Sam 13:19). Shaving the hair also functions as a sign of mourning (Jer 41:5) as well as a part of purification rituals (Lev 14:8-9; Num 6:9). For instance, Assyrian priests were shaved at the time of their installation. Similarly a man portraying himself as a doctor in *The Poor Man of Nippur* (Sultantepe Tablets) shaves his head. This may be associated with purifying himself or because of the physician's repeated contact with the diseased and dying.

2:1-13

Injustice and False Prophecy

2:2. seized property. The acquisition of property by oppressing the poor and weak violates both the law against coveting as well as the injunction not to violate the covenantal division of the land to each Israelite household after the conquest. Despite these laws, the mounting debt of small landowners and the political power exercised by large landowners led to abuses (see comment on Is 5:8), which are mentioned in Egyptian wisdom literature *(Instruction of Amenemope).*

2:5. assembly of the Lord. See the comment on Deuteronomy 23:1-8 for this technical term for the group of men enfranchised to make decisions within the Israelite community and to serve in the military.

2:5. dividing the land by lot. When the father of a family died, the landholdings were divided among the sons by lot. The Eshnunna Laws, the Hammurabi Code and the Middle Assyrian Laws all make reference to this situa-

tion. Texts from Tell Sifr specifically mention dividing the estate by lot. Here Micah suggests that the one who has oppressively accumulated landholdings will have no one to pass them on to.

2:11. acceptance of optimistic prophets. In Assyria, prophets were expected to be supportive of the king and his policies. Israelite prophets tended to be more counterculture and more often than not were critical of the reigning kings. As Jeremiah 28:8-9 notes, the people are to be wary of "the prophet who prophesies peace." The role of prophets in ancient Israel is to provide reproof and warning to the people when they violate their covenant obligations. This differs from ancient Near Eastern prophets, such as those mentioned in the Mari texts, who generally concern themselves with cultic violations (failure to make a sacrifice or build a promised temple) or with matters of warfare.

3:1-12

Corrupt Leaders

3:2-3. cannibal analogy. The rapacious nature of the leaders and judges of Judah is compared to a cannibalistic feast in which the people fall victim to the economic knives and voracious appetite of these corrupt officials. The realistic aspects of preparing the flesh and cracking the bones for their marrow may well be based on the necessities of survival during famines or military sieges (see comment on 2 Kings 6:29).

3:5-7. unsuccessful prophets. A failed or unsuccessful prophet is one who no longer receives any communication from God (see the "famine" of God's words in Amos 8:11-12). This has been brought about by the greed of the prophets who sell their deceptive prophecies rather than speaking them freely in response to God's prompting. The commercialization of prophetic speech assures "peace" or prosperity for the merchants and the nobility who give the prophets "bread" and brings down threats of ruin, allegorized here as "war," on those who fail to bribe them. Micah, who was not a member of the prophetic guild, but, like Amos, simply a man chosen by God to speak (Amos 7:1-15), replaces their failed rituals and divinatory practices with the true word of God. Prophets of this period in Assyria were often in the employ of the royal court and were expected to support the legitimacy of the regime. We would use the expression that it was important for them to recognize which side their bread was buttered on.

3:12. plowed like a field. An area had to be totally cleared of debris in order to be plowed and planted. This metaphor demonstrates how completely the city and its foundations would be destroyed. The armies of Assyria will plow the city, returning it to its original state as cultivated land (compare Is 5:6). While this did not occur in his lifetime, Jeremiah takes up the oracle, and it is quoted by the elders at his trial (Jer 26:18), demonstrating that the predictions of the prophets were compiled and studied.

4:1—5:15

Days Near and Far

4:3. swords into plowshares. Rather than "plowshares" that turn over the dirt as they plow, this may refer to the metal tip of the plow that breaks up the earth and scratches out a furrow. This tip is about seven inches long. However, this same Hebrew word is used in 2 Kings 6:5, where it appears to refer to some sort of axe. Since the sword is "broken up," it is possible that the resulting product is metal shards that could be put to various uses.

4:4. own vine and fig. Vineyards and fig trees were the basic elements of the diet and economy of the village culture of ancient Israel, and their loss would devastate the people (Joel 1:6-7). The idyllic image of peace and prosperity in the ancient Near East is to be able to sit under one's own vine and fig tree. Egyptian tomb paintings, Assyrian reliefs and the biblical writers commonly use the phrase to refer to a people who control their own lives, without foreign interference, and are able to cultivate the land which the gods/God has given to them (1 Kings 4:25; Is 36:16). The vine and fig provided some shade as well as fruit, and enjoying them indicated some long-term prospects as each took several years to become productive.

4:8. watchtower/stronghold. Although Migdal Eder (NIV: "watchtower of the flock") is a place name elsewhere (Gen 35:21), it is paralleled in this context with Ophel, a section of the old city of David on the eastern hill of the city of Jerusalem. As such, both images are of a citadel or watchtower protecting the "flock" and serving as a rallying point from which God's eventual restoration of the nation and the people will occur (compare the opposite image in Is 32:14). If the term refers to an actual citadel tower, it could be the central tower of the Ophel (the citadel or the hill it was on) in Jerusalem (daughter of Zion).

4:10. Babylon. It would have been more logical in Micah's day if he had assigned Ashur or

Nineveh as the place of exile. But prophecy is not always logical. In Micah's time, the Neo-Assyrian empire, under the Sargonid rulers, Sargon II and Sennacherib, was the most powerful political network the world had ever seen. It stretched across the Near East and would eventually even include Egypt for a short time. The ravaging army of Sennacherib was responsible for destroying many towns and villages in Judah during his two invasions, and the Assyrian reliefs even depict captives being taken away from Lachish. During this period, Babylonia and its Chaldean rulers were subjected, just like all other nation states, by the Assyrians. However, they, like the Medes in western Iran, periodically tested the Assyrian hegemony with revolts or by attempting to subvert Assyria's allies and vassal states. Particularly troublesome was Merodach-Baladan, who ousted Assyrian rulers of Babylon on at least two occasions. Finally in 689 B.C. Sennacherib sacked the city and assumed the title of king of Babylon. Shortly after 660, as the Assyrian empire began to crumble, Babylonia and Media combined to put even greater pressure on the last of the great Assyrian kings, Ashurbanipal. His death in 627 marked the end of Assyrian world power and the emergence of Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonian empire.

4:12. sheaves to the threshing floor. One of the principal agricultural installations in the village culture throughout the ancient Near East was the threshing floor. Sheaves of grain were brought to this central location, where they would be threshed and winnowed. Because of the importance of agriculture and fertility, the threshing floor was often a place of ritual importance. Threshing floors were large, flat, open areas and certainly could have been useful for other purposes besides threshing. It is no surprise, therefore, that it should double as an open-air facility when space constraints or the desire for public visibility rendered the palace facilities inadequate. Consequently it became a place of assembly where legal as well as business transactions could be finalized. In the Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat, the king, Danil, publicly judges cases at the threshing floor outside the gate of his city. It was a place where the good was separated from the bad.

4:13. horns of iron, hooves of bronze. Although there are no direct references to animals pulling a threshing sled in the biblical text (see, however, comment on 2 Sam 24:22), Micah is clearly describing standard operations at a threshing floor. Egyptian tomb paintings depict oxen and donkeys pulling a sled weighted with pieces of flint and metal over the grain, and this custom is still followed by farmers in the Middle East. There is also some evidence for metal shoes being attached to the feet of these animals to more efficiently cut the stalks of grain.

5:1. strike on the cheek with a rod. To be struck on the cheek is generally considered a gesture of contempt (see 1 Kings 22:24; Job 16:10). Hammurabi's Code provides for a variety of punishments for the person who strike others on the cheek—from flogging and mutilation to stiff fines. Striking Judah's "judge" implies both the contempt of the nations as well as the impotence of Judah's ruler to respond. In the New Year festival *(akitu)* that was practiced in both Assyria and Babylon, the priest slapped the king on the cheek in a ritual that led to the king claiming he was innocent of injustice.

5:2. Bethlehem. The double place name Bethlehem Ephrathah reflects a tribal distinction within the Bethlehem community and also reinforces the tie to David's family (see comments on Ruth 1:1; 1 Sam 16:4; 17:12). Linking the future messianic king to the origins of David's household rather than to Jerusalem recalls how David was chosen directly by Yahweh as king and breaks with the hereditary succession pattern. This suggests the expectation of a new David.

5:2. ruler with origins from ancient times. Most of the Neo-Assyrian kings claimed that their kingship had been ordered by the gods from days of yore. Ashurbanipal claimed to have been created by Ashur and Ninlil and proclaimed king since the days of yore by Ashur and Sin, created for kingship in the womb of his mother.

5:5. Assyrian invasion. The Assyrians invaded Judah in 713 (though the major objective of the campaign was Philistia) and in 701 under Sennacherib. This text more likely discusses the latter invasion. For detailed information see the sidebar in 2 Chronicles 32. Shepherds usually refer to kings, so the seven/eight may refer to the coalition that is expected to be organized against the invasion. Sennacherib's inscriptions mention Sidon, Ashkelon and Ekron (with help from Egypt and Nubia) as being fought and conquered. Other city-states and territories submitted and paid tribute (Arvad and Byblos in the north, and Ashdod, Ammon, Moab and Edom in the south). It is unclear how many of these may have actually been part of the anti-Assyrian coalition.

5:6. land of Nimrod. Nimrod, the "mighty hunter before the LORD," only appears in Genesis 10:8-11 (see comment there), in the period

before the flood. There he is identified as the founder of many Mesopotamian cities, including Babylon and Nineveh, so he appropriately represents any Mesopotamian empire.

5:12. witchcraft. Literally thousands of texts have been uncovered that deal with magic, including incantations that help alleviate the pain of a toothache, help a baby that is stuck in the womb and help a mother who was barren. It appears that the common person hired an incantation priest for even the most mundane problem. The priest then came and recited a spell to either exorcise a problematic demon or other divine irritant. Certainly then they would resort to incantation priests to try to avoid disasters that were either portended or threatened. Incantations were intended to magically bind the supernatural powers that posed a threat. Magical and divinatory practices were common in Mesopotamia and Egypt, where exorcists, diviners and magicians were fixtures at court, interpreting omens and performing rituals. In addition to these professional practitioners, there were sorcerers who performed malevolent forms of magic. The biblical text outlaws both, since their work invoked deities other than Yahweh and attempted to manipulate the divine.

5:13. sacred stones. Standing stones or *maṣṣebot* were apparently a common feature of Canaanite religion and also appear as memorials in a number Israelite covenantal contexts (see Ex 24:3-8; Josh 24:25-27). Their association with Asherah, Baal and other Canaanite deities are the basis for their being condemned as a rival and threat to Yahweh worship. Archaeologists have discovered sacred stones at Gezer, Shechem, Dan, Hazor and Arad. In the latter three cases they are clearly within a sacred precinct and part of the cultic practices at these sites. The Hazor stones include incised representations of upraised arms and a sun disk.

5:14. Asherah poles. Asherah can be either the name of a fertility goddess or the name of a cult object (as here). The goddess was popular in the religious deviations in Israel and was sometimes considered a consort of Yahweh. An indication of this belief is found in the inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom. In Canaanite mythology she was the consort of the chief god, El. She appears in Mesopotamian literature as early as the eighteenth century, where she is consort of the Amorite god Amurru. The cult symbol may or may not have born a representation of the deity on it. The pole may represent an artificial tree, since Asherah is often associated with sacred groves. Sometimes the cult object can be made or built, while on other occasions it is planted. We have little information of the function of these poles in ritual practice. The writer of Kings points to the veneration of Asherah poles as one of several reasons for Assyria's conquest of Israel (see comment on 2 Kings 17:10). The reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah both attempted to outlaw these images sacred to the Canaanite goddess Asherah.

6:1-16

God's Lawsuit

6:1-2. court case of covenant violation. Using treaty formulas and terminology from ancient Near Eastern treaties, such as that negotiated between Rameses II and Hattusilis III, the *rib*-pattern or covenant lawsuit is found in most of the Hebrew prophets (see Is 1:2-4; Jer 2:4-9). As in this case, all of creation is called to witness Israel's violation of the covenant with Yahweh (see comment on Is 1:2), and a judgment is declared justifying the punishment of God's covenant partner.

6:5. Balak/Balaam. The prophet calls to mind for his audience the famous incident when a foreign nation and a renowned seer are thwarted. Instead of the requested curse, a blessing is pronounced over Israel. In Numbers 22:6 Balaam is said to be a man whose blessings and curses are effective. He was from the region of upper Mesopotamia, near Carchemish, and had an international reputation as a true prophet. Balak was the king of Moab at the time of the Exodus. His interest in Balaam seems to be based on his ability to invoke blessings or curses—no matter which god he called upon. In 1967, a Dutch archaeological expedition, led by H. J. Franken, discovered some inscribed pieces of plaster at a site in Jordan known as Deir 'Allah. Apparently written in Aramaic, the fragments date to about 850 B.C., and they mention Balaam son of Beor, the same figure described as a "seer" in Numbers 22—24. Although the text is very fragmentary, with many breaks and uncertain words, it can be established that (1) Balaam was a seer, (2) he received a divine message during the night, and (3) his message was not what his neighbors expected to hear. Whether this text refers to the events described in the Bible is problematic, but it does establish a nonbiblical tradition, current just a century before Micah, of a prophet named Balaam.

6:5. Shittim to Gilgal. See the comments on Joshua 2:1 and 4:19. Shittim was Joshua's camp east of the Jordan River, and Gilgal was the place where the Israelites miraculously

crossed the Jordan and established a base camp from which to begin the conquest. An abbreviated itinerary such as this is typical of Mesopotamian royal annals that include the list of cities along the victorious trek of the king.

6:6. year-old calves. Yearling animals would have been more valuable than newborn ones. Thus to offer a year-old calf as a burnt offering would be real financial sacrifice and would represent a major ritual of purification or initiation. At the heart of this practice, however, is a polemic against the formulaic religious rituals of Mesopotamia and Egypt in which the process transcends the meaning. The prophet tries to establish exactly what Yahweh requires and like Samuel (see comment on 1 Sam 15:22) determines it is obedience and love, not simply going through the motions of making sacrifices.

6:7. hyperbole. There is a steady escalation of the size and precious nature of the offerings listed by Micah. Only Solomon could offer thousands of sacrificial animals (1 Kings 8:63). Oil was used for libations (see comment on Lev 14:15). Human sacrifice was abhorred by the Israelites, seeing it as a statute of Canaanite and Phoenician religious practice (see comment on Gen 22:1-2). In fact, while Yahweh had a claim on the first-born son of every family, the Law required them to redeem the sons and substitute animal sacrifice (see comment on Num 3:12-13). God was not asking to be appeased through extravagant gifts. The most extravagant offering they could give him would be their obedience.

6:10. ill-gotten treasures. Micah condemns corrupt merchants who cheat their customers to enrich themselves. While these practices were to be condemned whenever they occurred, it would be particularly harmful during times of war when profiteers would take advantage of shortages to raise prices (2 Kings 6:25). This is also a theme developed by Amos (8:5-6) and Hosea (12:7-8). There are also a series of fair business practice laws in the Code of Hammurabi and the Laws of Eshnunna which set prices and establish standards of behavior.

6:10. short ephah. Just as Amos criticizes dishonest merchants who make the ephah "small" and the shekel "great" (Amos 8:5), Micah also cautions them against cheating their customers with a false measure of grain. The ephah and the hin were used as the primary dry and liquid measures and were equal to half a bushel or one gallon (Lev 19:36). One of the offenses listed in the *Shurpu* incantations was buying by a large measure and selling by a small one.

6:11. dishonest scales/false weights. A just society was one in which the government standardized and guaranteed honest weights and measures. The prologue to the law code of the Ur III king Ur-Nammu (c. 2100) includes a list of the measures he had taken to insure justice and truth throughout his realm. This included the standardization of all the copper and stone weights used in commerce. The Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope* warns against tampering with scales or the weights used for buying and selling. In a Babylonian Hymn to Shamash, Shamash as the god of justice will punish the merchant who uses deceptive practices with regard to the scales or the weights. The fact that Micah complains of false weights indicates a lawless period without strong government or a concern for covenant obligation (see Prov 11:1; 20:23).

6:14-15. punishment. These curses of infertility and loss are similar in form to those found in the Egyptian execration texts and in coffin texts found in tombs. They represent Yahweh's justice against the covenant violations of Israel (see the set of curses in Deut 28:15-44). Several other prophets also use this form of "futility" curse (threatening lack of success in a course of action: Hos 4:10; Zeph 1:13).

6:16. statutes of Omri. Like the "sins of Jeroboam" that are so often invoked as the height of evil by a king (2 Kings 13:2, 11), the names of Omri and Ahab also serve as labels for monarchs guilty of idolatry (for the crimes of Ahab see comment on 1 Kings 18:4). The dynasty of Omri had come to an end with the death of Zechariah in 753 just a generation earlier than Micah.

7:1-20

From Ruin to Restoration

7:1. agriculture reference. According to the Gezer Almanac, an inscription dated to around 925 B.C., the gathering of summer fruit was the last harvest of the year, taking place in late August and September. This would be the second crop of figs (the first ripening in June), and this fruit would be dried for consumption through the winter months (see Is 16:9; Jer 48:32). Once it had been harvested and the gleaners had taken all that remained, no further fruit could be expected for many months.

7:2. hunting with a net. Fowling and fishing were the common man's form of hunting since they required only nets and traps. Egyptian tomb paintings depict hunting birds with a net (see Prov 1:17) and the an-

tiquity of the net is to be found in the Sumerian word for hunting that is an ideogram in the shape of a net. Isaiah 51:20 describes using a net, possibly a corral of nets, to hunt antelopes that may have been driven into the trap by a line of beaters. It is truly a lawless time when every man is both hunter and hunted (see Ps 10:9).

7:14. geography. Bashan and Gilead are fertile regions lying east of the Jordan River. They had originally been part of the division of the land (see the comment on Josh 13:24-29 and 13:30-31 for Gad's and Manasseh's assignment) but were lost to Assyria during the eighth century. The expectation here is that in the day of Yahweh's triumph all the lost territories would be restored to Israel (see Jer 50:19).

7:17. snake licking dust. Just as the serpent was cursed in the garden of Eden to eat dust (see comment on Gen 3:14), the enemy nations will also be humbled (see Ps 72:9). Since foreign nations are often depicted as serpents (Is 14:29; Jer 8:17), this may be a further condemnation of the use of snakes as fertility symbols and deities in Mesopotamian and Egyptian religious art. In the Amarna texts, eating dirt or dust is a metaphor for suffering defeat.

7:19. treading sins underfoot. Yahweh's forgiveness of Israel allows a conquest of sin in much the same way that a monarch triumphs over his enemy, treading him underfoot or placing his foot on his neck (see comments on Jos 10:24; Ps 60:12). Similar images of the activities of "Divine Warrior" gods are found in Anat slaughtering her enemies in Ugaritic epic and the military exploits of the Babylonian god Marduk and the Hittite god Teshub.

NAHUM

1:1. Nineveh. This oracle against the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh most likely dates to the period between 663 B.C. (the date that the Egyptian city of Thebes is captured by the Assyrians—Nahum 3:8) and the fall of the city to a combined army of Babylonians and Medes in 612 B.C. Nineveh, on the east bank of the Tigris River (ancient Kuyunjik and modern Mosul), was about six hundred miles upriver from the Persian Gulf and just over 250 miles from Babylon. It functioned as one of the major cities of Assyria for much of its history—serving the Old Akkadian, Amorite and Mitanni dynasties prior to the establishment of the Middle Assyrian kingdom in the mid-fourteenth century B.C. At the height of this expanding empire's power, in the reign of Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.), it became Assyria's capital. Excavation of its palaces has revealed stone reliefs of the invasion and ransacking of Judah in 701. The library of its last great king, Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.) has provided scholars with copies of much of ancient Mesopotamia's literature and scientific works.

1:1. Assyrian history of this period. The last great Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, ruled from 668 to at least 635, when it is believed that he abdicated. It appears that he does not die until 627. After his reign, Assyrian history becomes confused, and it is sometimes difficult to determine who is in charge, though the two main rulers were Ashur-Etil-Ilani and Sin-Sharra-Ishkun. During Ashurbanipal's reign, most of Syria-Palestine passively accepted Assyrian rule (though Tyre presented continual difficulties). Manasseh of Judah was, for the most part, a cooperative vassal. However, from 652 to 648 a rebellion was led by Ashurbanipal's brother, Shamash-Shum-Ukkin (appointed king of Babylon), who appears to have won the support of Manasseh (see comment on 2 Chron 33:11). Babylon's last revolt came in 626, when the Chaldean Nabopolassar declared himself king and established a dynastic line that became the Neo-Babylonian empire. These Babylonians, allied with the Medes, brought the fall of the Assyrian empire, starting with the overthrow of Ashur in 614, then Nineveh in 612, Haran in 610 and, finally, Carchemish in 605.

1:1. Elkoshite. The place or clan name Elkosh only appears in the book of Nahum. No exact location for Nahum's village has been established. Jerome places it in the Galilee (possibly el-Kauzeh or Capernaum) and somewhat later traditions locate it either near Nineveh or in Syria. None of these suggestions currently have sufficient evidence to make a positive identification.

1:2. jealous deity. The theme of Yahweh as a jealous god appears first in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:5), is repeated in Joshua's

covenant renewal oration following the conquest (Josh 24:19) and is reflected again in Ezekiel's vision of the "image of jealousy" (Ezek 8:5), which blocks his entrance into Jerusalem's temple. The word represents a determination to defend zealously and aggressively that which rightfully belongs to him from those who would lay claim to it. This attribute of God is designed to prevent either comparison with other gods or any subordination of Yahweh in worship or ritual to any other deities. Failure to acknowledge Yahweh's sole position is justification for vengeance.

1:3. whirlwind and storm. As in Habakkuk 3:10, Yahweh is portrayed as master of the storm and controller of the winds that can bring both life and destruction. This type of figurative language, demonstrating God's majesty, is also found in the theophany in Job 38:1 (also see comment on 1 Kings 19:11-13) and is a common feature in ancient Near Eastern epic poetry. For example, in the Ugaritic *Epic of Baal and Anath* the god Baal is described as the "Rider of the Clouds," and his "voice" is the sound and fury of thunder and lightening. Similarly, in the Babylonian story of creation, *Enuma Elish,* the storm god Marduk defeats the primordial goddess of watery chaos, Tiamat, through his control of the winds and his use of the lightning.

1:4. drying bodies of water. The image of God controlling the power of the rivers and seas is a common one in the ancient world (compare Jesus' stilling the waters of the Sea of Galilee in Mk 4:39). The most potent Old Testament example is the parting of the Red Sea. The Ugaritic cycle of Baal stories portrays the storm god in a monumental contest for supremacy with the god Yamm, the sea—an image whose origin may have sprung from observation of the stormy seas off the Mediterranean coast near Ugarit. Yahweh's "rebuking" the waters is also mentioned in Isaiah 50:2 and Psalm 104:7. In each passage the majesty of God over the forces of nature is made clear, as is the ability to impose drought on generally fertile areas.

1:4. Bashan and Carmel. Among the most lush and fertile areas within the region of Syria-Palestine was Bashan and the Carmel range of hills. This comprised the northern portion of the Transjordanian plateau, east of the Sea of Galilee, and the hill country extending northwest toward the Bay of Acco on the Mediterranean coast, just south of Lebanon. Both Carmel and Bashan were known for their pastures and cattle grazing. To see them transformed into blighted and drought-stricken lands would have been a reversal of their traditional role as places blessed with richness and plenty. This type of prophetic speech is part of the "world turned upside down" theme found outside the Bible in the prophecies of Balaam (Deir 'Alla inscriptions) and the visions of Neferti (Old Kingdom Egypt).

1:5. effects of theophany. The thunderous effects of Yahweh's voice and presence resemble the earth-shattering shocks of an earthquake. However, the references to the hill country and the control over the forces of the storm suggest that this theophany is modeled after the frighteningly close thunder, lightning and strong winds characteristic of a mountain storm. A similar example of this imagery is found in Psalm 29:3-9, where "voice of the Lord" shatters the mighty cedars of Lebanon and makes "Lebanon skip like a calf." Ugaritic (Baal cycle) and Hittite myth *(Song of Ullikummis)* both describe the use of winds and lightning by the storm god in much the same frightening manner.

1:13. yoke and shackles. Prophetic speech often refers to the burden of political domination as a yoke or shackles. In the Amarna letters the rulers of the Canaanite city-states speak to Pharaoh of how they willingly placed themselves in the yoke to serve Egypt faithfully. Akkadian wisdom literature indicates that bearing a god's yoke is desirable because of the fringe benefits. In the *Atrahasis Epic* the gods find the yoke of Enlil unbearable and so rebel. Assyrian inscriptions describe their conquest of other lands as imposing the yoke of the god Ashur on the people, and rebellion was portrayed as throwing off the yoke. The prophet is thus using an image familiar throughout the ancient Near East.

1:14-15. history of Nineveh after its fall. According to the Babylonian Chronicle, Nineveh was destroyed by the combined Medean and Chaldean (Babylonian) army led by Nabopolassar (625-605 B.C.) in the spring of 612 B.C. after a three-month siege. Ritual and actual desecration of the site occurred with the carrying of its ashes back to Babylon. The reported inundation of the city (based on classical sources, Diodorus Siculus and Xenophon) would have probably involved the damming of the Khosr River which flowed between the two citadels of Nineveh on the east bank of the Tigris River (Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus). The city never reached its former heights again, although it was rebuilt and there are Hellenistic, Parthian and Roman remains at the site.

1:14. Assyrian temples and gods. From the time of Shamshi-Adad I (c. 1813-1781 B.C.) the

principal gods of Assyria's pantheon were the king of the gods, Ashur, and Ishtar, the goddess of love and war. Other gods included Ninurta (warfare and hunting), Adad (storm god), Sin (moon god) and Shamash (sun god), as well as many lesser deities, and each had a cult center and attendant priestly community. These temples were heavily subsidized by the grants made to them by the monarchy, based on the looting of neighboring countries during nearly continuous periods of warfare. Much of their rituals and religious festivals were borrowed from older Sumerian and Babylonian forms. Nearly every Assyrian royal annal describing military campaigns includes the statement "by the command of Ashur" as the justification for war. The "Banquet Stele" of Ashurnasirpal II's palace at Nimrud, which chronicles his military victories, makes it clear that the gods of Assyria were residents of his palace. Similarly, the text bands that decorated the walls of the palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad include the invitation for "Ashur, father of the gods, the great lord, and Ishtar, who dwell in Assyria" to take up residence there. Sennacherib moved the Assyrian capital to Nineveh and rebuilt the huge temple complex to the goddess Ishtar as part of his building campaign to create restored cult centers for the gods and a "palace without rival." It was normal procedure in the ancient world to destroy the images of the gods and desecrate the temples of defeated cities. The images would be toppled over and disfigured, with heads and limbs cut off.

1:15. Judah's history under Assyrian power. From around 734 B.C. until the fall of Nineveh in 612, Judah was a vassal state within the Assyrian empire. King Ahaz paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III and stayed out of the plots to gain independence that led to the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel and the devastation of many of the other neighboring states. Hezekiah did attempt to assert some measure of independence (cleansing the temple, closing the local high places), but that led to an invasion of Judah by Sennacherib (see comments on 2 Kings 18), the destruction of many towns like Lachish, the deportation of some of the population and a siege of Jerusalem that impoverished the nation. The long reign of Manasseh (see comments on 2 Chron 33) was marked by a complete submission to Assyrian control. In addition to a wide range of stipulations designed to promote and demonstrate political loyalty, Esarhaddon's vassal treaties required respect for the god Ashur as king of the gods and as their own god. Manasseh's cooperation allowed for a period of peace and rebuilding, but represented a political and theological compromise that marked him, in the eyes of the biblical writers, as the worst of kings. It is only the political chaos following the death of Assyria's last great king, Ashurbanipal (see comment on 1:1), that allows Judah to temporarily assert its freedom under King Josiah.

2:3. soldiers wearing red. Not yet bloodied in battle, the red uniforms of the soldiers may indicate they are a professionally equipped and well-trained fighting unit (see the blue-clad soldiers in Ezek 23:6). In Greece the Spartans were known for wearing red tunics under their armor as an indicator of membership in their ranks and as a further effort to intimidate their opponents. In Assyria it was common rhetoric to speak of cities and countrysides dyed red with the blood of enemies, and the army marching through the blood of their enemies. Additionally, Isaiah 9:5 refers to a practice of warriors rolling their garments in blood. It would be logical, therefore, that armies would choose to wear red tunics to suggest that they were covered with the blood of their enemies. Paintings at Til-Barsip show red uniforms, and classical sources describe soldiers of this period as wearing red or purple tunics.

2:3. metal on chariots. Metal ornamentation of chariot bodies to strengthen them for plowing through ranks of infantry is attested in the Judges period, and examples of decorated chariots have been found in Assyrian reliefs and Egyptian tomb paintings.

2:5. protective shield. This word occurs only here in the Bible and is possibly a term borrowed from the Akkadian language used by the Assyrians and their besiegers. In Akkadian the term refers to a plug or something used to stop something up. Since the next verse speaks of manipulating the sluice gates in an attempt to bring about the collapse of the palace, a plug may have been used to block where the water would usually have flowed through the city walls after the river had been dammed up at the reservoir created by Sennacherib about two miles up the Khosr River.

2:6. river gates at Nineveh. Sennacherib had created an elaborate network of canals and sluice gates to control the waters of the Khosr River and to provide irrigation channels to the city of Nineveh and its surrounding farm land. Though the language of this section is difficult, one scenario would involve damming the river, then scrambling to the walls while the dam held in order to position some sort of plug where the water entered the city. When the gates were opened, the wall of wa-

ter would rush at the walls and effect their collapse. The Babylonian Chronicle does not mention the use of flood waters as one of the methods of conquering the city, though classical sources do. Archaeological evidence at Nineveh suggests a great conflagration but gives no indication of flood damage.

2:6. palace of Nineveh. The "palace without rival," or the "Southwest Palace" as it is known today, was built by Sennacherib between 703 and 691 and consists of a huge complex of interconnected rooms and courts (estimated at 1635 by 786 feet, an area large enough to fit twenty-five football fields). Those areas closest to the throne room were decorated with carved limestone facades, massive statuary (winged bulls and fish-scaled giants), and intricate reliefs of military campaigns, while the outer courts, with their more utilitarian functions, were devoid of elaborate design or statues. The palace has been excavated over a period of 120 years, starting in the 1850s by A. H. Layard, and is still not completely uncovered. Its layout was dictated by the preexisting Ishtar temple and ziggurat on the highest point of Kuyunjik and by the Khosr and Tigris Rivers to the southeast and west.

2:11-12. lion metaphor. The iconography of the Assyrian gods depicts Ishtar, the patron goddess of Nineveh, as accompanied by a lion, and the sun god Shamash is often portrayed as a winged lion. Assyrian kings, like Esarhaddon (680-669), described themselves like lions in their rage and fierceness in battle. Here, however, the lions who had so proudly taken whatever they wanted for themselves and their cubs are cowering and no longer in command. In this way the prophet throws one of Assyria's favorite metaphors back in its face as a taunt.

3:4. offenses of Nineveh. The actual events behind the crimes of Nineveh mentioned here are unknown. However, this harlotry and sorcery are both well-known metaphors used to depict a city or nation that victimizes others, for both witch and prostitute exert their power over the weak, vulnerable or unwary. Other instances of this seductive harlot image include Babylon in Revelation 18:3 and Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16:15-22 and 23:2-8. There may also be a reference here to Ishtar, the patron goddess of Nineveh, whose rituals and sacred stories often contained explicit sexual activity. It may actually be referring to the web of political intrigue created by the Assyrians as they expanded their control over much of the ancient Near East. The taunting of Hezekiah by Sennacherib's representative, the Rabshekah (Is 36), includes reference to the maneuvering for power by Egypt and Assyria (Is 36:4-6), while the smaller states were drawn into treaties and vassalage that impoverished and destroyed them. Certainly the economic exploitation of the natural resources of Syro-Palestine by the Assyrians would also fit Nahum's list of charges against Nineveh (see Rev 18:14-17).

3:7. no one to comfort. One scholar (Becking), noticing the similarity between a number of the judgment pronouncements in Nahum and the curses in vassal treaties, recognized in this line the Assyrian curse that the dead would have no one to care for their spirit by pouring out libations.

3:8. Thebes. As he taunts Nineveh, Nahum reminds them that another heavily fortified city, Thebes (known as "No Amon" to the Greeks and thus named in the Hebrew), had not been able to withstand the Assyrian armies of Ashurbanipal in 663. The Kushite ruler, Tantamani, had taken control of Thebes and Memphis in 664, drawing a response from the Assyrians, who supported the current northern regime of Necho (whom Tantamani executed). Under the Assyrian onslaught, Tantamani briefly made a stand at Thebes before abandoning it to the invaders and fleeing to Napata. Thebes, located about 325 miles south of Memphis (which is about 15 miles south of Cairo) on the east bank of the Nile River, had, like Nineveh, an elaborate system of moats and other defenses that gave the illusion of invulnerability. Also like Nineveh, it was a sacred city, dedicated to the god Amon and containing the magnificent temples of the Karnak complex.

3:9. Cush, Egypt, Put, Libya as allies. At the time that Thebes was conquered by the Assyrians, it and Egypt was being ruled by a Cushite (Nubian) dynasty (Twenty-Fifth Dynasty). The capital of Nubia was Napata (between the third and fourth cataract of the Nile, eight hundred miles south of Thebes, in modern Sudan). Ancient Libya was mostly along the coast west of Alexandria but included the long expanse of desert west of the Nile Valley. Put is more difficult. The most likely conclusion is that Put is an alternate name for Libya and that together they refer to the area to the west of ancient Egypt represented by the modern state of Libya.

3:10. lots cast for nobles. As the leaders of Egypt were forced to surrender, they were distributed as slaves among the Assyrian commanders along with the rest of the loot. Provision for the division of spoils, including the casting of lots, is also found in Homer's *Il-*

iad, the Mari texts and Joel 3:3.

3:14. preparation for siege. Fortifications for cities in the ancient Near East consisted of earthen ramparts, a sloping glacis, towered gates and walls (sometimes twenty-five to thirty feet thick) constructed on a stone foundation and made of sun-baked mud bricks. However, wind and rain eroded these walls, and they had to be constantly repaired. Thousands of bricks were needed and countless hours were spent making them. Many royal annals and inscriptions mention the repair or construction of city walls as a major accomplishment, and this would have been even more important in anticipation of a siege. Nineveh's city walls, constructed by Sennacherib, ranged approximately seven and a half miles in circumference. It was also necessary to insure an adequate water supply during a siege. Nineveh's water came mainly from the river and the system of aqueducts connected to it, but that supply could be compromised by the enemy outside the walls. The drawing of water here would refer to the activity of filling huge cisterns within the city.

3:15-17. locust metaphor. Swarms of locust have periodically plagued the Near East throughout its history. They originate in desert and steppe regions as unwinged grasshoppers, and as their population grows they transform themselves into winged locusts whose numbers can literally blot out the sun as they eat, mate and infest the area with huge quantities of their young (see comment on Ex 10:1-20).

3:17. guards and officials. Nahum is using well-known Assyrian titles here referring to courtiers and scribes (probably a more general title for administrative officials). Records of the period show that some of the administration led by Ashur-Uballit II managed to flee west to Haran when the fall of Nineveh was imminent.

3:18. identity of king of Assyria. Since the date of the book of Nahum is uncertain, it is not possible to determine which king of Assyria is referred to in this final oracle. Most scholars would say that the earliest date would be shortly after the capture of Thebes in 663 and the terminus date would be the actual fall of Nineveh in 612. It may be Nahum was written as encouragement to the people of Judah to revolt as the Assyrian empire began to break apart after Ashurbanipal's death in 627. The reference may alternatively be to Sin-Shar-Ishkun, who was the Assyrian king when Nineveh fell.

HABAKKUK

1:1-11
First Complaint and Response

1:2-4. complaints about social injustice. Although Habakkuk is speaking to the people of Judah in the late seventh century B.C., his statements regarding social injustice are quite similar to those made by Amos to the northern kingdom of Israel in the eighth century. Both prophets condemn the self-indulgent and corrupt leaders of their time (see the sidebar on Amos 2:6-8 dealing with economic and social conditions in the eighth century and the comment on Amos 5:12 on the corrupt justice system). Accusations of social injustice are standard fare in Egyptian wisdom literature. The writers attempt to hold the leadership of the nation to a very high standard, and they feel it is essential for the survival of their culture that corruption be exposed and dealt with by the highest powers. Thus in the period of the Middle Kingdom (2050-1800) a *Dispute over Suicide* was composed to expose those social ills that had nearly destroyed Egyptian society during the just completed First Intermediate Period (2258-2050). The man who asks for the release of death through suicide complains that "everyone is a thief," "hearts are covetous," and "crimes outrage no one." Also during this time of instability, the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* speaks of the need for Egypt's administrators to check the actions of lawmakers who "approve of robbery" and inspectors who "condone corruption." He calls on judges not to accept bribes or to countenance perjury. In the ancient Near East justice was the most basic and necessary characteristic of society. It was the job of the king to maintain justice. To an even greater extent, the covenant required of Israel that justice be strictly maintained on both a personal and societal level.

1:6. chronology. If Habakkuk's prophecy is

to be understood as utterly amazing and unbelievable (1:5), it must have been given before Babylon was sweeping across the earth. It therefore seems necessary to conclude that the book should be dated prior to the Battle of Carchemish in 605. Otherwise, Habakkuk's prediction of Yahweh's "raising up the Babylonians" would have been anticlimatic. The Babylonians only became a significant threat to Judah after 605, and by 597 they had already captured Jerusalem and taken King Jehoiachin as a hostage (see the comments on 2 Kings 24:10-14). Babylon became an independent state in 625 and began its expansionist activities by 620. It is impossible to offer more precision for dating the oracles of Habakkuk.

1:6. Babylonians (Chaldeans). The Chaldeans are first mentioned in Mesopotamian sources in the ninth century B.C. Although related ethnically to the other Aramean tribes of southern Babylonia, they had a distinct tribal structure. As the Assyrian empire began to weaken, Chaldean leaders, including Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar, eventually gained their independence and established the Neo-Babylonian dynasty after 625. Nebuchadnezzar inherited this powerful state in 605, becoming its most famous king. He literally rebuilt the city of Babylon, solidified Babylonian control throughout the Near East and even attacked Egypt (although unsuccessfully). His long reign lasted until 562. He was briefly succeeded by three descendents who reigned a total of six years. The last king of the dynasty of Nabonidus, who had apparently been a high official during Nebuchadnezzar's reign. He reigned until 539, when Babylon was captured by the Medo-Persians under Cyrus the Great.

1:8. Babylonian cavalry. Given the description here of swiftly moving cavalry, it seems most likely that these are spear-carrying horsemen rather than mounted archers. Assyrian reliefs from the palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh show how effectively these mounted soldiers could traverse hills and woodlands. Their sudden appearance would have terrified local villagers. In open country the chariot corps functioned as mounted infantry and archery platforms, serving as a frontal assault force, while the infantry followed them. Mounted bowmen and spear carriers, fighting in pairs for protection, stood on the flanks to protect the army from being taken in the rear and also to bar the escape of enemy soldiers.

1:10. earthen ramps. See comments on Isaiah 29:2 and Jeremiah 32:24; 33:4 for discussion of the use of earthen ramps in siege warfare.

1:12—2:20
Second Complaint and Response

1:12. rock. The metaphor comparing deity to a rock focuses primarily on the issues of protection and shelter. A large rock could provide shade, and caves were sometimes found in rocky areas. This is not a metaphor common in the river cultures of Egypt or Mesopotamia, with their abundance of alluvial plains (see the sidebar on metaphors at the beginning of Psalms). It is possible that the term is more than a metaphor because it appears in personal names in the same place as a divine name would normally appear (for example, Elijah means "Yahweh is my God," so by comparison Elizur [Num 1:5] would mean "Zur [Rock] is my God"). It also occurs in the Amorite and Aramaic personal names from Syria in the position of a divine name.

1:15-16. fishing equipment. At least in royal inscriptions and art, fishing was done with woven baskets rather than individual hooks (see the comments on Ezek 12:13 and Amos 4:2). Naturally, in these instances the point is political, depicting the strength of a ruler who can trap his enemies like fish or birds (see the comment on Hos 5:1) in a net.

2:2. herald running with tablets. The idea of running with a message suggests its urgency or importance. What is unclear is whether the "one who reads the message" is a herald (with NIV) whose task is to run from location to location reading aloud his proclamation, or whether it refers to anyone who reads the message. In the former case the inscribed tablets would be entrusted to a professional. In the latter the inscription would be set up in a public place, and as individuals read it, they would run off to spread the news. Preference lies with the former, since the text here speaks of tablets. Publicly posted inscriptions would usually be on stelae. Professional messengers were a common fixture in royal courts such as those at ancient Mari and Babylon. They were needed as "runners" to carry their lord's commands (see also Jer 36:4 and Baruch's mission as Jeremiah's scribe and messenger).

2:17. Lebanon. According to his royal annals, Nebuchadnezzar ordered his army to construct a road "for the transport of the cedars" of Lebanon. He describes how they "cut through steep mountains, split rocks, [and] opened passages" to build this commercial logging road. This was done in the name of freeing the land of its foreign enemies. However, these trees actually were used to build

his palace and to enhance the temple of Marduk in Babylon. It may be assumed that the workers also hunted the mountainous areas of Lebanon for the food they needed to supplement their own stores.

2:18. image teaching lies. The uselessness of worshiping or consulting idols is once again declared here (see Is 46:7 and Hos 4:12 for other examples). Isaiah applied the phrase used here to a false prophet (Is 9:15), but Habakkuk is referring to the priests who manipulate people by "making the idol speak" or pronounce an oracle. The Babylonian *baru* priests functioned as diviners, interpreting omens, signs and performing rituals that were designed to solicit an answer from the gods.

2:19. bringing wood, stone to life. See the comment on Isaiah 44:17-18. The ritual of "opening the mouth" was employed in Babylon to transform a wooden image, decorated with gold and precious jewels, into the physical embodiment of the god. The incantations of the priests proclaimed to the god, "From this time forth you shall go before your father Ea." Ceremonial processions then take place, the mouth of the image is washed repeatedly (fourteen times in all), and food and drink are presented. After a evening of sacrifices the priest opens the eyes of the image with a wand of tamarisk, and then the "god" is enthroned within the temple and dressed with the insignia of office.

3:1-19

Habakkuk's Prayer

3:1. *shigionoth.* This verse serves as a superscription to the third chapter and functions in the much the same way that superscriptions or rubrics do in the Psalms. *Shigionoth* appears in the singular form in Psalm 7:1. Presumably it refers to a particular kind of song. If a linguistic connection can be made with Akkadian *shigu,* it possibly refers to a lament. However, its exact meaning is still unknown. For this and other musical terms, see the sidebar on musical terms in Psalms.

3:2-19. Habakkuk's psalm and mythology. As can be seen frequently in Isaiah and Ezekiel, the prophets often make use of familiar mythological imagery in order to convey their message. Two of the ways that this can take place are (1) history can be told using mythological motifs; and (2) mythological tales can utilized with historical elements substituted in. The first is illustrated when the exodus and, especially, the crossing of the Red Sea are told using the mythological motif of divine combat with the sea (see comment on Ex 15:3). The second can be seen in Isaiah 27 or Ezekiel 32, where familiar myths are turned into oracles against real nations in real historical contexts. Habakkuk uses both of these techniques as he interweaves elements from Babylonian and Canaanite mythology into this hymn. The general flow of this chapter shows some similarity to the Babylonian *Enuma Elish.* Marduk's praise is sung, he acquires weapons (similar list), he rides on the storm with assistants by his side, and the enemy is split open and crushed. This sequence is not unique to *Enuma Elish* but shows the intention of Habakkuk to adopt these well-known motifs and transform them to new use.

3:3. Teman. See the comments on Obadiah 9 and Jeremiah 49:7 for this site that is mentioned in the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscription and either may be a city or a portion of the country of Edom.

3:3. Mount Paran. The area or "wilderness" of Paran is generally considered to be a region south of Palestine, but there is a difference of opinion on whether it lies westward into the Sinai peninsula or to the east of the Arabah in the vicinity of Teman (see the comments Num 10:12 and Deut 33:2).

3:3. sun metaphor. Hymns to the Babylonian sun god, Shamash, use similar terminology. One incantation refers to Shamash shining forth and filling the lands with his heavenly splendor. Yahweh is occasionally praised in terms that are also used in sun worship and in some periods was probably misconstrued as a sun god (see comment on 2 Kings 23:11). Official evidence of sun worship in ancient Israel seems to be tied primarily to the reign of Manasseh. The horses and chariots of the sun that he set up are destroyed by Josiah as he attempts to cleanse the temple complex of foreign religious influence (see comment on 2 Kings 23:11). Place names such as Beth Shemesh, Ein Shemesh, and Mount Heres (Josh 15:7; Judg 1:35) also attest to the popularity of sun worship.

3:4. rays in his hand. A typical pose of divine warrior storm gods in the ancient Near East is with bolts of lightning in an upraised hand.

3:5. plague, pestilence. The terms are personified here as associates of Yahweh in battle. The Hebrew word translated "pestilence," *resheph,* is the name of the Canaanite god of the plague. He is well known from Ugaritic, Phoenician (identified with Apollo) and Aramaic inscriptions. He is also associated with the Babylonian Nergal, who was connected with plague. In ancient Near Eastern mythology the gods going into battle are often accompanied by two associates.

3:7. tents of Cushan. This ethnic term, probably of a nomadic tribal group, appears nowhere else in the Bible. Since it appears in parallelism with Midian, it may be presumed that their territory was also in the southern steppe. They may in fact have been a subgroup of the Midianites.
3:7. dwellings of Midian. For Midian and the Midianites, see the comments on Exodus 2:15 and Numbers 22:4-7. Habakkuk here predicts the route of the divine warrior from his holy mountain to attack the Babylonians. Apparently this will startle but not harm the inhabitants of the southern regions.
3:8. conflict with rivers/sea. In Canaanite literature from Ugarit there is a lengthy myth devoted to the war between Baal and Yamm (Sea) and his associate Nahar (River), who represent the forces of chaos and destruction. Habakkuk indicates that Yahweh's anger was not directed against these mythological foes, but against the enemies of his people (v. 13).
3:9-11. cosmic effects of divine warrior. The idea of a divine warrior who leads his people into battle is well developed in the Israelite conquest narrative (see the comments on Josh 2:11 and 3:17). It also appears in the Moabite inscription of King Mesha and in the prophets (see the comment on Jer 32:21). A particularly spectacular example is found in the "Song of the War of Yahweh" in Isaiah 34 (see the comments on Is 34:4). It may be compared as well with a portion of the Ugaritic Baal epic in which that deity's approach is marked by the "withering of the heavens" and whose voice is described in the Aqhat legend as "double deep," a thundering exclamation that presages the rains. F. M. Cross cites an El Amarna text in which a subject prince, Abimilki of Tyre, refers to Pharaoh Akhenaten as the one "who utters his (battle) cry in the heavens, like Haddu so that the whole land shakes at his cry." A Mesopotamian lamentation of the first millennium uses terminology for divine judgment similar to Habakkuk when it speaks of the heavens rumbling, the earth shaking, the sun lying at the horizon, the moon stopping in the sky and evil storms sweeping through the land. For more specific information concerning the movements of the heavenly bodies connected to warfare see comments on Joshua 10:12-13.

ZEPHANIAH

1:1-13
Judgment Against Judah

1:1. chronology and pedigree. This superscription dates the book to the reign of Josiah (640-609 B.C.). Since Josiah came to the throne as a small boy, a regency made up of priests and court officials ruled Judah until 622 (see 2 Kings 22:1). Because there were several persons with the name Zephaniah in the period just prior to and during the exile, adding a short genealogy helped indicate which person was responsible for the oracles (compare a similar practice of attaching the prophet's name to a list of prophecies in the Mari texts and the Assyrian Annals of Esarhaddon).
1:4. Josiah's reform. The cultic abuses and idolatry described in this verse anticipate the actions taken by Josiah after 622 B.C. (see the comments on 2 Chron 34). When Josiah was able to effect his cleansing of the temple and elimination of foreign gods, idols and priests, he did it in the name of a restoration of the covenant's provisions (see 2 Kings 23:24-25). A similar reform had been carried out by Hezekiah about eighty years earlier (2 Kings 18:4). In both instances the apparent weakness of the Assyrian monarchy contributed to attempts by small kingdoms like Judah to assert their political and religious independence.
1:5. worshiping starry host. Worship of the starry hosts refers to the celestial gods (sun god, moon god and Venus particularly; in Babylonia, Shamash, Sin and Ishtar respectively), who were primary in most ancient religions. Controlling calendar and time, seasons and weather, they were viewed as the most powerful of gods. They provided signs by which omens were read, and they looked down on all. By the end of the second millennium a major compilation of celestial omens, the seventy tablets of the work known as *Enuma Anu Enlil,* had been compiled and was consulted for nearly a thousand years. Stamp seals from Israel in this period show that astral deities were very popular. There were many constellations recognized by the Mesopotamian astrologers (many, though not all, the same we recognize today, transmitted through the Greeks), but the zodiac was not

yet known. For more information see comment on 2 Chronicles 33:5.

1:5. Molech. See the comments on Leviticus 18:21 and Deuteronomy 18:10. Many consider Molech to have been a netherworld deity featuring rituals with Canaanite origins focusing on dead ancestors. An eighth-century B.C. Phoenician inscription speaks of sacrifices made to Molech before battle by the Cilicians and their enemies.

1:8. foreign clothes. Since Judah had been under foreign (Assyrian, Egyptian and Babylonian) domination for over a hundred years, it is not surprising that government officials and those who wished to curry favor with their overlords would adopt their clothing styles as well as other cultural traits. Neither Judean nor Babylonian dress of this period is well attested in the inscriptional materials, so detailed comparison is not possible. Differences could have included the articles of clothing that were worn or the style, material, weave or dyes that were used. A later example of the adoption of foreign styles is found in the Hellenistic period, when Jason, the high priest, forced the nobility of Jerusalem to wear a broad-brimmed hat associated with the Greek god Hermes (2 Macc 3:12).

1:9. stepping on threshold. The threshold was typically made of a single stone that spanned the doorway, raised slightly from the level of the floor. Sockets were cut into the outer edges of the threshold on which the gates or door swung. The height of the threshold would prevent the doors from swinging out. Entryways were often considered both sacred and vulnerable. Superstitious belief presumably held that stepping on the threshold would allow the demons that haunted the entryway to gain admission. Similar superstitions have continued in the Near East and the Far East from Syria to Iraq to China, but ancient information concerning this superstition is lacking.

1:10. Fish Gate. Jerusalem had many gates to serve its various quarters. The Fish Gate provided an entrance through the northern wall just to the west of the Tower of Hananel (Neh 12:38-39). Archaeological excavations confirm that it opened upon a ridge leading from the temple enclosure to the Benjamite plateau. Its name probably derives from the presence of a fish market established there by Tyrian merchants (see Neh 3:3).

1:10. New Quarter. This section of Jerusalem was created when Hezekiah built the first defensive wall around the western hills of the city (2 Chron 32:5). Manasseh apparently repaired these walls during his reign (2 Chron 33:14). Avigad's excavations have disclosed a seventh-century wall over 225 feet long and 24 feet thick. It may have surrounded the entire western hill, providing additional protection to the northern section of the city.

1:11. market district. As each district of Jerusalem is called upon in turn to lament, the Mortar or market district in the western section of the city takes up the wail. Based on the Hebrew word *maktesh* (bowl or mortar; see Prov 27:22), it was probably located in one of the folds or depressions within the Tyropoeon Valley and was enclosed within the city walls in the seventh century.

1:14—2:15
Day of the Lord Oracles Against Nations

1:14. Day of the Lord. See sidebar at Joel 2.

2:4. Philistine cities in late seventh century. After Sargon II's and Sennacherib's campaigns of the late eighth century and the capture and destruction of many of the Philistine cities, these sites were then rebuilt by the Assyrians, and several of them (particularly Timnah and Ekron) prospered as centers for olive oil production. Archaeological evidence has identified industrial districts where olive oil was processed and cloth was woven (based on large numbers of loom weights in these levels). There are indications of Egyptian presence in Philistia after the Assyrian empire collapsed (see comment on Ezek 25:15). These cities were then destroyed in 600 B.C. in the campaigns of the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar.

2:8-9. Moab and Ammon in late seventh century. Like all the small kingdoms in Syro-Palestine, Moab and Ammon were vassals of the Assyrians during the eighth and seventh centuries. Evidence of this is found in the mention of four Moabite kings in the Assyrian Annals (ranging from the time of Tiglath-Pileser III to Ashurbanipal). It can be expected that they gained some measure of independence toward the end of the seventh century as chaos reigned in Assyria (see the comment on Ezek 25:8). However, Josephus records that they were subjugated by the Babylonians shortly after the fall of Jerusalem (see the comment on Ezek 25:2).

2:12. Cushites in late seventh century. It is unclear what prompted this oracle against Ethiopia. The Cushites had not ruled Egypt since the supplanting of their dynasty in 664 by the Saite dynast Psammeticus I. While this native Egyptian pharaoh did ally himself with the Assyrians after 616, no specific event or campaign in Palestine is referenced in his or

his successors' inscriptions prior to the 609 campaign of Necho II. There has been some suggestion that this reference to Cush should be understood in relation to Mesopotamia (as is possible in Gen 10:8), since it precedes the oracle on Assyria.

2:13. Assyria in late seventh century. After the death of Ashurbanipal in 627, the disputes among his heirs and potential successors so weakened the Assyrian empire that it swiftly fell apart. This collapse was hastened by two factors. First were the harsh administrative policies. The hatred generated against the Assyrians was further compounded by their use of extreme terror tactics in warfare (see the sidebar on the siege of Lachish in 2 Chron 32:9). The emergence of a Babylonian-Median coalition provided a match for Assyria's army, and by 612 the Assyrian capital at Nineveh had been captured and destroyed (see the comment on Is 13:1). The final step in completely eliminating all vestiges of Assyrian power came at the Battle of Carchemish in 605. Its empire fell to the Egyptians and Neo-Babylonians to divide (see the comment on Is 31:8).

3:1-20
Hope for Jerusalem

3:3. officials as lions. The prophet's analogy between Judah's officials and ravenous lions may be compared to the lament in Psalm 22:12-21, where the sufferer is threatened by roaring lions and calls out for rescue from their open mouths (see also Jer 2:30). In seventh-century Assyrian literature the lions' pit occurs as a metaphor for vicious and antagonistic courtiers of the king.

3:9. purifying lips. Mesopotamian rituals often featured the purification of lips as symbolic of the purification of the person. It was viewed as a prerequisite, especially for diviner priests, before they could appear before the divine council and report what they had witnessed.

3:10. rivers of Cush. As alluded to in 2:12 above, Cush can refer to several different places in the Old Testament, though it most frequently is the designation for the area translations usually render "Ethiopia." This is misleading, for the area Cush refers to is not modern Ethiopia (Abyssinia) but the area along the Nile just south of Egypt, ancient Nubia (in modern Sudan). The boundary between Egypt and Nubia in ancient times was usually either at the first or second cataract of the Nile. It is unlikely that Nubia ever extended much beyond the sixth cataract at Khartoum. This verse would then refer to the region of the Blue and White Niles in Upper Egypt. Alternatively, since no Israelites were known to have been scattered to the region of Nubia, this verse may refer to the rivers of Mesopotamia (see Gen 2:13).

HAGGAI

1:1-15
Call to Build the Temple

1:1. chronology. The use of a precise date to introduce a particular prophetic narrative is common in the postexilic writings. The monarch mentioned here is Darius I, who seized the throne of Persia on September 29, 522 B.C. This followed what had been almost seven months of trouble in the empire, beginning with the revolt by Gaumata on March 11 and his subsequent usurpation of the throne on July 1 of the same year, upon the death of Cambyses. Even after Darius secured the throne, revolts continued, as recorded on the famous Behistun Inscription. The date given in Haggai is August 29, 520.

1:1. Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the heir to the Davidic throne (grandson of Jehoiachin; see comment on 2 Kings 24) and served as governor of Judah under the Persian king Darius I. There was a significant amount of expectation surrounding him that had a messianic flavor to it. Undoubtedly some expected him to set up the promised kingdom and bring freedom from their slavery (to the Persians). While his duties were primarily secular, he is described in Ezra, along with the priest Joshua, as the force behind the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Governing under the auspices of the Persian king, he was responsible for maintaining law and order, and for the collection of taxes. Though Zerubbabel is the last Davidic heir to serve in the role of governor, archaeologists have found a seal of Shelomith (listed as a daughter of

Zerubbabel in 1 Chron 3:19), where she is designated as either a wife or an official of Elnathan, the governor who is thought to have succeeded Zerubbabel.

1:1. Joshua. Joshua was the high priest in the early postexilic period. His grandfather, Seraiah, had been executed by Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:18-21; note that Ezra is also from the line of Seraiah, see 7:1). Judah's heir to the throne, Zerubbabel, served as governor, but since Judah was still under Persian control, there were restrictions on the extent of his control (so as not to compete with the Persian king). Consequently, rule in the community was now divided between the governor and the high priest, giving the priest a more prominent role. Little is known about him except that he was one of the leaders who helped get the temple rebuilt. There are no contemporary extrabiblical references to him.

1:4. paneled houses. The term "paneled" can mean "covered," "roofed," or "paneled," but the point in any case is that it represents the finishing touches. Their homes were not "in process" but were fully appointed, while the temple remained a ruin. The term does not imply luxury or great expense, though paneling can be of that nature. Wood paneling was unusual in private residences, although Solomon's throne was "paneled" (1 Kings 7:7).

1:7. prophetic role in temple rebuilding. In the seventh century, Assyrian prophets offered encouragement to kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal to rebuild the temples of particular deities. This message from the gods was considered essential for the kings to feel free to proceed with the building preparations. The deity who was to dwell in the temple was the only one who could authorize the undertaking.

1:15. chronology. The date here is about September 21, 520 B.C., three and one-half weeks after the first prophecy.

2:1-9

Temple Grandeur

2:1. chronology. This would have taken place on October 17, 520, about seven weeks after the first prophecy.

2:3-4. temple glory and God's presence. The main reason for all of the splendor built into a temple was to make it worthy of the deity's presence. Honor was bestowed by the wealth and luxury of the building and its furniture. Some would have even felt that this was necessary to induce the deity to make the temple his dwelling. Here Haggai deflates their fears by assuring them that the Lord intends to inhabit the "less-than-glorious" house and will subsequently bring splendor to it.

2:10-23

Defilement and Blessing

2:10. chronology. The equivalent date is December 18, 520, over three and one-half months since the first prophecy.

2:12. transmission of purity. The "holy meat" consecrates anything it touches (e.g., the fold of a garment), but nothing that touches the fold of the garment would in turn be consecrated. The situation pictured here may have been quite common at this time. The altar had been rebuilt within a few years of the return (535), but the temple had not yet been built. This means that meat from the sacrifices could not be eaten in the regular temple precincts, as was the norm. Instead, the food would have to be transported to the eating place. The regulations governing the transfer of purity are not found in Scripture and so must have been part of Israelite oral tradition. The law in Leviticus 6:27 states that whoever touches the flesh of a sin offering will be consecrated, and when any of the blood splashes on a garment, that garment had to be washed.

2:13. transmission of impurity. Ritual defilement, however, was passed on by contact in a manner like a contagious disease (see comments on Lev 11:8; 22:3-9). In fact, contact with a corpse caused the highest degree of defilement. Those who were ceremonially unclean because of a corpse were not allowed to participate in organized worship (e.g., Num 9:6; see further the comment on Num 19:11) and often were sent away from the camp (Num 5:2). Thus, food touched by one who was defiled was contaminated.

2:17. blight, mildew and hail as divine punishment. The three punishments described here, blight, mildew and hail were all typical forms of divine correction in ancient Israel (see comment on Amos 4:9). Blight is derived from a Hebrew term signifying a scorching wind. The term usually refers to the hot east wind that blows across the land from the desert. The term "blight" refers to the debilitating effects of the wind, causing the withering and destruction of plants and grain. Mildew is a term that refers to a disease of grain caused by a fungus. It has been thought that it is often caused by drought and excessive rains. A third adverse weather condition is hail, which, if followed by a strong wind, will damage crops. Like the other terms, hail is often seen as divine judgment (see comment on Josh 10:11).

2:18. chronology. December 18, 520 (the same date mentioned in 2:10), is described here as the

date of the founding of the Lord's temple. Thus the date of was great importance to Haggai.

2:23. signet ring. The term "signet" probably refers to a seal, which could have been either a cylinder seal worn with a cord around the neck or a stamp seal embedded in a ring, which is referred to here. The former was very common in Mesopotamia, while the latter was used in Israel. Thousands of cylinder seals and stamp seals have been found in Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine respectively. They were a sign of authority, identification and ownership.

ZECHARIAH

1:1-6
Call to Repentance

1:1. chronology. Zechariah dates his oracles very precisely, as did his contemporary Haggai. His ministry began in November-December of the year 520 B.C., overlapping Haggai by one month.

1:1. Iddo. If several ancestors are mentioned in a genealogical note, the last one is usually someone of importance. In Nehemiah 12:4 an Iddo is mentioned among the priests who returned from exile with Zerubbabel in the first wave in 538. If this is the same Iddo, it indicates that Zechariah is of a prominent family with a priestly heritage.

1:7-17
First Vision: Myrtle Valley

1:7. chronology. This vision occurs several months after the initial oracle. It is dated to February 15, 519 B.C. Since the next chronological notation does not occur until after this sequence of visions, it should be considered as offering the framework for the visions, which give central attention to the rebuilding of the temple. It is likely not coincidence, then, that the vision occurs just one week prior to New Year's day, when temple building and restoration projects usually commenced in the ancient world. In addition, some scholars believe that Darius marched to Egypt in 519 to secure its renewed loyalty and that the preparations of the army for this march were a source of concern for the people of Judah. They could have felt very uncertain about what demands might be made on them and how they would be treated.

1:9. angel directing vision. Angels not only delivered messages from deity but explained those messages and answered questions concerning them. Thus Gabriel is seen in Daniel 8:16 as one who can interpret the vision. In the polytheistic context of the ancient world the messengers of the gods were generally gods themselves (of lower rank). In Mesopotamia

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

"Apocalyptic" is the name that has traditionally been given to a particular category (genre) of literature. Apocalyptic is defined by its characteristics. It has some traceable roots outside the Bible (see the sidebar on Akkadian apocalypses in Dan 11) but finds its earliest true members in Old Testament books such as Daniel and Zechariah. In the Bible it is intricately intertwined with prophetic literature. There are over a dozen Jewish apocalyptic works during the intertestamental period, the most prominent being *4 Ezra* and the books of *Enoch*. The book of Revelation is the New Testament's contribution to the genre. Other Christian apocalypses began to appear on the heels of the New Testament, including works like the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Ascension of Isaiah*. The genre was a favorite of the Gnostics, whose literature contains numerous examples. Apocalypses feature a narrative framework and often portray an angelic interpreter or guide alongside the prophet. The angel may take the prophet on a tour of heavenly realms to convey certain realities and activities. Alternatively, he may unveil a future time of trouble and deliverance. This literature operates by means of a broad spectrum of symbols using significant numbers and mythological images. It draws heavily on both biblical and extrabiblical literature. It tends to schematize. When reading apocalyptic, there are a couple of important guidelines to keep in mind. First, each detail does not necessarily carry symbolic significance. Even the details that do carry symbolic significance may not be transparent to us and speculating accomplishes little. Second, it is important to remember that the apocalyptic vision is not the message itself but rather is the vehicle or occasion for the message. So, for instance, the message of the first vision of Zechariah (1:7-17) is *not* that there are going to be four horses of different colors in a myrtle grove. The message is laid out very clearly in verses 14-17. Apocalyptic is simply a medium.

we find individuals such as Nuska and Kakka, while the well-known Hermes serves the function in Greek mythology. In a dream of Nabonidus a young man appears to offer an interpretation of a celestial omen that has been observed.

1:10. sent throughout the earth. The Persians were well known for their mounted couriers, who traveled daily through the empire maintaining the most efficient communication system known in the ancient world. The myrtle trees evoke the image of palace gardens. Persian kings enjoyed the parks of trees that stood beside the audience halls and received visitors and reports there.

1:11. Persian peace. Just as royal couriers would be reporting to their superior that all was peace, so these angelic couriers bring their report to the angel of the Lord. The fact that Darius was now securely seated on the throne and smoldering revolts had been quenched would have been good news for the empire but bad news for the Jews. Their hopes for the restoration and reestablishment of a Davidic monarchy that had been excited at the prospect of the collapse of the Persian empire were now dashed. Additionally, if Darius's army is on the way to Egypt through Judah (see comment on 1:7), the horseman's report could offer assurance that there will be no trouble from the Persians as they pass through.

1:16. status of rebuilding. Ezra 3 reports work that had been done on the temple site prior to 520. Certainly the altar had been set up on its foundation and was operational, but the chronological note introducing the building of a foundation in Ezra 3:10 is not as clear as it could be (see comment on Ezra 3:8). It is not impossible that a foundation was laid a second time.

1:18-21
Second Vision: Horns and Craftsmen

1:18. four horns. It was common in Mesopotamia for kings and gods to wear crowns featuring either protruding or embossed horns. Sometimes the sets of horns were stacked one upon another in tiers. The winged lion from Ashurnasirpal's palace has a conical crown on its human head with three pairs of tiered horns embossed on it. It is difficult to determine what the significance of the four might be. Suggestions include the presentation of a four-empire scheme (see comment on Dan 7:17) or perhaps a reference to the four corners of the earth from where these enemies have come (see comment on Ezek 7:2). Given the context of temple building, a persuasive suggestion is that the symbolism of the horns was evoked from the four horns of the altar. An altar had been set up on the temple site soon after the arrival of the returnees (see comment on 1:16) but probably would have had to be removed for the reconstruction work to take place.

1:20-21. craftsmen. Among the many categories of Babylonian temple personnel at the end of the sixth century was one designated "craftsmen" *(ummanu).* A number of different guilds were included in this group (those who worked with materials such as wood, metal, leather, gold, cloth, stone and gems, as well as those who carried out tasks such as laundering). This same term was extended to serve as a title of royal advisors believed to be supernaturally endowed. Individuals of this title are also identified as the sages who composed famous pieces of literature. In short, this term referred to various experts in the employ of the palace and temple. The Erra Epic makes it clear that it was the *ummanu* who were responsible for crafting divine images. The Hebrew term used here can also refer to a wide range of guild workers, including those who craft images and serve the temples, but is never clearly extended to sages or royal administrative advisors. In the Canaanite pantheon the important deity Kothar-wa-Hasis is the craftsman of the gods. He makes the weapons of the gods and is responsible for building Baal's house. In the Egyptian pantheon, Ptah of Memphis is the craftsman deity, who was thereby considered a creator as well as the patron of artisans. If it is correct that these are the craftsmen who are dismantling the altar (see previous comment), then they are artisans in the employ of the temple carrying out a sacred and ceremonial task.

2:1-13
Third Vision: Measuring Line

2:2. measuring Jerusalem. The placement and orientation of a temple was considered extremely important (see the comment on Ex 26:1-36). This is also evidenced in temple building texts both mythological and historical in Mesopotamia. In *Enuma Elish* when Marduk is preparing to build his cosmic temple, he measures the Apsu (the area where the foundation of the temple will be laid). From Sumerian times through Assyrian and Babylonian periods the possession of the measuring equipment is a sign of the divine commission for the rebuilding project. It is through this

equipment that the leader is given divine direction. Additionally this equipment was used to determine the exact location of previous temple foundations.

2:5. glory within. As early as Sumerian literature it can be observed that the presence of deity in a city represents the city's protection. For example, in the *Curse of Agade* the gods take their leave of the city and thereby make it vulnerable to its enemies.

2:6. land of the north. Especially in Jeremiah, the north was direction that the enemy was going to come from (see comment on Jer 1:14-15). Eventually it became clear that Babylon was that enemy from the north. Even though Babylon was located east of Jerusalem, all traffic flowed in an arc around the Syrian desert. Thus Babylonians would come into Judah from the north, and Israelites would go to Babylon from the north. Now Zechariah is urging them to flee from the lands of their captors.

2:6. four winds. In Mesopotamian thinking there were occasionally seven winds, but four was the more usual. The four were connected with compass points in accordance with the direction they blew from, just as they are today.

3:1-10 Joshua's Investiture

3:1. Satan. Here and in the book of Job the word *saṭan* appears with a definite article ("the"), which makes it clear that it is not being treated as a personal name. The Hebrew word *saṭan* is used to describe an adversary and can be used of human beings or supernatural beings. Even the angel of the Lord can exercise this function (Num 22:22). The term does not clearly take on the role of a personal name until the intertestamental period (specifically the second century B.C.). Though the individual functioning as an adversary to Joshua here may well be the one who later bears the name Satan, that cannot be concluded with certainty. Those who serve as adversaries are generally in the role of calling God's policies and decisions into accountability.

3:3. Joshua. Joshua is the high priest in the early postexilic period. His grandfather, Seraiah, had been executed by Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:18-21; note in 7:1 that Ezra is also identified as being from the line of Seraiah). Judah's heir to the throne, Zerubbabel, served as governor, but since Judah was still under Persian control, there were restrictions on the extent of his control (so as not to compete with the Persian king). Consequently, rule in the community was now divided between the governor and the high priest, giving the priest a more prominent role. Little is known about Joshua except that he was one of the leaders who helped get the temple rebuilt. There are no contemporary extrabiblical references to him.

3:4. those standing before him. The scene that includes an accuser and one standing in the dock evokes the imagery of a heavenly court. Such a concept had a long-standing tradition in both Israel and the ancient Near East. In the ancient Near East the major decisions were all made in the divine council. There the gods would consult with one another and share their information and opinions. The familiar picture of a heavenly throne surrounded by the heavenly council is well known from the Ugaritic texts (most notably the Epic of Keret), though this Canaanite council is made up of the gods of the pantheon. Examples occur also in the tenth-century building inscription of Yehimilk from Byblos and the Karatepe stele of Azitawadda. In the Akkadian *Enuma Elish* it is the assembly of the gods that appoints Marduk as their head. Fifty gods made up this assembly, with seven in the inner council. In Israelite belief the gods were replaced by angels or spirits—the sons of God or the heavenly host.

3:5. investiture. There is no mention in this section of the most notable items of the priest's regalia—no ephod, no breastplate, not even any linen—just the turban. This suggests that Joshua's priestly status is not the issue. In a relief of Ashurbanipal (seventh century) the king wears a special turban as he carries the foundation brick in a basket on his head. Alternatively, then, we could view Joshua being prepared for his role in the temple reconstruction.

3:8. branch. Most consider the word "branch" a technical term referring to a rightful heir of an established dynastic line—in Israel, a future Davidic king who would restore the monarchy. A similar usage has been found in a Phoenician votive inscription from Cyprus honoring Melqart that dates to the early third century B.C. There it refers to a legitimate "branch" of the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt. The Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran do not use the term in a messianic sense, but the kingship sense does occur in Ugaritic and Assyrian texts. For instance, Tiglath-Pileser III is described as the shoot or scion of the city of Baltil (Ashur) who brings justice to his people.

3:9. seven eyes on the stone. It has generally been held that the seven "eyes" are seven facets. The problem is that gemstones were

shaped but not faceted in the ancient world. Given the context, it is preferable to associate this stone with a new foundation stone for the temple (see the comment on 4:7). In Mesopotamia there are beads of precious stones given as gifts to the temple that are cut in the shape of eyes and engraved with the names of the donors. Assyrian and Babylonian kings included gemstones in the foundation deposits of temples. Nabopolassar reports spreading gold, silver and imported stones on foundations. Foundation stones were sometimes overlaid with precious metals and could therefore be encrusted with gems. If Zechariah reflects this practice, the seven "eyes" are being inlaid on the stone rather than engraved on it.

4:1-14

Lampstand and Olive Trees

4:1. angel directing the vision. See comment on 1:9.

4:2. description of lamp. This solid gold lamp consists of a pedestal on which a large bowl rests. Arranged around the rim of the large bowl are seven lamps. These lamps are small shallow bowls that hold the oil. Such bowl lamps are common throughout the biblical period, though they take varying shapes in different periods. Typically they feature a pinched area on the rim where a wick can be squeezed in with the bottom of it submerged in the oil. The wick will then draw oil up to burn. Each of the seven lamps here has seven pinched spouts around its rim, as attested in some excavated lamps. In this way the large lamp has forty-nine lights. The large bowl presumably contained oil that was somehow channeled to the seven smaller lamps. There are no excavated artifacts that bear a resemblance to the complex lamp described here. An alternative design that has a little more support from archaeology is that of the kernos. This type of vessel features a pottery ring (instead of a bowl) on which the seven lamps are mounted. Kernoi that were used as lamps have been found in Persian-period Palestine.

4:3. setting of the lamp. O. Keel has demonstrated that in the iconography represented on seals of the eighth and seventh centuries, the deity is often represented stylistically. Astral images usually represent the deity, most commonly the crescent moon with its horns facing upward. Both the shape and the fact that light is involved can easily parallel the lamp of this vision. Additionally, this symbol is flanked by worshipers, sometimes represented stylistically as trees, though often of the cypress variety. It is not impossible that, as B. Halpern has suggested, the vision of the lampstand provides a description of that which will be inscribed on the foundation stone. The main advantage to this is that it draws together the seven eyes of the stone in 3:9 with the seven eyes representing the lamps in 4:10, since the lampstand and the stone would be one and the same.

4:6. Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the heir to the Davidic throne (grandson of Jehoiachin, see comments on 2 Kings 24) and served as governor of Judah under the Persian king Darius I. There was a significant amount of expectation surrounding him that had a messianic flavor to it. Undoubtedly some expected him to set up the promised kingdom and bring freedom from their slavery (to the Persians). While his duties were primarily secular, he is described in Ezra, along with the priest Joshua, as the force behind the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Governing under the auspices of the Persian king, he was responsible for maintaining law and order, and for the collection of taxes. Though Zerubbabel was the last Davidic heir to serve in the role of governor, archaeologists have found a seal of Shelomith (listed as a daughter of Zerubbabel in 1 Chron 3:19), on which she is designated as either a wife or an official of Elnathan, the governor who is thought to have succeeded Zerubbabel.

4:7. capstone. Rather than a capstone, this is more likely to be the foundation brick that is always significant in temple building and restoration. One of the most detailed temple-building accounts in ancient Near Eastern literature describes Gudea's construction of a temple for Ningirsu around 2000 B.C. The ceremony concerning the premier brick shows its centrality to the building procedure. In Neo-Assyrian texts, Esarhaddon personally brings out the old premier brick from the site of the temple so that restoration can begin. The reference to level ground here suggests that Zerubbabel is ceremoniously removing the premier brick from the prior temple to indicate that the restoration can begin.

4:9. Zerubbabel to complete the temple. In the *Autobiography of Adad-Guppi,* Adad-Guppi, the mother of King Nabonidus (just a few decades prior to Zechariah) is told in a dream that her son will construct the temple of the god Sin in Harran. He will complete the work and bring renewed glory to Harran and its patron deity.

4:10. plumb line. The Hebrew speaks only of a tin stone. Some temple restoration projects in the ancient world featured a tin bracelet

used by the one who removed the premier stone (see the comment on 4:7 above). Tin was also occasionally used as a tablet for the foundation inscription.

4:10. seven eyes of the Lord. The seven "eyes" of the Lord are represented by the lamps. If the connections suggested between 3:9 and 4:3 above are correct, these seven "eyes" are also the same ones mentioned in 3:9 and are embedded in the foundation stone as part of the picture of the lampstand.

4:12. golden pipes. In the seals described in the comment on 4:3, there are also portrayed what Keel identifies as "tassels" extending from the crescent moon. In this vision they take the form of pipes conducting oil from the trees to the lamp.

4:14. significance of oil. The word used for oil in verses 12 and 14 refers to the raw material, unprocessed oil. This would not be used for anointing (NIV's "anointed" in the Hebrew is "sons of oil"). As a raw material it is often connected with prosperity, but it is difficult to know what connection that would have here. Given the context of laying the foundation of the temple, it may be important that the ceremonial laying of the foundation often featured mortar mixed with oil rather than water. If this connection is valid, it would again identify Joshua and Zerubbabel as the ones carrying out the building project. Sennacherib claims that he sprinkled a foundation with oil as if it were river water.

5:1-4
Flying Scroll

5:1. flying scroll. The description of the scroll as flying suggests that it is at least partially unrolled. Though in English we can speak of a flag flying as well as a creature flying, Hebrew usage is only in the latter category (though sparks and clouds are also said to "fly"). This is confirmed in verse 4, where the scroll is sent out and enters houses. There is no parallel to flying scrolls in extrabiblical literature.

5:2. dimensions compared. The dimensions of the scroll are the same as the portico area of Solomon's temple, but it is difficult to identify any significance to such a correlation. The thirty-foot-long scroll is not unusual for ancient scrolls, but the fifteen-foot width is extraordinary and out of proportion. Concern for proportionality has led some to consider the thirty-foot length as a reference to only the few columns that were visible in a partial unrolling of the scroll. It would be highly unusual to unroll the entire scroll. Conventional practice would be to unroll both sides of the scroll simultaneously to move through the scroll, maintaining the visibility of just a few columns of text at a time. Having the open section thirty feet long would be more consistent with the giant size suggested by the fifteen-foot width. Since a column of writing on a scroll was typically about half as wide as the height of the scroll, probably two columns would be visible, with the still rolled portions on either side making up the remainder of the width.

5:3. curse on the scroll. The word used here for curse refers to the dire consequences called down on one who violates an oath, or to a public summons intended to collect information concerning a crime that has been committed (see Lev 5:1). Failure to reveal information that one has would implicate a person as an accomplice, subject to the same punishment as the perpetrator.

5:3. written on both sides. Though scrolls usually had writing on only one side, it is not without precedent for the writing to carry over onto the other side (see Ezek 2:10). Having said that, however, it is not at all clear that the text is referring to a scroll written on two sides. In almost every use of this idiom, the two sides are left and right, not front and back. If front and back were intended, the same idiom that is used in Ezekiel 2:10 would have been the logical choice. It is therefore more likely that two columns are exposed on the scroll (see comment on 5:2), with one addressing the punishment for theft and the other the punishment for swearing falsely.

5:3. thieves and oath breakers. The text suggests a connection between theft and oath breaking. What oath could be made that, if broken, would constitute theft? One possibility is that individuals had made pledges of funds to accomplish the building of the temple and were now reneging on their oaths. In that case they would be guilty of stealing (it had been pledged and, therefore, no longer belonged to them) and of oath breaking. The sanctions (represented in the scroll) are now going forth to ferret them out and bring the consequences down on them. The problem of investing in their own houses instead of the temple is referred to in Haggai 1:4; the accusation of theft for holding back that which has been pledged is seen to be a postexilic problem in Malachi 3:8-10.

5:4. curse entering a house and remaining in it. If, as suggested in the above comments, the offenders have reneged on their promised contributions to the temple, it is appropriate that their obstruction of the building of the Lord's house should result in the destruction of their own houses. It is another way of say-

ing that their unfaithfulness will come back to haunt them in such a way that the punishment is suited to the offense.

5:5-11

Woman in the Basket

5:6. measuring basket. Special ceremonial containers were used to transport the premier stone as well as to house the foundation deposits. This container is described only by its size, an ephah, which is generally considered about two-thirds of a bushel. There is no indication as to what material it is made out of. The container used for foundation deposits in Mesopotamia is called a *quppu* and could be either a wicker basket or a wooden chest. Judging from what was placed in them, they could be of varying sizes.

5:7. lead. Though the NIV interprets this as a cover, the text refers to it in verse 7 as a "talent" of lead (a particular weight, usually the shape of a convex disk) and as a stone of lead in verse 8. Temple foundation deposits often included metal pieces (gold, silver, iron, bronze, lead), sometimes small scraps, other times large blocks and at times square convex tablets or bricks.

5:7. woman inside. The small size of the container has led to the conclusion that the woman sitting inside refers to a figurine. The connection of this to temple building could be that figurines were often buried next to the foundation deposit or beneath the door-pivot stone. Such figurines could either indicate dedication to a particular deity, or represent an apotropaic (protective) deity. It is very tempting to see this vision as entailing a foundation deposit box taken from the ruins of the temple that contained a figurine and a piece of lead.

5:9. women with wings. In the Old Testament angels are not female and are not portrayed with wings (though in Dan 9:21 Gabriel perhaps comes in swift flight; but see comment there). In Ugaritic literature Baal's sister, Anat, is portrayed with wings. In Mesopotamian art winged creatures are generally either protective genies or demons. The goddess Ishtar is also occasionally portrayed with wings. Two winged female genies are portrayed flanking a stylized tree in a relief from the ninth century.

5:11. building a house for it. The pronoun "it" is feminine, as are the woman and the ephah. Since the second part of this verse makes reference to the container rather than to the woman, the house is seen as being built for it rather than for her. This would further confirm that the container should be identified as a foundation deposit that will be set in place in a temple there. The word "house" is often used for a temple.

6:1-8

Four Chariots

6:1-5. charioteer messengers of deity. These are called the four spirits, the same terms as the four winds in 2:6. Psalm 104:4 refers to the winds as the messengers of Yahweh, and that

SUMMARY OF THE TEMPLE-BUILDING CONNECTIONS TO ZECHARIAH'S VISIONS

The series of visions starts off with the affirmation that Yahweh still cares about his people despite the secure standing of the Persian empire. The first vision indicates that his plan for the future is going to be accomplished through the rebuilt temple. The second vision begins the process of preparing the site for the rebuilding. The dismantling of the altar is envisioned as representing the terrifying of the nations. The third vision continues the preparation by measuring the city (1:16 shows that measuring the city is part of the preparation for building the temple). Measurements of the city served the purpose of determining the placement of the temple. Such a process would not be productive in this case, however, because the city is not going to have walls to calculate from. It would be highly unusual for a temple not to be protected by a wall because of all the valuables stored there and the need to preserve the sanctity of the area. In a preamble to the fourth vision, Joshua is prepared to play his role; he is purified for the rituals surrounding the premier stone and given the ceremonial cap on which the stone is carried. This foundation stone is ornamented with seven semiprecious stones that serve as seven lamps in the inscribed decoration. The inscription on the stone is a typical scene of a lampstand (representing the temple and indirectly Yahweh, who dwells there) flanked by stylized trees. Here they are olive trees that supply the oil to keep the lampstand/temple going. Oil is also used to pour over the foundation and mix with the mortar for the placement of the ceremonial premier stone. In this vision, Zerubbabel is the one responsible for ceremonially removing the previous premier stone so that the leveling of the site can take place. The fifth vision represents an attempt to call in the pledges that have been made for the funding of the building project. The deadbeats are guilty of breaking their oaths and, in effect, of stealing because they have kept that which had been pledged to the temple rebuilding fund. The sixth removes an idolatrous figurine that would have been deposited in the foundations in a previous renovation. It is sent back to Babylon where it belongs, and there a temple can be built for this foundation deposit. The sequence ends with the temple serving its function as a base of operations from where Yahweh can carry out his military and political plans.

is the function they are serving here. The horsemen in chapter 1 were comparable to the Persian courier service, but chariots were not used that way. It is unusual that a chariot should be used by a messenger, because it would only slow him down and tire his horses unnecessarily. In the ancient Near East a supernatural being in a chariot was usually transporting the deity rather than serving as a messenger (see comment on 2 Kings 2:11).

6:9-15
Joshua's Crown

6:11. high priest's crown. The crown referred to here is a circlet, and, though it is occasionally worn by royalty, it more often adorns a person who is being honored or celebrated. It can be made of precious metals, as it is here, but can also be made of flowers or greenery.

7:1-14
Fasting Question

7:1. chronology. The date equivalent is December 7, 518 B.C. This is nearly two years after the last date given in chapter 1 and the last date given in the book. There is no evident correspondence to any particular event in either the Jewish calendar or the activities of Darius that would give this date significance.

7:2. people of Bethel. The town of Bethel was about twelve miles north of Jerusalem and was on the northern fringe of the Persian province known as Yehud (Judah).

7:3. fast of the fifth month. Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the temple had taken place in the fifth month (see 2 Kings 25:8). It is logical that a fast day had been established on that date. The delegation would undoubtedly wonder whether they should continue to observe a fast for the destruction of the temple now that it was being rebuilt. Zechariah responds by questioning whether the fast focused on a petition to rebuild the temple or on a petition that concerned repentance for the sins that had brought about the destruction.

7:5. fast of the seventh month. The only known event from the seventh month that could reasonably the occasion for a fast is the assassination of Gedaliah (Jer 41). He had been appointed governor of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar after the fall of Jerusalem.

7:5. purpose of fasting. Fasting is little attested in the ancient Near East outside of the Bible. It generally occurs in the context of mourning. In the Old Testament the religious use of fasting is often in connection with making a request before God. The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background. In this sense the act of fasting is designed as a process leading to purification and humbling before God (Ps 69:10; 102:4). It is not an end in itself, but rather it is the disciplined training in preparation for an important event.

8:1-23
Oracles of Restoration

8:19. various fasts. The fasts of the fifth and seventh months have been identified in the comments on chapter 7. The other two also appear to be connected with the events surrounding the siege of Jerusalem. The fourth month represented the end of Davidic kings occupying the throne. It was in the fourth month that the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, secretly fled the city after a year and a half of siege. The tenth month had marked the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies.

8:22. powerful nations seeking the Lord. This was already a theme in preexilic prophecy. See comment on Isaiah 2:2.

8:23. grasping the hem. Grasping the hem of the garment was a common phrase found in Ugaritic, Aramaic and Akkadian (languages related to biblical Hebrew). In Akkadian the phrase was "to seize the hem." In both Israel and Mesopotamia, grasping the hem of someone's garment was a gesture of supplication and submission. Saul's grasping of Samuel's skirt was a final plea for mercy. This is also the case in the Ugaritic Baal cycle, where Anat seizes the hem of Mot's garment to plead for her brother Baal.

9:1-17
Coming Judgment

9:1. Hadrach/Damascus. Hadrach is not known from any other biblical references but is familiar from Neo-Assyrian sources beginning in the mid-eighth century as the district of Hatarikka. It is located along the upper Orontes River between Aleppo and Hamath. It is the northernmost area of the Persian satrapy known as Abarnahara (land across the river) that dominated the region between the Orontes and the Euphrates. Damascus dominated the northeastern region of the satrapy between the Orontes and the Syrian desert. During this period it was a province, as was Hadrach.

9:2. Hamath in early fifth century. Hamath is

likewise a term that could refer to a region as well as a city. It was located about 130 miles north of Damascus along the Orontes. If it was a province during this time, as some suggest, its territory would most likely have been the area between the Orontes and the Mediterranean. Neither archaeological or literary sources provide much information for the sixth and fifth centuries.

9:2. Tyre and Sidon in the early fifth century. These cities represent the province(s) of Phoenicia between the Litani River and the Mediterranean. Though as port cities these two were important to the Persian military efforts in the west, there is little information about them during this period.

9:5-6. Philistine cities in early fifth century. The area of ancient Philistia was now identified as the province of Ashdod. Gaza served as the base for Persian military operations against Egypt, and Ashkelon was a prosperous port city. Excavations at Ashdod suggest a thriving town during the Persian period but historical documents give little information.

9:7. blood, forbidden food. This speaks of a change in Philistine diet such that they will conform to Jewish law. The Israelites were forbidden to eat meat without draining the blood (see comments on Lev 17:11-12, and there were regulations concerning animals that could or could not be eaten (see comments on Lev 11).

9:7. Ekron like Jebusites. The Jebusites were native to the region of Jerusalem at the time of the conquest of the land under Joshua. They continued to control Jerusalem for the centuries of the Judges period up to the conquest of Jerusalem by David. There are a few textual indications that they were absorbed into Israel rather than wiped out (see comment on 2 Sam 24:18). Ekron has been identified as Tell Miqne in the Sorek Valley, about twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem and fifteen miles from the Mediterranean. It features a forty-acre lower city, a ten-acre upper tell and a two-and-a-half-acre acropolis. Excavations since the early 1980s have given a good picture of this town. It was known for its production of olive oil and had over one hundred processing plants. An inscription found on the site in 1996 that dated to the seventh century B.C. provided the first example of the Philistine dialect of West Semitic using the Phoenician script. After Ekron's destruction by Nebuchadnezzar in 603, there was very little occupation of the site.

9:9. king riding donkey. It was common in the ancient Near East for a king to ride a mule (see comment on 1 Kings 1:33), but here the reference is to a common donkey. Although Akkadian texts do evidence a king riding a donkey, it is by no means a royal mount. The word translated "colt" in the NIV refers to the same animal that is the mount for the sons of judges in Judges 10:3. Using a donkey for a mount is more likely to be connected to humility than to royalty.

9:10. battle bow. In Assyrian texts from the seventh century (Esarhaddon), a deity breaking the bow of the enemy is a way of describing conquest. In this passage the action appears to prevent future battle. In other biblical texts the same concept is expressed by the idea of beating swords into plowshares (see comment on Is 2:4).

9:10. sea to sea. Rather than referring to particular seas such as the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea, the universal tone of the passage suggests that reference is being made to cosmic seas that encompass all the inhabited lands.

9:10. River to ends of the earth. When "river" is used with a definite article, it is usually a name for the Euphrates. Here there is no definite article, suggesting a more abstract cosmic reference. In Akkadian literature the great cosmic river is known as *apsu* and would serve as a suitable contrast to the ends of the earth. "The ends of the earth" is used to refer to the most distant known places.

9:13. Greece in the early fifth century. The Hebrew term used here, "Javan," was probably the Greek name Ionia, the Greek region of the western coast of Turkey and the Aegean islands. Ionian Greeks settled this area just before the first millennium B.C. There is evidence of contact between them and the Assyrians by the eighth century B.C. By the time of Zechariah the Greeks have been involved in warfare with the Persians (see comment on Esther 2:1).

9:14. divine warrior. In the divine warrior motif the deity is fighting the battles and defeating the deities of the enemy. In Assyria Nergal is the king of battle, and Ishtar is viewed as a war goddess. The Canaanite Baal and the Babylonian Marduk are divine warriors. In this worldview human warfare is viewed simply as a representation of warfare among the gods. The stronger god would be victorious regardless of the strengths or weaknesses in the human combatants. Thunder and lightning were considered to regularly accompany the presence of a deity, especially in a battle setting. From the Sumerian *Exaltation of Inanna,* to the Hittite myths about the storm god, to the Akkadian and Ugaritic mythologies, the gods are viewed as thundering in judgment against their enemies. Baal is depicted as grasping a handful of thunderbolts. Thunder-

ing terminology is picked up in royal rhetoric as Hittite or Assyrian kings portray themselves as the instruments of the gods, thundering against those who have violated treaties or stood in the way of empire expansion.

9:15. bowl from sprinkling corners of altar. The horns of the altar were sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifices, so it was blood that filled these bowls. The comparison to the bowl therefore suggests massive bloodshed.

10:1—11:3
Deliverance of Judah from Oppressive Shepherds

10:1. Yahweh as fertility deity. There is a long history in the ancient Near East of particular worship being offered to the storm god who brought rain and fertility to the fields. Baal was that god in the Canaanite system. Israelites in the preexilic period had been inclined to attribute the fertility of the fields to Baal even while they gladly acknowledged Yahweh as their national God (see comment on Hos 2:1).

10:2. idols and diviners. The word translated "idols" is *teraphim,* which are not representations of the gods, but, most likely, of the ancestors (see comment on Gen 31:19). These images would most likely "speak" through omens or through the necromancers who professed skill in communicating with the spirits of the dead. Experts in divination not only interpreted dreams (see comments on Dan 1:17; 2:4), but also specialized in inducing revelatory dreams (see comment on 1 Sam 3:3).

10:3. leaders as shepherds. The ideology of the king as a shepherd to his people is applied to Lugalzagessi of Sumer as early as around 2450 B.C. The contemporary king Urukagina of Lagash claimed that the god Ningirsu owned his state and that the king had been chosen as a "shepherd" to administer the city on behalf of the gods and the people. Gods responsible for maintaining justice (Shamash in Mesopotamia, Amon in Egypt) are likewise represented in this way. This ideology continued in the ancient Near East into the monarchy period, occurring in reference to Ashurbanipal of Assyria (seventh century) and Nebuchadnezzar (sixth century).

10:4. cornerstone. Israelite Iron Age architectural design made increasing use of cut stone masonry over the rough boulders and rubble construction of earlier periods. In order to provide stability and to bind two adjoining walls together, a finely shaped block of stone was inserted that became the cornerstone. It would have been a larger stone than those normally used, and its insertion often required special effort or rituals. Its large, smooth surface was a natural place for inscribing religious slogans, the name of the architect or king responsible and the date of construction. It is possible that the cornerstone could also serve as the foundation stone.

10:4. tent peg. It could be said that the tent peg is to the tent what the cornerstone is to a building. Alternatively, there is an Old Assyrian inscription of Irishum that suggests that a peg is driven into the wall of a temple as a symbol of its completion. In such a case the foundation stone marks the beginning of the project, while the peg marks the end of it. The terms both came to be used metaphorically as that which is foundational (as in Is 22:23; Ezra 9:8). Such pegs were sometimes included in Mesopotamian foundation deposits.

10:10. places of exile. Although Assyria is the well-known site of exile for both the northern kingdom and groups from the southern kingdom (see comment on Is 22:2-3), it is evident that there were also colonies of Israelites that had either fled to Egypt or been taken to Egypt, perhaps as early as the eighth century but certainly by the seventh century (see comment on Jer 43:7).

10:10. Gilead and Lebanon. Referring to Gilead (tableland east of the Jordan) and Lebanon (Beqa Valley along the Litani River between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountain chains) for Israel would be like referring to Montana and Wyoming in the United States. Images would be evoked of wide open, sparsely inhabited spaces.

11:1-3. destruction of forests and pastures. Forestation and pasturage are valuable resources in this land that offers so little of them. Vast stretches of potentially productive land become trackless waste land when the greenery is destroyed. The modern state of Israel is reclaiming the land's productivity by reintroducing forestation into desolate areas. Ancient invaders strategically destroyed farmland, pasturage and forestation when seeking to cripple a nation long-term (see comment on 2 Kings 3:25).

11:4-17
Drama of Two Shepherds

11:4. flock marked for slaughter. The temple kept extensive herds that had been given as firstfruit offerings (and for other reasons) and were marked for slaughter in that they had been promised to the Lord. There would therefore be many shepherds in the employ of

the temple to watch over these herds.

11:6. handing people over to neighbors. The Hebrew word for neighbor is very close to the Hebrew word for shepherd. The parallel with the word "king" in this verse has led some to conclude that the word "shepherd" was the original reading. Alternatively, there may just be a play on words here.

11:12. thirty pieces of silver. By verse 12 it is difficult to know whether Zechariah is still in his role as shepherd and is collecting shepherd wages, or whether he is collecting wages for his prophetic role (last line of v. 11). Information from the law codes in the second millennium B.C. indicates that a shepherd would normally make ten shekels in a year. On the other hand a prophet might expect to be paid well for his skills. The fact that a slave was worth thirty shekels is not helpful here, since Zechariah is not being bought as a slave. In Sumerian usage "thirty shekels worth" has an idiomatic meaning along the lines of "two bits" or "a plug nickel," meaning that something was virtually worthless. While this would fit the context here, the jump from Sumerian to postexilic Hebrew is a large one and cannot be relied upon.

11:13. thrown to the potter. Three possible explanations have been given here, and it is difficult to decide between them. First, it is likely that there was a pottery shop in the vicinity of the temple that served the temple's needs. But why would this money be thrown there? Second, the word for potter simply means "fashioner," so some have suggested that here it refers to a metalworker who is perhaps going to make a figurine out of the silver. This may offer an explanation of why the silver is thrown here, but it requires an unusual meaning to be applied to a fairly common noun. Third, it has been observed that the word rendered "potter" can, with very little change, be understood as "treasury." Some of the early translations take this route, and it can find some support in the New Testament as well (Mt 27:5-6, though Matthew also refers to the potter). Each interpretation has its difficulties, and no information from the ancient Near East can shed light on the actions of the prophet.

11:16. tearing off hoofs. Herds of sheep were rarely used for meat. The wool was far more valuable. A shepherd's main responsibility was to preserve the life and health of the sheep so as to vouchsafe their continued productivity. Eating the meat spoke of the shortsighted self-indulgence of undisciplined appetites rather than wise management of long-term resources. The tearing off of the hoofs may represent an attempt to persuade the owner that the sheep had been devoured by a wild animal so that the shepherd would not be held accountable. Alternatively, the shepherd may be seeking to sell the hoofs so as to get a small return.

12:1-14

Deliverance of Jerusalem

12:2. cup (bowl) of reeling. The expression "cup of reeling" is used elsewhere in Isaiah 51:17, 22, but here the text actually speaks of a bowl *(saph)* rather than a cup. It is possible that the author chose the word "bowl" in order to execute a wordplay. The Hebrew word *saph* also means "threshold." Just as the drink from a vessel could cause drunkenness and stumbling, a threshold could easily cause stumbling, because part of the threshold was raised above ground level. The threshold consisted of a large stone slab that featured sockets on each end into which the door pivots were fitted (though large gates would have separate sockets sunk in the ground). The door would close against the protruding threshold. This threshold slab could also be the immovable rock that is referred to in the next verse.

12:3. immovable rock. If the word translated "bowl" in the last verse is doing double duty as a reference to the threshold, then this would likely refer to the threshold slab. As an integral part of the gate structure, the threshold stone would probably be dislodged when the gates were destroyed. This would be a prime objective of a besieging army. Tearing down gates is mentioned in Neo-Babylonian texts, but the taking up of the threshold is not specifically referred to. A Sumerian lament over Eridu reports that the doorframe was ripped out. Akkadian texts describe the high grade of stone that is used and the function these slabs serve as a foundation for both gates and walls. When Sennacherib destroyed Babylon, he tore out the foundations of temples and walls and threw them into the canal. Temple thresholds were often inscribed with prayers for protection.

12:11. weeping of Hadad Rimmon. This name occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament, though each of the parts are known. Hadad was the name of the Canaanite storm god, the head of the Aramean pantheon, who was generally referred to by the title "Baal." A temple of Rimmon is referred to by Naaman in 2 Kings 5:18. Rimmon (or Ramman, "thunderer") is believed to be a title of this storm god Hadad. Though this association is confidently

made, there has been no occurrence of this title outside the Bible. Though some interpreters have thought of mourning that took place at a location known as Hadad Rimmon, it is more likely that a reference is being made to a mourning festival or ritual connected to the deity Hadad Rimmon. When the expected rains did not come at their proper time, mourning for the storm god was one step taken to bring the rains needed for planting season.

12:11. plain of Megiddo. The plain of Megiddo is the Jezreel Valley. If mourning rites for a storm god are indicated here, the Jezreel Valley, the most fertile land in Israel, would be the likely site for the ritual. If Hadad Rimmon is a place in the Jezreel Valley, it may indicate the location of a devastating event. It was in the plain of Megiddo, for instance, that the promising and godly king Josiah lost his life attempting to stop the Egyptians from helping the floundering Assyrian empire in 609 B.C. (see comments on 2 Chron 35:20, 22). This loss was felt so deeply that a customary day of mourning was instituted (2 Chron 35:24-25).

12:12-13. historical significance of named clans. David and Levi are recognizable as the royal and priestly lines. Nathan and Shimei are more difficult in that there are numerous individuals in the Bible with those names. Since Nathan was one of the sons of David (2 Sam 5:14), and Shimei was one of the grandsons of Levi (Num 3:21), many see in these verses a reference to clans and subclans. Also of interest is the possibility that all of these clans had a relationship to Zerubbabel. He descended from David through Nathan and through Levi (Lk 3:29, 31), and Zerubbabel's brother is named Shimei (1 Chron 3:19).

13:1-9

Cleansing and Refining

13:4. prophet's garment of hair. The distinctive prophet's cloak was most likely made of animal skin and was hairy in appearance, though not all cloaks were so made. Very little is said about prophetic garb in the ancient Near East, so comparison is difficult. It may be of interest that Assyrian inscriptions beginning at this period portray a few individuals wearing lion-headed cloaks. These individuals seem to be involved in ritual activities (dance) and accompany deity. It is guessed that they may be exorcists.

13:6. wounds on prophet's body. Self-laceration is evident in 1 Kings 18:28 as part of a mourning ritual performed by the prophets of Baal. In the Ugaritic literature the gods are portrayed as lacerating themselves when they hear of the death of Baal. Additionally an Akkadian wisdom text from Ugarit compares the blood-letting of mourning rites to that practiced by ecstatic prophets. Marks of self-flagellation would be indicative of practicing prophets.

14:1-21

The Lord Reigns

14:3. divine warrior. See comment on 9:14. The imagery of the deity standing on a mountain is well known in the ancient Near East (see comment on Mic 1:3), especially on cylinder seals. In these pictures the mountain is believed to represent the center of the earth.

14:4. Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives is so named only here in the Old Testament. It is a ridge two and a half miles long running north and south just east across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem.

14:4. splitting of Mount of Olives. In Akkadian literature leveling mountains is an act of destruction, but there is no reference to splitting mountains to provide for escape. The ascent up the Mount of Olives from the Kidron Valley is quite steep, so an east-west valley would certainly facilitate the refugees' flight.

14:5. Azel. There is no clear consensus regarding the location of Azel. In other verses it is only the name of a person in the genealogy of Saul. If the territory name is connected to the person, it would be located northwest of Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin, but it is difficult to understand what is intended by having the valley extend there.

14:5. earthquake in Uzziah's days. Seismic activity in Syro-Palestine is a common occurrence. The region lies over the Jordan Rift, which stretches from Damascus to the Gulf of Aqabah, and is therefore subject to periodic shifts of the earth. There is evidence of a sizeable earthquake in the stratum 6 excavations at Hazor, dating to approximately 760. It is possible that this is the one referred to here, but additional corroborating evidence needs to be sought at other sites, especially Bethel and Samaria. The fact that this earthquake is used to date both Amos's prophetic activity and the reign of King Uzziah suggests that it must have been massive and therefore an event that would have stuck in the minds of the people.

14:7. cosmic effects. The cessation of markers of time signifies the most dramatic world-upside-down effect imaginable (see comment on Jer 4:23-26). It is accompanied by extensive topographical changes (vv. 8, 10) and by sweep-

ing political developments (vv. 12-13), as well as by a redistribution of wealth (v. 14) and a reorientation of worship (v. 16).

14:8. Jerusalem as watershed with stream. "Living water" refers to flowing spring water (in contrast to collected runoff or rain water). In Jerusalem the source of water is the Gihon Spring on the southeastern flank of the city by the Kidron Valley. Although there are higher elevations south of Jerusalem (Bethlehem to Hebron), the land slopes away both in the west (through the Shephelah down to the Mediterranean coast) and in the east (down to Jericho, the Jordan Rift Valley and the Dead Sea). Many wadis in Israel contain water only during the rainy season (winter), but this verse speaks of a continuous flow. The Gihon Spring gushes daily throughout the year (see comment on 2 Sam 5:8).

14:10. Geba to Rimmon. Geba is located about five miles north of Jerusalem. It guards the Wadi Swenit near what was the northern border of the Persian province of Yehud. Rimmon is a little more difficult. There is a site known elsewhere as En-Rimmon on the southern end of the Shephelah (about ten miles north of Beersheba), but this would not have been in the territory of Yehud and appears too far south to be matched with Geba.

14:10. land like the Arabah. The term "Arabah" is capable of having both specific and general meanings. As a specific geographical designation it refers to the arid region around the Dead Sea and south to the Gulf of Aqaba. As a general topographical designation it refers to flat steppe land. The context of this verse demands the latter meaning.

14:10. Jerusalem topography. The Benjamin Gate (other times called the Sheep Gate), north of the Temple Mount, exits from the area of the Bethesda Pool (known in this period as the Sheep Pool) into the Kidron Valley. It is toward the northern side of the east wall (near the present day Lion's Gate) and would have led to the Jericho road. If First Gate is the name of a gate, it should probably be associated with the Old Gate (see comment on Neh 3:6). The Corner Gate is located on the northwest corner of the city's western expansion. It is in the vicinity of today's Jaffa Gate. The gates mentioned therefore span the city from east to west along the northern walls. The Tower of Hananel was positioned on the northwest side of the city near the Temple Mount. This is about the same location as the Antonio Fortress in Herod's Jerusalem. Finally, the king's winepresses were probably in the area of the king's garden (see comment on Neh 3:15) at the southern end of the city. The winepresses combined with the Tower of Hananel span the city from north to south.

14:12. plague description. Among the most common treatments of prominent enemies in the ancient Near East were flaying the skin, putting out the eyes and cutting out the tongue. Here those are accomplished through "plague." These symptoms are unattested as connected to any particular plague in the ancient Near East.

14:16. feast of tabernacles as enthronement feast. Although an enthronement festival per se is unattested in Israelite practice, it is often assumed to have existed, and, if it did exist, it would most logically have been connected to the Feast of Tabernacles (see comments on 1 Kings 12:32-33 and Ezra 3:4). That would especially be significant in this context as the nations are expected to attend in order to acknowledge the kingship of Yahweh.

14:18. rain in Egypt. Egypt receives very little rain, and what it receives is not essential to its productivity. Agriculture in Egypt is dependent almost entirely on the annual flooding of the Nile.

14:20. bells of horses. When something is designated "Holy to the Lord" it is given sacred status as part of that which is purified for service within the sacred space of the temple precinct where Yahweh's presence dwelt. In Exodus 28:38 it was engraved on the golden plate worn by the high priest. Although priests wore bells on their garments (Ex 28:33), this is a different Hebrew word. The word used here may simply refer to metal disks that tinkled together.

14:20. cooking pots and sacred bowls. Sacred bowls would have been used for the most significant ritual activities such as transporting the blood of the sacrificed animals. Cooking pots, in contrast, were the most common of the temple vessels. Both could come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

MALACHI

1:3. Esau's mountains. "Esau's mountains" was most likely a designation for the hill country of Seir (Gen 36:8-9, 21), which was in the eastern Negev. The mountains of Seir are mentioned in Scripture (e.g., Gen 14:6, Deut 2:1). It was most likely a designation for the southern portion of the Edomite state, between the Wadi al-Ghuwayr and Ras en-Naqb.

1:4-5. Edom in the fifth century. Although Edom did not appear to join the rebellion against Babylonian rule in the sixth century B.C., the region appears to have been attacked by the last Babylonian monarch, Nabonidus. References in Obadiah, Jeremiah 49 and Ezekiel 25 refer to its destruction, but here in Malachi it implies that the territory was not as of yet abandoned by the Edomites. In the fifth century B.C., however, little is known of the fate of Edom. There appears to be some economic activity from Edom with the Levant and eastern Mediterranean, as well as evidence of new population groups in the area. The Qedarites appear to have belonged to the Syrian desert southeast of Damascus, raiding and migrating as far south of Moab and Edom. It is also possible that the Nabataeans, who conquered the area of Edom in the late third century B.C., may have begun to migrate north to this area from the Arabian desert.

1:8. offering defective animals. With the termination of funding from the Persian government (see comment on 3:10), various attempts were being made cut costs. Apparently one of them came in the form of relaxing the regulations concerning the animals that could be offered for sacrifices.

1:12. Lord's table. The phrase "the Lord's table" is found only here in the Old Testament. The term translated "table" is a common one used literally and figuratively to denote a table (e.g., Is 65:11). Tables were used in Ezekiel 40:39-43 at the gates of the inner court to slaughter sacrifices or for utensils. In the context of Malachi 1:12, the Lord's table appears to be synonymous with the altar, which has been defiled by the Israelites. It is figuratively described as a table because of the imagery of sacrifices being "food" for God. For discussion of this imagery see the comment on Leviticus 1:2.

2:5-7. role of postexilic priesthood. Over four thousand members of priestly and Levitical families returned to Palestine after the exile under the supervision of Zerubbabel and Joshua. Both groups engaged in a variety of activities, including the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, instructing in the law and leading in the religious duties of the nation. However, the priestly cult must have deteriorated during this time (especially during Nehemiah's absence), since a foreigner (Tobiah the Ammonite) was allowed a room in the temple. In fact, the Levites had forsaken the temple for a time (Neh 13:10-11). Malachi 2 fits in this context, as the contemporary priesthood had abrogated its priestly responsibilities. The high priesthood continued to exist as an office, continuing in Zadok's line. The book of Zechariah indicates that many civil responsibilities exercised by the king or governor had been assigned to or simply absorbed by the priesthood so as to prevent the governor from competing with the authority of the Persian king.

2:11. marrying the daughter of a foreign god. Although the meaning is not entirely certain, the phrase "marrying the daughters of a foreign god" probably refers to mixed Jewish and non-Jewish marriages. The women who were married to Jewish men remained devoted to the service of their idols, and thus the Jews were brought into the family of foreign gods, making them liable to commit idolatry. These marriages were condemned by both Ezra and Nehemiah. For further information on the practice of endogamy (marrying within the group) see comment on Ezra 9:10-12.

2:14-16. marriage and divorce in fifth century. What is known of marriage and divorce in the Persian period comes from the Jewish documents from Elephantine. Marriage contracts often included stipulations concerning the disposition of the dowry, bride price, property and children in the event of a divorce. Divorce appears to have been common and uncomplicated with economic implications being of greatest concern. At Elephantine no reason for the divorce had to be offered.

3:1. preparatory role of the messenger. The idea of the preparation for the way of the Lord is also found in Isaiah 40:3. This concept probably comes from an ancient Near Eastern custom of sending messengers ahead of a visiting king to inform local inhabitants of his coming in order for them to pave the way (remove all obstacles) for the monarch.

3:2. launderer's soap. Launderer's soap was used to remove impurities and unclean elements from clothing and other items. The soap described here is the alkali that comes from the iceplant, which was found in Babylo-

nia but not in Syro-Palestine. The term occurs elsewhere only in Jeremiah 2:22.

3:3. refiner and purifier of silver. In the ancient world silver was extracted and assayed through a process called cupellation. In the initial smelting process silver was extracted from lead ores (galena) containing less than 1 percent silver in a given sample. The lead was melted in shallow vessels made of porous substances such as bone ash or clay. A bellows was then used to blow air across the molten lead, producing lead oxide (litharge). Some of the lead oxide was absorbed by the bone ash, while some could be skimmed off the surface. Ideally, the silver would remain. Malachi might alternatively refer to the assaying process. This involved heating a sample of silver together with large amounts of lead in order to draw off the impurities.

3:5. sorcerers. The technical term here refers to those who were specialists in spells and incantations. These experts would have had familiarity with the literature for omens and dreams. They would have practiced sympathetic magic (based on the idea that there is an association between an object and that which it symbolizes; for example, that what is done to a person's picture will happen to the person) and would have used their arts to command the gods and spirits. Magic was the thread that held creation together. and it was used both defensively and offensively by its practitioners, human or divine.

3:8-10. tithes providing food. There is little difference in the ancient Near East between tithes and taxes. Both were exacted from villages as payment to the government and usually stored in temple complexes, from which the grain, oil and wine were then redistributed to maintain royal and religious officials. In collecting and redistributing the tithe, the distinction between sacred and secular is blurred. The tithe (literally, the "tenth part") mentioned here was a compulsory contribution for the maintenance of both the cult and the government of ancient Israel. It was also used among various other peoples in the ancient Near East, including the Phoenicians and Canaanites. Israel was commanded to tithe to God and to "eat before the Lord," probably a communal meal. It is unlikely that the one who is tithing is expected to eat the entire tithe. That would frustrate its purpose of providing for the priestly community and serving as a reserve for the destitute. The injunction probably has more to do with bringing the tithe (or its value in silver) to God's sanctuary in Jerusalem and thereby demonstrating devotion. See comment on Numbers 18:21-32 for further information.

3:10. shortfall in temple funds. The problem of appropriating for private use that which rightfully belonged to the temple was recognized early on in the ancient Near East. In a Sumerian prayer to Enki a worshiper denies that he has plundered the offerings of the deity. During the reign of Xerxes the funding of the temple by the Persian empire came to an end. This meant that there was a greater burden placed on the people to provide the support for all of the priests, the worship activities and the temple upkeep. This additional financial responsibility created what the people considered a hardship and led to rationalizations for cutting back temple spending.

3:16. scroll of remembrance. The expression "book of remembrance" is found only here in Scripture, although the idea of God having a book in which he recorded entries is found elsewhere (e.g., Ex 32:32; Ps 139:16; Is 4:3; 65:6; Ezek 13:9). Ancient Near Eastern kings often had a record written of the most important events in their reign (see comment on Esther 2:23). It was believed both in Israel and in the ancient Near East that deity kept books as well. In Exodus 32:32-34 Moses is willing to be blotted out of the book of life, an action that would result in his death. Yahweh replies that the one who sins is wiped out from the book. The metaphor is of a ledger that contains a list of the living. This is comparable to the book that contains the names of those destined for death that Enkidu sees in his dream of the netherworld. Mesopotamian literature contains references both to tablets recording evil deeds (in the *Shurpu* texts) and to tablets recording good deeds. See comment on Psalm 56:8.

4:2. sun of righteousness with healing in its wings. The sun of righteousness here is bringing justice. Throughout the ancient Near East solar deities are connected to justice. It is not unusual in the Old Testament for Yahweh's work to be depicted using this metaphor of solar terminology. "Healing in its wings" is a symbolic use of the wings of a bird with the rays of the sun. The wings denote protective care (hence the healing). An ancient Near Eastern motif in astral religions has the sun depicted as a winged disk. This is especially pervasive in the Persian period.

4:4. Horeb. Horeb was another name for Mount Sinai, the place where God revealed himself to Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments. Its precise location is uncertain, and there are at least four possible locations in the southern Sinai argued by scholars to be Mount Sinai: Jebel Musa, Ras es-safsafeh, Jebel Serbal and a mountain near al-Hrob. For discussion of the location see comment on Exodus 19:1-2.

GLOSSARY

Many terms that arise frequently in our discussions are explained in this glossary. To aid readers we have placed asterisks (*) throughout the text before terms that are found here. Not all terms will be found in exactly the same form here as in the text.

Adapa: a priest of the god Ea in the Sumerian city of Eridu. The story about him tells how he was tricked out of the opportunity to obtain immortality when he was advised not to eat divine food.

Ahiqar: an advisor to the Assyrian king Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.), who was exiled and wrote a set of teachings on "wise" and "foolish" men that parallels some of the saying in Proverbs.

Akkadian: term applied to Mesopotamian culture and language from about 2500 to 500 B.C.

Alalakh: a northern Syrian city in the southern part of the plain of Antioch that flourished in the early second millennium B.C. It produced numerous records that describe the politics and economy of the area, and it is mentioned in texts from Mari, Nuzi and the Hittite kingdom.

Amarna: see El-Amarna.

amulet: a carved ornament worn around the neck designed to ward off evil, cure disease or bring good luck to the owner.

Amorite/Amurru: a group of Semitic peoples who lived in an area west of Mesopotamia and including the Mediterranean seacoast during the second millennium B.C.

anachronism: a detail or word in a story that does not fit the time period of the story. Often anachronisms can be understood as clarifications or adjustments made to the text at a later time.

Anat: goddess of fertility and warfare, and principal consort of the god Baal in Canaanite and Ugaritic religion.

Anatolia: roughly equivalent to the area known in the New Testament as Asia Minor and today as Turkey. It was the home of the Hittites in the mid-second millennium.

annunciation: a birth announcement.

Apocrypha: books written in the Hellenistic period between the Testaments. These fourteen books were not part of the Jewish canon and are not included in the Protestant canon but are retained in the Catholic tradition.

apodictic law: a type of legal statement in the form of a command, without explanation.

apostasy: any action which allows or condones false worship.

apotropaic: an action taken or a symbol used to drive away evil.

Aqhat: the son of Danil. He is the hero of a Ugaritic epic in which he is portrayed as a mighty hunter and is murdered by the goddess Anat when he refuses to give her his bow. The story has parallels with the ancestral narratives and the book of Judges.

Aram: the northwestern half of Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean coast was the home of the Arameans in the late second and early first millennia B.C.

Asherah: Canaanite fertility goddess, consort of Baal, often associated with sacred groves or represented by sacred poles in the Bible.

Assyria: northern Mesopotamian area centered on the Tigris River. It has several periods of prominence, the most important being from 1000 to 612 B.C., when it conquered all of the Near East and produced a law code (Middle Assyrian Code) that parallels biblical law.

Astarte: a Canaanite and Phoenician goddess, consort of the god Baal, associated with fertility and known as the goddess of war.

Baal: Canaanite and Ugaritic god of storms and fertility.

Babylon: major Mesopotamian city located

at the closest conjunction of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which dominated the history of that area during several periods.

Bronze Age: the era (divided into Early, Middle and Late periods) from approximately 3000 to 1200 B.C., characterized by bronze technology.

bulla: a clay stamp used to seal a papyrus document. The seal impression prevented tampering and also provided the name or the rank of the official who wrote the document.

casuistic law: a form of legal statement based on an "if-then" structure.

Chalcolithic Age: the era from 4300 to 3000 B.C., characterized by use of copper technology.

Chaldean: period of Mesopotamian history from approximately 700 to 540 B.C. and associated with the Neo-Babylonians and King Nebuchadnezzar.

Chemosh: Moabite national god, often associated with war.

circumcision: the religious ritual of removing the foreskin from the penis. It was employed by the Israelites to mark them as members of the covenant community.

cognate: languages that are part of the Semitic family and share vocabulary and numerous grammatical features with Hebrew. The principal cognate languages are Akkadian, Aramaic and Ugaritic. Among several other less significant cognates are Arabic, Moabite, Ammonite, Amorite, Ethiopic and Syriac. The literature written in these languages is referred to as cognate literature.

colophon: a statement or phrase placed at the end of a document, or a literary segment that may serve as a summary or simply as an end marker.

concubine: a secondary wife, who may have come to the marriage without a dowry and whose children may not inherit from their father unless he publicly declares them as his heirs.

corporate identity: a group is treated as a single unit. Reflected in a legal principle that rewards or punishes an entire household for the righteousness or the sins of the head of the household.

covenant: a contractual agreement associated in the Bible with the agreement between Yahweh and the Israelites that promises land and children in exchange for exclusive worship and obedience.

cult: the organization and activities of a religious group, including sacrifice and other rituals.

cuneiform: the wedge-shaped syllabic script invented by the Sumerians and used by every subsequent civilization in Mesopotamia until the coming of the Greeks.

demotic: a shorthand version, dating back to 700 B.C., of the Egyptian language known as hieratic, a more practical cursive script than its precursor, pictographic hieroglyphics.

Dilmun: an Edenlike land in Mesopotamian mythology. Utnapishtim, the hero of the *Gilgamesh Epic,* was taken here to live eternally after the flood.

divination: a process of determining the will of the god(s) through the examination of natural phenomena (cloud formations, the entrails of sheep) or by casting lots.

Dumuzi/Tammuz: a Mesopotamian god, consort of the goddess Ishtar, whose death and incarceration in the underworld represented the changes of the seasons.

Ea: Mesopotamian god of rivers and streams who figures in the flood story of the Gilgamesh Epic and in the Babylonian creation story, *Enuma Elish.*

Early Bronze Age: the era from approximately 3300 to 2300 B.C., characterized by the emergence of cities, the high civilization of Early Dynastic Egypt and Sumer, as well as bronze technology.

El: the high god in the Ugaritic pantheon and also a generic term for a god. It would be added to a place name (i.e., Bethel or El Elohe-Israel) to distinguish it as a place where a god has made his power manifest.

El Amarna: the capital of Pharaoh Akhenaten (fourteenth century B.C.) in which archaeologists have discovered hundreds of royal dispatches describing rather chaotic events in Canaan during this period.

Elam: country to the east of the Tigris River in modern Iran.

Elohim: one of the names for the Israelite god, generally translated as "God" in English but occasionally used for other gods or supernatural beings.

Emar: a Bronze Age city (Tell Meskene/Balis) located on the northern reaches of the Euphrates River in Syria. Texts found here from the Late Bronze period provide insights into daily life during the fourteenth through the twelfth centuries B.C.

Enki and Ninhursag: a Sumerian myth

providing an explanation for the life-giving properties of river water (Enki) and the types of vegetation engendered as the water passed through and nourished the land (Ninhursag and her children).

Enlil: Mesopotamian storm god, the head of the divine assembly and instigator of the flood in the Gilgamesh Epic.

Enuma Elish: the Babylonian creation story.

Eshnunna: Mesopotamian city in the Diyala region east of modern Baghdad that produced a short-lived kingdom between 2100 and 2000 B.C. and a law code that contains some parallels to Hammurabi's Code and biblical law.

Etana: ancient Mesopotamian king, the subject of a legend in which he obtains a plant from heaven that provides fertility and thus is able to father a son to continue his rule. His flight to heaven is on the back of an eagle and thus he is depicted on ancient seals.

etiology: story that attempts to explain the origin of a name, a custom or a current reality, such as death or painful childbirth.

execration: a method of cursing an enemy by fashioning a doll or an incantation bowl containing the name of the accursed party.

exorcism: a ritual, including spells and incantations, designed to cast out or remove demons from persons or places.

fertility worship: a dominant religious practice in much of the ancient world. The principal gods were paired as male and female, and their rites were designed to insure plentiful rain, plant growth and bountiful harvests and herds. This worship could include sacrifices as well as sacred prostitution. In a society dominated by farming and herding, fertility is of utmost importance.

funerary: rituals and objects involved with the internment of the dead. Funerary rites were also part of a larger system of ancestor worship.

Gilgamesh: Sumerian king of Uruk who is the prototypical hero of Mesopotamian literature. His epic contains a quest for the secret of immortality and a flood story.

glyptic: a type of engraved art featured especially on seals where the design is engraved in reverse so that its impression on clay or wax will be embossed and upright.

Habiru: a term used in Mesopotamian texts for stateless persons.

Hammurabi: Babylonian king (1792-1750 B.C.) who compiled a law code containing a number of parallels with biblical law.

henotheism: a religion that acknowledges the existence of other gods but often insists on the supremacy of one's own god.

herem: "holy war" or the "ban" which requires the complete destruction of all persons, animals and property as a dedicatory sacrifice to Yahweh.

Herodotus: a Greek historian who lived in the fifth century B.C. He is best known for his *Histories* (ca. 445 B.C.), which document the history of the Persian Wars against the Greeks, such as the battles at Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis.

Hesiod: a Greek philosopher from the eight century B.C. His major work was the *Theogony,* the earliest known Greek account of creation and the origins of the gods.

hieroglyphic: the pictographic, syllabic script developed by the ancient Egyptians.

Hittites: an Indo-European people who migrated into Anatolia after 2000 B.C. and created an empire that challenged Egypt for control of Syro-Palestine during the mid-second millennium. They also produced a law code with parallels to biblical law.

Hurrian: a non-Semitic people who created a kingdom in Mitanni, central Mesopotamia, during the mid-second millennium.

Hyksos: an alliance of Semitic peoples, perhaps from the resurgent cities of Middle Bronze Canaan, who settled in Egypt and gained control of major portions of the country c. 1750 B.C. They eventually came to rule most of Lower Egypt, with their capital at Avaris, until c. 1570 B.C.

iconography: pictoral, rather than verbal, messages inscribed on ancient artifacts. These images include three-dimensional objects, reliefs, paintings, seals and even graffiti. As visuals, they are an important source of information that complement the textual data.

impurity: a state of being in which an individual, a group or an object has been polluted through an unlawful act or through contact with an impure person or thing. The result is ritual impurity, which prohibits a person or group from participating in religious activities and may (in the case of leprosy) require expulsion. Rituals of purification are required to remove this stigma and restore the person or group to full participation.

in situ: a term applied to the resting place or "find spot" of an artifact that has been uncovered and recorded by archaeologists.

Iron Age: the era in ancient Near Eastern history from 1200 to 300 B.C. characterized by the use of iron technology.

Ishtar: Mesopotamian goddess of love, the consort of Dumuzi, who appears in Gilgamesh's flood story.

Josephus: Jewish historian from the first century A.D. His two great works, *Antiquities of the Jews* and *Jewish Wars,* offer a detailed look at Jewish perspectives on their times and their history.

Kassites: a people originally from the mountainous region in northern Mesopotamia who conquered the Old Babylonian kingdom about 1595 B.C. and ruled in Babylon until 1157 B.C.

Keret: the king hero of a Ugaritic tale in which he receives instructions from the gods concerning how to acquire a wife and an heir to his throne. This family crisis is only one of a series that includes illness and rebellion by one of his sons.

Lagash: third-millennium Sumerian city-state (el-Hiba) containing several urban centers, which contested for control of the region with Ur, Uruk and Kish.

Larsa: early second-millennium Sumerian city, ten miles east of Uruk and twenty miles north of Ur.

Late Bronze Age: the chronological era from 1550 to 1200 B.C., which is marked by the Amarna age and New Kingdom in Egypt, the Hittite empire in Anatolia and the invasion of the Sea Peoples.

Levant: the area of the eastern Mediterranean. Also referred to as Syro-Palestine.

Leviathan: a sea serpent associated with the chaotic powers of the sea. The name is found in Ugaritic mythological texts as well as Job, Psalms and Isaiah.

Lipit-Ishtar: king of the Ur III dynasty in Mesopotamia who produced a law code that parallels some aspects of biblical law.

Marduk: principal god of Babylon who defeats Tiamat in the creation story *Enuma Elish* and becomes the head of the divine assembly.

Mari: Mesopotamian city on the northern reaches of the Euphrates River that thrived from 2500 to 1700 B.C. and produced thousands of cuneiform documents describing political events, prophetic activity and the pastoral nomadic peoples of northern Syria.

Middle Bronze Age: the chronological era from 2300 to 1550 B.C., which includes the period of Israel's ancestors, the Old Babylonian period and Egyptian control of Syro-Palestine.

Mitanni: the kingdom of the Hurrians in central Mesopotamia during the mid-second millennium B.C.

monolatry: a situation where a person or group has determined to worship only one God regardless of whether other gods exist or not.

Nazirite: an Israelite (either male or female) who takes an oath to refrain from consuming any product of the grape, from coming in contact with the dead and from cutting his or her hair.

Nineveh: the capital of the Assyrian empire on the upper reaches of the Tigris River.

Nuzi: a Hurrian city of the sixteenth and fifteenth centuries B.C. that has provided family and business documents documenting marriage and inheritance customs similar to those in the ancestral stories.

Old Babylonian: a period of Mesopotamian history from 2025 to 1595 B.C. highlighted by the reign of Hammurabi (1792-1750 B.C.), who produced a law code and united all of the city-states under his rule.

oracle: a prophetic speech or a reading of divine will through the use of divination.

Osiris: the Egyptian god of the underworld.

pollution (uncleanness): ritual impurity is caused by contact with or consumption of polluted items, such as blood, and can only be removed through ritual acts designed to take away the person's impurity and transform him or her from an unclean to a clean state.

pseudepigraphic: literature produced under the persona of a respected and well-known individual. Old Testament pseudepigraphal works are attributed to people such as Enoch and Ezra, and date to the intertestamental period or later.

purity: to be in compliance with the law and free to participate in religious and social activities. This state may be achieved through proper action, ritual purification or sacrifices.

ritual acts: a prescribed set of actions taken for religious purposes, such as a sacrifice.

ritual prostitution: the practice of sexual

acts as part of a religious ceremony, to promote fertility or to enrich a sanctuary.

Sea Peoples: a mixed group of peoples from throughout the Mediterranean area who served as mercenaries in the Egyptian and Hittite armies until about 1200 B.C. when they made a collective attack on the major civilizations of the Near East and disrupted them enough to allow for the emergence of new peoples in Canaan.

Sinuhe: an official of Pharaoh Amenemhat I (1991-1962 B.C.) who was exiled in Canaan for many years before being pardoned and allowed to return to Egypt. His story contains some parallels to that of the ancestors in Genesis as well as the story of Moses.

Sumer: the southernmost area of ancient Mesopotamia. It produced the first true civilization in that region about 3500 B.C., invented cuneiform script and created many of the myths that sustained religion for the next several millennia.

sympathetic magic: the ritualistic representation of reality in an object. A person's name, hair or blood may be used, or images may be made of the person or thing to be affected. The idea is for the person's essence to be linked or transferred to the representative object.

syncretism: the borrowing of cultural ideas, practices, and beliefs and combining them with one's own.

tell: an artificial hill that has been created by the successive layers of settlements on that site.

theophany: the appearance of God to a human being, as in the "burning bush."

theophoric: personal names that contain a reference to a named deity. Theophoric names such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jerubbaal and Nebuchadnezzar often make statements about the deity.

Thoth: the Egyptian moon god.

Tiamat: primordial Mesopotamian goddess of salt water, the consort of Apsu, god of fresh water. She is Marduk's opponent in the creation story *Enuma Elish.*

Ugarit: northern Syrian seaport city that controlled the Mediterranean carrying trade from approximately 1600 to 1200 B.C., when it was destroyed by the Sea Peoples. Several Ugaritic epic stories have been discovered that help illumine biblical stories from the ancestral and settlement periods. Ugaritic culture is thought to have approximated Canaanite culture.

Ur III: the period of Mesopotamian history from 2120 to 1800 B.C. founded by Ur-Nammu, centered in the city of Ur and characterized by a brief revival of Sumerian culture.

Ur-Nammu: Ur III king, father of Shulgi, who produced a law code that has some parallels with biblical law.

Uruk: third- and early second-millennium Sumerian city ruled by Gilgamesh.

Utnapishtim: hero of the flood story in the Gilgamesh Epic.

Wenamon: a priest of the Egyptian god Amon (c. 1100 B.C.), sent as an envoy to obtain logs for the royal barge from the rulers of Syria and the Phoenician coast. His mission was delayed by the weak stature of Egypt at that time and the chaotic political conditions following the invasion of the Sea Peoples.

Xenophon: Greek historian writing early in the fourth century B.C. His most famous historical work, *Anabasis,* focuses on the battle between Cyrus the Younger and Artaxerxes II.

Yahweh: one of the names for the Israelite God, sometimes anglicized as Jehovah and translated in English as "LORD."

Major Tablets of Old Testament Significance

NAME	NUMBER OF TABLETS	LANGUAGE	DISCOVERER	LOCATION FOUND	DATE FOUND	SUBJECT	DATE OF ORIGIN	BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE
Ebla	17,000	Eblaite	Matthiae	Tell-Mardikh	1976	Royal archives containing many types of texts	24th c.	Provide historical background of Syria in late 3rd millennium
Atrahasis	3	Akkadian	Many found different parts	different parts in different sites	1889 to 1967	Account of creation, population growth and flood	1635 copy	Parallels to Genesis accounts
Mari	20,000	Akkadian (Old Babylonian)	Parrot	Tell-Hariri	1933	Royal archives of Zimri-Lim containing many types of texts	18th c.	Provide historical background of the period and largest collection of prophetic texts
Enuma Elish	7	Akkadian (Neo-Assyrian)	Layard	Nineveh (library of Ashurbanipal)	1848-1876	Account of Marduk's ascension to the head of the pantheon	7th c. copy	Parallels to Genesis creation accounts
Gilgamesh	12	Akkadian (Neo-Assyrian)	Rassam	Nineveh (library of Ashurbanipal)	1853	The exploits of Gilgamesh and Enkidu and the search for immortality	7th c. copy	Parallels to Genesis flood accounts
Boghaz-Köy	10,000	Hittite	Winckler	Boghaz-Köy	1906	Royal archives of Neo-Hittite Empire	16th c.	Hittite history and illustrations of international treaties
Nuzi	4000	Hurrian dialect of Akkadian	Chiera and Speiser	Yorghun Tepe	1925 to 1941	Archive containing family records	15th c.	Source for contemporary customs in mid-2nd millennium
Ugarit	1400	Ugaritic	Schaeffer	Ras Shamra	1929 to 1937	Royal archives of Ugarit	13th c.	Canaanite religion and literature
Amarna	380	Akkadian (W. Semitic dialect)	Egyptian peasant	Tell el-Amarna	1887	Correspondence between Egypt and her vassals in Canaan	1370 to 1340	Reflects conditions in Palestine in the mid-2nd millennium
Babylonian Chronicles	4	Akkadian (Neo-Babylonian)	Wiseman	Babylon	1956	Court records of Neo-Babylonian Empire	626 to 594	Record of capture of Jerusalem in 597 and history of the period
Emar	800	Akkadian	Margueron	Tell-Meskene	1975	Royal Temple, and family archives	13th c.	family customs; religious rituals
Alalakh	500	Akkadian	Woolley	Tell-Atchana	1939	Royal Temple archive; Statute of Idrimi	18th-17th c.	Treaties and contracts offer cultural background

Major Inscriptions of Old Testament Significance

NAME	LANGUAGE	DISCOVERER	LOCATION FOUND	DATE FOUND	SUBJECT	DATE OF ORIGIN (B.C.)	BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE
Beni Hasan Tomb Painting	Hieroglyphic Egyptian	Newberry	Beni Hasan	1900	Tomb painting of Khnumhotep II	1920	Pictures Semites in Egypt
Laws of Hammurabi	Akkadian (Old Babylonian)	deMorgan	Susa	1901	Collection of Babylonian laws	1725	Illustrates ancient Near Eastern law
Merenptah Stela	Hieroglyphic Egyptian	Petrie	Thebes	1896	Military accomplishments of Merenptah	1207	First mention of the name "Israel"
Sheshonq Inscription	Hieroglyphic Egyptian		Karnak Temple	1825	Military accomplishments of Sheshonq	920	Confirmation of raid against Rehoboam
"House of David" Inscription	Aramaic	Biran	Dan	1993	Syrian conquest of region	9th c.	Earliest mention of David in contemporary records
Mesha Inscription	Moabite	Klein	Dibon	1868	Military accomplishments of Mesha of Moab	850	Moabite-Israelite relations in 9th century
Black Stela	Akkadian (Neo-Assyrian)	Layard	Nineveh	1845	Military accomplishments of Shalmaneser III	840	Picture Israelites paying tribute
Balaam Texts	Aramaic	Franken	Deir Alla (Succoth)	1967	Prophecy of Balaam about the displeasure of the divine council	8th c.	Connected to a famous seer known from the Bible
Silver Scrolls	Hebrew	Barkay	Hinnom Valley Tomb	1979	Amulet containing the text of Num 6:24-26	7th c.	Earliest copy of any portion of the Bible
Siloam Inscription	Hebrew	Peasant boy	Jerusalem	1880	Commemoration of the completion of Hezekiah's water tunnel	701	Contemporary example of Hebrew language
Sennacherib Prism	Akkadian (Neo-Assyrian)	Taylor	Nineveh	1830	Military accomplishments of Sennacherib	686	Describes siege of Jerusalem
Lachish Ostraca	Hebrew	Starkey	Tell ed-Duweir	1935	18 letters from the captain of the fort of Lachish	588	Conditions during the final Babylonian siege
Cyrus Cylinder	Akkadian	Rassam	Babylon	1879	Decree of Cyrus allowing the rebuilding of temples	535	Illustrates the policy by which Judah also benefited

Legal Texts of the Ancient Near East

	NAME	CENTURY B.C.	DESCRIPTION
SUMERIAN	Reform of Uruinimgina (King of Lagash)	24th Early Dynastic III	Social reform
	Laws of Ur-Nammu (King of Ur)	21st (Ur III)	About 31 laws remain. Fragmented
	Laws of Lipit-Ishtar (King of Isin)	19th (Isin-Larsa)	Parts of 38 laws with prologue and epilogue: civil law only
AKKADIAN	Laws of Eshnunna	18th (Old Babylonian)	60 paragraphs civil and criminal law
	Laws of Hammurabi (King of Babylon)	18th (Old Babylonian)	282 laws remaining (35-40 erased) plus prologue and epilogue
	Middle Assyrian laws (Tiglath-Pileser I?)	12th (Middle Assyrian)	About 100 laws on 11 tablets civil and criminal law
HITTITE	Hittite laws (Murshilish I or Hattushilish I)	17th (Old Hittite)	About 200 laws civil and criminal law

Ancient Near Eastern Literature Containing Parallels to the Old Testament

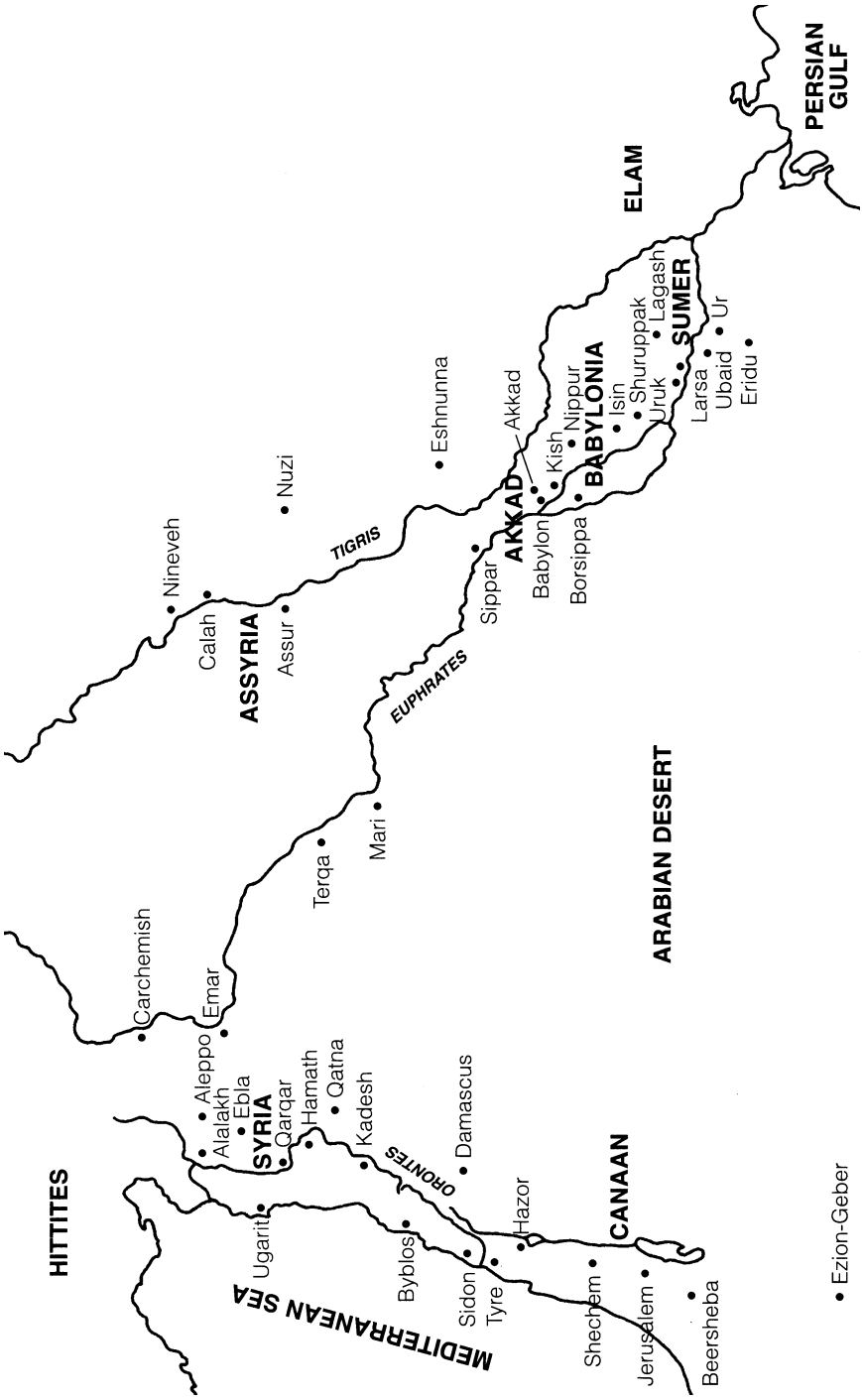
LITERARY WORK	LANGUAGE	DATE	OT BOOK	NATURE OF PARALLEL
Atrahasis Epic	Akkadian	~1635	Genesis	Creation, population growth and flood with ark
Enuma Elish	Akkadian	~1100	Genesis	Account of creation
Gilgamesh Epic	Sumerian Akkadian	~2000	Genesis	Account of the flood complete with ark and birds
Memphite Theology	Egyptian	~13th c.	Genesis	Creation by spoken word
Hammurabi's Laws	Akkadian	~1750	Exodus	Laws similar to those given at Sinai in form and content
Hymn to the Aten	Egyptian	~1375	Psalm 104	Wording used in motifs and analogies; subject matter
Ludlul bel Nemeqi	Akkadian	~13th c.	Job	Sufferer questions justice of deity
Babylonian Theodicy	Akkadian	~1000	Job	Dialogue between sufferer and friend concerning the justice of deity
Instruction of Amenemope	Egyptian	~1200	Proverbs 22:17—24:22	Vocabulary, imagery, subject matter, structure
Hittite Treaties (36)	Hittite	2nd m.	Deuteronomy; Joshua 24	Format and content
Lamentations over the fall of Sumerian Cities (5)	Sumerian	20th c.	Lamentations	Phrasing, imagery and subject matter
Egyptian Love Songs (54)	Egyptian	1300-1150	Song of Solomon	Content and literary categories employed
Mari Prophecy Texts (~50)	Akkadian	18th c.	Preclassical Prophecy	Addressed similar subjects (military undertakings and cultic activity)

Comparative Ancient Near Eastern Chronology 10,000-2100 B.C.

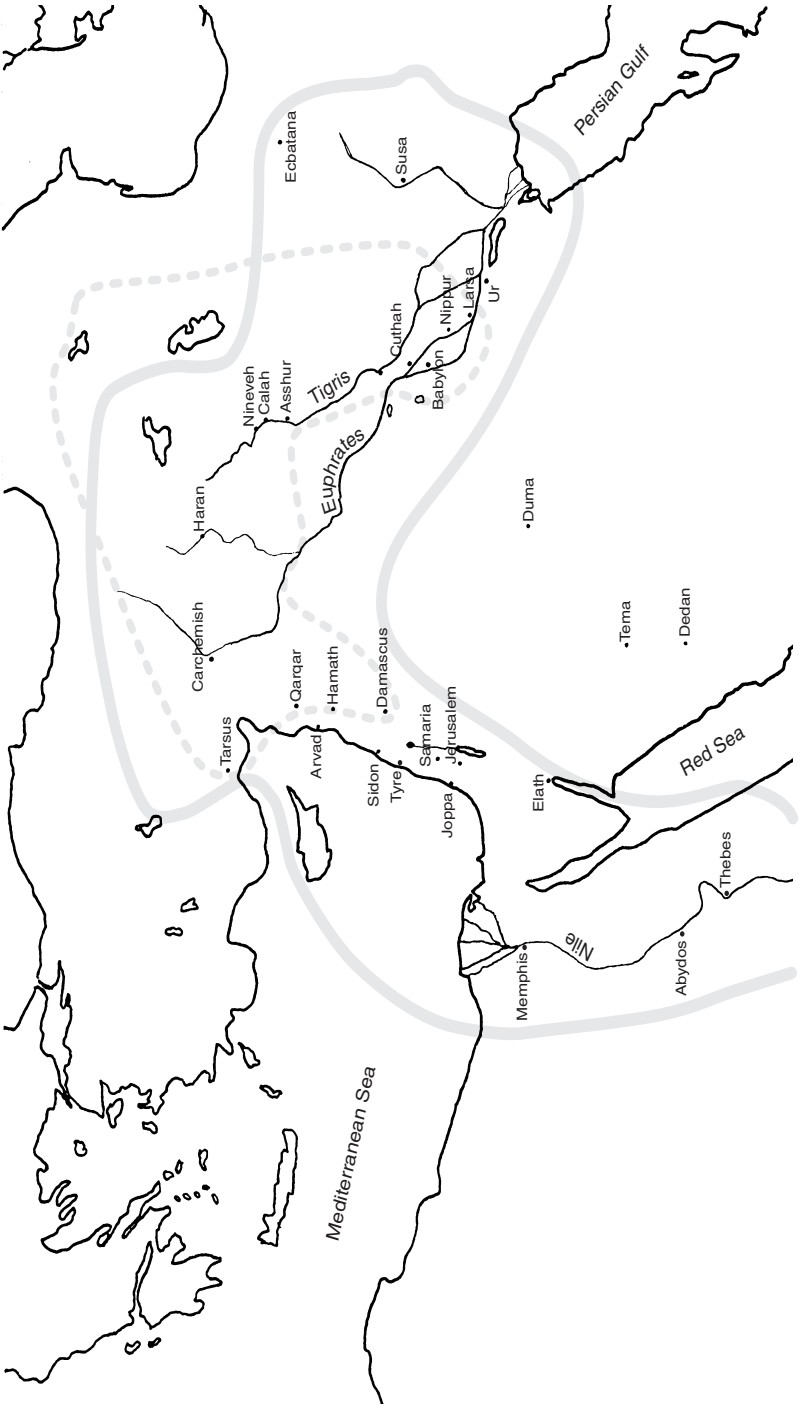
Anatolia/Syria	Mesopotamia			Palestine	Egypt
			10000		
				Mesolithic: Natufian	
			8000		
				Neolithic Pre-pottery	
	Jarmo		5000		
A	Hassuna Samarra Halaf			Neolithic Pottery Period	
			4300		Predynastic Preiod: Fayyum A, Deir Tasa Badarian, Amratian Gerzean
N	Ubaid (4300-3500)			Chalcolithic: Ghassulian	
C	South: Uruk (3500-3100)	North: Tepe Gawra (3500-2900)	3300		
I	Pro-literate Jemdet Nasr (3100-2900)		3000	Early Bronze I	
E			2900		
N	Early Dynastic I		2800		Protodynastic Period: Dynasties I and II (3000-2700)
T				Early Bronze II	
			2700		
H	Early Dynastic II				
A			2600		
T	Early Dynastic III		2530	Early Bronze III	Old Kingdom Pyramid Age Dynasties III-V (2700-2350)
T			2400		
I	Akkadian Period		2300		Dynasty VI (2350-2160)
				Early Bronze IV	
	Gutian Period: Dynasty of Lagash		2200		First Intermediate Period (2160-2010)
			2100		

Comparative Ancient Near Eastern Chronology 2100-332 B.C.

Anatolia/Syria	Mesopotamia		Palestine	Egypt
		2100		
	Ur III Dynasty		Middle	
		2000	Bronze I	
	Isin-Larsa		Patriarchs	Middle Kingdom: Dynasties XI-XII (2106-1786)
		1900		
	Elam-Amorite Invasions		Middle Bronze	
		1800	IIA sojourn	
Old Hittite Empire (1800-1600)	Old Babylonian Period:	1700		Second Intermediate Period: Hyksos (1786-1550)
	Age of Hammurabi		Middle Bronze IIB & C Sojourn	
		1600		
		1500	Late Bronze I	
Mitanni-Hurrian Empire (1500-1350)			Exodus and Conquest	New Kingdom (1550-1069): Dynasty XVIII (1550-1295)
	Kassite Period	1400		
			Late Bronze II	
Neo-Hittite Empire (1460-1200)		1300	Judges to Deborah	
		1200		Dynasty XIX Empire Age (1295-1186)
Neo-Hittites of North Syria Through Eighth Century			Iron I	
	Assyrian rise to power	1100	Judges and United	Dynasty XX (1186-1069)
		1000	Monarchy	
		900		Dynasty XXI (1069-945)
Syrian Strength till Fall of Damascus (732)	Assyrian Empire	800	Iron II Divided Monarchy	Late Period: Dynasties XXII-XXVI (945-525)
		700		
	Neo-Babylonian Empire	600		
	PERSIAN CONTROL (539-332)			

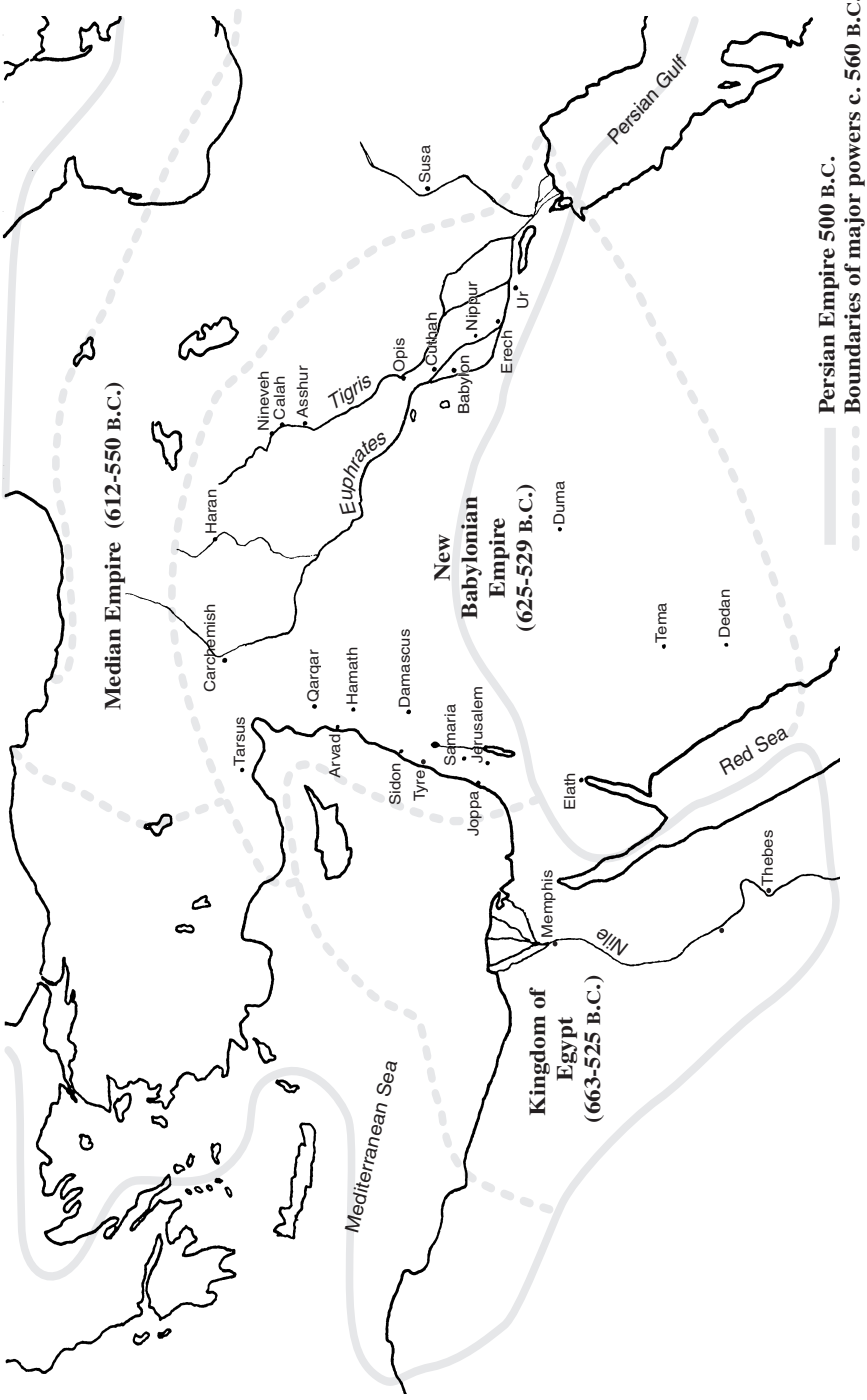


The Ancient Near East

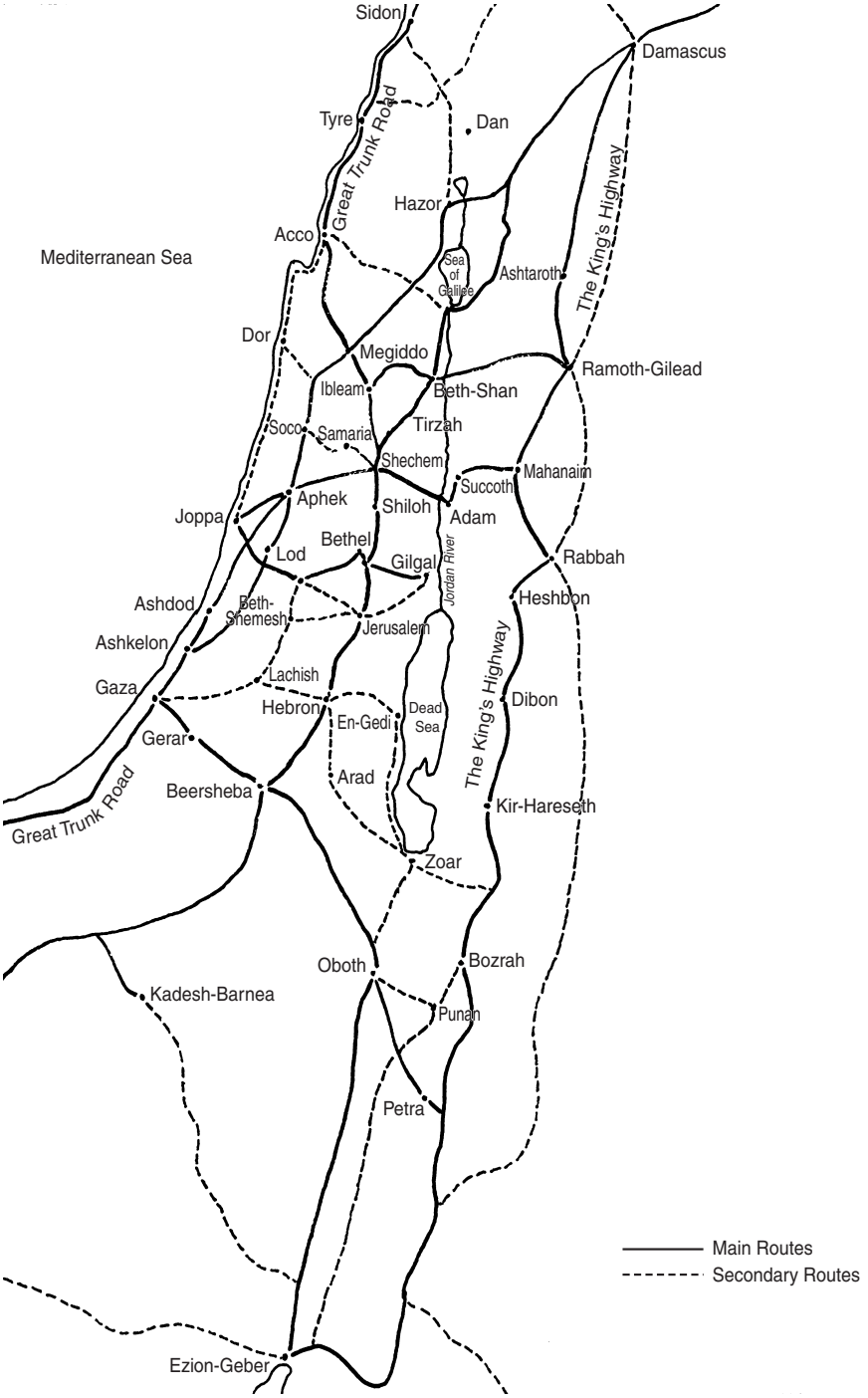


Assyrian Empire

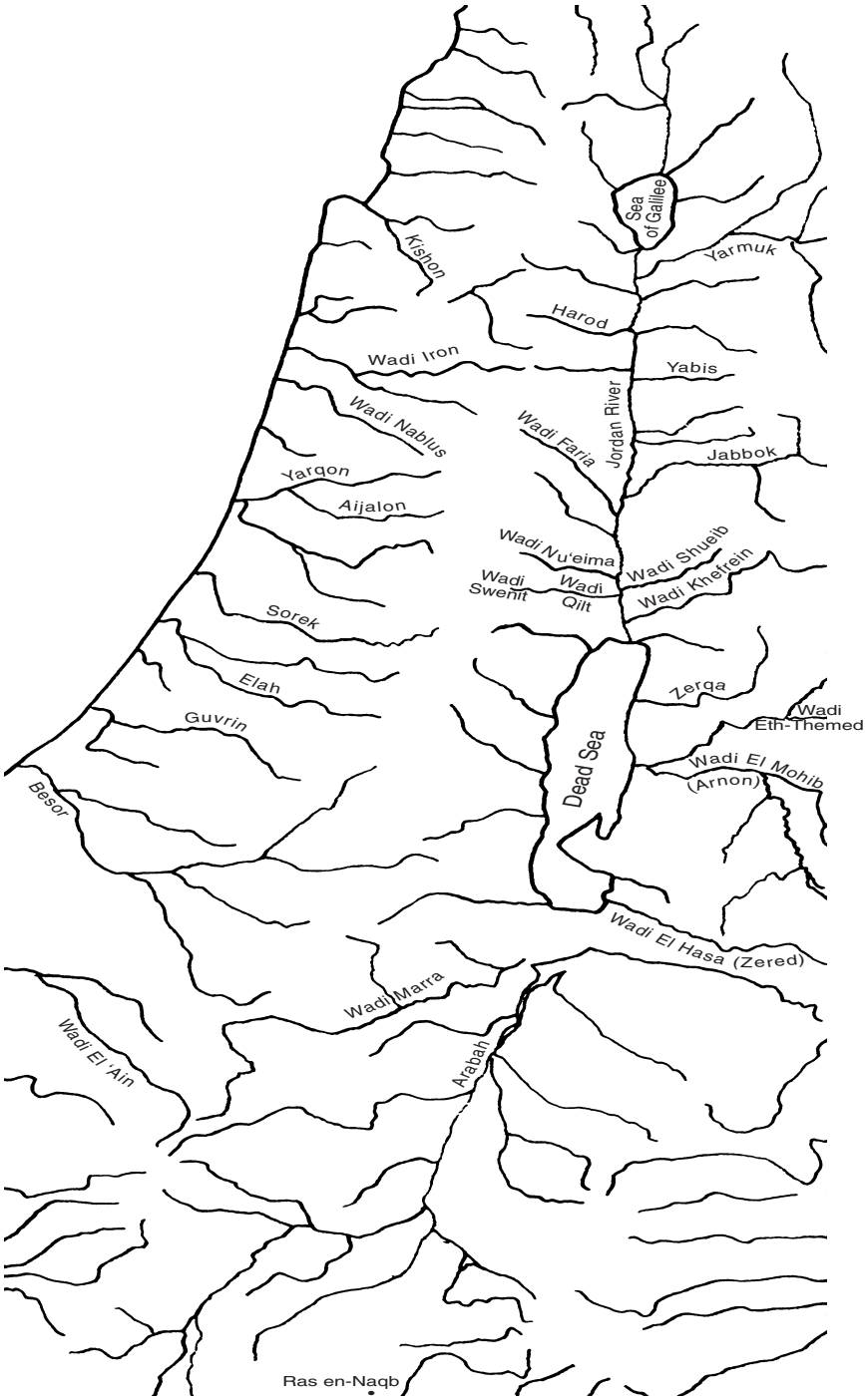
New Babylonian Empire 625-529 B.C.



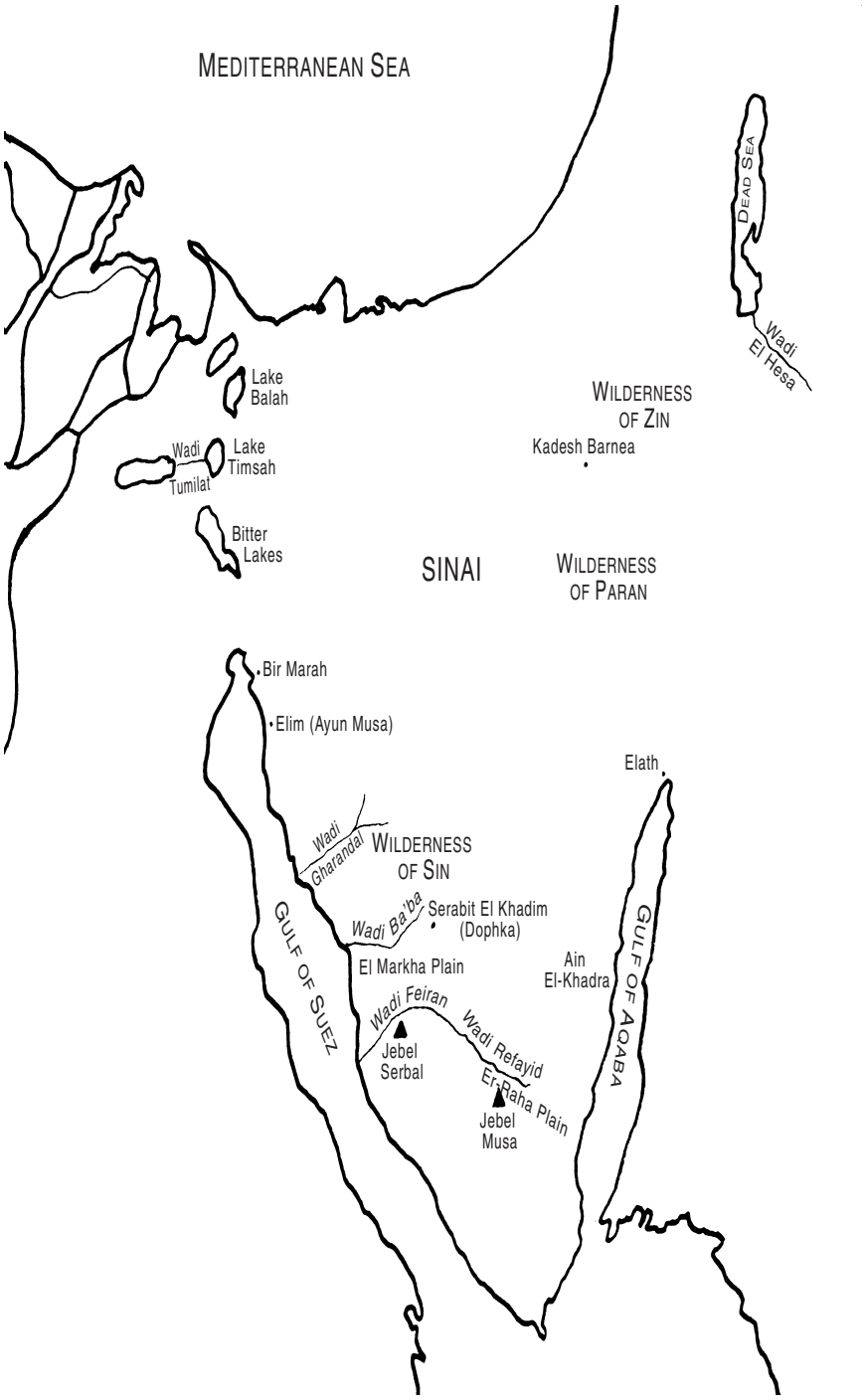
Persian Empire and Major Empires of the 6th Century B.C.



Roads of Palestine



Rivers and Wadis of Palestine



Rivers and Wadis of Egypt and Sinai

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This book is dedicated to our brothers and sisters
on the frontline of evangelism in Africa, Asia, Latin America,
the inner cities of North America and the many other places
where followers of Jesus are paying a high price
to proclaim his gospel in truth. Many of them have not had
the time or opportunity to pursue the original cultural context
of the New Testament, but I pray with all my heart
that this book will be useful to them in their service
to our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

When I began studying the Bible, I just wanted to learn the Bible itself in its original languages so I could spend the rest of my life living and preaching it. The more I studied it, however, the more I realized that I needed the *background*. Once I realized, more than three decades ago, that background helps us understand the Bible better, I desperately began looking for a book that would provide the necessary background for each passage, so I could use that in my sermon preparation. Unable to find such a book, I began scouring many books, and soon began working through countless volumes of ancient sources. Eventually I resolved to provide such a book, if no one else offered the service first, to save ordinary readers the years of study it had taken me. At the time of this foreword, the commentary has received almost unanimously positive reviews and, including translations and electronic editions, has sold more than six hundred thousand copies. Others have also developed different kinds of background commentaries for other purposes since that time.

I wrote the *Background Commentary* to serve readers like the young preacher I was when I began my study: many pastors and other readers who lack access to more detailed tools for reasons of time, training or economics. In addition to busy pastors, I envisioned students and others doing inductive Bible study, and readers in some parts of the world where few resources for research on the ancient world were available.

I did not write the book (in contrast to many of my other books) for scholars, who have access to many primary sources, or even for those pastors who had many commentaries providing more background detail. Many of my fellow biblical scholars have, however, expressed regret that this work does not provide scholarly documentation they could follow up. This lack is unfortunate, but given the book's size and its primary audience, the editorial decision was made not to bog it down with documentation, which would have been extensive. I have added some more references for this edition, but only very sparingly.

Scholars will know where to find some of the information, but I am also writing more academic commentaries that provide much of the documentation as well as the detail for what is only summarized here. Those looking for my information on the Gospels will find most of it in my academic commentaries on Matthew and John (in addition to my *Historical Jesus of the Gospels*); my multivolume commentary on Acts; and my shorter commentaries on Romans, 1–2 Corinthians and Revelation, which also supply the most relevant of my sources for these works. I could not include such documentation here without expanding this volume and its printing cost, but I am making it available in the appropriate venues, where those who desire it can access it. I trust that no one who has perused my scholarly work will doubt the level of research in ancient sources that stands behind my work. Nevertheless, a good scholar keeps learning, and after two decades in print, the time has come to provide a slightly revised version of the commentary.

I am deeply indebted to the many professors with whom I studied over the years. I am also deeply indebted to the students I served through campus ministry or teaching, and to the congregations I served, for the opportunity to test out the ideas in this commentary. They are the ones who helped me sift through which elements of potential background were more relevant for communicating the message of the biblical text and which elements were more peripheral.

I should especially acknowledge InterVarsity Press and my editors there (at the time Rodney Clapp, Ruth Goring and Dan Reid) for taking seriously the mission of this book. Just as we need to make the text of the Bible available to ordinary readers in all cultures, we need to make the background available that helps readers hear biblical passages the way their first audiences would have heard them. About two years after I decided that InterVarsity would be an ideal publisher for a commentary like this if I ever got the time to write it, Rodney asked if I would be interested in writing for InterVarsity, and I proposed this commentary. Before I received word back I began calculating the amount of income I would need to buy groceries and pay rent (in an apartment large enough for my research files) if I spent a year writing the commentary full time. At the time, the figure seemed overwhelming, given the only kind of employment I thought available to me that year, and I could only pray. Less than twenty-four hours later, Rodney called, surprising me with the unexpected offer of an advance. He could not have known that the offer came to the exact dollar amount that I had prayed for the night before. I am most grateful to the Lord for providing the opportunity to pursue and publish this research, and I pray that this book will serve the needs of his church.

List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ASV	American Standard Version
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
CCSS	Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture
ESV	English Standard Version
GNC	Good News Commentary
GNS	Good News Studies
GNT	Good News Translation
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IVPNTC	InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement
KJV	King James Version
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LXX	Septuagint
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCB	New Century Bible
NCC	New Covenant Commentary
NIBC	New International Bible Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLBMI	Society of Biblical Literature: The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study

SHBC	Smyth and Hewlys Bible Commentary
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina Commentaries
TDGR	Translated Documents of Greece and Rome
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
*	Indicates names and terms found in the glossary

How to Use This Commentary

In its most basic form, "background" is what the biblical writers did not have to say because they could take for granted their original audiences knew it. Modern audiences, however, often do not know it, and some texts become even obscure to us without it. Cultural and historical background can shed light on virtually every text in the New Testament, yet much of this material is difficult for nontechnical readers to find. Although many helpful commentaries exist, no single one-volume commentary has focused solely on the background material. Yet it is precisely this element—the background that indicates how the New Testament's writers and first readers would have understood its message—that the nontechnical reader needs as a resource for Bible study (most other elements, such as context, can be observed on the basis of the text itself).

Some surveys of the cultural background of the New Testament exist, but none of these is arranged in a manner that allows the reader to answer all the pertinent questions on a given passage. This deficiency convinced me nearly three decades ago to undertake this project, unless someone else provided the service first. This book is written in the hope that more readers will now be able to hear the New Testament much closer to the way its first audience would have heard it.

A Cultural Commentary

Cultural context makes a difference in how we read the New Testament. For instance, since there were plenty of exorcists in the ancient world, ancient readers would not have been surprised that Jesus cast out demons, but since most exorcists employed *magic spells or stinky roots to seek to expel demons, Jesus' driving them out "by his word" was impressive. Viewing the conflict concerning head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11 in the broader context of tensions over head coverings between well-to-do and less well-to-do women in first-century Corinth clarifies Paul's teaching in that passage. Understanding ancient views on slavery demonstrates that

Paul's teaching, far from supporting that institution, undermines it. Recognizing what Jewish people meant by "resurrection" answers the objections of many skeptics today concerning the character of Jesus' resurrection. Understanding Roman law helps us understand why Felix was playing unjust politics by not simply releasing Paul after his defense speech. And so forth.

The sole purpose of this commentary (unlike most commentaries) is to make available the most relevant cultural, social and historical background for reading the New Testament the way its first readers would have read it. Although some notes about context or theology have been necessary, such notes have been kept to a minimum to leave most of the work of interpretation with the reader.

Knowing ancient culture is critical to understanding the Bible, especially the passages most foreign to us. Our need to recognize the setting of the biblical writers does not deny that biblical passages are valid for all *time;* the point is that they are not valid for all *circumstances.* Different texts in the Bible address different situations. (For instance, some texts address how to be saved, some address Christ's call to missions, some address his concern for the poor, and so on.) Before we can determine the sorts of circumstances to which those passages most directly apply, we need to understand what circumstances they originally addressed.

This observation is not to play down the importance of other factors in interpreting the Bible. The most important issue, next to the Spirit's application to our hearts and lives, is always literary context: reading each book of the Bible the way it was put together under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This commentary itself is meant only as a tool to provide readers ready access to New Testament background—it is not meant to be the whole story. In my own preaching and teaching, I am more concerned with literary context than with culture. But readers can ascertain the context on their own by studying the Bible itself. For most of us, application of the Bible is also crucial, but specific applications will differ from culture to culture and from person to person, and these, again, are readily available to readers of the Bible without outside helps.

For the majority of the users of this commentary, who have not studied Greek and Hebrew, a good, readable translation is crucial for understanding the Bible. (For instance, both the NASB, which is more word for word, and the NIV, which is more readable, are very helpful. One might read regularly from the NIV and study more detailed passages from or compare with the NASB.) In contrast to the half-dozen mainly medieval manuscripts on which the King James Version was based, we now have over five thousand New Testament manuscripts, including some from extremely close to the time the New Testament books were written (by the standards used for ancient texts). These manuscripts make the New Testament by far the best-documented work of the ancient world and also explain why more accurate translations are available today than in times past. But the biggest reason for using

an up-to-date translation is that it is written in the form of language that we speak today and thus is easier to understand. Understanding the Bible so one can obey its teaching is, after all, the main purpose for reading it.

Other methods of getting into the text itself, like outlining and taking notes, are also useful to many readers. For more complete guides on how to study the Bible, the reader may consult (among less technical sources) works like Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), or J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

But the one factor in applying the Bible that is not available to most Bible readers is the cultural background. This commentary is meant to fill that need and should be used in conjunction with other important elements of Bible study: an accurate and readable translation, context, prayer and personal application.

Again, this commentary will not be helpful for those who neglect context, a rule of interpretation more basic than culture. It is best to read through each book of the Bible as a whole, rather than skipping from one part of the Bible to another, so one can get the whole message of a particular biblical book and see each passage in its larger context. For the most part, these books were written one at a time to different groups of readers, who read them one book at a time and applied them to their specific situations. One must keep this point in mind when reading, teaching or preaching from the Bible. (Many alleged contradictions in the Bible arise from ignoring context and the way books were written in the ancient world. Ancient writers, like modern preachers, often applied and updated the language, while being faithful to the meaning, by arranging their materials; so the context is usually inspired guidance on how to apply a teaching in the Bible.) It is always important to check the context of a passage in the biblical book in which it occurs before using this commentary.

But once one has examined a passage in context, this commentary will be an invaluable tool. One may use it while reading through the Bible for daily devotions; one may use it for Bible studies or for sermon preparation. The one book orthodox Christians accept as God's Word is the most important book for us to study, and it is hoped that this commentary will aid all believers in their study of God's Word.

Although the format of this book has been tested in the classroom, in Bible studies, from the pulpit and in personal devotions, it may fail to answer some social-cultural questions related to passages of the New Testament. Despite efforts to answer the right questions, it is impossible to anticipate every question; for this reason, some helpful books on ancient culture are listed in the brief bibliography at the end of this introduction.

The reader may also find background relevant to a particular passage under other passages where I had felt it was most important to include it. Because the New

Testament itself is composed of books aimed at different audiences (Mark was meant to be read quickly, whereas Matthew was meant to be studied and memorized), my treatment of some books is more detailed than that of others. As the book most foreign to modern readers, Revelation receives the most detailed treatment.

How to Use This Book

This commentary may be used either for reference or in conjunction with one's regular Bible reading. In reading the Bible devotionally or in preparing sermons or Bible studies, one has two of the most crucial tools for interpretation in the Bible itself: the text and its context. The third most crucial tool, which was already known and assumed by the ancient readers but is unavailable to most modern readers, is the background of the text. This commentary is written to supply that need to the fullest extent possible in a one-volume work.

The most important ancient background for the New Testament's ideas is the Old Testament, especially in its Greek translation. Most New Testament authors wrote to biblically informed audiences and could take for granted this shared theological background. This commentary includes Old Testament background, but because that background is available to all readers of the Bible, this commentary especially emphasizes other Jewish and Greco-Roman culture of the first century. Early Christian writers naturally also drew on other early Christian traditions, many of which are available to us in the New Testament. These traditions are often more relevant, especially for later works in the New Testament, than some other background I have offered, but because that material is directly available to the reader, it has been omitted for the most part here. Similarly omitted are notes on background that is transcultural, because readers in all cultures assume this information.

Those who use this commentary in conjunction with personal Bible study should read the biblical passage first and examine its context. Then they may most profitably examine the notes in this commentary; the notes on related passages may also be helpful. Having established what the text was saying to the ancient readers, one has a better feel for the issues being addressed and is ready to move to the stage of application.

The situation behind Paul's letter to the Romans provides one example of how one could apply what one learns in this commentary. In that letter, Paul argues (among other matters) that Jews and Gentiles are saved on the same terms and urges reconciliation between them within the body of Christ. If Paul's gospel message challenged ethnic divisions that God himself had in some way established, how much more would it challenge the ethnic, tribal and racial divisions in the body of Christ today, both locally and globally? Once we grasp the point of the text in its original historical setting, we are in a position to apply that text to both our personal lives and our culture today.

Because the Bible's original message, once understood, speaks to human issues today in a variety of situations and cultures, the way we apply it will vary from person to person and culture to culture. (For instance, if Paul urges the Corinthians to deal seriously with sin, the principle is clear; but different people will have to deal with different sins.) For that reason, most application is left to the reader's common sense and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

This point usually applies even where I strongly felt that guidance should be given concerning application. For instance, in my treatment of Matthew 24:15-22 I emphasize those details that were fulfilled in A.D. 66–70. Some people think that certain prophecies in that passage will be fulfilled again; but because that is a theological rather than a cultural-historical issue, I leave that matter to the reader's discretion. In the same way, I am convinced that the background provided for passages on women's ministry should lead modern readers to recognize that Paul does indeed accept the teaching ministry of women. But due to the nature of this work, someone who does not share that conviction can nevertheless profitably use the commentary on those passages without feeling constrained to accept my view. (Most of those who disagree will find at least some use for the background here; few today take the injunction of silence so literally, for example, as to preclude even singing.) At least on most issues, sincere believers, grappling with the same context and the same background, often come to similar conclusions in the end.

Most readers will be familiar with words like *priest* and *Palestine,* but terms whose cultural significance may be unfamiliar to the reader are found in the glossary at the end of this book and are marked at least once in a given context with an asterisk (*). Some recurrent theological terms (like *Spirit, apocalyptic, Diaspora, Pharisee* and *kingdom*) had a range of specific connotations in the ancient world that cannot be mentioned in each text; the regular reader of this commentary should thus become familiar with these terms in the glossary. I should pause to note that I have often followed common nomenclature even when it is imprecise or sometimes controversial where alternative terms were difficult to supply. Thus I use "Christian" and "Jewish" even though these categories strongly overlapped. Similarly, I am following usual scholarly convention concerning Roman antiquity, not making a political statement (as one critic complained), when mentioning "Palestine"; I am open to an alternative, but Judea-and-Samaria-and-Galilee is too cumbersome to be useful. I retain scholarly convention in mentioning "patrons" rather than the stricter Roman political usage; and so forth.

How Not to Use This Book

Not all background in this commentary is equally helpful for understanding the Bible. Some background is almost self-evident, especially where ancient culture and modern readers' culture overlap. Likewise, not all sources are of equal merit for our

purposes. Some sources, particularly rabbinic sources, are later than the New Testament; some of the information from these sources is more helpful whereas other material is less helpful, and I weighed these factors as carefully as possible in writing this commentary. Usually only Old Testament and Apocrypha citations and occasionally citations from the Jewish Pseudepigrapha are explicitly given in this commentary; citing all the rabbinic, Greek and Roman sources would weigh it down too heavily for the general reader. Many observations and analogies offered in my scholarly work are missing here, because it is difficult to determine the likelihood of their relevance (e.g., if a custom is attested only later and rarely).

Some background is included because it appears in standard scholarly commentaries, and readers must judge for themselves how relevant it is for their interpretation. This is a *background* commentary; it does not dictate how readers must understand or apply the text, and readers who disagree with some interpretations I suggest will nevertheless find the commentary useful.

More importantly, the general reader should be aware that parallels between an idea in the New Testament and an idea in the ancient world need not mean that one copied the other—both may have drawn on a familiar saying or concept in the culture. Thus I cite the parallels simply to illustrate how many people in that culture would have heard what the New Testament was saying. For instance, Paul's use of the kinds of arguments used by rhetoricians (professional public speakers) indicates that he was relating to his culture, not that he wrote without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Further, people and sources from wholly unrelated cultures (e.g., Stoics and the Old Testament) may share some concepts simply because those concepts make sense in those cultures (or even most cultures), even if they do not make sense in ours; our own culture often unconsciously limits our understanding of Paul and his contemporaries. Because ancient peoples did not think as we do does not mean that they were wrong; we can still learn much from their insights in areas like rhetoric and human relationships.

Similarly, when I comment that Paul used the language of Stoic philosophers, I do not mean that Paul had adopted Stoicism; public philosophical discourse had been commonly affected by Stoic ideas and terminology. In other cases, the adoption of philosophical language is intentional; outsiders sometimes viewed Christianity as a philosophical school, and Christians were able to use this outside perception as a means to communicate the gospel. Like other writers, Paul could appeal to his culture in the popular language of his day but give that language a new twist.

When I cite a later Jewish tradition that amplifies the Old Testament, I do not mean to imply that the tradition is necessarily true. These citations are to help us feel how the first hearers of the New Testament felt about the Old Testament characters; sometimes New Testament writers also allude to these extrabiblical traditions (Jude 14-15). (One need not assume that New Testament writers always simply

recycled earlier Jewish imagery to relate to their culture, however; often a variety of Jewish views existed, and a New Testament writer often picked a particular one. Although the New Testament writers had to accommodate the language of their day to communicate their point, neither they nor we need see all that language as inaccurate. Some modern readers assume glibly that ancient worldviews are wrong, but experiences and interpretations sometimes attributed to "primitive" worldviews, such as possession by harmful spirits, appear in a wide range of cultures; they need not be explained away by modern Western reductionism.)

Finally, we should always be cautious in application; it is important that we apply biblical texts only to genuinely analogous situations. For an obvious example, it is not accurate to read Jesus' attacks on the religious leaders of his day as attacks against all Jewish people, as some anti-Semites have. Jesus and his disciples were themselves Jewish, and such an abuse of the text makes no more sense than using the book of Exodus against Egyptians today (later Old Testament prophets did not, e.g., Is 19:23-25). Jesus' challenges against the piety of religious authorities in his day have nothing to do with their ethnicity; these challenges are meant to confront us as religious people today and warn us not to act as those religious leaders did. The issue was a religious one, not an ethnic one. In other words, we must apply the *principles* of the text in the light of the real issues the biblical authors were addressing and not ignore the passages' historical context.

A Popular, Not a Scholarly, Commentary

Scholars may be disappointed that the text of this work is not documented or nuanced the way a scholarly work would be, but should keep in mind that this book is not written primarily for scholars, who already have access to much of this information elsewhere. For much of the New Testament, I have already provided the most relevant of my sources in more detailed commentaries. But a concise and handy reference work in one volume can place much relevant information at the fingertips of busy pastors and other Bible readers who have fewer resources and less time available.

Scholars like to document and investigate all angles of a question, nuancing their language carefully and guarding against attacks by those holding other interpretations of the same texts. I follow this procedure in some of my other works, but this approach is not possible in a work of this length. Scholars also like to include all available data, which the same limitation also prohibits here. To be useful for most pastors' preaching and most other Christians' Bible study, this work's language needs to be plain and concise.

I have generally ignored scholarly questions that do not deal directly with the issue central to this book, the ancient context of the New Testament. It is important for the purpose of this book to ask what the text as it stands means; it is not im-

portant to ask about the sources behind the text and their editing, and I have dealt with those issues only where absolutely necessary.

The purpose of this book is likewise limited not only to cultural-historical context in general, but also to that which actually sheds light on the New Testament. For instance, to claim that some emphasis of early Christianity is distinctive to Christianity is not to claim that other groups did not have their own distinctive characteristics; but this is a commentary on the New Testament, not a commentary on those other groups.

I have, however, tried to be as fair as possible to the major different views of the background of the New Testament. My own research divides fairly evenly between the Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts of the New Testament, with an emphasis on ancient Judaism as part of the larger Mediterranean culture. I have often labored over a variety of interpretations of the evidence before selecting which interpretation or interpretations I felt were most accurate or most relevant to the text. Not every scholar will agree on every point, but I have endeavored to make the book as accurate and helpful as possible. I hope that this book will both stimulate other students to pursue more detailed scholarship and provide easy access to the world of the New Testament for those whose call in life does not permit them the opportunity to pursue it in more detail.

My comments are based on what were originally one hundred thousand index cards, especially from the primary literature of the ancient world but also recent scholarly research in ancient Judaism and Greco-Roman antiquity, as well as observations in earlier commentaries.

To keep the commentary to manageable length, I have made painful decisions about what material to omit. I have not adduced the many parallels available to turns of phrases or mentioned remote parallels that would not illumine a passage for the Bible teacher or general reader. I have often chosen to delete material of uncertain value, even if it is used by many other scholars. (For instance, given the uncertainty of the date of the document called the *Similitudes of Enoch,* I have not cited it as background for Jesus' title "Son of Man," although it could be relevant.) I have also tried to avoid duplicating the kinds of information available in other commonly used reference works. Because word studies are elsewhere available (and the New Testament contains many Greek words), I have generally omitted discussions of Greek words except where the meaning of the text depends on the broader cultural context of these words.

Readers may detect some points where my own theology has influenced my reading of a text in a manner that disagrees with their own. I genuinely try to derive my theology and applications only from my study of the biblical text, but if the reverse has occasionally happened, I ask the reader's pardon. This book is meant to be useful, not controversial, and if readers disagree on some points, I hope they will find most of the rest of the commentary helpful nonetheless.

Other Sources for the Cultural Context of the New Testament

The following sources are useful to readers of the New Testament.

General. See especially John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment,* LEC 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986); David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment,* LEC 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987); Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). A helpful anthology of texts is C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents,* rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989); some one-volume Bible dictionaries (for example, those by Eerdmans and InterVarsity Press) are helpful; see more fully larger reference works, such as Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,* 4 vols., rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–88); David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992); and (esp. on background) Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000). Extremely helpful for understanding the New Testament are reference works on antiquity such as *The Oxford Classical Dictionary,* 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) and *Brill's New Pauly* (15 vols.), although, as with all such reference works, one must either read the entire way through or know where to look for information. Several years after my present one-volume background commentary was released (1993), some useful multivolume background commentaries (those edited by Clinton Arnold and Craig Evans) were also published; a different sort of useful background resource, including block quotations from ancient sources, is M. Eugene Boring, Klaus Berger and Carsten Colpe, eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995). The most thorough work providing New Testament background today is a long-term project that will no doubt prove invaluable to scholars: Ugo Schnelle et al., eds., *Neuer Wettstein: Texte zum Neuen Testament aus Griechentum und Hellenismus* (New York: De Gruyter, 1996–).

How to Understand the Bible in Its Context. On a basic level, see works such as Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981); J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001). Two of the recent New Testament introductions that emphasize cultural context are David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004); Gary M. Burge, Lynn H. Cohick and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament Within Its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

For more advanced discussions of interpretive approaches, see, for example,

Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation,* rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006); and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); with a special focus on cultural issues in interpretation, see William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), with a foreword by Darrell L. Bock.

Judaism: General. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1992).

Judaism: Rabbinic Judaism. Our most voluminous corpus of ancient Jewish sources comes from the rabbis; one popular survey of rabbinic literature is Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs,* 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew University Press, 1979). Unfortunately, it does little with the comparative dates of the rabbinic traditions; New Testament students must depend on the earliest and most widely attested (preferably in other kinds of sources) traditions. Some detailed work on dating rabbinic traditions appears in the multivolume work of David Instone-Brewer, *Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004–).

Judaism: Surveys of the Documents. One useful work is Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); see most extensively Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). Some recent and progressive approaches may be sampled in volumes such as Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, eds., *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters,* SBLBMI 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986). Most issues are treated in detail in more specialized works; for instance, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), for Jewish views on salvation (qualified in some respects by more recent studies); on the roles of women see Leonard Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976); Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Judaism: Primary Sources. One should especially read the Old Testament and the Apocrypha (in the latter, especially Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach); then translations of the Dead Sea Scrolls (perhaps especially the Manual of Discipline [1QS], the Damascus Document [CD] and the War Scroll [1QM]); and the documents of most relevant date in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983–1985), especially *1 Enoch, Jubilees,* the *Sibylline Oracles* (not all from the same period), the *Letter of Aristeas*

and other works like *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch.* Josephus is in many respects one of our most valuable sources next to the Old Testament, though due to the sheer volume of his works, one may wish to focus on *Against Apion,* the *Life* and then the lengthier *Jewish War*. Readers may wish to peruse Philo to acquaint themselves with a major Jewish philosopher in the Diaspora; the works of Philo are now available in a one-volume edition (trans. C. D. Yonge; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993). Those who wish to examine rabbinic literature firsthand might start with *Avot* in the Mishnah; many early traditions are also preserved in the Tosefta, *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* and the tannaitic commentaries on parts of the Pentateuch (Mekilta on Exodus, Sifra on Leviticus, Sifre on Numbers, and Sifre on Deuteronomy). Archaeological data are regularly published in journals and books; collections of inscriptions and papyri, such as *Select Papyri,* a three-volume work translated by A. S. Hunt, C. C. Edgar and D. L. Page (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932–1941) and discussions, such as Naphtali Lewis, *Life in Egypt Under Roman Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), are also helpful.

Greco-Roman World: General. See Stambaugh and Balch, *New Testament in Its Social Environment;* James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999); David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000); M. Cary and T. J. Haarhoff, *Life and Thought in the Greek and Roman World,* 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1946).

Greco-Roman World: Secondary Sources. On the way texts were written and understood in the Greco-Roman world, see Aune, *New Testament in Its Literary Environment;* see also Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity,* LEC 5 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986). On moralists and moral issues, see primary sources and comment in Abraham J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook,* LEC 4 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986). On Greek religion, see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

On history, Tacitus, Suetonius and Josephus are quite readable and may be pursued before the secondary sources; many Greek and Roman sources are available in paperback (e.g., through Penguin Books), although those wishing to do more advanced work should locate the Loeb Classical Library editions. Helpful secondary sources include F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972); and Bo Reicke, *The New Testament Era: The World of the Bible from 500 B.C. to A.D. 100* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974). Specialized works, such as those on women in antiquity (e.g., Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982], one collection of texts), are indispensable for more detailed study. On ancient rhetoric and argumentation, see, e.g., R. Dean Anderson Jr., *Glossary of Greek Rhetorical Terms Connected*

to Methods of Argumentation, Figures and Tropes from Anaximenes to Quintilian (Leuven: Peeters, 2000); Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 B.C.–A.D. 400* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). Too many valuable sources exist to name them all; one sample could include Edwin A. Judge, *The First Christians in the Roman World: Augustan and New Testament Essays,* ed. James R. Harrison, WUNT 229 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

Greco-Roman World: Primary Sources. A broad sampling of documents is available in Robert K. Sherk, ed., *The Roman Empire: Augustus to Hadrian,* TDGR 6 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For first-century Roman history, one should read especially Tacitus and Suetonius; for Judea, especially relevant material in Josephus. For first- and second-century moral thought, one should at least sample Epictetus, Seneca, Plutarch and perhaps a satirist like Juvenal; see also Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition,* SBLSBS 12 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977). For ancient and argumentation, helpful works include Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory,* the rhetorical essays of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Cicero, and the like.

The Need for a Cultural-Historical Commentary

Many readers will recognize the value of a cultural commentary. But others may, even after reading "How to Use This Commentary," still remain unclear. The following essay elaborates the importance of cultural background in biblical interpretation for those who have not been exposed to this issue previously. Because those already trained in biblical studies will agree with the need for cultural context, this essay is directed solely toward nontechnical readers.

How the Bible Invites Us to Interpret It

Sometimes reading passages in light of their ancient context simply makes them more concrete for us, for example, knowing something about the character of Pilate or Herod Agrippa I. Sometimes, however, it prevents us from reading texts in impossible or absurd ways. For example, you probably do not set aside money for the Jerusalem church every Sunday, even though that is a direct command of Scripture (1 Cor 16:1-3). Perhaps you have also never traveled to Troas to try to find Paul's cloak to bring it to him (2 Tim 4:13), even though this passage is also phrased as a command.

There are other passages that may not seem absurd to us but which also would sound different to us if we understood their original setting. The danger of "absurd" applications, however, points us to the importance of reading Scripture in its setting, where possible. It suggests a way of reading that, if followed consistently, can help us grasp all of the Bible more concretely.

Readers of the Bible have long realized the value of cultural and historical background for understanding the Bible. The biblical writers themselves assume its importance. For instance, when Mark writes about an issue debated by Jesus and his opponents, he explains the custom involved in it to his Gentile readers, who would

not have otherwise known the custom (Mk 7:3-4). Similarly, when Jesus' opponents take an apparent concession in the law at face value, Jesus says that the *intent* of the law is what is crucial, and to grasp it one must understand the situation and the state of its original audience (Mk 10:4-5).

Biblical writers can often simply assume the importance of the readers' knowing the situation. It was understood in the ancient world that the better one knew the situation with which a work dealt, the better one could understand a work (see the first-century A.D. Roman rhetorician Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*, 10.1.22 on speeches; one should also keep rereading the speech to catch all the subtle nuances and foreshadowings in it; see Quintilian 10.1.20-21). For instance, when Paul writes a letter to the Corinthians, he can assume that the Corinthians know what situations he is addressing. Reading 1 Corinthians may be like listening to one side of a telephone conversation, and we can fortunately reconstruct most of the conversation by reading 1 Corinthians. But part of the meaning of the conversation is determined by the situation itself, not just by the words in front of us. What Paul *assumes* his readers will grasp in his writing is as much a part of his meaning as what he *says,* because this is a *part of the meaning he did not need to specify explicitly.* (This approach recognizes insights in what scholars call "relevance theory.") As Jesus pointed out in his conflicts with some Bible interpreters of his day, the original meaning and intention matters, not just the wording (e.g., Mk 10:5-6).

If we cannot relate to the situation the biblical writers and their readers are assuming, we will have more difficulty understanding the points they are making. A few examples will illustrate this point.

Paul addresses the issue of celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7. There he definitely sounds as if he favors celibacy, and even though he allows marriage as a valid lifestyle, some commentators think he suggests that it is a second-class lifestyle for those who do not have the gift of being able to "control themselves." He certainly makes some valid points about the benefits of singleness, but is he really against marriage in general? First Corinthians 7:1 tells us plainly that Paul is responding to a letter from some of the Christians in Corinth. Because some of these Christians followed a certain view in their culture that opposed marriage, one could just as easily read the chapter as follows: Paul is saying, "You have a good point, and I agree with you that singleness is a good gift from God. But you are taking matters too far if you impose it on married people or on people who should get married."

A clearer example would be how we read Paul's warnings about meat offered to idols. It would be all too easy for readers in some cultures today to say, "Well, there aren't any idols to sacrifice meat to today, so let's just skip this chapter of 1 Corinthians." But this sidesteps the transcultural issue *behind* the cultural issue. Once we see how concrete the issue was in Corinth—that well-to-do Christians who did not eat this food could offend friends and business associates, and all to keep the less-

educated Christians from being hurt in their faith—we can compare it with similar issues today. Some Christians today want a prestigious lifestyle because it attracts others to a religion that demands little in the way of sacrifice—even if such a religion alienates the homeless and hungry in poorer nations and in our own cities. Considering how to balance the interests of different factions in a church is similarly relevant in many congregations today.

Understanding that the Bible does address issues and motives like those we face today is important. Far from making the Bible less relevant, understanding the situation helps us make it more relevant (sometimes even uncomfortably relevant). It forces us to see that the people with whom Paul dealt were not simply morally unstable troublemakers; they were real people with real agendas like ourselves. This recognition invites us to deal with how Paul's words would challenge us as well.

Relevance to All Cultures

Most of the book God gave us was not directly dictated in the first person (i.e., the Bible does not read as if God were explicitly saying: "I'm God, and I am speaking directly to everybody in all times"). Some Bible readers have always wanted the Bible to read that way and like to pretend that this is the proper way to interpret it. But God chose to inspire the Bible in a different form: he inspired his prophets and witnesses to address real situations in their own day as an example for generations that would follow (1 Cor 10:11). If Paul was inspired to write a letter to the Corinthians, whether people today like it or not, that letter is a letter to the *Corinthians,* just as it claims to be. We should listen in and learn from the wisdom God inspired Paul to give believers in Corinth; to do so we should do our best to hear it the way the Corinthians would have.

God gave us eternal principles, but he gave them to us in specific concrete forms, addressing real situations. He gave us those principles in the form of illustrations, to show us how those principles work out in real-life situations, because he wanted to make sure that we would apply them to our own real-life situations. Thus, for example, Deuteronomy 22:8 ("build a parapet around your roof, lest you incur bloodguilt if someone falls off") still teaches us concern for our neighbor's safety, even though most of us no longer have flat roofs on which we entertain our neighbors. The moral today might be, "Make your colleague fasten her seatbelt when she rides with you to work." The example might be different today, but the point is the same; yet until we understand the original example, we cannot recognize the real point we must reapply in our own culture.

We may not like the fact that God gave us his Word in concrete form, because in much of Western culture we are used to thinking abstractly. But in many cultures people think concretely and can read a story or a conversation and learn more lessons than Western readers learn from reading a series of abstractions. Those

cultures are more attuned to the Bible that God chose to give the world than we in the West are. Much of the Bible is historical narrative (i.e., true stories), and much of it is letter or prophecy directed to specific situations. Thus its format is more like a conversation than an abstract philosophical treatise. Even abstract principles like those in Proverbs are expressed in specific cultural forms; for instance, some Egyptian wisdom sayings use almost the same wording as their Hebrew counterparts, because that was how people in that part of the ancient Near East expressed their wisdom at that time.

If God had not chosen to give us the Bible in concrete, cultural forms, what forms would he have used? Is there a neutral language, a universal one not bound by any culture? As one scholar put it, if God had just spoken to us in a cosmic wind, how many of us would have understood him? Or as one cartoon put it, if God had revealed the details of quantum physics and the theory of relativity to Moses, instead of "In the beginning God created," would Moses or the Hebrew language have been able to communicate that data to his contemporaries? God is too practical and too concerned about us understanding him to try to communicate with us like that. He worked through all the different cultures—from early in the Old Testament to totally different cultural situations in the New Testament—to communicate his Word.

Beyond Our Own Cultural Starting Points

Indeed, God is so involved in the multicultural matrix of history that he did not disdain to step into it himself. The ultimate enculturation of his Word occurred when the Word became flesh, as the prologue of John (1:1-18) declares. Jesus did not come as a cultureless, amorphous, genderless human. He came as a first-century Jewish man, with unique chromosomes and physical features, just as each of the rest of us is unique. His cultural specificity does not mean that he was not *for* all of us; it means instead that he could better identify with all of us as a *particular* person—by being like we are—than by being a general, faceless person who compromised any real humanity for an indistinctive "neutrality." Many Gnostics, who reinterpreted Christianity in later centuries, tried to deny that Jesus really came "in the flesh," but the apostle John is clear that this point is the dividing line between genuine and phony Christians: genuine Christians believe that our Lord Jesus came in the flesh, as a particular historical person (1 Jn 4:1-6). Those who insist on understanding Jesus—or the other people in the Bible—apart from that historical particularity are treading on the outer fringes of Christian faith.

One of the main emphases in the book of Acts is that the gospel is for all peoples and all cultures. The first Christians were surprised to learn that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews, but throughout the book of Acts the Spirit of God was revealing this multicultural mission to the church. That was God's program from the beginning: missions from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Those like Stephen

and Paul, who already knew more than one culture, were the most ready to participate in God's plan. People who assume that God reveals himself only in one culture (their own) are a couple of millennia behind on their Bible reading! In Acts we find God purposely revealing himself to people of all cultures in terms they understood; thus Paul preaches one way in a synagogue in Acts 13, another way to rural farmers in chapter 14 and still another way to Greek philosophers in chapter 17. The same Paul related to specific issues of ancient culture in his letters, and we cannot ignore those issues if we wish to know what Paul's point was.

When Paul fought for Gentiles to have the right to come to Christ as Gentiles, he was fighting culturally prejudiced persons who (in that case) said that one had to be Jewish to be a first-rate Christian. They read the Bible in the light of their own culture and tradition and thought that everybody else should read it the same way they did. They had quite a lot of good company, unfortunately, because their problem was not their Jewishness—Paul was just as Jewish as they were. The problem was that they read the Bible in light of their own cultural assumptions, which is the same problem we all have unless we train ourselves to see beyond those assumptions. Our own backgrounds and the information we start with affect the categories and associations we bring to a text—consciously or unconsciously. By contrast, getting more of the ancient readers' backgrounds helps us to read texts more as they would have read them.

Missionaries today face problems similar to Paul's. If we read the gospel in the light of our own culture, we are in danger of mixing our culture in with the Bible and then imposing our new concoction on someone else as a condition of being right with God. Some Western missionaries forced converts to adopt Western lifetsyle, dress and even names to become Christians, rather than allowing that God works within a variety of cultural settings. Of course, some other missionaries, such as many early Jesuits or Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission, showed greater respect and cultural identification.

Most missionaries today recognize that Christians in different cultures can learn from one another. Sometimes even different parts of the Bible appeal to different groups. One part of the Bible unclear to us may be clear to some Shona Christians in Zimbabwe. Or a reading that one group thinks is clear may be a misinterpretation of the text. Hindus who read Jesus' teaching about being "born again" as a reference to reincarnation have missed Jesus' meaning because they have read it from the standpoint of Hindu assumptions. But if we start merely from our own culture's assumptions, we stand as much chance of misreading the Bible as reincarnationist Hindus do. (Some less informed non-Christian readers in North America might even popularly associate the phrase with a modern political agenda.)

Some devoutly evangelical Christians in certain Asian and African cultures still venerate their ancestors, and North American Christians generally consider such

veneration as pagan. But we North Americans sometimes explain away texts like "You can't serve both God and mammon," and "covetousness is idolatry," so we can live the way we want. Christians in other cultures generally consider our culture's materialism as pagan too. Our cultural blinders let us see other people's sins more easily than our own, and only reading the Scriptures the way the writers were inspired to intend them—rather than the way the Scriptures fit what we already believe—will challenge our own cultural misconceptions.

What common ground can we, as Christian interpreters from a variety of cultures, have? If we want an objective way to interpret the Bible, and if we believe that the writers were inspired to address specific issues of their day, then we need to try to find out what issues they were addressing. To some extent we can figure that out from the texts themselves. We do not have to know what women's head coverings looked like in Corinth to figure out from 1 Corinthians 11 that the question of whether women should wear head coverings was an issue there. Further, some texts can give us background for other texts; for instance, 2 Kings tells us what was going on when Isaiah was prophesying to the people of Israel, and so helps us understand the book of Isaiah.

But such background is not always enough. This is true not only of so-called problem passages but also of passages that we assume we interpret correctly. For instance, when we read that the good seed bears fruit a hundred times over (Mt 13:23), only if we know the average size of an ancient Palestinian harvest do we understand how abundant such a harvest would be. The charge against Jesus posted above the cross, "The King of the Jews," makes a lot more sense if we recognize that the Romans were very nervous about so-called prophets in Judea whom some people thought were messianic kings, because some of these "prophets" had already stirred up a great deal of trouble for Rome.

Further, culture affects even which books strike us as easier to understand; different parts of the Bible appeal to different cultures. Any reader of Leviticus and 1 Timothy could tell that the forms of writing used in these documents are quite different. Leviticus's hygiene codes have parallels in Hittite and other ancient Near Eastern texts; Leviticus was addressing issues of its day. But the subject matter of Leviticus would not have even interested most Greco-Roman readers by the time 1 Timothy was written, whereas all of 1 Timothy's themes and literary forms have parallels in Greco-Roman literature. To modern Western readers, most of the New Testament is much more inviting than Leviticus; but in many cultures, customs concerning what is clean and unclean appear important, and Christians in these cultures have taken more interest in some parts of the Bible that we tend to ignore. Of course, we have theological reasons for saying that we do not need to obey Leviticus literally today; but if all Scripture is inspired and profitable for teaching (2 Tim 3:16), it must have some purpose. The question is just, What is that purpose?

What point was God communicating to his people? Cultural background helps us figure out what the purpose was.

Objections to Using Cultural Background

Although everyone knows that the Bible was written in a different time and culture, and most people take that fact into account when they read particular passages, not everyone is consistent in using cultural background. Of course, not all passages in the Bible require much background; our culture still has some features in common with the culture of the Bible. But if we do not know anything about the original culture, we may sometimes assume that we do not need any background for a passage when in fact it would dramatically affect the way we read the text. Even though most people recognize the need to pay attention to cultural background, some people become nervous at the suggestion that they need it.

Some Christians occasionally object that using cultural and historical background is dangerous. "After all," they complain, "you can use culture to twist the Bible around to mean anything." People who raise this objection could cite the popular idea that the "eye of a needle" through which a camel must pass was a gate in ancient Jerusalem. Unfortunately, no gate with this title existed in first-century Jerusalem; convenient as it would be for us, this is a case of invented background. (Happily, some other background is relevant: the use of hyperbole, or rhetorical overstatement, was common among ancient Jewish teachers.) Although this example is a good argument against *making up* cultural background, it is no reason not to use genuine cultural background. A good bit of invented cultural background circulates on the market today, but that is all the more reason for readers to seek background based on genuine, solid research.

One might keep in mind that people have been twisting the Bible quite ably for a long time without using any cultural background; it is doubtful that a little historical study would make matters any *worse*. *Ignoring* the original culture and so reading it in light of our own is a far graver threat to most of us. (For example, the "Aryan Christians" under the Nazis "demythologized" biblical history to make it non-Jewish and hence more palatable to Nazi tastes. This is an extreme example of ignoring original historical context and reinterpreting the Bible to fit one's own culture. It differs from most reinterpretations today only in that the Nazis did it intentionally.)

A more common objection, which I raised myself as a young Christian, is that assuming the importance of cultural background might take the Bible out of the hands of nonscholars. At that time I rejected the use of cultural information so thoroughly that I insisted that women should wear head coverings in church, and I even tried to get up enough nerve to engage in some of Paul's "holy kissing." Reading the Bible forced me to come to grips with the way it is written, however,

and the more I have studied the world of the Bible, the more I have come to realize that God was being relevant in communicating his Word the way he did. He gave us concrete examples of how his ways address real human situations, not just abstract principles that we could memorize without pondering how to apply them to our lives. If we wish to follow God's example of being relevant, we need to understand what these teachings meant in their original culture before we try applying them to our own.

Cultural background does not take the Bible out of people's hands; it is when we *ignore* cultural context that we take the Bible out of people's hands. To hand people the symbols in Revelation with no explanation of how such symbols were commonly used in the ancient world is like handing the Gospel of Luke in Greek to somebody who cannot read Greek and saying, "Since this is the Word of God, you must understand and explain it." Only a trained scholar or a complete fool would have any idea what to do with it (and the fool's idea would be wrong).

Translating Both Language and Culture

Some scholars before the time of Luther decided that the church hierarchy of their day was wrong to keep the Bible in Latin. Most people could not understand the Bible unless scholars translated it for them into their own language. Some of these scholars were martyred for their conviction that the Bible must be available in common people's language; Luther, who translated the Bible into the German of his day, barely escaped this same fate. The best way scholars could help people was not by saying, "Translations are not available for the common people; therefore we take the Bible out of their hands if we say they actually needed such translations all along." The better approach was for such scholars to say, "Translations are not available for the people; therefore we will put the Bible into their hands by doing some hard work and making translations." Of course, as people in Luther's day realized, having a translation does not resolve all the problems of determining what the text *means;* that work is not completed simply by offering translations.

Translating can be difficult, as anybody who has studied a foreign language can testify. Some words do not translate directly in a single term; sometimes a word or phrase can have several different meanings, and the translator has to decide which meaning is best for a particular context. There is also more than one way to express an idea in English once one decides what it means. Those of us who have read the whole New Testament in Greek can testify that the same problems obtain there as in any other text we might try to translate. A random check of any passage in two or three Bible translations will verify the difficulty: no two translations will match exactly (otherwise, of course, they wouldn't be separate translations).

When Bible translators go into other cultures they face difficult questions regarding the meanings of words and phrases. For instance, some translators had to

explain "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (Jn 1:29) for a culture that had no sheep and thus no words for lambs. The culture did, however, have pigs, and used them for sacrifices. But if they translated it "Behold, the Pig of God!" (which does not ring nicely to many of our modern ears, and certainly would have offended ancient Jewish sensibilities even more), what would happen when they had to translate passages in the Old Testament where pigs were unclean but sheep were not? Perhaps they could best solve the issue by putting a footnote in the text and by translating with some combination of words that communicated the concept as best as possible in their language, like "hairy pig." Old Testament translators have had to resort to similar methods when rendering the Hebrew words for different kinds of locusts into English (Joel 1:4; 2:25). English does not have enough different words for locusts to match all the Hebrew terms, perhaps because the many varieties of locusts were more of an issue for the Israelites than they are for most of us.

But there is a bigger problem than just the words in the text in front of us. What happens when Paul makes an allusion to a whole concept that was important in his day (as he often does)? How do we translate that? Or do we just mention the issue in a footnote? The allusion that Paul makes is part of his meaning, yet sometimes even those who are otherwise competent to translate the text cannot catch the allusions Paul makes.

Some Christian readers during and before the Reformation period tried to figure out the situations that biblical texts were addressing. It was good that many scholars recognized the need to read the New Testament in the context of its own world, rather than viewing it as if it had been written in German or English directly to readers in the Renaissance or some other period. They were not, however, the majority. Most readers still read too much of their own culture into the text, just as we do when we fail to look at it in the light of the original culture. Most medieval and Renaissance intellectuals did the same thing; most of us have seen paintings of biblical scenes with Europeans in European dress filling all the roles of the biblical dramas. They were painted as if most of the biblical characters were Europeans, even though we know that few biblical characters were Europeans, and none was northern European.

Fortunately, some knowledge about the ancient world was still available in the Reformation period; unfortunately, it was not *always* the most *appropriate* background. Many scholars were so competent in the Greek classics that they could catch all sorts of allusions to Greek customs in the New Testament. The problem is that many Greek customs had changed from the time those early classics had been written to the time of the New Testament.

Another danger in assuming that all the background to the New Testament was classical Greek may be illustrated from the first few centuries that the New Testament was in circulation. The Gnostics often read the New Testament more in the

light of Plato than in the light of the Judaism from which it emerged, and this was the source of many of their doctrines which other Christians rejected as heretical. Plato did have some influence on the world of the New Testament, but he was hardly the most important influence.

Some writers, like John Lightfoot in the 1600s, challenged the predominant classical grid through which the New Testament was being read and offered Jewish texts as New Testament background. Lightfoot bent over backward to cover himself against the attacks of anti-Semites, explaining at some length that he indeed thought these Jewish texts were unspiritual, but that the work was necessary if one were to understand the New Testament.

Today, when anti-Semitism is less popular than in Lightfoot's day, it is more obvious to us that the Greek texts Lightfoot's contemporaries were using were much more pagan than the texts for which he found it necessary to apologize to his readers. Today it is generally recognized that ancient Judaism forms the *primary* context of the New Testament. Its basic, broad context is Greco-Roman society, but Jewish people had lived in and adapted to Greco-Roman culture, paving the way for the first Christians' witness in the context of pagan culture. Further, the first Christians were Jewish, and outsiders perceived Christianity as a form of Judaism. Moreover, the earliest Christians themselves saw their faith in Jesus as the true fulfillment of the Old Testament hope and hence saw themselves as faithful to Judaism. (Indeed, the New Testament writers affirm that only Christians were faithful to biblical Judaism; although some other Jewish groups also claimed to be the faithful remnant of Israel, these groups do not seem to have survived into subsequent centuries.) Both the specific Jewish and the broader Greco-Roman contexts of the New Testament are crucial for its interpretation, just as a good translation is.

The Work That Remains

Christians, especially those most committed to crosscultural missions, have always recognized the importance of reading the Bible in the light of its original cultural context. But while translations are available to most Christians, the cultural "footnotes" are not. (Hopefully this will change as study Bibles more frequently incorporate the most relevant features of background, so long as they depend on genuine research and not popular misconceptions.) Many helpful commentaries do exist (including some more recent ones focused on background), but no single commentary provides easy access to all the requisite background in one or two volumes. The more volumes in a work, the less accessible it becomes to most readers. Only a small percentage of people who read the Bible today have full sets of commentaries, fewer of them would have access to adequate cultural information in each of those commentaries, and fewer still can regularly take time to sort through them.

Many earlier biblical scholars gave their lives to translate the Bible and so to

begin to make it intelligible to whoever wanted to read it; but the work has never been completed. Many Bible readers still have very limited access to the background. Although many tasks demand the attention of Christian biblical scholars, this is surely one of the most important.

The need to understand the cultural context of the Bible should be as clear today as the need for translation was in the Reformation period. In our industrial, wired and often postmodern society, we have moved farther and farther from any vestige of biblical roots; our culture is becoming more and more alienated from the cultures in which the Bible was written and our young people are finding God's Book more and more foreign. It does no good to lament that most people will not visit our churches and learn our Christian language. God has called us to be missionaries to our world, so we must make the Word of God intelligible to our culture. We must not simply read it; we must understand it and explain it. We must explain what the writers meant when they wrote it to cultures long since changed or vanished, and how its message applies to us today. In fact, today's appreciation for diversity of cultures means that many people will be ready to hear the inspired biblical writers in those writers' own contexts.

Much of the church today seems asleep to our mission, largely because we have not allowed the Word of God to speak to us in all its radical power. We have allowed it to be a foreign book, and allowed the people it addresses to be a people far removed from our own lives. The tragedy is that the stakes have never been as high as they are in our generation: the world boasts a population seven times as high as it did two centuries ago, when the church was stirring to its mission in another great move of the Spirit.

God is making more than one important demand to his church, but one crucial demand is that we understand his Word. In a culture full of Bibles and teachings, those who value the Bible's authority still need to know, understand, obey and teach it more fully. Pastors, usually overworked, rarely have the time to investigate all the necessary resources to acquire background for each text on which they preach. Yet the need to understand God's message more fully and to awaken the whole church to his call so we can fulfill the commission our Lord has given us is urgent.

Among the resources God provides for that task are specialists gifted in the body of Christ as teachers who can provide various valid insights to help us understand and apply God's Word. Just as missionaries must learn a language and a culture to communicate God's message to another culture, we need servants of God on the other end, learning the language and culture in which God's Book was written. Such teachers labored in the past to provide translations and labor today to provide other tools to make the treasures of the Bible more widely accessible to all its readers.

While not all scholars devote their research to serving the church, many have done so throughout history, from Justin, Jerome, Augustine and Bede, to the monks

who led the medieval universities on which modern universities are based, and later Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards and others. Likewise, many scholars today have pursued scholarship because this was God's call for them.

But the biggest task does not fall to scholars alone. All believers are called to hear God's voice in the Scriptures, to start with what is already clear and to learn more from there. One need not be a scholar to read passages of the Bible in context or to read the cultural footnotes to the Bible that a commentary like this one is meant to provide. May God give us all grace to do our part, to obey Christ our Lord and to reveal him to the needy people of our generation.

Gospels

Introduction

Note: asterisked (*) terms appear in the glossary.

Genre. *Genre* means the kind of writing a work is, whether poetry, *prophecy, bomb threat, letter, etc. Today it is easy to identify the genre of the Gospels, because four of them are grouped together at the beginning of the *New Testament. But when each Gospel was written, people would have read it as belonging to some genre or genres they already knew. Genre is important because our expectation of the kind of writing something is will influence how we read it (e.g., we take poetry less literally than prose).

The Genre of the Gospels. Some classifications of the Gospels have not stood the test of time. Some earlier scholars focused on elite classical Greek literature thought that the Gospels looked like common people's literature instead of "high" literature. But subsequent studies have shown that literature ranged widely between folk and high literature, and folk literature often imitated high literature. Even our Gospels range from Mark's rough style to Luke's sometimes fairly sophisticated style.

By contrast, more recent studies have compared the Gospels with the sources they would have most resembled for ancient readers. Thus the majority of recent scholars have come to classify the Gospels as ancient biography, which resembles the way that the church has historically treated them. Ancient biographies did not necessarily emphasize the same features that modern biographies do, but they were still a form of historical writing.

How historically reliable were ancient biographies? There was a range of reliability, but a major factor in this range was the chronological distance between the writer and the writer's subject. Some biographers, like *Plutarch and *Livy, certainly spiced up their *narratives, but especially when writing about characters who lived centuries earlier. Writers sometimes openly admitted the difficulty of distinguishing legend from fact when they wrote about reported events centuries earlier. Other authors, like *Tacitus (in the *Agricola*) and *Suetonius, writing about events of the past century and a half, kept very close to their sources.

When writing about subjects in the past generation, as (for example) the Gospel of Mark does, biographers were able to depend on large amounts of information. Thus, for example, Tacitus, Suetonius and Plutarch in the early second century write about the short-lived emperor Otho half a century earlier. When we compare them, we find that their material overlaps in very considerable detail. Because they follow their sources so closely where we can test them, we may assume that they generally follow them no less closely where other sources are no longer available to us. The Gospels supply much historical information about Jesus.

Biography was a largely Greek and Roman category, but it influenced other writers. Jewish writers could model their biographies after *Old Testament biographical narratives, which everyone in their day took to be reliable. Only Jewish writers composing in Greek created conventional biographies, however, and these often followed Greek forms. *Josephus spiced up his autobiography in good Greek rhetorical style but still expected his readers to take his account seriously, and the substance of his account is mostly reliable. But even works such as **Jubilees*, with its haggadic expansions (often to explain details), deletions (often to whitewash heroes) and so forth, follow the basic outline of their sources at most points; the early Jewish *Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* does so even more. Jewish novels about biblical characters also flourished, but not about characters of recent history and not with detailed dependence on sources. Luke wrote like a popular Greco-Roman historian, and none of the Gospels fits the haggadic *midrash pattern.

Ancient Historiography. Both Jewish and Gentile writers could take some liberties in how they recounted their narratives, but biographies about recent characters were supposed to be grounded in facts. Many scholars view ancient biography as a specialized form of ancient historiography. Whenever possible, historians consulted eyewitnesses or those who knew them. While historians and novelists both used some similar storytelling (or in elite circles, rhetorical) techniques, ancient writers (from *Aristotle to Pliny and *Lucian) insisted that history must deal in facts and distinguished it from novels.

Like many historians, journalists and others today, ancient historians had particular themes they wanted to emphasize. History was full of meaning and was to be written in a way that brought out its meaning. Far more often than novelists, historians (and still more clearly biographers) wrote with clear moral, political or theological agendas and expected readers to draw lessons from their works. Most historians and biographers also sought to recount their narratives in a lively and entertaining way. At the same time, however, historians by definition sought to follow the sense of their sources, to be as accurate as possible. Even those who took the most freedom followed the basic substance of history; and, where they had inadequate sources, they aimed for verisimilitude.

Are the Gospels Accurate? On the continuum between more and less careful

biographers, the writers of the Gospels are among the most careful. When we test how Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source, it is clear that they followed their sources carefully. Writing for ancient readers, they naturally followed the literary conventions of their day. But the first Gospels were written when eyewitnesses were still in positions of authority in the church and oral tradition could be checked, and this supports a higher degree of reliability than found in biographies of much earlier persons; biographies of roughly contemporary characters were normally far more accurate than those concerning heroes of the distant past. See further comment on Luke 1:1-4.

Sayings. Students carefully learned sayings of their teachers, often taking notes to help them memorize. Extraordinary feats of ancient memory indicate the extent to which memory could be accurate in ancient Mediterranean society, where memorization pervaded education from the elementary level. At a more advanced level, *disciples ordinarily learned their teachers' sayings well, often extensively. Sometimes they even collaborated with other former students to collect the teachings. Ancient schools often preserved the teachings of schools' founders, making them "canonical" for what the school would teach new adherents. (In one graphic but perhaps fictitious ancient example, *Pythagorean students had to repeat back their teacher's lectures from the previous day before getting out of bed in the morning. But disciples of other teachers were also rigorous in preserving their masters' teachings.)

We should expect no less for Jesus' disciples than for these other ancient students; to expect less of Jesus' disciples is simply to assume skepticism against our best evidence about how disciples learned. In their own instruction during years and decades that followed, the disciples would repeat the teachings of Jesus that they remembered, hence would know these selected teachings far better than disciples of other teachers who did not become teachers themselves.

None of this means that anyone expected the sayings to appear in sequence. The sayings were sometimes passed on with the stories in which they occurred, and at other times they were passed on as isolated proverbs (sayings of the wise); later students in rhetorical schools could also transplant sayings to other appropriate stories about the same teacher. Taking matters further, some critics warn that sayings of one teacher were also sometimes modified or transferred to another teacher after much time had elapsed. This observation is less relevant for the Gospels, however, since they focus on only a single founder and chief teacher for the movement. Moreover, they were written in the first two generations, when Jesus' teachings were still in the memories of the writers' sources, making radical changes unlikely.

Just as we do not expect the sayings to appear in sequence, we do not expect them to be verbatim (impossible for Jesus' *Aramaic sayings anyway, since the

Gospels are written in Greek). Jesus' words sometimes differ slightly from Gospel to Gospel. We expect such differences, because paraphrasing sayings in one's own words was a standard school exercise and a common writing technique in ancient times. (Those who conclude that different Gospel writers contradict each other because they quote Jesus differently are thus not paying attention to how works were written in antiquity.)

At the same time, a particular style and rhythm and sometimes Aramaic expressions (e.g., "*Son of Man") come through Jesus' sayings, indicating that the Gospel writers did not always paraphrase him, even in translation from Aramaic to Greek. (Jesus probably sometimes spoke Greek as well as Aramaic, but most scholars believe that he would have addressed Galilean crowds especially in Aramaic. Most Galileans would have been bilingual; some Jewish schools conducted advanced discussions even in Hebrew.)

Jesus used many of the Palestinian Jewish teaching techniques of his day, such as *parables and *hyperbole (rhetorical exaggeration), to make his points graphically. To grasp them the way his first hearers grasped them, his sayings must be read in this light and then understood in the context of the whole of his teachings. For example, readers must adequately recognize both loyalty to parents (Mk 7:9-13) and the greater demands of the *kingdom (Mk 10:29-30). Parables must also be read the way Jesus' Jewish hearers would have understood them. They were illustrations meant to convey truth, but some of the details of most parables are included simply to make the story work, so we should be careful not to read too much into such details.

Literary Techniques. Greek literary conventions permeated most Jewish literature written in the Greek language, and were applied both to historical books (such as biographies like the Gospels) and novels alike. Writers of topical biography had complete freedom to rearrange their sources, so it should not surprise us that Matthew and Mark often have events in Jesus' ministry in different order.

Although Jesus, like other Jewish teachers, surely repeated the same sayings on separate occasions, some of his sayings probably occur in different places in the Gospels simply because the writers were exercising the freedom ancient biographers had to rearrange their material. This freedom enabled the Gospel writers, like preachers today, to preach Jesus as well as report about him, while still recounting his words and deeds accurately. Ancient Christians already knew, of course, that the Gospels (like the majority of ancient biographies) were not in chronological order, as the early Christian teacher Papias plainly remarked about Mark.

Other Gospels? By the time that Luke wrote his Gospel, other works about Jesus were in circulation (Luke 1:1) this undoubtedly includes Mark. Luke, Matthew and possibly Mark also used material they shared in common, and the common sequence at points suggests at least one written source, which many scholars call "Q." Based on Papias, some scholars believe this source reflects early notes by Matthew

(to which Mark's narrative was added in forming our current Matthew's Gospel). These studies are valuable. The only first-century Gospels that survived, however, are the four that the church ultimately preserved as Scripture (and any material from other sources preserved in them). Later writers composed apocryphal Gospels, but instead of reflecting significant information about the Jesus who lived in first-century Galilee they fit the form of novels and derive from their heyday in the late second and third centuries. Later *Gnostics composed collections of sayings attributed to Jesus, but these are not really "Gospels" in the traditional sense of narratives about Jesus like the first-century Gospels. The earliest of these might date to 120 years after Jesus' public ministry; most belong to the late second century or later.

How to Read the Gospels. Ancient biographies were meant to be read the whole way through rather than jumping from a passage in one book to a passage in another. Each of the four Gospels was written separately to different readers and was meant to be read on its own terms before the reader moved to a different Gospel. We should therefore work through each Gospel, following the flow of that Gospel's thought.

Ancient biographies often had morals to their stories and set forth the characters as positive or negative examples. Old Testament stories about men and women of God taught morals about faith and how to serve God. The reader is therefore meant to ask at the end of each Gospel story, What is the moral of this story? How does this story help me relate to Jesus better? What does it teach me about the character of the Lord I serve?

Sayings were often passed down as proverbs, which are general principles or graphic ways of making a point; other times they appear in the context of stories where they are applied in a specific way.

Although we speak of "reading" the Gospels, most people in antiquity would have "heard" them. Many people could not read, and few people had economic resources to obtain their own copies of books. Instead, a person who could read would read the Gospels to gathered assemblies of believers, and most believers would "hear" the Gospels. In that sense we should speak of them as "audiences" rather than "readers." Each Gospel writer may have had a special target audience in mind, but probably most hoped for a wider audience as well. In antiquity, books that succeeded well in public readings came to circulate more widely as more people had copies made.

Applying the Gospels Today. When we read narratives, or stories, in the Bible, we should look for the moral or morals of the story that the author wished to emphasize for his audience. We should try to put ourselves in the place of ancient hearers and listen to the words of Jesus as if we were hearing them for the first time from his own mouth. We should allow Jesus' graphic language to strike us the way it would have struck the first hearers. The Gospels recorded Jesus' sayings to apply

them to other generations besides Jesus' own (the writers wrote them down for their own generation, after Jesus had ascended to heaven), expecting their hearers to apply them to their own situations. But before we can understand how Jesus' teachings apply to our situations today, we must understand what he actually said in first-century Palestine and what he meant.

The Gospels in This Commentary. Matthew, Mark and Luke overlap significantly (see "*Synoptic Gospels" in the glossary), and in order to avoid repetition I have sometimes included more background under one of the Gospels than another one. Because readers will learn the most by working their way through one Gospel at a time, however, I have provided sufficient background for interpretation for each of the three Gospels. Mark was meant to be read quickly, like a tract, whereas Matthew was meant to be studied more, perhaps as a training manual; my comments on Matthew are thus often more detailed, although Matthew and Luke receive less attention where they use Mark. When Matthew and Luke overlap, the commentary is generally more detailed on Matthew. I have treated John independently, because the Fourth Gospel overlaps with the others considerably less than they overlap with one another.

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Matthew

Introduction

Authorship. In contrast to, say, Paul's letters, attributions of authorship in the Gospels are generally based on church tradition rather than evidence in the biblical text itself. Although these traditions surface in various parts of the second-century empire, there appears to be unanimity regarding the authorship of the four Gospels, suggesting the traditions are early. Rarely were works the size of the Gospels published anonymously, so the first generation would have probably remembered and transmitted accurately traditions about their authorship.

Some question the specific tradition about Matthew, in part because the earliest tradition also claims that the original Gospel of Matthew was written in Hebrew, which is not true of our First Gospel. Some suggest that Matthew authored an earlier Hebrew work, perhaps especially involving Jesus' sayings; translated into Greek, this material was used by other Gospel writers but especially developed in our Gospel of Matthew. Most scholars also believe that our current Gospel of Matthew uses Mark. Although this observation might count against direct authorship by Matthew, one could argue against it being decisive by itself. Xenophon, for example, depends on an earlier written source even while reporting events of which he was an eyewitness, presumably because that source had become standard. Whatever one's conclusions, it seems best to speak of "Matthew" for lack of any better designation. There was also likely a reason for the church's tradition. Some scholars note that tax collectors (Mt 9:9) would be among the Galileans most apt to be able to take notes.

Date. The date of Matthew is debated (from before 70 to around 90). Even fairly conservative scholars differ in their views of Matthew's date and authorship. Most scholars, however, do not date Mark before 64, and do believe that our current Gospel of Matthew depends on Mark at a time when the latter was circulating widely. Because Matthew shows more concern for the emerging power of the Pharisaic rabbinic movement than Mark, and these *rabbis began to achieve some political power in Syria-Palestine mainly after 70, some argue that Matthew wrote in the seventies. Scholars lack unanimity; suggestions range earlier and later.

Where Matthew Was Written. The most likely proposed locale is in the area of Syria-Palestine. Some do so because that is where the rabbis may have exercised their greatest influence in the seventies and eighties of the first century. Whether or not that is the case, much of Matthew's language fits that of Jewish sages from the eastern Mediterranean, suggesting such a milieu. But again certainty is not possible.

Setting, Purpose. Matthew addresses the needs of his Jewish-Christian hearers, whom many scholars believe were in conflict with a Pharisaic religious establishment (cf. Mt 3:7 with Lk 3:7; Mt 5:20; 23:2-39). Members of the early rabbinic movement, mainly successors of the earlier *Pharisees, never achieved the power that later rabbis claimed, but they began to consolidate as much juridical and theological influence as possible, especially in Syria-Palestine, in the years and decades following A.D. 70.

Matthew presents the traumatic destruction of the temple (on many views this event had occurred recently; see the previous discussion on date) as judgment on the earlier Judean establishment (though it was mainly Sadducean) in chapters 23–24. He wants to encourage his community to evangelize *Gentiles as well as their own people (cf. 1:5; 2:1-12; 3:9; 8:5-13; 15:21-28; 24:14; 28:19). Many scholars believe that Matthew's collection of Jesus' teachings (especially chaps. 5–7, 10, 13, 18, 23–25) is to be used to make other disciples for Jesus, just as other Jewish disciples passed on their rabbis' teachings to their own disciples (28:19).

Genre and Sources. Most scholars think that when Matthew wrote his Gospel, Mark was already in circulation. (Not all scholars accept this position, but it is widely viewed as the consensus.) In line with a common literary practice of the day, Matthew followed an important source—Mark—and then wove in material from other sources around it. Given the character of ancient biography (see introduction to the Gospels), Matthew would have used only sources that he believed to be reliable; given the range of dates proposed, most of Matthew's primary sources would have come from the generation immediately following Jesus' ministry. Due to space limitations in this commentary, much of the material found in both Matthew and Mark receives more detailed treatment only under Mark.

Matthew and Luke also follow other material they share in common. Given Luke's birth *narratives and other material, the majority of scholars think it unlikely that Luke was depending on our current Gospel of Matthew. Instead, both share a common source or sources, sometimes in the same sequence (as one might expect particularly for a written source). Like most sources from antiquity, this one has not survived, except insofar as we might infer it from Matthew and Luke.

Biographies were written differently in Matthew's day than they are today. Biographers could write either in chronological order (e.g., Luke usually follows the order of his sources as carefully as possible) or, more frequently, in topical order. Matthew arranges the sayings of Jesus according to topic, not chronology: the ethics

of the *kingdom in chapters 5–7, the mission of the kingdom in chapter 10, the presence of the kingdom in chapter 13, church discipline and forgiveness in chapter 18 and the future of the kingdom in chapters 23–25. Some commentators have argued that Matthew grouped Jesus' sayings into five sections to parallel the five books of Moses. (Other works were also divided into five to correspond with the books of Moses, e.g., Psalms, Proverbs, the rabbinic tractate *Pirke Avot,* 2 Maccabees and perhaps **1 Enoch*.) This could be the case, although one cannot parallel specific speeches with specific books of the Pentateuch.

Matthew's Message. Some scholars believe that this Gospel or one of its sources was used as a training manual for new Christians (Mt 28:19); rabbis taught oral traditions, but Jewish Christians needed a body of Jesus' teachings in writing for Gentile converts. Matthew repeatedly emphasizes that Jesus fulfills the Jewish Scriptures, and argues from those Scriptures the way a trained *scribe would. He portrays Jesus as the epitome of Israel's hopes for his Jewish audience, but also emphasizes missions to the Gentiles: outreach to the Gentiles is rooted both in the *Old Testament and in Jesus' teaching. Matthew is quick to counterattack the religious leaders of his day who have attacked the followers of Jesus, but he also warns of the growing dangers of unfaithful religious leadership within the Christian community.

Commentaries. For background material, very useful commentaries include Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew,* ICC, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988–); and R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). On a more popular level, see, for example, R. T. France, *Matthew,* TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008); Joe Kapolyo, "Matthew," in *Africa Bible Commentary,* ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), pp. 1105-70; Craig S. Keener, *Matthew,* IVPNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997); and Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew,* Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

Those most familiar with Matthew's milieu, however, will recognize my debt to primary sources and to various scholars on Jesus and his Jewish setting, both earlier voices such as I. Abrahams, Joachim Jeremias, T. W. Manson and Gustaf Dalman; and more recent scholars such as E. P. Sanders, Geza Vermes and Martin Goodman. For examples of useful specialized studies, see, for example, Marshall D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies,* SNTSMS 8, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), whose treatment includes Matthew 1:2-16; and on John the Baptist, works such as Carl H. Kraeling, *John the Baptist* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951); and Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist Within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

1:1-17
The Background of Jesus

Ancient biographies typically began by rehearsing the noble lineage of their subject. Here Jesus is connected with the history of his people from the beginning.

1:1. Greek readers often called the book of Genesis "the book of generations," and the title is also used for genealogies and other accounts contained in it (Gen 2:4; 5:1 LXX). In Genesis genealogies are named for the first person cited, but Matthew's genealogy is named for the person in whom it climaxes, Jesus Christ. For Matthew, Jesus' ancestors depend on him for their historical significance no less than others expected descendants to depend on their ancestors.

The *Messiah was to be a "son [descendant] of David"; "son of Abraham" was applied to Jewish people in general, so Matthew begins by reminding us that Jesus is Jewish. Genealogies could provide unity to a survey of history between major figures (as with Adam, Noah and Abraham in Gen 5, 11).

1:2-16. As in *Old Testament genealogies, but in contrast to Luke and Greco-Roman genealogies, Matthew records the names beginning with the oldest and moving to the most recent.

Genealogies reminded Jewish people of God's sovereignty in arranging marriages and providing offspring. Sometimes they also used genealogies to explain why a person behaved a particular way (e.g., perhaps Moses' descent from lawbreakers like Reuben, Simeon and [directly] Levi in Ex 6:12-30); Greek biographers could use illustrious ancestry to honor a person about whom they wrote. Most important, Jewish genealogies were essential to document a person's proper lineage as a pure Israelite (i.e., not descended from converted *Gentiles), a member of the priesthood, or royalty. Genealogies could also be used as unifying links between major figures in history; Genesis links Adam, Noah and Abraham in this way (Gen 5, 11). Matthew connects Jesus with the Old Testament narratives about the patriarchs, the Davidic kingly line and the exile.

Tradition records that at least partial genealogical records of important (especially priestly) families were kept in the temple. Though the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, the claim for Jesus' Davidic descent was made before 70, when it still could have been checked (Rom 1:3). Even after 70, tradition reports that the evidence for his Davidic descent was still sufficient to provoke trouble for some of Jesus' relatives with the Roman government.

Ancient genealogies usually omitted women, but Matthew includes four women (1:3, 5-6).Three of these women were Gentiles (Gen 38:6; Josh 2:1; Ruth 1:4) and the other was at least associated with a Gentile (2 Sam 11:3)—though Matthew omits the four matriarchs prominent in Jewish tradition, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and (less relevantly here) Rachel. Thus he hints from the Old Testament that God has always planned a mission to all peoples (Mt 28:19). Yet Jews emphasized their pure ancestry!

Scholars have suggested that some ancient genealogies incorporated symbolic material based on the interpretation of biblical texts. Jewish interpreters of Scripture sometimes would modify a letter or sound in a biblical text to reapply it figuratively. Thus the Greek text of Matthew 1:10 reads "Amos" (the prophet) rather than "Amon" (the wicked king—2 Kings 21), and Matthew 1:8 reads "Asaph" (the psalmist) rather than "Asa" (a good king turned bad—2 Chron 16); most translations have obscured this point.

1:17. Matthew omits some names, as was customary in genealogies (in this case perhaps following the Greek translation of the Old Testament); creating patterns like three sets of (roughly) fourteen made lists easier to remember. Dividing history into eras was common; a later Jewish text, *2 *Baruch,* divided history into fourteen epochs. By surveying Israel's past, Matthew suggests that Israel was due (or overdue) for a new event in salvation history. Less certainly, some commentators have argued that Matthew uses fourteen generations because the numerical value of David's name in Hebrew letters is 14. (Unlike letters in the English alphabet, Greek and Hebrew letters were also used as numerals; the Jewish practice of counting the numerical values of words and deriving meaning from them came to be called *gematria.*)

1:18-25
The Birth of Jesus

Ancient biographers often included stories

about the virtue of their subjects' birth or upbringing. Sometimes they even praised miraculous features of the births of their subjects (especially prominent in the *Old Testament), but there are no close parallels to the virgin birth. Greeks told stories of gods impregnating women, but the text indicates that Mary's conception was not sexual; nor does the Old Testament (or Jewish tradition) ascribe sexual characteristics to God. Many miraculous birth stories in the ancient world (including Jewish accounts, e.g., **1 Enoch* 106) are heavily embroidered with mythical imagery (e.g., babies filling houses with light), in contrast with the straightforward *narrative style of this passage (cf. similarly Ex 2:1-10).

1:18. Betrothal (*erusin*) then was more binding than most engagements are in the Western world today. If Joseph followed earlier tradition, he would pay a bride price, at least part of it offered during the betrothal. Betrothal, which commonly lasted a year, meant that bride and groom were officially pledged to each other but had not yet consummated the marriage; advances toward anyone else were thus regarded as adulterous (Deut 22:23-27). Two witnesses, mutual consent (normally) and the groom's declaration were necessary to establish Jewish betrothals (in Roman betrothals, consent alone sufficed). Although Romans sometimes used engagement rings, Palestinian Jews probably did not use them in this early period.

Mary may have been between the ages of twelve and fourteen (or even as old as sixteen); if this was Joseph's first marriage, he may have been between the ages of eighteen and twenty (the age for men's marriage considered ideal by later *rabbis). Their parents likely arranged their marriage, with Mary and Joseph's consent. Later traditions suggests that premarital privacy between betrothed persons was permitted in Judea but frowned upon in Galilee, so Mary and Joseph may well not have had any time alone together at this point.

1:19. The penalty for adultery under Old Testament *law was death by stoning, and this penalty applied to infidelity during betrothal as well (Deut 22:23-24). In *New Testament times, Joseph would have merely been required to divorce Mary and expose her to shame; the death penalty was rarely if ever executed for this offense. (Betrothals were so binding that if a woman's fiancé died, she was considered a widow; betrothals could otherwise be terminated only by divorce.) But it could be difficult for a woman with a child, divorced for such infidelity, to find another husband, leaving her without means of support if her parents died. The unfaithfulness of a betrothed woman would also dishonor the man to whom she was pledged.

A husband could divorce his wife publicly before a judge if he were charging her with an offense; in this case he could dissociate himself from her publicly, get back any bride price he had paid, and acquire any dowry her father had given her for the marriage. Because divorces could be effected by a simple document with two witnesses, Joseph could divorce her without making her shame more widely known. Much later rabbinic tradition charges that Mary slept with another man, but Joseph's marrying her (v. 24) demonstrates that he did not believe this was the case.

1:20. In the Old Testament, angels often brought messages in dreams; in Greek literature, deceased people (as well as pagan deities) often brought messages, but this occurs nowhere in the Bible. The Old Testament does mention expert dream interpreters, like Daniel (Dan 1:17; 2:19-45) and Jacob's son Joseph (Gen 37:5-11; 40–41). Most stories from here in Matthew 1 to the end of Matthew 2 involve supernatural guidance (dreams or the star).

1:21. The name Jesus (*Aramaic *Yeshua*, Greek *Iesous*) means "God is salvation" in Hebrew. Parents often intended the names they gave children to have some meaning, but if God gave the name, it had special significance (cf. Gen 16:11; 17:19). The Old Testament taught that God's people would be saved in the time of the *Messiah (Jer 23:5-6), and Jewish readers in the first century would have understood this salvation to mean more than just personal forgiveness. They prayed for the day when God would deliver his people from the consequences of their sins—from subjugation beneath their enemies; many believed that this deliverance would occur when their people as a whole reformed and turned wholeheartedly to God. Jesus also came to deliver his people from personal sin and thus to deliver them from its judgment.

1:22-23. Matthew cites Isaiah 7:14 and indicates a broad familiarity with Isaiah's context. In that context, Assyria would lay waste Israel and Aram before the promised son was grown (Is 7:14-17); "a son" thus seems to refer to Isaiah's own son in Isaiah 8:3-4. But all the names of Isaiah's children were meant as signs pointing to significant events beyond themselves (8:18), and to whom would "Immanuel," or "God with us" (7:14), more aptly point than to the son of David rightly called "Mighty God" (9:6; cf. 10:21; 11:1)?

1:24-25. Joseph acts like Old Testament men and women of God who obeyed God's call even when it went against all human common sense. Marriage consisted of covenant (beginning at the betrothal; the marital contract also involved a monetary transaction between families), a celebration and a consummation, which ratified the marriage, normally on the first night of the seven-day wedding banquet. Joseph here officially marries Mary but abstains from consummating the marriage until after Jesus is born. They abstain even though she could have proved her virginity on the wedding night; in this way Jesus has not only a virgin conception but a virgin *birth* (1:23). Newly married couples sometimes lived in very small quarters. Jewish teachers thought that men had to marry young because they could not resist temptation (many even blamed a woman's uncovered hair for inducing lust). Joseph, who lives with Mary but exercises self-control, thus provides a strong role model for sexual purity.

2:1-12
The Pagan Seekers

Ancient writers and audiences often compared or contrasted characters in the *narratives. Here Israel's ruler acts like a pagan king, while *Gentiles come to honor Israel's true king; meanwhile, the religious teachers who knew the most (2:5) failed to act on the truth, even already at Jesus' birth.

2:1. Herod the Great died in 4 B.C.; Jesus was thus born before 4 B.C., rather than in A.D. 1; our calendars are off by several years. "Magi" (not "wise men"—KJV) were pagan astrologers whose divinatory skills were widely respected in the Greco-Roman world; astrology had become popular through the "science" of the East, and everyone agreed that the best astrologers lived in the East. The *Old Testament explicitly forbade such prognostication from signs (Deut 18:11; cf. Is 2:6; 47:11-15), prescribing true *prophecy instead (Deut 18:15).

2:2. Astronomers have offered various proposals for the appearance of this star in the first decade B.C. The ancients thought comets and falling stars predicted the fall of rulers; some emperors even banished from Rome astrologers who issued such predictions. Despite the biblical prohibition of divination, by this period many Jewish people accepted the idea that the stars could accurately predict the future (especially for Gentiles). Even though these Magi were pagans, God had chosen to reveal himself to them.

2:3. Many rulers feared astrological signs of their demise; the Emperor Nero later reportedly slaughtered many nobles in the hope that their deaths (rather than his own) would fulfill the prediction of a comet. Jerusalem was an important trade center; the Magi must have come with quite an entourage for the whole city to notice them. Then again, many people resented Herod's rule and rumors could have circulated quickly. King Herod, who was aware of broad currents of thought in the Roman Empire and sponsored pagan temples among Gentile cities in his realm, might have been especially apt to consider the Magi's mission significant.

2:4. The chief priests (*Josephus shows that in this period, the plural title applied to the aristocratic priests generally) belonged mainly to the wealthy aristocracy of *Sadducees; "*scribes" in the narrow sense in which the term is used here applies to experts in the Jewish *law, most of whom were also teachers of the law. That Herod exercised a great deal of influence over the prominent leaders of the people is not surprising; Josephus says that he executed the earlier Sanhedrin and after that assembled councils as he wished.

2:5-6. Micah 5:2 predicted Bethlehem as the *Messiah's birthplace, because the Messiah was to be a descendant of David, and Bethlehem had been David's hometown. It was a small town about six miles south of Herod's capital, Jerusalem. The Magi had come to Jerusalem because that was where they expected to

find any Judean king—but Herod had apparently not had any new sons lately. Remarkably, the scribes who knew where the Messiah would be born did not act on that knowledge; successors of these Jerusalem leaders later sought Jesus' execution (26:3-4, 57).

2:9-10. The text might imply only that the star *appeared* to move due to the Magi's own movement. Even had the object been close enough to earth to calculate its relation to Bethlehem, Bethlehem was so close to Jerusalem that any distance would have been negligible unless the object was only a mile high. But the description of God's leading of the Magi by a moving, supernatural sign may recall how God had led his own people by the fire and cloud in the wilderness (Ex 13:21-22).

2:11. Their posture of worship was appropriate toward gods or toward kings in the East. (Unlike most Mediterranean peoples, the Magi may not have been polytheists; they may have been Zoroastrian dualists. Scholars do, however, debate the exact nature of Zoroastrianism in this period.) Incense and myrrh were treasures characteristic of the East that the Mediterranean world typically imported from there (cf. 1 Kings 10:10; Ps 72:10-11, 15).

2:12. Most kings reacted with hostility to potential usurpers and to astrological predictions of their demise. That the Magi had to be warned by a dream not to return to Herod thus suggests their naiveté, an innocence Jews rarely expected of Gentiles. Most peoples in the ancient world paid attention to special dreams (1:20); some even had rules on how to interpret them; and the Greeks thought that Magi were specially adept at dream interpretation.

The main road they would need to take northward from Bethlehem went directly through Jerusalem, then eastward through Syria. Given the probably large size of their entourage, the Magi could not approach Jerusalem without being noticed, as Herod knew very well. Indeed, no major route could take them homeward without passing through Jerusalem. They may have ventured far south to Hebron; perhaps they then followed the rugged road to Gaza on the coast, where another road could lead them northward, then through Galilee and on to Damascus.

2:13-15
Egypt and a New Exodus

2:13-14. A very large Jewish community lived in Egypt in this period. Perhaps one-third of Alexandria, located in northern Egypt, was Jewish; with a population estimated at about one million, it was one of the empire's largest cities. Alexandria included a well-to-do Jewish element, schooled in Greek thought; most inhabitants of Egypt, however, were agrarian peasants, some of the poorest in the empire. Other Jewish communities had existed farther south, especially in Elephantine, for centuries. Literature from Palestinian Jews indicates that many of them questioned the devoutness of their Egyptian Jewish kinfolk, although Egyptian Jews considered themselves faithful to God.

The Nile made travel easy within Egypt, but the coastal road to Egypt from Palestine was not the finest. From Bethlehem one would take the poorer route southward to Hebron (see comment on 2:12). Egypt had served as a place of refuge in the past (1 Kings 11:40; Jer 26:21). In one Jewish tradition, God in a dream predicted to Moses' father that Moses would be a deliverer, before Moses was born. By leaving "at night," Joseph's family made their route of departure impossible to trace; the language might also evoke Jewish readers' memory of Exodus 12:31. Especially if they had an animal, they could have taken some of the gifts (2:11) for their life in Egypt.

2:15. Matthew builds almost every paragraph from the genealogy to the Sermon on the Mount around at least one text in the *Old Testament, explaining some event of Jesus' life from Scripture. In context Hosea 11:1 refers plainly to the Israelites leaving Egypt in the exodus; Matthew applies this text to Jesus because Jesus epitomizes and fulfills Israel's history (Mt 1:1). The broader context of Hosea 11 promises a new exodus and era of salvation (Hos 11:5, 11).

Matthew could have learned this Israel/Messiah interpretive analogy from his reading of Isaiah. Isaiah 42–53 narrows down the mission of Israel as a whole to the one who can ultimately fulfill that mission and suffer on behalf of the whole people—the one whom Christians would later understand to be Jesus (see Mt 12:17-21).

Herod died in 4 B.C.

2:16-18
Herod's Slaughter: A New Captivity

2:16. Because the most natural route by which the Magi could have returned was through Jerusalem (2:12), Herod knew that the Magi had purposely avoided returning to him. He was known for acts like the massacre described here. A young but popular competitor, a *high priest, had a "drowning accident" in a pool that was only a few feet deep. Enraged at his favorite wife, Herod had her strangled (discovering her innocence only afterward); he was deceived into having two innocent sons executed; and on his own deathbed Herod had another son executed (admittedly a guilty one). Although probably fictitious, a purported comment of the emperor is appropriate: Better to be one of Herod's pigs than his son. Josephus reports that Herod ordered nobles executed at his death to ensure mourning when he died; they were instead released at his death, producing celebration.

One of his fortresses, the Herodium, was within sight of Bethlehem, and he could have dispatched guards from there. Jewish people saw infanticide (killing babies) as a hideous, pagan act; sometimes applied by the Romans to deformed babies, it had also been used to control oppressed populations (Ex 1:8-22; 1 Maccabees 1:60-61; 2 Maccabees 8:4). Herod thus acts like a pagan tyrant, particularly Pharaoh in Exodus 1:22 (and secondarily Antiochus Epiphanes). Like Moses, Jesus escaped the fate of other male babies (Ex 1:22–2:10), and some Jews were expecting the coming of a prophet "like Moses" (Deut 18:15, 18).

2:17-18. Jeremiah 31:15 refers to the figurative weeping of Rachel, who was buried near Bethlehem (Gen 35:19). Jeremiah said she mourned for her descendants carried off into captivity during the Babylonian exile. Israel's corrupt ruler Herod is not only like Pharaoh; he is like Israel's subsequent oppressors. As Jesus' escape presaged a new exodus (Mt 2:15), so here his people's suffering echoes the captivity (cf. 1:11-12). The context of Jeremiah's *prophecy might remind Matthew of Hosea 11:1 (see Jer 31:20), but the suffering in the context becomes a prelude to the hope of the new covenant (31:31-34; cf. Mt 26:28).

2:19-23
The Nazarene

2:19. On dreams, see comment on 1:20.

2:20-21. Matthew's first readers would have undoubtedly caught the comparison Matthew implies between Jesus and Moses here (cf. Ex 4:19).

2:22. Archelaus, one of Herod's surviving sons, not only exhibited his father's worst flaws but also lacked his administrative skill. That his mother was a *Samaritan surely also failed to commend him to his Jewish subjects. His rule was unstable, and the Romans ultimately deposed him and banished him to Gaul (France); see Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.334; *Jewish War* 2.111.

2:23. Archaeological evidence in the region of Nazareth suggests that many people had moved there from Judea, including from the area near Bethlehem. Joseph may have had friends or relatives in Nazareth (cf. Lk 2:4). Nazareth was on a major road from the coast to Syria and only a few miles from the more cosmopolitan city of Sepphoris, which was being rebuilt during Jesus' childhood (cf. Mt 13:55). Some scholars believe that only a few hundred people lived in Nazareth proper. Though small, Nazareth would not have been isolated from broader cultural currents of antiquity. Nevertheless, it also appears to have been fairly conservative in its Jewish practice.

No single text provides Matthew's citation here. But ancient authors sometimes blended texts together, and both Jews and Greeks used plays on words to make points in argumentation, so this text could be a play on the Hebrew word *netser,* "branch," a title for the *Messiah (Jer 23:5; Zech 3:8; 6:12; cf. Is 11:1). (The only problem with this suggestion is that it assumes Matthew's original readers already knew Hebrew; but perhaps some of the more skilled among them did.) Or it could be a play on "Nazarene": by changing some letters slightly, it could refer to the Nazirites, a class of people dedicated to God (cf. Num 6:1-21).

3:1-12
Jesus' Forerunner

See Mark 1:2-8 for more detailed comments. Isaiah 40:3, cited in Matthew 3:3, refers to a

herald of the new exodus, when God would save his people again from the oppression they suffered.

3:1. "In those days" was a common *Old Testament expression, especially in (but not limited to) prophecies concerning the future. Many people in Jesus' day expected a great leader to bring deliverance to God's people from the wilderness, in a new exodus. In times of severe national apostasy in the Old Testament, some prophets (like Elijah) found it necessary to live outside society's boundaries.

3:2. The Jewish people recognized that God ruled the universe in one sense now, but prayed daily for the time when his *kingdom, or rule, would be established over all peoples of the earth. (See further comment on Mk 1:14-15.)

3:3. Isaiah 40:3 is in the context of Isaiah's *prophecy of a new exodus, when God would again deliver his people and lead them back to Jerusalem from all the nations among which they were scattered. Highways required adjustment of terrain to make them straight and level, and ancient kings, especially the kings of the East, expected the roads to be well prepared before they would travel on them. Perhaps in the interest of technical accuracy, Matthew deletes Mark's citation of Malachi here (used in Mt 11:10; Lk 7:27).

3:4. John's diet is that of the very poor; although domestic beekeepers were common, John eats only wild honey. (Honey was normally procured by smoking the bees out and then breaking open the honeycomb; honey was the only sweetener for food and was considered the sweetest of tastes.) But *Essenes and other pious Israelites (2 Maccabees 5:27) ate such diets to avoid unclean food.

John dressed like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8) and other people who lived outside society (some, like *Cynics and *Josephus's Essene tutor Bannus, were more *ascetic). Elijah was to prepare the way for God's coming, suggesting Jesus' identity (Mal 4:5-6; cf. 3:1).

3:5-6. Pagans wanting to convert to Judaism would repent and be baptized, but John here treats Jewish people on the same terms as pagans (see further comment on Mk 1:4-5.)

3:7. An ancient tradition suggested that some kinds of vipers ate their way out of their mothers (see, e.g., Herodotus, *Plutarch). It was bad enough to be called a viper, but to be called a viper's child was even worse—killing one's mother or father was the most hideous crime conceivable in antiquity.

3:8. *Repentance meant turning from sin. The *Pharisees themselves are known to have questioned professions of repentance if the supposedly repentant person continued sinning. The Old Testament prophets had sometimes described the obedience one owed God, or God's future blessing of his people, in terms of fruit (a natural image in an agricultural society; cf. Is 5:2; 27:6; Hos 10:1, 12-13; 14:7-8; Prov 11:30-31).

3:9. Jewish people commonly believed that they were saved as a people by virtue of their descent from Abraham. The idea of God raising up people from stones would have sounded to John the Baptist's Jewish hearers more like pagan mythology (the Greeks had such stories) than reality, but ancients often used the metaphor figuratively. Some scholars have also suggested a wordplay on "children" and "stones" in *Aramaic; biblical prophets sometimes used puns to hold attention. The God who could create from dust (Gen 2:7; cf. 1:24) or ribs (2:21) could create from stones; moreover, stones could be used to symbolize God's people (Ex 24:4; 28:9-12; Josh 4:20-21; 1 Kings 18:31). Other prophets had emphasized that God did not need Israel to fulfill his purpose (as in Amos 9:7).

3:10. Jewish literature sometimes used trees (like many other things) to symbolize Israel; at times the Old Testament used trees in *parables of judgment against the nations (Is 10:33-34; Ezek 31:2-18; Amos 2:9) or Israel (Is 10:18-19; Jer 11:16; Ezek 15:6). The wood of a thick tree (like a cedar from Lebanon) would have been used for building, but much of the wood from Palestine's many slender fruit trees (e.g., olive or fig trees) would be useful only for small items or, often as here, for fuel.

3:11. Slaves of high-status individuals often had higher status than free persons. A slave (unlike a *disciple, who also served a master) carried the master's sandals; John here claims that he is not worthy even to be Christ's slave—even though earlier prophets were often called "servants" of God (e.g., 2 Kings 9:7; Jer 7:25; Dan 9:6, 10).

The prophets had predicted the outpouring of God's *Spirit on the righteous at the time

when God established his kingdom for Israel (Is 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28). They also decreed fire upon the wicked (Is 26:11; 65:15; 66:24; Jer 4:4; 15:14; etc.). In Matthew 3:11, the wicked are baptized, or immersed, in fire (3:10, 12), the righteous in the *Holy Spirit.

3:12. Because the same Greek (and Hebrew) word can mean both "spirit" and "wind," the picture of wind and fire carries over from 3:11. Winnowing was familiar to all Palestinian Jews, especially to the farmers: they would throw harvested wheat into the air, and the wind would separate the heavier grain from the lighter chaff. The chaff was useless for consumption and was normally burned. Some other writers also described the day of judgment as a harvest (**4 Ezra* 4:30-32; cf. Jer 51:33; Joel 3:12-14) or the wicked as chaff (Is 17:13; Jer 13:24; 15:7; etc.). That the fire is "unquenchable" points beyond the momentary burning of chaff to something far more horrible (Is 66:24). Indeed, John presupposes the harshest view of hell available in his day, since Jewish tradition was far from unanimous concerning its duration (see "*Gehenna" in glossary).

3:13-17
Jesus' Accreditation by God

See Mark 1:9-11 for further details.

3:13-15. John anticipates Jesus' immediate *baptism in the Spirit (see comment on 3:11); Jesus identifies with Israel.

3:16. Many believed that the Spirit was no longer available in their time; others believed that the Spirit simply did not work as forcefully as in the days of the prophets, until the time of the end. That the Spirit comes on Jesus indicates the inauguration of the messianic era and marks Jesus out as the Spirit-bearer and hence *Messiah (3:11). The dove might evoke a new era (cf. Gen 8:11-12).

3:17. Many believed that voices from heaven were the closest anyone came to *prophecy in their time. Both kinds of witness support Jesus: the heavenly voice and John's prophecy. Matthew intends his more erudite readers to see allusions not only to a royal Messiah in Psalm 2:7, but also to the suffering servant of Isaiah 42:1-4 (see comment on Mt 12:18-21).

4:1-11
Jesus Overcomes Israel's Tests

The devil tried to shape Jesus' understanding of "sonship" (3:17) according to worldly models of power; Jesus allowed Scripture to define his mission. The three texts from Deuteronomy (6:13, 16; 8:3) he cites (Mt 4:4, 7, 10) were commands God gave to Israel when he tested Israel for forty years in the wilderness, the context of the first one addressing God's "son." Unlike Israel of old, Jesus as Israel's representative (1:1; 2:15) passes the tests. Some scholars have compared the battle of wits between Jesus and the devil to the way rabbinic debates were conducted. Jewish stories also praised those who endured and passed the severest moral tests.

4:1. One of the most common recitations of God's acts in the *Old Testament was that he "led" his people in the wilderness (see especially Is 63:14), where they were tested. Although the Old Testament only rarely mentions the devil, his activity as tempter (cf. Job 1-2) had come into focus much more by Jesus' day. A surprising feature here for most Jewish readers would not have been that the devil was providing temptation, but that he was doing it in person.

4:2. Moses also fasted forty day and nights; Jesus may appear here as a new Moses, the new lawgiver (see Mt 5:1-2). Israel also was in the wilderness forty years (see the introduction to this section).

4:3. The ancients attributed this sort of feat to magicians, who claimed to be able to transform themselves into animals and to transform other substances, like stones into bread. Many Jewish people were also hoping for a new exodus led by a new Moses—complete with new manna, or bread from heaven. The devil challenges or seeks to define Jesus' sonship against God's Word (3:17; cf. Gen 3:1); models of power in that culture included magicians and (as in 4:8) worldly rulers. The devil wants to conform the definition of Jesus' divine role to contemporary expectations.

4:4. The devil offers worldly models for what it means to be God's "son" (4:3); trusting the Father's voice (3:17), Jesus defines his mission instead from Scripture. Jesus would have known the context of Deuteronomy 8:3,

which he cites: he can depend on God's provision of manna in the wilderness because God is Jesus' Father as God was Israel's (Deut 8:5).

Other Jewish circles (as evident, e.g., in the *Dead Sea Scrolls and later rabbinic texts) also used the phrase "It has been written" to introduce Scripture.

4:5-6. "The holy city" was a standard title for Jerusalem. The devil takes Jesus to a part of the temple that overlooked a deep valley; a fall from there would have meant certain death. Later *rabbis acknowledged that the devil and *demons could handle Scripture expertly. Here the devil cites Psalm 91:11-12 out of context; 91:10 makes clear that God's angelic protection (cf. Mk 1:13) is for events that *befall* his servants, not an excuse to seek out such dangers. The devil phrases his temptation in language a popular Jewish work applied to the wicked mocking the righteous (Wisdom of Solomon 2:18).

4:7. Using the same general context as previously, Jesus cites Deuteronomy 6:16, which refers to how the Israelites had tested God at Massah by refusing to accept that God was among them until he wrought a sign for them (Ex 17:7).

4:8-9. This realm did not technically belong to the devil (see Dan 4:32), who owned human hearts only as a usurper. The best the devil could do would be to make Jesus the political, military sort of *Messiah most Jewish people who expected a Messiah were anticipating.

4:10. Deuteronomy 6:13, which Jesus cites from the same context as previously, prohibits idolatry (see Deut 6:14), a commandment anyone who worshiped the devil would obviously violate. Cf. Mt 16:22-23.

4:11. The promised angels of Ps 91:11 serve Jesus (cf. perhaps Ps 104:4), who refused to abuse the promise out of context in Mt 4:6-7.

4:12-17
Foreshadowing the Preaching to Gentiles

4:12-13. Nazareth was a small agricultural village and suburb of the old Galilean capital, Sepphoris; Capernaum was a larger fishing town (some estimate of one or two thousand) on the northwest edge of the Sea of Galilee. The trade routes brought *Gentiles through those parts. Capernaum lay in the borders of Naphtali but not Zebulon; Matthew mentions the latter because they occur together in Isaiah 9:1, which he cites in 4:15.

4:14-16. Citing here Isaiah 9:1-2, Matthew undoubtedly knows the context: the light to which it refers involves the promised Davidic king (Is 9:6-7). (Matthew again is anticipating the evangelization of non-Jews by foreshadowing it in his *narrative.) Many non-Jews in Galilee had been forcibly converted to Judaism in the second century B.C.; they had previously been aligned with Judea's Phoenician enemies (1 Maccabees 5:15). Subsequently, however, many Judeans settled in Galilee, and its inhabitants were primarily ethnically as well as religiously Jewish. More to the point, Galilee was surrounded on all sides (except its southern, *Samaritan border) by *Hellenistic city territories. Capernaum (like Sepphoris and Nazareth farther south) was situated along one of the major trade routes of Palestine, later called "the way of the sea." This was a caravan route from Damascus to Caesarea Maritima, which was on the Mediterranean coast.

4:17. Jesus' message is summarized as *repentance to be ready for the *kingdom; see comment on 3:2. First-century Jewish hearers would have heard in this proclamation a warning of the imminent day of judgment.

4:18-22
Examples of Repentance

Ancient writers often illustrated their teachings (here, 4:17) with narrative examples. See comment on Mark 1:14-20 for further details.

4:18. Most Galileans depended especially on salted fish, wheat and barley for sustenance; fish products like fish gravies were thus also common. The fish of the Sea of Galilee included large carp; the fish would be dried, salted or pickled to preserve them. Fishermen were central to the Galilean economy and could make a good living by the standards of their culture, far better than the large numbers of peasants who worked the land through much of the Roman Empire. It is thought that the casting net had a narrow end pulled by the boat and a wide end sunk by leads (contrast the larger dragnet of 13:47); nets were probably made of rope or cords woven from flax, papyrus or hemp. Archaeologists have recovered an ancient Galilean fishing boat.

4:19-20. *Disciples normally chose to become students of a particular rabbi. Only the most radical teachers called their own disciples.

4:21-22. Fishermen had more income than average people in Galilee, so James and John were not leaving their job just because it did not pay well. More than that, however, they suddenly left behind their father and the family business; such abandonment could easily bring them dishonor in the community. (Both Jews and Greeks, however, had similar accounts and would recognize this sudden departure as a sure sign of radical discipleship.)

4:23-25
Examples of Kingdom Authority

Ancient literature commonly includes not only longer *narrative segments but also summary statements like this passage (also 9:35; 19:1-2; etc.).

4:23. Visiting teachers, especially popular ones, were normally invited to speak in *synagogues, which in this period were led by priests or laymen who were prominent members of their communities.

4:24. Because many Jewish people lived in Syria, Matthew presumably intends Syrian Jews here (Matthew probably would have eagerly mentioned Gentiles had they come). The presence of multitudes seeking relief at hot springs (like Hammath-Tiberias) in Galilee testifies to the vast numbers who sought healing in the first century; the few figures reputed as wonder-workers (e.g., Jewish exorcists or Gentile magicians) could also draw great crowds.

Although some (not all) contemporary medical writers thought epilepsy was due to demonic activity, Matthew here distinguishes the two.

4:25. The Decapolis, the "Ten Cities," was a Gentile area that included a large Jewish population.

5:1-12
The Beatitudes, or Blessings

Matthew 5–7 is the first block of teaching material in Matthew, dealing with the ethics of the *kingdom. In 4:17 Jesus summarizes his message: "Repent, for the kingdom is at hand"; Matthew 5-7 shows in greater detail the repentant lifestyle that characterizes the people of the kingdom. This block is introduced by a common *Old Testament literary form called beatitudes: "Happy are those who . . . for they shall . . . " (e.g., Ps 1:1). (The form appears also in some Greek literature, but is more common in Jewish sources.) Here the blessings are the promises of the kingdom for those who live the repentant life. Jesus' hearers would have understood them especially as promises for the future time of God's reign; we must read them in the light of the present aspect of the kingdom as well (see "kingdom" in the glossary). The future kingdom was sometimes defined by images from the creation *narratives or from Israel's exodus from Egypt, which the Jewish people regarded as their original redemption.

5:1-2. Although one would stand to read Scripture publicly, the most respected Jewish teachers would usually sit to expound it, often with *disciples sitting at their feet. Some scholars have compared the "mountain" (cf. Lk 6:17) here to Mount Sinai, where God through Moses first taught his ethics by the *law (Ex 19-20; cf. Is 2:2-3).

5:3. Ancient writers and speakers would sometimes bracket a section of material by beginning and ending with the same phrase. These blessings involve the gift of the kingdom (5:3, 10).

Many Jewish people believed that the kingdom would be ushered in only by a great war and force of arms; Jesus promises it for the "poor in spirit," the "humble" or "meek" (5:5), the peacemakers (5:9). Poverty and piety were often associated in Judaism; the term *poor* could encompass either physical poverty (Lk 6:20), or the faithful dependence on God that it often produced ("in spirit," as here).

5:4. Mourning was usually associated with either *repentance or bereavement; the conjunction with "comfort" means that the second aspect is in view here. It could mean grief over Israel's sins, but in this context probably refers to the pain of the oppressed (it involves the broken, as perhaps in 5:3). "Comfort" was one of the blessings promised for the future time when God would restore his mourning people (Is 40:1; 49:13; 51:3, 12; 52:9; 54:11; 57:18; 61:2; 66:13).

5:5. Here Jesus cites Scripture (Ps 37:9, 11). Not those who try to bring in the kingdom politically or militarily but those who humbly wait on God will "inherit the earth." The

Hebrew of the psalm could mean "inherit the land" in a narrower sense (Ps 25:13), but in Jesus' day Jewish people expected God's people to reign over all the earth, as some other Old Testament passages suggest.

5:6. On the physically needy, see comment on Lk 6:20. Jewish people understood that God would also satisfy his people's needs in the future kingdom (Is 25:6; 41:17-18; 55:2), as he had supplied for them in the exodus when he first redeemed them (Deut 6:11; 8:7-10). But the greatest object of longing should be God (Ps 42:1; 63:1) and instruction in his righteousness (Ps 119:40, 47, 70, 92, 97, 103; Jer 15:16).

5:7. Some later *rabbis uttered similar statements (cf. also Prov 11:17). Like the peacemakers (v. 9), the merciful are not those who seek to bring in the kingdom by force. The mercy Jewish people generally hoped to receive was expected in the day of judgment (cf. Mic 7:18-19).

5:8. The "pure in heart" (Ps 73:1) were those in Israel whose hearts were "clean," or undefiled, those who recognized that God alone was their help and reward (Ps 73:2-28). The righteous would see God on the day of judgment (e.g., Is 30:20), as in the first exodus (Ex 24:10-11).

5:9. Both the Jewish people and the righteous were called "sons of God" in Jewish tradition; the ultimate declaration of that fact would be made in the sight of the nations on the day of judgment (cf. Hos 1:10). Those teachers who came to dominate Pharisaism after the war of A.D. 66–70 were the ones who emphasized the way of peace rather than the way of revolt espoused by others. But many other Jewish leaders had joined in the spirit of revolt and were killed or came to be viewed as illegitimate leaders after the revolt's failure.

5:10-12. Many of the Old Testament prophets suffered in bringing God's word to Israel (e.g., Jer 26:11); Jewish tradition amplified the number of prophetic martyrs further and made it a major emphasis. The burden of proof was always on the prophet who spoke what people wanted to hear (Jer 28:8-9; cf. 6:14; 8:10-11; 23:17).

Most Jewish people did not believe that prophets still existed in the Old Testament sense, so Jesus' comparing his followers to the prophets indicated that they would have an extraordinary mission. To suffer for God was meritorious (Ps 44:22; 69:7), and Judaism highly honored martyrs for God's law; yet no other rabbi called disciples to die for his own teachings or name.

5:13-16
Real Discipleship

A *disciple of the *kingdom who does not live like a disciple of the kingdom (5:3-12) is worth about as much as tasteless salt or invisible light.

5:13. Various scholars have emphasized different uses of salt in antiquity, such as a preservative or an agent regularly added to manure; but the use of salt here is as a flavoring agent: "if salt has become tasteless" (the Greek word can also mean "become foolish," so it may include a play on words).

Although the salt recovered from impure salt substances taken from the Dead Sea could dissolve, leaving only the impurities behind, the point here may be closer to that expressed by a rabbi at the end of the first century. When asked how one could make saltless salt salty again, he replied that one should salt it with the afterbirth of a mule. Being sterile, mules have no afterbirth, and the rabbi was saying that those who ask a stupid question receive a stupid answer. Real salt does not lose its saltiness; but if it did, what would you do to restore its salty flavor—salt it? Unsalty salt was worthless.

5:14. Jewish tradition considered Israel (Is 42:6; 49:6) and Jerusalem (as well as God and the *law) the light of the world. The "city" here could thus be Jerusalem; or it may be any elevated city at night, whose torch lights would make it visible to the surrounding countryside.

5:15-16. The small wicker oil lamps of this period gave little light in the average home, which had few windows; they would be most effective by being set on a lampstand. Something large placed over them would presumably extinguish the light altogether.

5:17-20
The Law Enforced

Jesus' ethical demands (5:3-16) are no weaker than those of the *law given by Moses; cf. 5:21-26.

5:17. Jewish teachers said that one "abolished" the law by disobeying it (cf. Deut 27:26),

because one thereby rejected its authority. Such highhanded rebellion against the law—as opposed to particular sins—warranted social and spiritual expulsion from the Jewish community. The charge of openly persuading others that the law was no longer in force would be even worse. Jesus opposed not the law but an illegitimate traditional interpretation of it that stressed regulations more than character.

5:18. Jesus refers here to the *yod,* the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Later rabbis told the story that when God changed Sarai's name to Sarah, the *yod* that was removed complained to God for generations till he reinserted it, this time in Joshua's name. In another later story, a *yod* protested that King Solomon was trying to uproot it from the Bible; God replied that a thousand Solomons would be uprooted, but not a single *yod* would pass from Scripture. Jewish teachers used illustrations like this to make the point that the law was sacred and one could not regard any part as too small to be worth keeping.

5:19. Later rabbis debated which commandments were the greatest. Some decided that the greatest commandment was honoring one's father and mother, and the least, respecting a mother bird; they reasoned that both merited the same reward, *eternal life (based on "life" in Ex 20:12; Deut 22:7). A modern reader might ask, What happens to the person who breaks one and keeps another? But such a question misses the point of this hyperbolic language which other Jewish teachers also typically used to say, "God will hold accountable anyone who disregards even the smallest commandment."

5:20. The *Pharisees were the most respected religious people in Judea, and the *scribes the supreme experts in the law (especially, no doubt, the Pharisaic scribes). Verses 21-48 show what Jesus' demand for a "higher" righteousness involves. The Pharisees also stressed the right intention of the heart (*kavanah*); Jesus' criticizes not their doctrine but their hearts as religious people. Religious communities led by Pharisaic teachers may have also been opponents of Jewish Christians in Syria-Palestine in Matthew's day, giving Matthew additional incentive to record these words.

5:21-26
Anger as Murder

Six times in verses 21-43 Jesus cites Scripture and then, like a good rabbi, explains it (5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). The sort of wording he uses (especially "You have heard") was used by other Jewish teachers to establish the fuller meaning of a text, although Jesus speaks with greater authority than Jewish teachers normally claimed.

5:21-22. "Raca" is *Aramaic for "empty-headed or worthless"; the insult is about the same as the one that follows it, "Fool!" The punishments are also roughly equal: the (day of God's) judgment, the heavenly Sanhedrin or supreme court, and hell. (Jewish literature described God's heavenly tribunal as a supreme court, or sanhedrin, parallel to the earthly one.) "The hell of fire" is literally "the *Gehenna of fire." Teachers envisioned Gehinnom as the opposite of paradise; in Gehinnom the wicked would be burned up (according to some Jewish teachers) or eternally tortured (according to other Jewish teachers). Here the addition of "fire" makes Gehinnom's fiery character all the more emphatic. Some other Jewish teachers would have agreed that not only the outward act of murder but also the inward choice of anger that generates such acts violates the spirit of God's *law against murder.

5:23-24. Judaism stressed reconciliation between individuals; God would not accept an outward offering if one had oppressed or mistreated one's neighbor and did not make it right. In the *Old Testament God accepted only sacrifices offered with a pure heart toward him and one's neighbor (Gen 4:4-7; Prov 15:8; Is 1:10-15; Jer 6:20; Amos 5:21-24).

5:25-26. Again Jesus returns to the image of the heavenly court (5:22). Here he may use the custom of debt imprisonment as another image in the *parable; this was a non-Jewish custom, but Jewish hearers would have known about it among the *Gentiles. No mercy would be shown: the amount of money to be repaid extended to the last (literally) *quadrans,* almost the least valuable Roman coin, the equivalent of only a few minutes' wages. (Details like the "officer" make the parable work as a story but do not symbolize anything in particular. Ancient storytellers did not invest

meaning in every detail of their parables; see "parable" in the glossary.)

5:27-30
Lust as Adultery

5:27-28. Many ancient Jewish sources warned against lust and emphasized women's seductiveness; Jesus here emphasizes only the responsibility of the one lusting. Other Jewish teachers also looked down on lust; some even went as far as Jesus in regarding it as adultery. The issue is thus not the doctrine of Jesus' hearers but their heart. The Greek word here is the same as in the opening line of the tenth commandment in the *Septuagint (the Greek version of the *Old Testament): "You shall not desire your neighbor's wife" (Ex 20:17). The tenth commandment, against coveting, forces Jesus' hearers to internalize Moses' other commandments.

5:29-30. Corporal punishment (cutting off appendages, e.g., Ex 21:24-25) is easier to bear than capital punishment, the decree of eternal death pronounced by the heavenly court. Some Jewish thinkers believed that one would be resurrected in exactly the form in which one had died (e.g., with limbs missing, as in the case of many martyrs) before being made whole, and Jesus employs this image. Many sources used physical "stumbling" (literally) as a metaphor for sin.

5:31-32
Remarriage as Adultery

Jewish *law about adultery technically addressed only intercourse with married women; the marital status of the man was not relevant. For this reason Matthew addresses here only the status of the divorced wife.

Some Pharisaic rabbis allowed divorce for almost anything (just as Roman law did); others allowed it only if the wife were unfaithful (see comment on 19:1-10; both Jewish and Roman law *required* divorce for adultery). Most recognized it as tragic. Yet the stricter rabbis did not view more lenient divorces as invalid. Jesus thus goes beyond the stricter position: not only does he allow divorce only if one's wife is unfaithful, but he regards divorce for any other reason as invalid, thus making remarriage in those cases adulterous. This seems, however, to be *hyperbole (as in 5:29-30), a graphic way of forbidding divorce except when the other partner has already irreparably broken the marriage covenant (see comment on Mk 10:11).

If Jesus' interpretation of the law was stricter than what the law said at face value, no one would have thought that he was therefore contradicting the law; "building a fence" around the law was a standard Jewish practice that involved making certain that the law's intent was not broken.

5:33-37
Integrity, Not Oaths

Oaths invoked the witness of a deity; people assumed that the deity would avenge any false appeals to his or her testimony. People swore by all sorts of things other than God to testify that their word was true. They reasoned that if they broke their oath based on any of these lesser things, at least they were not bringing God's name into disrepute. It eventually became necessary for rabbis to decide which oaths were completely binding. Like a small number of other thinkers, Jesus emphasizes having such integrity that oaths are unnecessary. He says that everything by which one could swear is ultimately God's, and demands that people simply be as good as their word. Jesus argues the point in part from Scripture; Isaiah 66:1 declared that heaven is God's throne and earth is his footstool.

Most people in Jewish Palestine had black or dark hair, unless they were older, in which case their hair was turning white; verse 36 would have been heard as referring to God's control over aging. Jesus' rule here is stricter than the letter of the *law but in accord with its spirit (Deut 23:21-23; Eccles 5:5). It is possible that the *Essenes also avoided oath-taking after their initial oath to join their sect.

5:38-42
Nonresistance

The language is partly *hyperbole—*disciples did not all engage in behavior that would immediately lead to homelessness (cf. 2 Cor 11:20). But hyperbole was meant to provoke hearers to consider the radical nature of what they were being told. To put the point more literally, Jesus is calling his followers to value relationships supremely and regard posses-

sions as nothing. (The point is absolute unselfishness, motivated by love; cf. 5:43-44.)

5:38. The "eye for an eye" and "tooth for a tooth" are part of the widespread ancient Near Eastern law of retaliation. In Israel and other cultures, this principle was enforced by a court and refers to legalized vengeance; personal vengeance was never accepted in the *law of Moses, except as a concession for a relative's murder (Num 35:18-21). The *Old Testament did not permit personal vengeance; David, a great warrior, recognized this principle (1 Sam 25:33; 26:10-11).

5:39. The blow on the right cheek (e.g., Job 16:10; Lam 3:30) was the most grievous insult in the ancient world (apart from inflicting serious physical harm), and in many cultures was listed alongside the "eye for an eye" laws; both Jewish and Roman law permitted prosecution for this offense. A prophet might endure such ill treatment (1 Kings 22:24; 2 Chron 18:23; Is 50:6).

5:40. The poorest people of the empire (e.g., most peasants in Egypt) had only an inner and outer garment, and the theft of a cloak would lead to legal recourse. Although conditions in first-century Palestine were not quite that bad, this verse could indicate divestiture of all one's possessions, even (hyperbolically) one's clothes, to avoid a legal dispute affecting only oneself. Jesus gives this advice in spite of the fact that, under Jewish law, a legal case to regain one's cloak would have been foolproof: a creditor could not take a poor person's outer cloak, which might serve as one's only blanket at night as well as a coat (Ex 22:26-27).

5:41. Roman soldiers had the legal right to impress the labor, work animal or substance of local residents (cf. Mk 15:21). Although impressment may not have happened often in Galilee, it happened elsewhere, and the fact that it could happen would be enough to raise the eyebrows of Jesus' hearers at this example of nonresistance and even loving service to the oppressor.

The Jewish hierarchy favored the status quo with Rome; some revolutionaries wanted to revolt. Most Palestinian Jews in this period wanted freedom but were not revolutionaries; at least some Galilean villagers, however, may have sympathized with bandits known for their hostility toward the existing powers. By A.D. 66 Jewish Palestine was caught up in a war, and by 70 the wisdom of Jesus' course was evident: Rome won the war, and the Jewish people, led to defeat by the revolutionaries, were crushed.

5:42. Beggars were widespread. The Bible stressed giving to those in need (Deut 15:11; Ps 112:5, 9; Prov 21:13). God would take care of the needs of those who helped the poor (Deut 15:10; Prov 19:17; 22:9; 28:8). Biblical laws against usury and especially about lending to the poor before the year of release (Deut 15:9; every seventh year debts were to be forgiven; cf. Lev 25) support Jesus' principle here, but Jesus goes even farther in emphasizing unselfish giving (especially Lk 6:35).

5:43-48
Beyond Nonresistance

5:43-44. The *Old Testament did not explicitly teach hatred for one's enemies (Ex 23:4-5; Prov 25:21-22), although hating God's enemies was a pious way to feel (Ps 139:19-22); some Jewish groups, like the *Essenes, emphasized hatred toward those outside the covenant. Greek ethics sometimes stressed learning from one's enemies' criticism but also could stress making sure to hurt one's enemies more than one was hurt by them (so Isocrates, a fourth-century B.C. Athenian orator and rhetorician).

Although vengeance belonged only to the Lord (Lev 19:18; Deut 32:35), prayer for one's persecutors (except that God would strike them dead!) had not generally characterized even the most pious in the Old Testament (cf. 2 Chron 24:22; Jer 11:20; 15:15; 17:18; 18:23; 20:12; often in Psalms, e.g., 137:7-9). Some philosophers valued nonresistance, but others answered their critics harshly and arrogantly.

5:45. Jewish teachers emphasized this universal aspect of God's mercy and that he alone was sovereign over rain. (Many also stressed that the prayers of the righteous could bring rain in times of drought, an issue not addressed here.) Some Jewish texts said that by being like God, one would be his child (i.e., imitator; e.g., Sirach 4:10).

5:46-47. Some Jewish teachers emphasized kindness to pagans (*Gentiles) to draw them to the truth, but most people greeted and (apart from charity) looked after only

those they knew. *Tax gatherers were considered among the most apostate Jews; Gentiles were considered (usually rightly) immoral, idolatrous, often anti-Jewish pagans. Jews agreed that one should not be like the pagans (so also the Old Testament: Lev 18:3; Deut 18:9; Jer 10:2).

5:48. Ancient rhetoric often included summary statements at the end of a speech or section. The *Aramaic word for "perfect" can mean "complete" or "whole," including the nuance of "merciful" (Lk 6:36). The Bible already commanded being holy as God is holy (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26), and Judaism (as well as some Greek philosophers) sometimes argued ethics on the basis of imitating God's character.

6:1-4
Secret Charity

6:1. Where appropriate, ancient speakers liked to offer a starting summary, and sometimes to illustrate with three main points. This verse is the thesis statement that introduces the three examples of private piety in 6:2-16. Judaism stressed that one should not perform deeds for the sake of reward but nonetheless promised reward, as Jesus does here; this reward is rendered at the day of judgment, as in Judaism. Prayer, fasting and gifts to the poor were among the basic components of Jewish piety (Tobit 12:8), and many *rabbis listed qualities (e.g., virtues on which the world was founded) in sets of three.

6:2-4. In general, Greeks and Romans did not emphasize personal charity; wealthy contributions to public projects or to *clients of slightly lower status were meant to secure the giver's popularity. In contrast, charity was central to Jewish piety; some writers even said that it saved a person, although some later rabbis' restrictions technically did not permit one to give over twenty percent above his tithes.

Some commentators have taken the trumpet sounding literally, but it is hyperbolic (people did not blow trumpets when giving alms) and might reflect a play on words (charity boxes were often shaped like trumpets). Not letting one's left hand know about the right hand's gift is *hyperbole (cf. Jon 4:11), and some similar graphic pictures appear elsewhere. The language of "having" a reward "in full" is the language of repayment in ancient business receipts.

6:5-15
Secret Prayer

The parallel structure of the larger section (6:1-18) and of this passage on prayer is augmented by the presence of a sample prayer (6:9-13; thus how one should not pray, 6:5, 7-8; and how one should pray, 6:6, 9). Judaism was much more serious about regular prayer than were Greek and Roman religions.

6:5-6. The problem is not public prayer but motives directed toward other people rather than toward God. It was probably common for pious people to recite their prayers at least individually in the *synagogue; it is not clear that everyone prayed simultaneously in all synagogues as early as Jesus' time. Some suggest that the "chamber" was a storeroom; most people did not have private rooms in their houses, and only that room would have a door on it. Standing was a common posture for prayer.

6:7. Jewish scholars were debating the use of fixed prayers in this period; they generally held them to be acceptable if one's intent was genuine. Greek prayers sometimes piled up as many titles of the deity addressed as possible, hoping to secure his or her attention. Pagan prayers typically reminded the deity of favors done or sacrifices offered, attempting to get a response from the god on contractual grounds.

6:8. Judaism recognized that God knew everything; the issue here (and often with respect to Jesus' teaching) is thus not Jesus' hearers' doctrine but their hearts. Jewish people saw God differently than Greeks saw their gods (even though even monotheistic faith was not always what it should have been). In Judaism, God was a Father who delighted in meeting the needs of his people; Judaism also recognized that God knew all a person's thoughts. Jesus predicates effective prayer on a relationship of intimacy, not a business partnership model, which was closer to the one followed by ancient paganism.

6:9-10. Greek sources often called the supreme deity "father," including in prayers, but this practice is pervasive in Jewish sources as well, even as early as the *Old Testament (Deut 32:6; Ps 68:5; Is 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:4, 19; 31:9; Mal

1:6; 2:10) and other very early Jewish works (e.g., Tobit 13:4; *3 Maccabees 5:7; 7:6). Jewish people commonly addressed God as "our heavenly Father" when they prayed, although such intimate titles as "Abba" (Papa) were rare (see comment on Mk 14:36). One standard Jewish prayer of the day (the Kaddish) proclaimed, "Exalted and hallowed be his . . . name . . . and may his kingdom come speedily and soon." Because God was Father, his children could depend on him (cf. 18:3).

Jewish prayers recognized that God's name would be "hallowed," or "sanctified," "shown holy," in the time of the end, when his *kingdom would come, as the Bible also said (Is 5:16; 29:23; Ezek 36:23; 38:23; 39:7, 27; cf. Zech 14:9). Jewish people would also recognize the importance of living consistently with what they valued in prayer. In the present God's people could hallow his name by living rightly; if they lived wrongly, they would "profane" his name, or bring it into disrepute among the nations (cf. also Ex 20:7; Jer 34:16; 44:25-26; Ezek 13:19; 20:14; Amos 2:7). Some regard the *kiddush hashem,* the hallowing of God's name, as the most fundamental principle of later rabbinic ethics; they counted profaning God's name as almost unforgiveable.

It was understood that after his kingdom came God's will would be done on earth as in heaven.

6:11. This verse alludes to God's provision of "daily bread" (manna) for his people in the wilderness after he first redeemed them. Some Jewish people looked for a renewal of manna in the end time, but prayers for God to supply one's basic needs—of which bread and water are the ultimate examples—were common in the ancient world (cf. Prov 30:8).

6:12. Prayer for forgiveness appears in standard ancient Jewish prayers (note the sixth of the Eighteen Benedictions). Jewish teaching regarded sins as "debts" before God; the same *Aramaic word could be used for both. Biblical *law required the periodic forgiveness of monetary debtors (in the seventh and fiftieth years), so the illustration of forgiving debts would have been a graphic one (especially since Jewish lawyers had found a way to circumvent the release of debts so that creditors would continue to lend).

6:13. Parallels with ancient Jewish prayers, and possibly the Aramaic wording behind this verse, suggest that the first line means: "Let us not sin when we are tested"—rather than "Let us not be tested" (cf. 4:1; 26:41 in context; cf. Ps 141:3-4). Some scholars have suggested an allusion to the final time of suffering here, which was expected to precede the coming kingdom, but while such testing could be included, most Jewish prayers about testing were for strength in the present era. Because Jewish prayers were commonly used in liturgical contexts that ended with a statement of praise, later texts' addition of the benediction ("Thine is the kingdom . . . ") to the original text of Matthew is not surprising.

6:14-15. Although others felt differently, some Jewish sages recognized that only those who forgave would be forgiven (Sirach 28:1-8). The principle of forgiveness that Jesus states here seems to be that only people of *grace know how to accept grace. See comment on 18:21-35.

6:16-18
Secret Fasting

Jewish people conjoined fasting with mourning, *repentance, or sometimes prayer; most fasts ran from sundown to sundown. During at least the dry seasons, many of the most pious people fasted (without water, though this was unhealthy) two particular days a week. This fasting was considered meritorious, although *ascetic fasting (e.g., fasting only to "beat down the flesh") was forbidden. Jewish fasting required abstinence not only from food but also from other pleasures, which would include the usual practice of anointing one's head with oil to prevent dry skin; avoiding all these practices made fasting obvious. (Greeks oiled their bodies before exercise and then used a metal utensil called a strigil to scrape off the sweaty dirt accumulated on the oil. But Jews did not practice this custom, and it is not in view here in Mt 6.) God had never settled for outward fasting only (Is 58:3-12; Jer 36:9).

6:19-24
Don't Seek Possessions

One should not value possessions enough to seek them (6:19-24)—or enough to worry about them—because God will provide one's

basic needs (6:25-34). Ancient views on possessions varied from denial of personal possessions (like the *Essenes) to viewing wealth as a blessing (more common); but most people then, like most people today, sought as much as possible.

6:19. Ancient teachers like *Hillel, a famous Jewish teacher, generally acknowledged the corruptibility of earthly treasure. Because thieves could dig through walls and steal a strongbox in one's home, well-to-do people usually tried one of several other methods to safeguard their wealth: investing money with moneychangers, depositing it in a temple for safekeeping (even most robbers balked at "robbing gods"), or burying it in the ground or in caves, where, however, moth (for expensive apparel) or rust (for coins, cf. Sirach 29:10-11; but the term here in Matthew may involve decay by creatures, e.g., worms) could destroy its value in time.

6:20-21. Jewish texts spoke of "laying up treasure" with God or in heaven (e.g., Tobit 4:7-10). Sometimes this meant that the generous person could trust that God would help him in time of need; sometimes it referred (as here) to treasure in the world to come.

6:22-23. Jesus speaks literally of a "single" eye versus a "bad" or "evil" one. This saying may involve several plays on words. A "single" eye normally meant a generous one but also sets the reader up for 6:24. A "bad" eye in that culture could mean either a diseased one or a stingy one. Many people believed that light was emitted from the eye, enabling one to see, rather than that light was admitted through the eye. Although here Jesus compares the eye to a lamp, he speaks of "diseased" eyes which fail to *admit* light. Such eyes become a symbol for the worthlessness of a stingy person.

6:24. Two masters rarely shared slaves, but when they did (sometimes through joint inheritance) it led to divided interests. "Mammon" is an *Aramaic word for possessions or money, and Jesus seems to be personifying it as an idol, using another ancient figure of speech (personification).

6:25-34
Don't Worry About Possessions

6:25. Most people in antiquity had little beyond basic necessities—food, clothing and shelter. Because their acquisition of these necessities often depended—especially in rural areas—on seasonal rains or (in Egypt) the flooding of the Nile, they had plenty of cause for stress even about food and clothing.

6:26-27. Some ancient philosophers taught about or drew morals from nature as well as from philosophy. Many Jewish teachers said that God's concern in the laws of the Bible was only for humans (although it was clear that God watched over all creation; cf. Ps 104:27). But Jesus' argument was a standard Jewish "how much more" (*qal vahomer*) argument: If God cares for the birds (and rabbis agreed that he sustained all creation), how much more does he care for humans?

6:28-30. Jesus' term could apply to any of the flowers in Galilee's fields, though some commentators have suggested anemones, which were purple, the color that many ancient readers would have envisioned for Solomon's royal robes (6:29). In any case, such flowers were fuel for women's bread-baking ovens. The perishing of grass and flowers as they dried up in each year's summer heat was a natural image for human mortality (cf. Ps 103:15-16; Is 40:6-8).

6:31-33. The pagan world did indeed seek after such necessities, but Jesus reminds his hearers that they could trust their Father (v. 32; see comment on 6:7-8) and should seek the kingdom (v. 33).

6:34. Other Jewish teachers after Jesus gave the same advice; whether Jesus used a common saying or his teaching in this case became a common saying is hard to determine.

7:1-5
Reciprocal Judgment

7:1-2. The idea of a measuring scale (the image is from the ancient marketplace) was used elsewhere for the day of judgment or divine retribution. "As one measures it will be measured back to one" occurs a number of times in later Jewish sources and may have been a maxim. For the principle, see 5:7, 6:14-15 and Proverbs 19:17. Compare also the *Old Testament principles that false witnesses were to receive the penalty they sought for the accused (Deut 19:18-21) and that God opposed unjust judges (Ex 23:6-8; Deut 16:18-20).

7:2-5. Although ancient eye surgery some-

times involved lancing the eye, here Jesus clearly uses *hyperbole. The imagery is vivid, shocking, ludicrous and probably humorous to Jesus' hearers, but it communicates the point. The prophets had appealed to graphic images, often employing plays on words to communicate their message (e.g., the Hebrew of Mic 1; Jer 1:11-12). The Old Testament (e.g., Prov 15:32) and subsequent Jewish tradition stressed that people should always be humble enough to accept correction.

7:6-12
Imitating God's Gifts

7:6. Pigs and dogs were considered unclean animals (Prov 26:11; 2 Pet 2:22), which had no appreciation for valuable things (Prov 11:22). Pigs typically ate the vilest foods, and dogs were scavengers, consuming even human blood. Stray dogs were known to growl at those who tossed them food as well as those who ignored them. The image would thus be forceful and beyond dispute for ancient hearers.

The more debated question is what the verse means in the context. Perhaps it means not correcting (cf. Mt 7:1-5) those who would not listen (cf. Prov 23:9).

7:7-8. Even as a general principle, the boldness with which this text promises answers to prayer is quite rare in ancient literature; only a few special men of God were thought to obtain most of what they requested.

7:9-11. Jesus adapts a standard Jewish argument here called *qal vahomer* arguing from the lesser to the greater (if the lesser is true, how much more the greater). Fish and bread were basic staples, integral to the diet of most of Jesus' hearers; they do not stand for the fineries of the wealthy.

7:12. That one should not do to others what one would not wish done to oneself was a common teaching; it occurred in the Jewish book of Tobit, reportedly in the teaching of the early Jewish teacher Hillel and in Greek sources as well (cf., e.g., the negative form in Tobit 4:15; Philo, *Hypothetica* 7.6; *Babylonian Shabbat* 31a; positively, *Letter of Aristeas* 207; cf. also Sirach 31:15; Greek sources and even Confucian teaching). The version attributed in a later source to *Hillel adds, "This is the whole law" (cf. Mt 22:40).

7:13-27
The Two Ways

7:13-14. Jesus' hearers would have been familiar with the image of "two ways"—one leading to life and the other to death; it was common in Judaism (see already Deut 30:15). Jesus' emphasis that few are on the right way occurs in **4 Ezra* but is not as common as the general image of the two ways. Apparently most Jewish people believed that Israel as a whole would be saved and that the few who were lost would be exceptions to the general rule.

7:15. Although many educated Jewish people did not believe that prophets had continued in the *Old Testament sense, they believed that false prophets (cf., e.g., Jer 2:8; 5:30) continued; *Josephus mentioned many of them in the first century. The contrast between vicious wolves and harmless lambs or sheep was proverbial. Stories existed of some using skins as disguises, but the image here is more graphic: wolves do not wear clothes.

7:16. Like wheat and barley, grapes and figs were among the most valuable and widely consumed fruits of the earth; thorns and thistles were worthless and troublesome to harvesters, as the Old Testament often mentions. For a figurative use of "fruits" in the Old Testament, see Isaiah 5:6 and comment on Matthew 3:8.

7:17-20. The repetition of "know them by their fruits" (7:17, 20) brackets this illustration; such bracketing was commonly used as a literary device (called *inclusio*) to mark off a paragraph. Prophets were known to be false if they led people away from the true God (Deut 13) or their words did not come to pass (Deut 18:21-22). The *rabbis allowed that prophets might temporarily suspend a teaching of the *law the way rabbis themselves would, but if they denied the law itself or advocated idolatry, they were false prophets. Jesus teaches that if they do not live right, they are false (Mt 7:21-23). Cf. Luke 6:43-45.

7:21-23. The miracles Jesus mentions are not necessarily false; it is possible to prophesy by the *Spirit's inspiration and yet be disobedient to God and unsaved (1 Sam 19:20-24). The admonition to depart is from a psalm about the vindication of the righteous (Ps 6:8; cf. 119:115; 139:19). Some tried to use Solomon's

name to cast out demons (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.47), but many acted or prophesied in God's name (Deut 18:22; 1 Sam 17:45; 1 Esdras 6:1).

7:24-27. The rabbis debated whether hearing or doing the law was more important; most concluded that hearing it was more important, because one could not do it without hearing it. But they did insist that both were necessary.

Again the image is of the day of judgment. The idea of ultimately being judged for hearing but not obeying was familiar (Ezek 33:32-33). But no Jewish teacher apart from Jesus claimed so much authority for his own words; such authority was reserved for the law itself. Some of Jesus' more biblically literate hearers may have thought of Proverbs 24:3 ("by wisdom a house is built") and the contrast between wisdom (which builds a house in 9:1) and folly in Proverbs 9:1-18. Later rabbis told a *parable very similar to that of Jesus here, but whereas their foundation involved heeding the Torah (e.g., *Avot de Rabbi Natan* 24A), *here* it involves heeding Jesus' words.

7:28-29
Response of the Masses

The teachers of the *law never claimed as much authority as Jesus had (7:24-27); they derived their authority especially from building on previous tradition.

8:1-4
Touching the Unclean: Leprosy

Matthew groups together nine stories containing ten specific miracles (some commentators have suggested that Matthew wants his readers to remember Moses' ten miracles) in chapters 8–9: three miracles in 8:1-17, then teaching on true discipleship (8:18-22); three more miracles (8:23–9:8), then teaching on true discipleship (9:9-17); and finally three more miracle stories, one of which includes two miracles (9:18-33).

Ancient writers used examples to illustrate points: Jesus' authority over sickness, *demons and nature summons people to recognize his authority over their lives. In ancient thought, miracles could call attention to or attest teachers or their views (in contrast to modern rationalistic attempts to deny them).

8:1. People in power viewed mobile teachers with followings of large crowds as threats to social stability; the Romans were always concerned about uprisings in Jewish Palestine. Readers familiar with this situation in pre-70 Jewish Palestine might recognize here a hint of impending conflict.

8:2. Leprosy was an unattractive skin disease for which the Bible had prescribed quarantine from the rest of society (Lev 13:45-46). Lepers were thus largely outcasts from society (2 Kings 7:3). In personal address, "Lord" could also mean "Sir"; the degree of respect connoted depended on the person addressed. Prostrating oneself before another signified extreme respect for another's dignity or power to meet a difficult need.

8:3. Touching a leper was forbidden (cf. Lev 5:3), and most people would have been revolted by the thought of it. Indeed, the *law enjoined the leper's isolation from society (Lev 13:45-46). See further comment on Mark 1:40-45. The miracle itself would have been viewed as the work of a mighty prophet, however (cf. 2 Kings 5:14).

8:4. Jesus here follows the injunctions detailed in the *Old Testament law of leprosy (Lev 14:1-32). The instructions not to tell anyone else resemble the clandestine activity of some Old Testament prophets; they would also appear honorable in view of ancient Mediterranean disdain for boasting and perhaps because Jesus avoids competing with those in power here. Of course, preventing excessive crowds that could deter his mission could be another consideration, since reports about divine works drew crowds. On the messianic secret, see further the discussion of Mark's message in the introduction to Mark.

8:5-13
A Non-Jew's Faith

By including this story from his source, Matthew encourages his Jewish Christian readers in the *Gentile mission. Even a single exception should be enough to challenge racist stereotypes.

8:5. The nearest legion of Roman troops was stationed in Syria; in Judea, several cohorts were stationed at Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast with additional soldiers in the fortress Antonia in Jerusalem; Capernaum, as a customs post, might have warranted

some soldiers, or the centurion might come from elsewhere or be retired. Soldiers in Palestine were largely auxiliaries, many of them from the local region; while they would become Roman citizens when discharged (and would represent Rome for Matthew's audience), many were Syrian ethnically. Centurions commanded a "century," but in practice this consisted of roughly eighty troops, not one hundred. Unlike higher officers, most centurions worked their way up through the ranks. They were the backbone of the Roman army, in charge of discipline. In view of the Judean-Roman War (or even soldiers' abuses in the East; see comment on 5:41), most of Matthew's audience would probably not typically like centurions.

8:6. On "Lord," see comment on 8:2. During their minimum of twenty years of service in the Roman army, soldiers were not permitted to marry. Many had illegal local concubines, an arrangement that the army overlooked and the concubines found profitable; but centurions, who might be moved around more frequently, might be less likely to have such informal families than most soldiers. The centurion may or may not have had an unofficial wife and children. By ancient definitions, however, a household could include servants, and household servants and masters sometimes grew very close—especially if they made up the entire family unit. Centurions were paid much better than lower-ranking troops. At average prices, a slave would have cost about one-third of the annual wages of the best-paid legionary (and more for other soldiers), but centurions made between fifteen and sixty times the wages of typical soldiers.

8:7. Jesus' response may be read as a question, a challenge, rather than a statement: "Shall I come and heal him?" (cf. 15:26). If one reads it as a statement, it declares Jesus' willingness to cross an important cultural boundary. It seems that pious Jewish people did not normally enter Gentile homes; see comment on Acts 10:27-29.

8:8. The centurion, who knows that Jewish people rarely entered Gentile homes, concedes Jesus' special mission to Israel (cf. 15:27). At the same time he expresses great faith, for among all the stories (both true and spurious) of healing miracles in antiquity, long-distance healings were rare and considered especially extraordinary.

8:9. The centurion's response demonstrates that he (backed by Rome's authority) understands the principle of authority that Jesus exercises. Roman soldiers were very disciplined and (except in times of mutiny) followed orders carefully; they provided the ultimate model of discipline and obedience in the Roman Empire. "Go" and "come" appear elsewhere as summary examples of expressing authority.

8:10. Gentiles were generally pagans, with no faith in Israel's God.

8:11. This verse reflects the standard Jewish image of the future banquet in God's *kingdom. Although the Bible declared that it was for all peoples (Is 25:6; cf. 56:3-8), Jewish literature by this period emphasized that it was prepared for Israel, who would be exalted over its enemies. People were seated at banquets according to rank. They "sat" at regular meals but "reclined" (as here) at feasts; table fellowship signified intimacy, so fellowship with the great patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was thought to represent a future hope for the Jewish people, not for Gentiles, with whom Jewish people did not eat.

8:12. The "rightful" heirs are cast out; other Jewish texts used outer darkness to describe hell, often where mighty evil spirits were imprisoned; the gnashing of teeth may allude to Psalm 112:10.

8:13. Some Jewish stories circulated about miracle workers, but reports of long-distance healings were rare and regarded as extraordinary. This healing would thus have been viewed as especially miraculous.

8:14-17
Messiah the Healer

8:14. Archaeologists have found what some think is this very home in a site close to the *synagogue. Adult children were expected to care for their aged parents. Newly married couples often lived with the groom's family. (For more details, see comment on Mk 1:29-34.)

8:15. Some religious men refrained from touching women in general to avoid any possibility of becoming unclean, unless they had means by which they could ascertain their status (based on Lev 15:19). That Peter's

mother-in-law was able to "serve" them at table, a common womanly role in antiquity (cf. Lk 10:40), indicates the extent to which she was genuinely healed.

8:16. Exorcists often used magical incantations and sought to manipulate higher spirits into helping them drive out lower ones; sometimes they also used smelly roots and similar techniques to expel *demons. In contrast, Jesus simply drives out spirits "with a word." Anthropologists have documented experiences indigenously interpreted as spirit possession in a majority of the world's cultures.

8:17. In context Isaiah 53:4 emphasizes particularly healing from the ravages of sin (53:5-6; cf. Hos 14:4, etc.), as some other Christian writers noted (1 Pet 2:24-25). But given Isaiah's emphasis on physical restoration in the messianic era (35:5-6) and the connection between physical and spiritual healing in Jewish tradition (cf. also Is 33:24), it makes good sense that Matthew also finds the nuance of physical healing here: Jesus inaugurates the messianic era, making some of its benefits available even in advance of the cross.

8:18-22
Jesus' Demands

8:18. *Disciples generally acted as servants to their *rabbis, following practical orders relevant to the work of the teacher and his school as well as learning his teachings.

8:19-20. Disciples usually sought out their own teachers. Some radical Greek philosophers who eschewed possessions sought to repulse prospective disciples with enormous demands, for the purpose of testing them and acquiring the most worthy. Those who joined radical Jewish sects such as the *Essenes had to relinquish their property. David warned a prospective follower about the suffering that would attend following him (2 Sam 15:19-20), but the proper response was to follow anyway (2 Sam 15:21-22). Like fishermen and *tax gatherers, carpenters had a much better income than agrarian peasants; Jesus' call, not involuntary poverty, summoned him and his followers to a sacrificial lifestyle.

Comparisons with animals constituted a fairly common teaching technique (e.g., the now famous animal fables attributed to Aesop). Jewish people could compare righteous sufferers with birds finding refuge for nesting only with difficulty (Ps 11:1; 84:3; 102:6-7; 124:7); foxes nested in desolate places (Lam 5:18; Ezek 13:4).

8:21-22. One of an eldest son's most basic responsibilities (in both Greek and Jewish cultures) was his father's burial; failure to meet this obligation could make one a social outcast in one's village. The initial burial took place shortly after a person's decease, however, and family members would not be outside talking with rabbis during the reclusive mourning period immediately following the death. Thus some argue that what is in view here instead is the secondary burial: a year after the first burial, after the flesh had rotted off the bones, the son would return to rebury the bones in a special box in a slot in the tomb's wall. The son in this *narrative could thus be asking for as much as a year's delay. Others note that in some Semitic languages, "wait until I bury my father" is a way of asking for delay until one may complete one's filial obligations, even if the father is not yet dead.

Even on these interpretations, however, Jesus' demand that the son place him above the greatest responsibility a son had toward his father would have horrified hearers: in Jewish tradition, honoring father and mother was one of the greatest commandments (see, e.g., Josephus, *Apion* 2.206), and to follow Jesus at the expense of not burying one's father would have been viewed as dishonoring one's father (on the need to bury parents, cf. Tobit 4:3-4; 6:15; *4* Maccabees 16:11). While some sages demanded greater honor than parents, only God could take precedence over them to this degree (cf. Deut 13:6).

8:23-27
Lord of Nature

Greek stories about those who could subdue nature were normally about gods or about demigods who had acted in the distant past. Jewish tradition reported some earlier teachers who could pray for rain or its cessation like Elijah. But absolute authority over waves and sea in Jewish tradition belonged to God alone. It is not difficult to understand why the *disciples did not know what to make of Jesus!

Only local people described the lake of Galilee as a "sea" of Galilee, as here (8:24). Phi-

losophers valued serenity during storms at sea as a sign of genuine belief in philosophy; similarly, ability to sleep in the face of danger could reveal faith in God (Ps 3:5; 4:8).

8:28-34
Lord over Evil Spirits

Proposals vary on why Matthew has two, and Mark but one, demoniac here (see comment on Mk 5:1-20); one suggestion is that Matthew knows of one that Mark omitted. Another is that he includes an extra one here because he left one out by omitting the story recorded in Mark 1:21-28; the doubling of characters here would not have violated standard Jewish writing conventions of that time.

8:28. Tombs were ceremonially unclean and were thought to be popular haunts for evil spirits (a belief the spirits were apparently happy to accommodate). Both Gadara (here) and Gerasa (Mk 5:1) were predominantly *Gentile cities in the region of the Decapolis, but Gadara was much closer to the Sea of Galilee (Gerasa, a prominent and magnificent city, was over thirty miles southeast). Roughly six miles to the southeast, Gadara probably controlled the land where this *narrative occurs. Violent behavior is still frequently associated with many cases of spirit possession in cultures that recognize the phenomenon.

8:29. "Before the time" means before the day of judgment. Apparently even the *demons did not expect the *Messiah to come in two stages, a first and second coming.

8:30. Jewish people lived in this region, but it was predominantly non-Jewish; hence the pigs. Herds could be huge; one ancient source speaks of a thousand pigs from a single sow.

8:31. Ancient stories about demons suggest that they liked to negotiate the least difficult terms if they were going to have to leave one whom they possessed. Hearing that demons would want to inhabit unclean pigs, Jewish listeners might have responded, "But of course!"

8:32. Though it was known that pigs could swim, they could not survive in this situation. In Jewish tradition, demons could die or be bound (sometimes beneath bodies of water); because Matthew says nothing to the contrary, his readers would probably assume that these demons have been imprisoned or otherwise deactivated.

8:33-34. Pigs required little oversight to graze, but some herdsmen, responsible to the owners, would nevertheless watch over them, and pigs might respond to their voices. The *Old Testament *narratives of Elijah and Elisha allowed Jewish people to place some miracle workers in the category of "prophet," but Greeks usually categorized miracle workers as magicians or sorcerers. Because magicians and sorcerers were usually malevolent and Jesus' coming had already cost these Gentiles from the Decapolis economically (a lot of pork), they were naturally terrified of him.

9:1-8
Authority to Forgive and to Heal

It was common to abridge accounts, as Matthew often does; reciting Mark's story about the paralytic (see comment on Mk 2:1-12), he omits even the dramatic letting down through the roof.

9:1-2. For many poor people, "beds" could be mats; thus the paralytics' friends may have carried him on the bed on which he lay all the time. "His own town" here is Capernaum (4:13).

9:3. Judaism believed that only God could forgive sins, but most Jews allowed that some of God's representatives could speak on God's behalf. The *Old Testament penalty for blaspheming God's name—reproaching rather than honoring it—was death (Lev 24:10-23). According to later rabbinic law, blasphemy technically involved pronouncing the divine name or perhaps inviting people to follow other gods. According to the more common, less technical usage, it applied to any grievous insult to God's honor (cf. Num 15:30). But these legal scholars were mistaken in interpreting Jesus' words as blasphemy, by any definition.

9:4. Judaism recognized that God sometimes revealed to prophets what others were thinking or planning.

9:5-7. Jewish teachers knew that only God could ultimately forgive (on the Day of Atonement in response to sacrifice); but they also recognized that healing ultimately came from God as well. *Josephus shows us that many false prophets in Jesus' day promised to work miracles but actually failed to work them; some of Jesus' critics may have placed him in this category, until they witnessed the miracles.

9:8. When ancient writers reported accounts of miracles, they generally concluded the account with the amazed response of the crowds who witnessed it.

9:9-13
A Physician for Sinners

9:9. Levi may have been a tax farmer working for Herod or the municipal government; situated at an office in Capernaum, many think that he was a customs agent, charging import duties on wares brought through this town on important nearby trade routes. Whether or not this is the case, his reputation seems to at least associate him with other kinds of tax collectors. Even more than the fishermen, he had a secure and prosperous job, which he surrendered to follow Jesus' call.

9:10. Most people regarded a man of wealth inviting a religious teacher over for dinner as honorable behavior. *Tax gatherers, however, were regarded as collaborators with the Romans or Herod's dynasty and were despised by religious people. Tax gatherers assessing property were free to search anything except the person of a Roman matron, seizing undeclared property; some were so brutal that they might beat an elderly woman to discover where her son had fled to evade payment. In poor areas in Egypt, we even hear of entire villages relocating to evade the tax gatherers. Presumably few agents in Galilee would have been so brutal, but tax gatherers were generally ill-liked. Even when tax gatherers did not extort additional money, taxes were high.

Some commentators have argued that "sinners" may refer to all who did not eat food in ritual purity, but the term probably refers to anyone who lived sinfully rather than religiously, as if they did not care what the religious community thought of them.

9:11. Table fellowship indicated intimate relations among those who shared it. Later *rabbis sometimes contrasted tax gatherers and *Pharisees as the epitomes of impiety and piety respectively. The Pharisees were particularly scrupulous about their special rules on eating and did not like to eat with less scrupulous people, especially people like tax gatherers and sinners. Here they assume that Jesus, being a wise teacher, ought to share their religious convictions, which they believed were scriptural (Ps 1:1; 119:63; Prov 13:20; 14:7; 28:7; the biblical principle, however, is to avoid being influenced by, not to avoid influencing, the ungodly). Judaism affirmed God's mercy (cf. Ps 25:8), but for Jesus as a teacher to pursue those known as sinners violated conventional expectations of holiness.

9:12. Jesus' reply plays on a common image of the day (comparing physicians and teachers) to make his point. Quick, witty repartee was characteristic of popular teachers in both Jewish and Greek traditions.

9:13. Other rabbis often said, "Go and learn" or "Come and see" to direct hearers to scriptural proofs for their position. Hosea 6:6 does not reject sacrifice or ritual, but elevates right relationship with God and right treatment of the poor, the oppressed and the outcasts above sacrifice and ritual (cf. similarly 1 Sam 15:22; Ps 40:6; 50:7-15; 51:16; 69:30-31; Prov 21:3).

9:14-17
Appropriate Fasting

9:14. People often held teachers responsible for the behavior of their *disciples. The *law required fasting only on the Day of Atonement, but many other fasts had been added by religious Jews, especially by groups like the Pharisees. Many of the Pharisees may have fasted two days a week without water, especially during the dry season (cf. Luke 18:12). Fasting was an important practice to join with prayer or penitence, so it would have been unusual for disciples (prospective rabbis) to have avoided it altogether. A teacher was regarded as responsible for the behavior of his disciples. If Jesus compares himself with the bridegroom (one should not press comparisons into every detail in *parables), it may be significant that God is the bridegroom in some OT images (e.g., Hos 2:14-20).

9:15. Wedding feasts could involve seven days of festivity; so crucial an obligation was joy that rabbis were said to pause their instruction to hail passing bridal processions. One was not permitted to fast or engage in other acts of mourning or difficult labor during a wedding feast. Jesus makes an analogy about the similar inappropriateness of fasting in his own time.

9:16. Again, the issue is the inappropri-

ateness of fasting in the present circumstance. Older clothes would have already shrunk somewhat from washing.

9:17. Wine could be kept in either jars or wineskins. The animal skins were often goatskins, often with two or three sewn together. Old wineskins had already been stretched to capacity by fermenting wine within them; if they were then filled with unfermented wine, it would likewise expand, and the old wineskins, already stretched to the limit, would burst.

9:18-26
Touching the Unclean: Blood and Death

Raising the dead was an extraordinary miracle, attributed to Elijah (1 Kings 17:21-22) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:33-35) in the Old Testament. Physical contact with either communicated ritual impurity (Lev 15:19-33; Num 19:11-12). See comment on Mark 5:21-43 for further details.

9:18-19. "Rulers of the *synagogue" were leaders in synagogues and were prominent members of their communities. (When honorary, the title may refer to benefactors only, but most Jewish people with this title were likely both significant donors and influential in the synagogue.) If the setting is still Capernaum (9:1), it is significant that Jesus' following could include both this man and more questionable elements of the community (9:9).

One would fall at the feet of someone of much greater status (like a king) or prostrate oneself before God; thus for this prominent man to humble himself in this way before Jesus was to recognize Jesus' power in a serious way.

9:20-21. This woman's sickness was reckoned as if she had a menstrual period all month long; it made her continually unclean under the *law (Lev 15:19-33)—a social and religious problem in addition to the physical one. If she touched anyone or anyone's clothes, she rendered that person ceremonially unclean for the rest of the day (cf. Lev 15:26-27). Because she rendered unclean anyone she touched, she should not have even been in this heavy crowd. Many teachers avoided touching women altogether, lest they become accidentally contaminated. Thus she could not touch or be touched, she had probably never married or was now divorced, and she was marginal to Jewish society. Leviticus forbade intercourse with a menstruating woman, and Jewish tradition mandated divorce when marriages did not yield children.

In an act of scandalous faith, she touches Jesus' garment's "fringe"—no doubt one of the tassels (*zizith*) worn by Jewish men, in obedience to Numbers 15:38-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12, on the four corners of their outer garment, and later on the prayer shawl (*tallith*). The tassels were made of blue and white cords woven together.

9:22. Many ancient people believed that only teachers closest to God had supernatural knowledge. Jesus uses his supernatural knowledge to identify with the woman who had touched him—even though in the eyes of the public this would mean that he had contracted ritual uncleanness.

9:23-24. Flute players were there to lead the crowd in mourning. Tradition preserved in the rabbis insisted on several professional women mourners for the funeral of even the poorest person; the funeral of a member of a prominent family like this one would have many mourners. The cathartic release of mourning included shrieking and beating of breasts. Because bodies decomposed rapidly in Palestine, mourners were to be assembled, if possible, immediately upon someone's death. Sleep was a common euphemism for death (though contrasted here).

9:25-26. The most defiling kind of ritual uncleanness one could contract in Jewish law came from touching a corpse, generating seven days' impurity (Num 19:11-22).

9:27-34
Healing Blind Eyes

9:27-31. "Son of David" was the title of the *Messiah, but in most expectations the Messiah was a political or military figure rather than a healer. But these blind men understand a connection between healing and Jesus' identity that went beyond Jewish tradition. God ruled over blindness and sight (Ex 4:11; Prov 20:12) and could answer prophets' prayers to remove and restore human sight (2 Kings 6:18-20). Matthew repeats or offers an analogous account at 20:29-34; Genesis and other earlier works likewise reported analogous incidents, inviting their audiences to read each incident

in light of the others (e.g., Gen 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:7-11).

9:32-34. Elijah and Elisha had done extraordinary healing miracles; David is the only recorded *Old Testament figure God used in exorcism (1 Sam 16:23). Matthew 9:33 thus indicates that the crowds were greatly impressed with his miracles.

9:35-38
More Laborers Needed

The works of Jesus in 8:1–9:35 must become those of his disciples in chapter 10. Disciples were typically expected to carry on their teachers' works.

9:35-36. Without Moses (Num 27:17) or a king (1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron 18:16) Israel had been said to be "without a shepherd," or ruler. When Israel was without other faithful shepherds (religious leaders), God himself would become its shepherd (Ezek 34:11-16, esp. 34:5: scattered for lack of a shepherd); the shepherd's ministry included feeding (34:2-3), healing (34:4) and bringing back the lost sheep (34:4-6). Matthew 9:36 thus also implies that those charged with shepherding Israel, its leaders, were failing.

9:37-38. Harvest was urgent and had to be completed within a narrow window of time. "Harvest" could be used as an image for the end time (cf. comment on 3:12). A late first-century rabbi said something similar to 9:37; perhaps it was already a standard Jewish saying.

10:1-4
Sending the Twelve

Israel had twelve tribes, and groups that chose twelve leaders (as in the *Dead Sea Scrolls) did so because they believed that their own group was the true, obedient remnant of Israel.

Ancient sources often include lists of names, including of *disciples. Some of the names here are among the most common in ancient Judea and Galilee: Simon, James, Judas, and the like ("Mary" was most common among women). The lists in Luke and Acts replace Mark and Matthew's "Thaddeus" with "Judas son of James" (cf. also Jn 14:22). Ancient documents show that it was common for people to go by more than one name, so the different lists of apostles probably do refer to the same people. Nicknames were common, appearing even on tomb inscriptions. "Cananaean" is *Aramaic for "zealot" (Lk 6:15); thus some translations simply read "Simon the *Zealot" here. In Jesus' day, this word could just mean "zealous one," but it may mean that he had been involved in revolutionary activity before becoming Jesus' follower, as it would probably mean when the Gospels were written.

"Apostles" means "sent ones," or commissioned representatives. The analogous Hebrew term was used for business agents, although the general concept is broader than that; a "sent one" acted on the full authority of the sender to the extent that one accurately represented the sender's mission. Commissioning *narratives appear in the *Old Testament, as when Moses commissions Joshua to carry on Moses' work and take the Promised Land (Deut 31:23). Teachers often allowed their advanced students to practice teaching while they were still students, to prepare them for their own future work.

10:5-15
The Mission

10:5. "Way of the Gentiles" probably means a road leading only to one of the pagan, Greek cities in Palestine; many Jewish people avoided roads that led into such cities anyway. Galilee was surrounded by *Gentile regions except in the south, where it shared borders with Samaria. (On *Samaritans, see comment on Jn 4:1-4.)

10:6. A common Jewish belief was that ten tribes of Israel had been lost and would be found in the time of the end. Here, however, Jesus uses "lost sheep of Israel" in the more common Old Testament sense: they have gone astray from the Lord (Is 53:6; Jer 50:6; cf. Ezek 34:5). But cf. Matthew 10:18.

10:7-8. That the apostles' mission is the same as Jesus' is appropriate for "sent ones" (see comment on 10:1-4): they acted within the limits of their authorization. "As I [God] [gave the *law] for free, so you should" was a later Jewish saying applied to teachers of the law; whether it was a proverb Jesus was citing this early we cannot be sure.

10:9-10. They are to travel light, like some other groups: (1) peasants, who often had only one cloak (cf. 5:40); (2) some traveling philosophers, called *Cynics (not present in Jewish Galilee, though probably represented

as nearby as Tyre and the Decapolis, Gentile cities surrounding Galilee), who ideally had only a cloak, staff, cup, and, for begging, a bag; (3) some prophets, like Elijah and John the Baptist (see e.g., 1 Kings 18:13; 2 Kings 4:38; 5:15-19; 6:1; Mt 3:4). They are to be totally committed to their mission, not tied down with worldly concerns. A traveler could use a staff to fend off animals or robbers, or to keep one's balance when walking; though homeless, even Cynics used staffs. The prohibited "bag" could have been used for begging (so the Cynics used it), different from depending on hospitality in 10:11; on "money belts," see comment on Luke 6:38. It is said that *Essenes received such hospitality from fellow Essenes in various cities that they did not need to take provisions when they traveled.

10:11-13. Showing hospitality by taking in travelers was one of the most important virtues in Mediterranean antiquity, especially in Judaism; Jesus could have drawn on Old Testament precedent for traveling ministers depending on such hospitality (2 Kings 4:8-11); cf. comment on Matthew 10:41. (Indeed, Israelite tradition had required even most wicked kings to respect prophets and to spare them despite their criticisms, which other ancient kings would not have endured.) Though hospitality was a virtue highly valued in Mediterranean antiquity generally, hospitality might prove less dependable during later missions in the *Diaspora. In Galilee, however, probably only the inhospitable or those hostile to Jesus' message would refuse them altogether.

To whom and under what circumstances greetings should or should not be given were important issues of social protocol, especially because the common Jewish greeting, "Peace," was really a blessing (a prayer implicitly invoking God but addressed to the recipient) meant to communicate peace. Jesus cuts through such issues of protocol with new directives.

10:14-15. Pious Jewish people returning to holy ground would not want even the dust of pagan territory clinging to their sandals; Jesus' representatives here treat unresponsive regions as unholy or pagan. Sodom is set forth as the epitome of sinfulness both in the prophets and in subsequent Jewish tradition; the point here is probably that they rejected God's messengers, albeit lesser ones than Jesus (Gen 19). Earlier Scripture often used Sodom as the archetypical site of judgment (Is 13:19; Jer 50:40; Zeph 2:9) and applied the image to Israel (Deut 32:32; Is 1:10; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46-49).

10:16-23
Promise of Persecution

10:16. The contrast between vicious wolves and harmless lambs or sheep was proverbial, and aggressors were often compared with wolves. Jewish people sometimes viewed themselves (Israel) as sheep among wolves (the Gentiles). Many also viewed doves as weak, timid or inconspicuous.

10:17. Before A.D. 70, local courts, or councils deciding cases, were run by local elders or priests, probably with an average of seven of them (in later rabbinic tradition, a minimum of three). Synagogues were the local places of public assembly, and thus provided the natural location for hearings and public discipline. Sometimes discipline was administered in the form of flogging; under second-century *rabbis' rules, Jewish flogging consisted of thirteen harsh strokes on the breast and twenty-six on the back with a strap of calf leather (forty is the maximum permissible, Deut 25:3). These words would have struck Jewish Christians as particularly painful, because they signified rejection of their preaching among their own people.

10:18. In Jewish thinking, a Jew betraying any Jew to Gentile persecutors was a horrendous act. "Governors" are Roman overseers in the provinces; the three levels were propraetors, proconsuls and procurators. "Kings" may refer only to Rome's vassal princes (e.g., Herod the Great earlier or Agrippa I later) but probably includes Parthian and other rulers from the East, indicating virtually universal persecution.

10:19-20. Jewish people thought of the *Holy Spirit especially as the Spirit of *prophecy who had anointed the prophets to speak God's message. Greek and Roman rhetoric emphasized careful preparation, yet people also respected those skilled enough to speak extemporaneously based on the knowledge they had already acquired.

10:21-22. See Micah 7:5-7 (more explicit in

Mt 10:35-36); this family divisiveness also became part of other Jewish images of the end time (e.g., *1 *Enoch* 100:2). In a culture where family loyalty was essential and honor of parents paramount, these words would have sounded particularly horrific.

10:23. A Jewish tradition that may have been in circulation in Jesus' day warns that in the time of final tribulation, Jewish people persecuted for their faith would have to flee from one city to another. The disciples may have understood Jesus' words in these terms. Jesus may emphasize that his followers' mission to Israel will continue until the end (cf. 23:39), and some will survive till then (cf. 24:22). Some people viewed fleeing as dishonorable, but (at least outside battles) most people preferred it to death (cf. 2:13).

10:24-33
Comfort in Persecution

Like most early Christians and zealous Christians in many parts of the world today, Matthew's readers faced persecution and often other dangers as part of their daily lives. Jesus' words would comfort them.

10:24-25. Disciples were to serve their teachers, in hopes of ultimately becoming master teachers themselves, yet always owing the teacher respect. A slave could attain status if owned by a prominent master, and under rare circumstances (e.g., if owned by a *freedperson), he could attain equal status after—but never before—becoming free and attaining wealth too. Verse 25 contains a play on words: by reading "Beelzebul" as if it meant "master" (*Aramaic *be'el*) of the house (Hebrew *zebul*), Jesus spoke of the "master of the house." "How much more" arguments were common (see e.g., 7:11; 10:29-31).

10:26-27. Secretive acts were often performed in darkness. Everything would come to light on the day of judgment, as was widely agreed; there was therefore no point in concealing anything now. The flat rooftops provided the best place for shouting messages out over the crowded streets.

10:28. Fearing (respecting, only in a much stronger way than we use the term *respect*) God was central to Jewish wisdom tradition and is repeatedly stressed in Jewish literature; some Jewish writers made affirmations about martyrdom similar to this passage (*4 Maccabees 13:14-15). Body and soul were instantly destroyed in some Jewish traditions about hell; in others, they were perpetually destroyed and tormented. Contrary to the assertions of many modern scholars, many Jewish people in this period agreed with most Greeks that soul and body were separated by death.

10:29-31. Sparrows were one of the cheapest items sold for poor people's food in the marketplace, the cheapest of all birds. Two were here purchased for an *assarion,* a small copper coin of little value (less than a sixteenth of a denarius, hence less than an hour's wages); Luke 12:6 seems to indicate that they were even cheaper if purchased in larger quantities. Some Jewish traditions preserved later recognize God's sovereignty even over birds, which they sometimes considered inconsequential. This is a standard Jewish "how much more" argument: If God cares for something as cheap as sparrows, how much more does he care for people! "Not a hair of (one's) head" falling was a familiar biblical promise of protection (1 Sam 14:45; 2 Sam 14:11; 1 Kings 1:52; Acts 27:34). While not itself a promise of universal protection, Matthew 10:30 thus invites trust in God's care and ability to protect.

10:32-33. Jewish teachers spoke of "confessing" God and warned against denying him; Jesus here speaks of himself in these terms. In some Jewish descriptions of the day of judgment, the testimony of righteous persons for or against others bore much weight with God. Rabbis spoke of God's angels or his attributes of mercy or judgment pleading a case before him. Here Jesus' advocacy before the Father weighs more heavily than anything else in this world.

10:34-39
The Cost of Discipleship

10:34. It was generally believed that there would be great sufferings before the end, and that the *Messiah would lead his people in a triumphant war, followed by a time of peace. Jesus assures his listeners that the promised era of peace is yet some time off and goes on to explain the nature of the current sufferings and conflict.

10:35-36. The context of Micah 7:6, cited here, describes the awful evils in the land and

the untrustworthiness of even the closest relatives and friends that would continue until the Lord would come to vindicate those who hoped in him. At least some Jewish people applied that text to the final tribulation. Given the belief held by many Jewish people that a time of sufferings would precede the end, the *disciples may have understood this saying as suggesting that they were already experiencing the sufferings of that time. A newly married couple often lived with the groom's parents (hence the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law here).

10:37. Jesus here expounds on the text just cited (Mic 7:6) to make a point virtually inconceivable to most of his hearers. Loving family members, especially parents, was one of the highest duties in Judaism; the only one who could rightfully demand greater love was God himself (Deut 6:4-5; cf. Exod 32:27; Deut 13:6-11; 2 Maccabees 7:22-23).

10:38. Crucifixion was a violent, painful and humiliating death by slow torture. A condemned criminal would carry on his back the horizontal beam of the cross out to the site of his execution, generally amid an antagonistic, jeering mob. This verse means a shameful, painful road to a dreadful execution.

10:39. Most Jewish people contrasted the life of this world with the life of the world to come.

10:40-42
Receiving Christ's Messengers

This passage returns to the theme of hospitality toward the messengers of the *gospel (10:11-14). The principle here is like that of the appointed messenger or agent in Judaism, who represented his sender to the full extent of his commission. God, his glory and *law, and Israel were also connected in this way in Jewish tradition. This principle had always been true of the prophets (e.g., Exod 16:8; 1 Sam 8:7; cf. Num 14:2, 11; 16:11): one who embraced them embraced their message and thus God's will. Those who provided for them were likewise rewarded (1 Kings 17:9-24; 2 Kings 4:8-37). A cup of water was the only gift of hospitality the poorest person might have available, but it would symbolize enough. Cold water was highly preferred for drinking (see comment on Rev 3:15-16).

11:1-19
More Than a Prophet: The Forerunner

Matthew 11:1 is an epilogue to 9:37–10:42; in 11:2-19, John, like Jesus and the Twelve, becomes a model for Christian discipleship.

11:1. Emissaries would often be sent to prepare people for the coming of a king or other important figure before his arrival. "Cities" is meant in a broad rather than a technical Greek sense: there is no indication that Jesus approached major cities like Sepphoris or Tiberias. Even most of the larger agricultural towns had fewer than three thousand inhabitants, and the Galilean countryside was full of villages.

11:2-3. John's attitude here contrasts strikingly with 3:14. Some commentators have suggested that John is concerned about reports that Jesus has been touching the unclean (8:3; 9:20, 25); to this report Jesus replies with the results of those touches (11:5). More likely, John, like most of his contemporaries, is tempted to think of a *kingdom bringer (3:11) or royal *Messiah rather than a "mere" miracle worker, so Jesus vindicates his healing mission with a text about the blessings of the messianic era (11:5). John's *disciples had probably traveled on the main road northward from Herod's Perean fortress Machaerus, where John was imprisoned, through Perea beside the Jordan, to cross west into Galilee, where Jesus was teaching.

11:4-6. Jesus cites signs from Isaiah 35:5-6 that refer to the arrival of the messianic era; cf. Isaiah 26:19; 61:1. (In a messianic context, a *Qumran text apparently attributes to God *eschatological healing and Isaiah 61's preaching to the poor, as here.)

11:7. Reeds were fragile (Is 42:3; *3 Maccabees 2:22), so a figurative "reed shaken by the wind" was notoriously weak (1 Kings 14:15) and undependable (2 Kings 18:21; Ezek 29:6). Tall reeds (as high as five meters) grew around the Jordan where John ministered. The image may also contrast with the pampered prince implied in 11:8: Antipas employed a reed as an emblem on his coins a few years earlier (up until A.D. 26).

11:8. Prophets were rarely well-to-do, and in times of national wickedness they were

forced to operate outside societal boundaries. (In David's time, Nathan and Gad could be court prophets; but by Ahab's time the court prophets were corrupt, and Elijah and others had to hide out in the wilderness or, in better days, at least remain outside the king's palace.) Even the plural "houses" could allude to Antipas's multiple palaces (or to multiple buildings comprising such palaces), although a broader application is also possible. Though Antipas was no king (see comment on 14:1), he was closer to royalty than anyone else in Galilee; his palaces included the fortress of Machaerus where John was executed.

11:9-10. Some Jews in the first century believed that full-fledged prophets had died out long ago, but they would have been open to the restoration of prophets in the end time. By fulfilling Malachi 3:1, John is more than just any herald of God; he is the direct announcer of the Lord, fulfilling the *prophecy of Elijah's return (Mal 4:5-6).

11:11. This statement elevates Jesus' disciples rather than demeans John (cf. 11:9-10). One may compare the early rabbinic saying that Johanan ben Zakkai, one of the most respected scholars of the first century, was the "least" of *Hillel's eighty disciples; this saying was not meant to diminish Johanan's status but to increase that of his contemporaries. Greek rhetoric often used comparison with an esteemed person to praise another all the more. Calling John the "greatest" was a typically Jewish form of praise, which could even be applied to more than one person at a time; *rabbis, for instance, could in the same breath speak of both Joseph and Moses as the greatest figures of Israel's history (in the *Old Testament cf., e.g., 2 Kings 18:5; 23:25). Those "born of women" was a familiar Old Testament and Jewish expression for humans (e.g., Job 14:1).

11:12. Revolutionaries, such as those later known as *Zealots, wanted to bring in the kingdom by military force. Jesus may use their zeal (cf. Prov 11:16) in a figurative way for the single-minded commitment necessary to enter the kingdom; he describes his followers as *spiritual* zealots (cf. Mt 10:34).

11:13. Jewish people sometimes summarized the Bible as "the Law and the Prophets"; many of them believed that after the biblical prophets the prophetic voice was muted until the messianic time. John thus introduces the messianic era.

11:14-15. Malachi 4:5 had promised the return of Elijah, who had reportedly never died (2 Kings 2:11); Elijah's return thus became part of Jewish expectation for the future.

11:16-17. "To what may we compare . . . ?" was a familiar idiom preceding a rabbinic *parable or argument from analogy. The marketplace was a town's open, most public place.

Although scholars debate the question, spoiled children who pretend to have weddings and funerals (one later game was called "bury the grasshopper") may stand for Jesus' and John's dissatisfied opponents; dissatisfied with other children who will not play either game, they are sad no matter what. The term for "mourn" here can mean "beat the breast," a conventional mourning custom in Jewish Palestine. Custom mandated that bystanders join in any bridal or funeral processions.

11:18-19. John the Baptist fit the role of an apparently *ascetic prophet, like Elijah; Jesus follows a godly model more like David, but both are proper in their place. The charge that John "has a *demon" suggests either that he is a false prophet possessed by an evil spirit, or that he is a sorcerer who manipulates a spirit guide; either charge would warrant the death penalty under earlier biblical *law (Deut 13:1-11; 18:9-20). "Glutton and drunkard" was also a capital charge (Deut 21:20). The charges against both prophets thus constitute serious accusations.

11:20-24
Judgment on Cities

Judgment oracles against nations were standard in the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Amos); they also appear in the Jewish **Sibylline Oracles* before, during and after the *New Testament period. The principle that those who had more light were judged more strictly appears in the Old Testament (cf. Amos 3:2; Jon 4:11).

11:20-21. Jewish people thought of Tyre and Sidon as purely pagan cities (cf. 1 Kings 16:31), though some of their inhabitants who were exposed to the truth had been known to repent (1 Kings 17:9-24). "Sackcloth and ashes" was dressing characteristic of mourning, including the mourning of *repentance (Job

42:6; Dan 9:3). Chorazin and Bethsaida were among the small villages on the lake of Galilee where Jesus ministered; Chorazin was a short walk, less than two miles, from Capernaum. It was unknown to people outside Palestine.

11:22. According to some Jewish stories about the time of the end ("the day of judgment," as it was often called), the righteous among the pagan nations would testify against the rest of their people, making clear that no one had any excuse for rejecting the truth about God.

11:23. Judgment was often described in the terms Jesus uses here (Is 5:14; **Jubilees* 24:31), especially against a ruler who exalted himself as a deity (Is 14:14-15, of the Babylonian king's death).

11:24. See comment on 11:22.

11:25-27
God's Revelation

In Jewish wisdom tradition, it was not those who were wise in their own eyes and leaned to their own understanding who were genuinely wise (Job 12:24-25; Prov 3:5-7; 12:15; 16:2; 21:2; 26:12), but the simple who began with the fear of God (Job 28:28; Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10). God confounds the wisdom of the "wise" (Is 19:11-12; 29:14; 47:10; Jer 8:8-9; Ezek 28:3-12). Only God fully knew personified Wisdom (Baruch 3:31-32), so only he could reveal it (Wisdom of Solomon 9:16-17). As the revealer of God in 11:27, Jesus assumes a position often assumed by divine Wisdom in Jewish tradition. For the image of infants, cf. 10:42 and 18:1-10; God had always favored the lowly (e.g., 1 Sam 2:3-9).

11:28-30
The True Sabbath

11:28. God offered rest to the weary (Is 40:28-31; cf. the invitation of divine Wisdom in Sirach 24:19).

11:29-30. Animals often carried yokes; when a man carried a yoke he was normally very poor and would carry it on his shoulders (cf., e.g., Jer 27:2); Judaism applied this image to subjection or obedience. Jewish people spoke of carrying the yoke of God's *law and the yoke of his *kingdom, which one accepted by acknowledging that God was one and by keeping his commandments. Jesus speaks of his own yoke in similar terms. Matthew intends Jesus' words about rest as a contrast with Pharisaic sabbath rules in the following passage (12:1-14): the promise of "rest for your souls" comes from Jeremiah 6:16, where God promises to stay his wrath if the people turn to him instead of to the words of the false religious leaders (6:13-14, 20). The labor, rest and yoke together also echo Sirach 51:23-27; greater than the sage Ben Sira, Jesus presents himself as wisdom itself.

Using the term translated "gentle" or "meek" here, Greeks did praise rulers who showed kindness and mercy. Except for those of low status, Greeks did not normally welcome self-abasement, a value more prominent in Jewish piety.

12:1-8
Food on the Sabbath

Other details are noted in Mark 2:23-27, although details in Matthew, written mainly for Jewish Christians, would have sounded less like a sabbath violation to Jewish ears than Mark's wording would. Matthew's structure follows the standard form for many ancient reports of arguments: he summarizes the situation (12:1-2), presents arguments by example (12:3-4), analogy (12:5), comparison (12:6), citation (12:7) and ultimate basis (12:8).

12:1. Jewish *law based on Deuteronomy 23:25 (cf. Ruth 2:2-3) provided for the poor to eat food as they passed through a field. The issue here is thus not that the *disciples took someone's grain but that they picked it on the sabbath; later rabbinic interpretation specifically designated harvesting and grinding grain as forbidden on the sabbath.

12:2. The modern picture of *Pharisees as legalists unfairly trivializes the Pharisees' piety (sometimes intentionally, so modern legalists will not have to address Jesus' real bases for criticism). Not only the Pharisees but other Jewish people throughout the ancient world honored the sabbath and celebrated it with joy. The Bible itself had forbidden infractions of the sabbath under pain of death.

12:3-4. Although highhanded rejection of the sabbath was regarded as rebellion against God, different Jewish groups made arguments for differing interpretations of sabbath laws and were not in a position to legally enforce their views against others. Jesus' argu-

ments here would not have satisfied the Pharisees, but they might have satisfied elders or priests serving as judges on local courts. Outright rejection of the sabbath was viewed as rejecting the law, but Jesus rejects only its abuse.

12:5-6. As we know from later sources, most *rabbis would have questioned an argument based merely on an example such as the one in 12:3-4 and Mark 2:25-26; it is significant that Matthew, writing for Jewish readers, has an argument from the law itself. The stricter school of Pharisees, the *Shammaites, accused the more lenient *Hillelite school of Pharisees of breaking holy days; Hillelites, like Jesus in 12:5, offered analogies with the priests or could appeal to temple service overriding the sabbath.

The law of Moses commanded work for priests on the sabbath (Num 28:10). This is a Jewish "how much more" argument: if acceptable for the guardians of the temple, how much more for one greater than the temple? The temple had become the central symbol of the Jewish faith, and the suggestion that a human being could be greater than the temple would have struck most ancient Jewish ears as presumptuous and preposterous. Jewish teachers could, however, accept and argue from the principle that some things took precedence over sabbath observance (temple ritual, saving a life, defensive warfare, etc.).

12:7-8. Jesus goes on the offensive here with a still higher principle of the *Old Testament; cf. 9:13.

12:9-14
Healing on the Sabbath

Other details are noted in the comment on Mark 3:1-6. Whereas Mark's argument would not have been as persuasive to Pharisees, being an argument from analogy from greater to lesser (3:4), Matthew includes a more helpful argument from lesser to greater (12:12).

12:9-10. As one may gather here, informal dialogues could occur in smaller *synagogue gatherings in this period that are quite different from the stricter ritual observed in most *churches and synagogues today. The predominant school of Pharisees in this period, the *Shammaites, did not allow praying for the sick on the sabbath; the minority school, however, the *Hillelites (who later became predominant after 70), allowed it.

12:11. The *Essenes would have forbidden even rescuing an animal on the sabbath, but many Pharisees and most other Jewish interpreters would have agreed with Jesus. Pits were sometimes dug to capture predators such as wolves, but livestock could fall into them as well. Counterquestions (as here, answering 12:10) were common in the debates of Jewish teachers.

12:12. Jesus here uses a standard Jewish argument, "how much more" (*qal vahomer*): If one is concerned for a sheep, how much more for a person? This too was an argument his opponents had to understand, and by analogy it showed the inconsistency of their interpretation of biblical sabbath laws.

12:13. Pharisees debated whether medicine could be applied on the sabbath. By contrast, Jesus here not only applied no medicine; he did not even lay hands on the man.

12:14. Pharisees, who had little political power in this period, could do no better than plot. Jewish courts could not enforce the death penalty in this period, although the law of Moses allowed it for sabbath violation (Ex 31:14; 35:2). Indeed, these Pharisees violate standard Pharisaic ethics, which could tolerate opposing biblical arguments and which emphasized leniency, especially regarding death sentences. The issue is not their official ethics (which often resemble those of Jesus) but their hearts.

12:15-21
The Spirit-Anointed Servant

12:15-16. Withdrawing from this synagogue with new followers was not actually destroying the synagogue; first-century Palestinian Judaism was very diverse, and not everyone in a synagogue need hold the same views.

12:17-18. The servant passage in Isaiah 42:1-4 in context refers inescapably to Israel, not to the *Messiah, despite a later Jewish tradition applying it to the Messiah (see 44:1, 21; 49:3). But because God's servant Israel failed in its mission (42:18-19), God chose one within Israel to restore the rest of the people (49:5-7), who would take the remainder of the punishment due Israel (cf. 40:2) in its place (52:13–53:12). Thus Matthew declares that the Messiah

takes up the servant mission of Isaiah 42:1-4, and he is marked by the presence of the *Spirit. Matthew translates Isaiah to conform to the language of Matthew 3:17 ("my beloved . . . in whom I am well pleased"), which was otherwise closer to Genesis 22:2.

12:19-21. This passage stresses Jesus' meekness, in contrast to the warlike Messiah many people hoped for; this was a reason for the messianic secret (on which see the introduction to Mark in this commentary). It was customary to quote only part of a passage, because the more biblically informed hearers would know the context; Matthew wants all of his readers to catch the note on which he concludes: salvation for non-Jews (12:21; cf. 12:18).

12:22-37
Blaspheming the Spirit

See further comment on Mark 3:20-30.

12:22-23. The *Messiah of Jewish expectation, a descendant of David, was not a miracle worker, but since God was with Jesus in such extraordinary ways, it is not difficult to see how messianic hopes would be attached to him. David was also the closest example to an exorcist reported in the Old Testament (1 Sam 16:23); Jewish tradition associated exorcism especially with his son Solomon.

12:24. Pagan exorcists sought to remove *demons by magical incantations. In the second century rabbis still accused Jesus and Jewish Christians of using sorcery to achieve the miracles that everyone acknowledged they were performing. Sorcery merited the death penalty under Old Testament *law (Ex 22:18).

The title Beelzebul, "Lord of the House," probably alludes to "Beelzebub" ("lord of flies," a possible corruption of Baal-zebul), the local deity of Ekron (2 Kings 1:2-3). The title was appropriately applied in some later Jewish sources to *Satan (**Testament of Solomon* 3).

12:25-26. Jesus does not deny the existence of other exorcists here. But a demon's retreat that meanwhile drew attention to another of Satan's servants would only be a strategic retreat; such possible activity of magical exorcists contrasts with the wholesale exorcizing of the masses that Jesus undertakes, which clearly signifies a defeat of Satan (12:29). Quick, witty repartee was characteristic of popular teachers in both Jewish and Greek traditions.

12:27. Other Jewish circles also affirmed the need for exorcism (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.47; 4Q242 fi 3.4; cf. Tob 8:3). "Your sons" probably means "members of your own group" or disciples (just as, e.g., "sons of the prophets" in the Old Testament meant "prophets"). Because some of the Pharisees' associates also cast out demons (by methods that would look more magical than Jesus'), they should consider their charge carefully. On being the judges of others in a group, see comment on 12:41-42.

12:28. It was generally believed that the *Spirit had been quenched or muted in some way after the Old Testament prophets had died, but that this withdrawal of the Spirit would be reversed in the time of the *kingdom, when the Messiah came. In the context of 12:18, Matthew wishes his readers to hear this text as Jesus' claim to be the Messiah (12:23).

12:29. Many early Jewish sources report that Satan or demons were "bound," or imprisoned, after God subdued them; magical texts often speak of "binding" demons by magical procedures. Here, however, the *parable about tying up a protective householder means that Jesus had defeated Satan and could therefore plunder his possessions—free the demon-possessed. Some plausibly find an allusion to God's activity in Isaiah 49:24-25.

12:30. Ancient Jewish teachers stated their points as starkly as possible; this statement and the one in Mark 9:40 both mean "A person is either on one side or the other." Other contrast sayings similar to this one circulated in antiquity.

12:31-32. Many Jewish teachers taught that one's sufferings in this life could make up for sins; but certain grave sins would be carried over into the world to come. (Some teachers declared similarly that King Manasseh's *repentance allowed him to be forgiven in this world but not in the world to come.) "High-handed" sins—deliberate rebellion against God—could not be *atoned for under Old Testament law. Blasphemy was punishable by death (Lev 24:10-23).

Jesus thus regards blasphemy against the Spirit—permanently rejecting his identity (Mt 12:18) even when attested by the Spirit's works (12:28)—as the worst of sins. (On the meaning of blasphemy in general, see comment on 9:3-8.)

12:33. For a figurative use of "fruits" in the Old Testament, see comment on 3:8; the fruits here are their words (12:34-37).

12:34-35. Their words (12:36-37) against him revealed their heart; on "offspring of vipers," see comment on 3:7 (cf. also Is 57:3-4; 59:5-8). Other Jewish teachers also often stressed the importance of a right heart (though believing something and being something are not always the same thing, as the lives of many who claim to be Christians today testify). People were characterized by their actions or speech as fools, wise, sinners, etc., in Jewish wisdom tradition.

12:36-37. Many proverbs emphasize the importance of sound speech and that silence is better than unhealthy speech (e.g., Prov 10:11; 15:4; 17:27-28). In context (Mt 12:32), Jesus' opponents reveal their hearts especially by rejecting testimony about Jesus' identity that was just as critical as the basic Jewish confession, the Shema' (Deut 6:4). Most Jewish people would have agreed that God will bring everything to light on the day of judgment.

12:38-45
A Demonized Generation

Here Jesus returns the charge: they, not he, are servants of Satan. Returning charges was standard practice in ancient courts and presumably other accusation settings.

12:38-41. Jewish discussions of the end times featured converts among the poor who would testify against those who said they were too poor to follow God, converts among the rich, converts among the Gentiles and so on. Here Jesus appeals to pagans who converted. Some Jewish teachers disliked Jonah for his initial disobedience to God "on behalf of Israel"—they said that he feared that Nineveh's repentance would leave unrepentant Israel condemned (Mekilta *Pisha* 1.80-82). In the Old Testament, Nineveh, responsible for permanently destroying the northern kingdom of Israel, epitomized wickedness (e.g., Nahum 2:8; 3:1, 7); but the repentance of Nineveh in Jonah 3:10 also taught that God could spare pagans who turned to him (Jon 1:15-16; 4:10-11) as well as judge his disobedient servants (1:14-15). (Some rabbis appreciated Jonah, suggesting that he resented Gentile repentance because it showed up Israel's lack of it.)

"Three days and nights" (Jon 2:1) need not imply complete days; parts of a twenty-four-hour day counted as representing the whole day. In early Jewish law, only after three days was the witness to a person's death accepted.

12:42. Some traditions identified the "Queen of the South," the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1), with the queen of Ethiopia (cf. Acts 8:27).

12:43-45. Jesus' point: Although he is casting out *demons, this wicked generation is inviting all the more back in. The desert was a natural haunt of demons in much of Jewish tradition, and "sevenfold" was a traditional way to express severe punishment (Gen 4:15, 24; Lev 26:18), so the hearers would have readily caught Jesus' point. Jesus thus reverses his opponents' charges in 12:24; reversing charges was standard practice (including in ancient defense speeches in courts).

12:46-50
Jesus' Real Family

See comment on Mark 3:31-34. Fidelity to and respect for one's family were so heavily emphasized that such words must have struck their hearers quite forcefully. Many Jewish interpreters regarded the command to honor father and mother as the most important in the *law.

Family relationships in the ancient world were often defined by hierarchy even more than by kinship ties, so that wives and especially children (and, in wealthy homes, slaves) were expected to obey the father of the household. Jesus can thus define his "mother, brothers and sisters" as those who obey his Father. To disavow literal family members was so repulsive that even using the image would have been culturally offensive. Further, spiritual or figurative kinship language in Judaism (especially "brothers") was usually viewed ethnically (fellow Israelites).

13:1-9
The Sower, the Seed and the Soils

Jewish sages from before till long after Jesus' era commonly taught in *parables, sermon illustrations to communicate their main point or points. Parables illustrated their teaching and also could provoke new ways of considering it. In the *New Testament, though others use illustrations, only Jesus uses story

parables, a Palestinian Jewish teaching form; it cannot be attributed to composition by the later *church outside Jewish Palestine. The range of Jesus' parables (e.g., stories, similes, riddles) fit the *Old Testament range of the Hebrew term *mashal*.

Later *rabbis developed fuller story parables like those of Jesus, though theirs (reflecting their higher-scale audience) included more royal courts and conventional values and fewer purely agrarian images. Most of the Roman Empire's inhabitants were rural peasant farmers or herders. The literate elite often ignored this large population, but Jesus' illustrations show that he ministered frequently among this class.

13:1-2. Jesus gets in the boat for the purpose of relieving the overcrowding, but this would also make him easier to hear; a speaker to a crowd on shore would produce an ideal acoustic situation.

13:3-4. Jewish teachers often told illustrative stories like this one, although Jesus, addressing Galilean farmers, focuses more on agrarian images than later rabbis usually did. See "parable" in glossary. Most Galileans (like the majority of people in the empire generally) were agrarian peasants; Galilee had only two significant cities, in neither of which is Jesus recorded as ministering. Seed was sometimes (though not always) sown before the ground was plowed; it thus commonly befell any of the fates reported here. A farmer could either cast the seed by hand, as probably here, or let it trickle from holes in a sack carried by an animal. The "path" or "road" is one of the many footpaths through the field.

13:5-6. Much of the land in Palestine has only a thin layer of soil over rock; if the sower had not plowed first, he would not be aware that he wasted seed on this soil until after the fact.

13:7. These thistles were probably unseen too; instead of having been pulled out, they may have just been cut or burned, leaving roots from which thistles could grow with the seed to choke it out. In April, thistles could grow taller than a meter around roads.

13:8. Thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold are tremendously good harvests from Galilean soil. The Jordan Valley normally yielded between ten- and a hundredfold, so a hundredfold need not be a miraculous harvest (Gen 26:12; cf. Amos 9:13). But for much of Palestine, the average yield was tenfold (meaning that ten seeds were harvested for every seed sown), and all the figures Jesus reports here are very good yields.

13:9. *Disciples learned especially by carefully listening to their teachers.

13:10-23
The Sower Explained: Understanding the Word

That some members of the community of disciples would not persevere fits Old Testament models; in the Old Testament, some persons, like Saul, turned away from obedience to God, whereas others, like David, persevered through many trials.

13:10. Disciples asked their teacher questions, normally away from crowds and interlocutors, till they understood what he meant. In the case of obscure or vague public teaching, they sometimes questioned their teacher privately as a group.

13:11-13. Parables were meant to explain a rabbi's point by illustrating it; the majority of ancient Jewish parables include an interpretation, sometimes with multiple points of correspondence to the story (in contrast to what some earlier modern scholars contended). If the point of the parable were not stated, however, the parable would amount to no more than a story—or a riddle. The *Qumran sectarians believed that God had given them special revelation of divine mysteries not available to outsiders. Rabbis (and some other ancient teachers) had some more secretive teachings that they thought only their closest disciples could handle, and they reserved these for private instruction. The meaning of Jesus' parables, then, would be understood only by those who chose to become insiders. They functioned like sages' riddles, inviting contemplation.

13:14-15. The people in Jesus' day were like the people in Isaiah's day who heard the word but could not really hear and repent (Is 6:9-10).

13:16-17. Some Jewish texts describe how the righteous in the Old Testament longed to see the era of messianic redemption and a fuller revelation of God. Making a statement about someone (here, Jesus) by blessing someone else (here, those who saw him in

contrast to the blind of 13:15) was an accepted rhetorical technique of the day.

13:18-19. Greek writers could use seed for word, and sometimes used "sowing seed" to symbolize education; Jewish writers applied God "sowing seed" in Israel to the *law (e.g., *4 Ezra* 9:31-37). Contrary to the assumptions of many scholars about Jesus' parables, ancient Jewish teachers often told parables with multiple points of comparison. Even more often, they offered interpretations immediately following their parables.

13:20-23. Outsiders chose what they would do with the word when it came to them. Rabbis sometimes said that one would be consumed with either the law or with the cares of this world (v. 22).

13:24-30
The Story of Wheat and Tares

Wealthy landowners controlled most of the rural land throughout the Roman Empire; their estates were worked either by free peasants or by slaves, whose options in life were roughly the same (except that slaves could also be beaten or sold). Many of Jesus' hearers (13:34) may have been rural farmers on larger estates, who would have readily identified with the difficulty of the situation he described.

13:24. "The kingdom is like someone who . . . " does not mean that the *kingdom is compared only to the person. Rabbinic *parables often began with, "To what may such and such be compared?" or, "Such and such is like . . . " In these parables the phrase meant that the subject was being explained by the whole analogy that followed, not just by the next word. Thus the kingdom here is compared not with the person alone, but with the entire situation Jesus goes on to describe. Parables sometimes compared God with a landowner.

13:25-27. People usually slept after lunch, but especially (and at greatest length) at night. Ancient farmers sometimes feuded, and Roman law even had to forbid the practice of sowing poisonous plants in a neighbor's field. The most basic staple of the Palestinian diet (and the ancient diet in general) was bread; thus wheat was critical. But a poisonous weed, a kind of ryegrass known as darnel (*lolium temulentum;* usually translated "tares") looked like wheat in the early stages and could only be distinguished from it when the ear appeared.

13:28-29. The fields were normally weeded in the spring, but if the weeds were discovered too late—as here—one would risk uprooting the wheat with them; the master does not want to risk his wheat. Once they were fully grown, however, harvesters could cut the wheat just below the head, leaving the shorter tares to be cut separately.

13:30. Although first-century Palestine was undoubtedly more forested than it became in subsequent times, much of the earlier forest had been cut down, and fuel could not be wasted; once dried, the darnel at least proved useful for something—fuel for burning.

13:31-33
The Stories of Mustard Seed and Leaven

The point of both *parables is that the mighty kingdom everyone expected could issue from apparently obscure beginnings—like Jesus and the *disciples.

13:31-32. Scholars still dispute what plant is meant by the "mustard seed." Nevertheless, by no conjecture is it the smallest of all seeds that Jesus' listeners could have known (the orchid seed is smaller); the point is that it was recognized as very small and yet yielded a large shrub. Around the Sea of Galilee, it can reach a height of ten feet and has sometimes reached fifteen feet. Its usual height, however, is about four feet; because it would grow anew each year, birds could not nest in it when they built nests in early spring. The *hyperbole Jesus applies to the best image of growth from tiny to large he had available does not change the point, however; the kingdom might begin in obscurity, but it would culminate in glory.

Even if birds could not nest in the mustard plant, they could perch in it (Matthew's term here was sometimes used that way); Matthew's language here alludes to Daniel 4:12, the splendor of another ruler's kingdom. Sources suggest that Palestinian custom relegated mustard seeds to fields rather than gardens; one may thus contrast Matthew 13:31 with Luke 13:19, each adjusting the image for their respective readerships.

13:33. Roman cities had bakeries, but the image here is that of a rural Galilean woman fixing her own bread. Leaven, or yeast, would

be mixed through the meal. Three pecks of flour, roughly a bushel, was all that a woman could knead, and the resulting bread would feed about a hundred people. This extraordinary quantity may prefigure the unexpected greatness of the kingdom.

13:34-35
Secret Teachings

See comment on 13:10-13. Matthew cites Psalm 78:2, where the psalmist describes his knowledge in traditional terms of Hebrew wisdom, then goes on to give its content in the rest of the psalm: the history of God's faithful, saving acts and of his people's rebellion.

13:36-43
The Final Separation of Wheat and Tares

Many *Essenes and a small number of other Jews withdrew from mainstream Jewish society to seek greater purity; *Pharisees limited certain kinds of contact with those they considered impure. But most expected the righteous and wicked in the world to be separated only on the day of judgment, recognizing that God alone knew the hearts of all people. Only at the end, at the day of judgment, would the righteous and the wicked be effectively separated. The harvest is used elsewhere (e.g., *4 *Ezra* 4:30-32; **2 *Baruch* 70:2; cf. Is 32:13-15; Jer 31:27-28; Hos 2:21-23; 6:11) as a symbol for the end, and Jewish texts sometimes compare hell with a furnace (**1 Enoch* 54:6; some manuscripts in 98:3; *4 Ezra* 7:36). The *Son of Man's authority might evoke Daniel 7:13-14. Other Jewish texts (perhaps following Dan 12:2-3) also spoke of the righteous shining with glory in the future kingdom.

13:44-46
The Kingdom's Value

13:44. Treasures were often buried for safekeeping. The most likely circumstance envisioned here is that of a peasant who, while working the field of a wealthy landowner, found the treasure but covered it again lest the landowner claim it for himself. The peasant then invested all his own resources into that field to procure the treasure. Rabbis told stories of abandoning much for the study of the *law. Stories of finding lost treasures naturally circulated among the poor; they usually emphasized the wealthy outcome, but Jesus uses the story line to stir his hearers to sacrifice whatever necessary for a treasure far greater than any on earth.

13:45-46. Divers sought pearls in the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, and some pearls, imported by the rich, could be worth the equivalent of millions of dollars. Jesus' hearers were probably familiar with the basic story line; there seems to have been a folktale that ran similarly, although it did not make the same point about the *kingdom.

13:47-50
The Final Separation of Good and Bad Fish

For further discussion see 4:19; on separation, 13:36-43; for the furnace, see comment on 13:40. Different kinds of nets were used for fishing; dragnets (the kind used here) were much larger than the fishing nets employed in 4:18. Dragnets had floats on top and sinkers on the bottom to keep one part of the wide end of the net at the surface while the other part dragged below, catching fish in the seine.

13:51-52
Scribes for the Kingdom

The *law and wisdom were often compared with treasure (and sometimes with a pearl); *scribes, who were specially conversant with the law, naturally had the "old" treasure, and the message of the *kingdom gave them something new. The image is that of a householder paying out old and new coins kept in a strongbox hidden in his home. Some scholars have suggested that Matthew's Gospel addresses especially Christian scribes whose vocation is to disciple the Gentiles to the greatest teacher, Jesus (28:19).

13:53-58
Dishonor at Home

See comment on Mark 6:1-6 for more details. The tradition of prophets being rejected by their own town was old (Jer 1:1; 11:21-23), but the theme of prophets being persecuted had developed even further in subsequent Jewish lore.

When Jesus was growing up in Nazareth, the demand for carpenters there was great (to rebuild nearby Sepphoris, which had been

burned and its surviving inhabitants enslaved); thus it is not surprising that this was Joseph's occupation. Carpenters engaged in woodwork, such as wooden plows, chairs and the woodwork on roofs. They could also engage in masonry where buildings were made of stone. Nazareth itself was a small village in this period, with perhaps sixteen hundred to two thousand inhabitants according to high, older estimates and perhaps five hundred by some more recent ones; Jesus would thus have been known to most of his townspeople. The size of Jesus' family here would not be unusual by the standards of his era. As in 13:57, biblical prophets were sometimes rejected in their home town (Jer 1:1; 11:21-23) and even more often by their own people; early Judaism developed this emphasis even further.

14:1-12
Herod Executes John

See Mark 6:14-29 for considerably more detail. This passage refers not to Herod the Great, who died within several years of Jesus' birth, but to Herod Antipas, Herod the Great's son by a *Samaritan mother, and full brother of Archelaus (2:22). He had ruled in Galilee and Perea (the latter was a narrow strip of land on the east of the Jordan) since about 4 B.C., and continued in power till A.D. 39. John's martyrdom foreshadows that of Jesus; ancient authors and audiences understood suspense and foreshadowing.

14:1. Matthew uses Herod Antipas's actual title, "tetrarch," rather than the sarcastic or loose one Mark gives him ("king"). "Tetrarch" originally meant ruler of one-quarter of some territory, but Romans applied it to rulers of any portion; Herod the Great's kingdom had been divided in 4 B.C. among Archelaus (later supplanted by Roman procurators), Antipas and Philip.

14:2. Probably Antipas envisions a temporary resuscitation like those performed on behalf of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 4:34-35), rather than the permanent *eschatological *resurrection, which was a corporate resurrection reserved for the end of the age (Dan 12:2).

14:3-4. The first-century historian *Josephus also reports Herod Antipas's affair with his sister-in-law Herodias. The tetrarch and his paramour divorced their spouses to marry one another, and Herod thereby offended his former father-in-law, the Nabatean king, ultimately leading to a war in which Herod's honor suffered greatly. John thus surely expected that Herod would resent his preaching, but he preached anyway; Herod could well have taken John's moral preaching as a political criticism. Many of Antipas's own subjects, especially in the region where John was probably preaching and was finally imprisoned, were ethnic Nabateans with divided loyalties, and Antipas would want to stifle criticism.

14:5-6. Jewish people did not normally celebrate birthdays in this period (Josephus declares celebrating birthdays forbidden). But though most Jews considered birthday celebrations a *Gentile custom, culturally prestigious Greek customs influenced the aristocracy. Rejecting invitations to such parties without good excuse would risk enmity. Lewd dancing was common entertainment at drinking parties; normally a princess would never participate, but the Herodian family already had a reputation for its moral extravagances. At Herod's fortress Machaerus, men and women dined in separate halls (a custom known in the eastern Mediterranean), so Herodias would not have directly witnessed Herod's behavior toward her daughter Salome.

14:7. Herod's oath is a drunken one; as a vassal of Rome, he had no authority to compromise any of his territory. (Cf. comment on Mark 6:23.) Hearers could also recoil at Herod's lust (cf. Mt 5:28); to sleep with the daughter of one's wife was incest (Lev 18:17).

14:8-9. It was an affront to one's honor to break an oath in front of guests, even if (as in this case) Jewish teachers would have preferred to absolve the oath. Antipas would not wish to shame himself at a party designed for his honor.

14:10-11. Pious Jewish *law required a trial before execution; here Herod, given power by the Romans, ignores this tradition. Beheading was the fastest and least painful method of execution and was carried out with a sword. But it was a Greek and Roman custom, contrary to Jewish custom. In ancient literature, only the most brutal amused guests by executing

someone or presenting a head at a banquet.

14:12. One's son would normally be in charge of the burial; either John had no adult sons (which is probable) or his *disciples were the only ones ready to fulfill this role. Although the whole ancient world (except for some eccentric philosophers) considered lack of proper burial the worst possible fate, some tyrants forbade it or forbade public mourning. Even Jewish custom forbade public mourning for those executed according to Jewish law. Potentially Herod could have resented whoever showed up to claim the body.

14:13-21
Feeding the Five Thousand

See comment on Mark 6:32-44 for more details. The most significant ancient reports of feeding miracles are the reports of Israel's eating manna in the wilderness of Sinai and miracles performed at the hands of prophets (e.g., Elisha in 2 Kings 4:42-44).

14:13-15. Bread and fish were basic staples of the Palestinian diet; meat was more expensive and rarely eaten except at feasts. Teachers were not normally responsible for feeding their disciples from their own means.

14:16. Ancient students often paid their teachers (though other teachers were self-supporting); it was honorable to invite teachers to dinner and to show them the utmost hospitality. But here Jesus, the teacher, assumes the role of host or provider. The ancient emphasis on hospitality included providing food as well as shelter for guests. Teachers sometimes delegated to disciples duties like procuring provisions for their school.

14:17-18. Even in a more inhabited region (cf. 14:13), an abundance of countryside villages could not have provided for a crowd of perhaps ten thousand people (cf. 14:20); even the largest villages rarely held more than three thousand residents. Compare especially 2 Kings 4:42-43 for the incredulity of prophet-disciples when Elisha tells them to distribute the food to the people.

14:19. It was customary for the head of the household to "bless," or give thanks for, food before a meal.

14:20. It was expected that the most generous hosts who had means normally provided enough food that some was left over. Ancient moralists condemned wastefulness.

14:21. A crowd of five thousand men plus women and children was larger than most of the villages that covered the Galilean countryside.

14:22-33
Walking on the Water

See also Mark 6:45-52. Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha had all done water miracles, parting the sea or the river Jordan; but the only one the *Old Testament said "trod" upon the waters was God himself.

14:22. Because a teacher controlled the duration of the learning situation, it would be understood that Jesus could send the crowds home.

14:23. The very pious could set aside two specific hours a day for prayer; Jesus here spends the whole remainder of the day in prayer (though how long this time was is uncertain, given Matthew's ambiguous use of "evening" here—vv. 15, 23). Mountains were places of prayer for Moses and Elijah; here, away from the crowdedness of Galilean town life, Jesus could find solitude.

14:24. Harsh storms often arise suddenly on the Sea of Galilee.

14:25. The fourth, or final, shift of the night watch was between 3 and 6 a.m.; the watches started at 6 p.m. Jewish people often divided the night into three watches, but the Romans had four.

14:26. Belief in ghosts or disembodied spirits was common on a popular level in antiquity, even though the idea of ghosts contradicted popular Jewish teachings about the *resurrection from the dead.

14:27. Jesus' answer is literally "I am"; although this can easily mean "It is I," it may also allude back to God's self-revelation in Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 43:10, 13: "I am."

14:28-32. Despite Peter's failure to follow through, by beginning to walk on water he had done something that not even the greatest prophets of the Old Testament had done. Walking on water might remind readers of Israel passing through the Red Sea or the Jordan but was a greater miracle. (In one story told by the *rabbis—we cannot determine whether it is as early as Jesus' time—the first Israelite to cross the Red Sea began to sink in the waves but was rescued by Moses' rod,

which divided the sea.) Faith to step into water could evoke Joshua 3:13-17. For Jesus' rescue, cf. Psalm 18:16 and 144:7.

14:33. The term *worship* was applied to homage offered to pagan kings as well as that offered to deities. Although it could indicate prostration as a sign of respect (e.g., 1 Sam 24:8; 25:23), it is an unusual term to express Jewish disciples' amazement at a human teacher, even in miracle stories. Though the disciples would not yet have verbalized Jesus' deity, Matthew is ready to do so (cf. 28:17-19). Ancient miracle stories (including many in the Gospels) often concluded with the observers' awe and praise.

14:34-36
Healings at Gennesaret

The "fringe" of Jesus' garment no doubt refers to the tassels he wore as an observant Jew; see comment on 9:20; cf. 23:5. Ancient literature commonly includes not only longer *narrative segments but also summary statements like this passage (cf. 4:23-25). Gennesaret was a plain on the northwest shore of the Lake of Galilee.

15:1-20
Human Tradition Versus God's Word

See Mark 7:1-23 for more detail.

15:1-2. Contemporary Jewish sources always characterize the *Pharisees as observing the traditions of the elders; in this way they felt they could depend upon a repository of the wisdom of the pious who preceded them. Washing hands before meals was one of the most prominent of those traditions but had no direct basis in Scripture.

15:3. Jesus responds to the Pharisees' question with a counterquestion, as *rabbis often did.

15:4-6. Judaism universally demanded honor of father and mother and included financial support of aged parents as part of this honor. Some, like *Josephus and many rabbis, regarded this demand as the most important commandment in the *law. The Pharisees therefore could not have disagreed with Jesus' example; they did not recommend that people fail to support their parents, but their allowance of special vows dedicating things only to "sacred" use created this loophole for those who could have wished to exploit it (cf. Prov 28:24). Some legal loopholes (such as the *prozbul,* an early rule circumventing the law's cancellation of debts in the seventh year) were intended to uphold the spirit of the law; this one unwittingly undercut even that.

15:7-9. Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13, which complained that Israel in Isaiah's day was outwardly religious but inwardly far from God (cf. Is 1:10-20). It goes on to criticize the folly of Israel's "wise" people.

15:10-11. In a later story Johanan ben Zakkai, a Jewish teacher from the generation after Jesus, admitted privately to his *disciples that outward impurity did not really defile; one should simply keep God's commandments about purity. But this sort of teaching, even if it had been widespread, was not emphasized publicly, lest people fail to keep the ceremonial laws (as happened among some well-to-do Jews in Egypt).

15:12. Although the Pharisees (from whose teachers most of the later rabbis seem to have come) had virtually no political power as a group in this period, they were respected and highly influential among the people. Offending them thus did not not appear to be prudent.

15:13-14. The images of uprooting (Jer 42:10; 45:4; cf. 1:10; 11:16-19; 12:2; 24:6; 31:28), blindness (15:14; cf., e.g., Deut 29:4; Is 6:10; 42:19) and leaders guiding others astray with falsehood (Is 3:12-15; 9:16) are standard *Old Testament judgment language; the *Dead Sea Scrolls similarly describe the *Qumran community as a shoot planted by God. The image here is that of a farmer preparing his field and ridding it of unwanted weeds (cf. 13:30). The point of Jesus' response to his disciples is: Do not worry about the Pharisees' power, because their day of judgment is coming (Mt 3:10).

15:15-20. Such views were rare, and even more rarely divulged publicly; see comment on 15:10-11. Liberal Alexandrian Jews who no longer believed in literal observance of the food laws (Lev 11; Deut 14) were particularly despised by their more conservative colleagues. But everyone would at least have had to agree with Jesus that the heart matters most (see Is 29:13, cited in Mt 15:8-9; cf. also Is 59:13).

15:21-28
Mercy on the Canaanites

15:21. Tyre and Sidon were traditionally pagan territory; Sidon had been the home of Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31). But in the same generation a woman from that region had miraculously received food and healing for her child from the prophet Elijah and so became a full believer in Israel's God (1 Kings 17:8-24). Some argue that in Jesus' period, their territory stretched inland, so that one had to pass through territory belonging to Syrophoenicia, as here, even to get from Galilee to Caesarea Philippi. Many Jewish people still lived here, however.

15:22. Canaanites, many of whose survivors had been driven northward into Phoenicia during the Israelite conquest, were the most morally despised of Israel's enemies in the Old Testament; Matthew's characterizing this woman with this term may have set Jewish hearers on edge. But by acknowledging Jesus as "Son of David"—*Messiah—she also acknowledges the right of the kingdom of David (who had also embraced many non-Jews as allies) over the land. How could a Jewish person remain prejudiced against a Canaanite woman such as this one? David had welcomed many *Gentiles.

15:23-24. Jesus' statement in verse 24 need not preclude a later mission to Gentiles. By way of comparison, the servant of Isaiah 53:6-8 suffers on behalf of the lost sheep of Israel (cf. 40:11; 56:11), but the servant's mission was ultimately to reconcile all nations to God (42:6; 49:6-7; cf. 56:3-8; perhaps 52:15).

15:25-28. Certain people in the Old Testament, such as the Sidonian woman to whom Elijah came (1 Kings 17:18-19) and the Shunammite woman with Elisha (2 Kings 4:28), laid their need before a prophet and would not take no for an answer; God answered their prayers with a yes. (Some Jewish teachers closer to Jesus' time were reported to exercise the same kind of holy chutzpah in praying for rain, etc.) Women, who often had little other access to justice and had less to lose than men by protesting, might also be specially insistent (see Mt 20:20-21; Luke 18:3). Even those who were most intimate with God approached him with only the greatest respect when praying an insistent prayer (Gen 18:22-32); but they also refused to be deterred. "Dog" was one of the harshest insults in antiquity. Even though here it is at most an implied analogy (playing more on the Gentile custom of using dogs as pets), it would take great humility for this woman to take up the analogy. People often respected witty retorts.

15:29-31
Lame, Crippled, Blind and Mute Healed

Here Jesus cures many traditional categories of serious ailments. Even in a culture where people did not deny the existence of miracles, these cures would be viewed as extraordinary. Matthew's summary of such miracles may recall prophecies of Isaiah (35:5-6; cf. 29:18-19, 23).

15:32-39
The Second Feeding

Jesus' first feeding miracle (see comment on Mt 14:13-21) was not an exception; he was able to repeat it at any time. Some have identified Magadan (v. 39), possibly Mary Magdalene's home town, with the Galilean village of Tarichea, associated with fishing; it apparently imbibed some Greek culture, but had strong Jewish patriotism.

16:1-4
No Sign but Jonah's

16:1. The *Pharisees and *Sadducees differed on most matters. The Pharisees had great popular support, whereas the Sadducees held most of the political power. Together they could make a dangerous team. Probably writing after 70, Matthew often links the various leaders together, though by this time the Sadducees and temple establishment had apparently lost power and Pharisees were gaining greater influence. On such testing, cf. 4:3. "From heaven" was sometimes a circumlocution for "from God," but the context may suggest they mean a heavenly sign (16:2-3).

16:2-3. They ask for a sign from heaven in verse 1 (cf. 2 Kings 20:8-9; Is 38:7; 2 Chron 32:24); astrologers used signs in the heavens to predict the fall of emperors, and *rabbis also tried to interpret such signs. Jewish writers like *Josephus believed there were portents in the heavens when disasters were about to

occur (cf. also Mt 24:29-30). Some prophets, like Elijah, actually had produced signs from heaven—he called down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:38)—but most prophetic signs were not so spectacular (Judg 6:17; Is 7:11-14; 8:18; 19:20; 20:3; 37:30; 38:7; 66:19; Ezek 4:3; 12:11; 24:24, 27). But in ancient Jewish parlance, "from heaven" can mean "from God" (cf. Mt 21:25), so they could simply seek any sort of divine sign (but cf. 16:2-3). Perhaps Jesus' opponents desire a sign to validate that he is a prophet—some rabbis believed that prophets could temporarily even set aside some commandments of the *law, provided they were attested by signs—or perhaps they merely want him to make a prediction. Many rabbis, however, rejected the validity of signs favoring positions that contradicted their interpretation of Scripture. In Palestine, a red morning sky indicated Mediterranean winds bringing rain from the west.

16:4. Like their ancestors who did not heed God's acts already done among them, this generation is evil (Deut 32:5, 20 in context). Signs had already been given them (Mt 16:3), even clearer than God's usual signs from the heavens (16:2), but the final attestation would be the *resurrection (12:40). Many Jewish people expected a particularly evil generation directly before the end. Sages sometimes challenged hearers with riddles.

16:5-12
Evil Yeast

16:5-6. Jewish tradition sometimes used yeast to symbolize evil; most fundamentally, it was something that spreads. Some Jewish teachers made such comparisons (e.g., describing false teaching as poisoned water); the *disciples should thus have recognized that their rabbi could speak figuratively. On the Pharisees and *Sadducees, see comment on 16:1 and glossary.

16:7-11. Like Israel in the wilderness, Jesus' contemporaries quickly forgot God's past provision, and he often called them to remember (e.g., Deut 8).

16:12. Among other beliefs, Sadducees denied the resurrection (Mt 22:23) and Pharisees held to human traditions (15:2-3); throughout Matthew, both oppose Jesus.

16:13-20
The Christ and the Rock

16:13. Caesarea Philippi (a city distinct from the usual *New Testament Caesarea, which was on the coast) was pagan territory, near a grotto devoted to the worship of the Greek woodland deity Pan; Herod had also dedicated a temple for the worship of Caesar there. Few Jewish people would have expected it as a site for a divine revelation. The city was some twenty-five miles from the Lake of Galilee and about seventeen hundred feet higher, hence they would have needed to stop along the way (15:21, 39); it lay near the source of the Jordan, at the *Old Testament Dan, the northern boundary of ancient Israel.

16:14. All these answers about who Jesus is fall into the "prophets" category; though many members of the Jewish elite held that prophets had ceased, popular expectation of end-time prophets remained strong. Elijah was expected to return (Mal 4:5), and many of Jesus' miracles resembled Elijah's. His judgment oracles (Mt 11:20-24) or downplaying the temple (cf. 12:6; 24:1-2) may have evoked the comparison with Jeremiah.

16:15-16. Peter has the right title, though the wrong concept of what *Messiah means (16:22). David's royal line was adopted by God (2 Sam 7:14), so it was natural for the ultimate successor to his throne to be called God's Son (Ps 2:7; 89:27), as a few Jewish interpreters in this period noticed (e.g., in the *Florilegium* from *Qumran Cave 4, an *Essene commentary on 2 Sam 7).

16:17. "Blessed are you" is a standard form of blessing (cf. comment on Mt 5:1-12). "Barjonah" is *Aramaic for "son of Jonah." "Flesh and blood" was a typical Jewish phrase for "human being(s)." Although all Jews emphasized learning by studying the Scriptures, some also recognized divine illumination (e.g., in the *Dead Sea Scrolls) or revelation (*apocalyptic literature; some mysticism).

16:18. In Aramaic, "Peter" and "rock" are the same word; in Greek (here), they are cognate terms that were used interchangeably by this period. For the idea of a person as the foundation on which something is built, cf. Isaiah 51:1-2; Ephesians 2:20. (In context, the point appears to be that Peter is the rock in his

role as confessor—v. 16—and others build on the foundation by their proclamation of the same confession.)

The Old Testament often spoke of those who "built" God's people (e.g., Ruth 4:11; Jer 1:10) and prayed for God to build Israel up (Ps 51:18; 69:35; 147:2; Jer 24:6; 31:4, 28). The "gates of Hades" in the Old Testament (Job 38:17; Ps 9:13) and subsequent Jewish tradition referred to the realm and power of death; death itself (cf. Mt 16:24-26) would not silence the *church. Against those who presuppose that Jesus could not have planned the church, though he chose twelve disciples as the nucleus of a remnant for Israel (compare the symbolic use of twelve in the Dead Sea Scrolls), the language of a "church" was already being used for a remnant community among his contemporaries (Dead Sea Scrolls; see "church" in glossary for further information). Teachers who founded schools normally expected their disciples to carry on after them.

16:19. The keeper of the keys was one of the most important roles a household servant could hold (cf. Mk 13:32-34). Because keys were bulky and might be carried by only a single person, they also symbolized authority; a high official held the keys in a royal kingdom (Is 22:20-22) and in God's house, the temple. Keys here may signify the authority to admit into the *kingdom (Mt 23:13), based on the knowledge of the truth about Jesus (16:16). The Qumran community also had officials deciding whether to admit members; the decision was made based on the prospective member's acceptance of the community's rule of life.

Many Jewish people felt that the Jewish high court acted on the authority of God's tribunal in heaven, in a sense ratifying its decrees. "Binding" and "loosing" (also 18:18) could refer to detaining or releasing prisoners, hence could function figuratively in a judicial setting. Rabbis also used these terms regularly for legislative authority in interpreting Scripture ("prohibiting" and "permitting"). Because "binding" and "loosing" also were figurative images for punishing and releasing, they could likely be used judicially as well (cf. 18:18).

16:20. For comment on the messianic secret, see the introduction to Mark's Gospel.

16:21-28
Redefining Messiahship

Peter had divulged Jesus' secret identity (16:16) yet retained a faulty concept of what that identity entailed.

16:21. Even most of the *Old Testament prophets sought to avoid martyrdom insofar as possible and complained about their sufferings (1 Kings 19:3-4; Jer 20:7-18). Although martyrdom was associated with the prophets, it was not their *goal;* but it seems to be Jesus' goal here (cf. especially 20:28). Jesus could foreknow his death as a prophet, but he also orchestrated it in a sense: no one could stir a commotion in the temple and defy its officials as Jesus did, then remain in the city unarmed, without expecting martyrdom.

16:22. Jewish tradition in this period emphasized a triumphant *Messiah; apparently only a century after Jesus' teaching did Jewish teachers begin to accept the tradition of a suffering Messiah in addition to a triumphant one. One of the first rules of ancient discipleship (with noticeably rare exceptions) was: Never criticize the teacher, especially publicly. Here Peter breaks that rule, even on standard cultural grounds.

16:23. Disciples sometimes walked behind their teachers to signify submission. The term *stumbling block,* referring to something over which people tripped, had come to be used figuratively for things that led people to sin or stumble in their faith. Peter here offers the same temptation as *Satan: the *kingdom without the cross (4:9-10). Rabbis sometimes punned on the names of disciples; here the "rock" (16:18) becomes a "stumbling stone."

16:24. For 16:24-28, see comment on Mark 8:34–9:1. Carrying the horizontal crossbeam en route to crucifixion (where the upright stake sometimes already stood awaiting the condemned person) often meant enduring mockery and scorn on a path leading to death as a condemned criminal. Crucifixion was the worst form of criminal death, the supreme Roman penalty, normally inflicted only on lower class provincials and slaves; even talk of it could evoke horror. "Follow" can be the language of discipleship, since disciples followed their teachers; here disciples follow to the cross.

16:25-26. Although God had sometimes accepted a substitution (Ex 30:12), no treasure could really ransom one's life eternally (cf. Ps 49:7-8), and treasure was valueless without life. Various Jewish thinkers recognized that losing one's life in the present age was worthwhile if it would preserve one's life in the *age to come.

16:27-28. Jesus alludes to the *Son of Man in Daniel 7:13-14. He also applies Old Testament language for God as judge to himself (Ps 62:12; Prov 24:12; Jer 17:10; 32:19; Ezek 18:30). The reference to angels is probably from Zechariah 14:5, though it also fits the context of the image in Daniel 7:13-14. "Taste death" was idiomatic for "die." Verse 28 is a transition to the proleptic revelation of the kingdom to follow in 17:1-8 ("proleptic" means that this revelation anticipates the kingdom).

17:1-13
The Glory Shines Again

This passage includes so many allusions to God revealing his glory to Moses on Mount Sinai that most ancient Jewish readers would certainly have caught them. For more details on the passage, see comments on Mark 9:2-10.

17:1. The six days alludes to Exodus 24:16, when God began to speak to Moses from his cloud on the mountain.

17:2. Both Greek myth and Jewish *apocalypses told of transformations or transfigurations (in the latter describing glorious angels or the resurrected righteous, sometimes shining like the sun). The most obvious primary background for biblically literate hearers, however, would have been Moses' glorification on Mount Sinai (Ex 34:29, where Moses' face radiated glory because of God's revelation of himself to Moses).

17:3. Jewish people understood Scripture as denying that Elijah had ever died; God himself had buried Moses. Jewish people expected the return of both Elijah and Moses at the end of the age (Deut 18:15-18; Mal 4:5). Both of them (Ex 24:15-16; 1 Kings 19:8) heard from God at Mount Sinai (also called Horeb).

17:4. Israel had dwelt in tabernacles in the wilderness while the presence and glory of God was among them. Jews commemorated this annually by building shelters, so Peter would know how to build one.

17:5. The cloud of glory overshadowed the mountain in Exodus 24:15 and the tabernacle in 40:34 (the same Greek word is used in the *LXX of Ex 40:35 that Matthew uses here).

To the biblical allusions in Matthew 3:17, the voice in this passage apparently adds words from Deuteronomy 18:15: When the prophet like Moses comes, "give heed to him."

17:6-8. The *disciples' fear and falling on their faces were characteristic of people in the *Old Testament and later Jewish tradition when they experienced revelations of God (e.g., Ezek 1:28; Dan 8:17). The revealers also sometimes told people to arise and not be afraid (e.g., Ezek 2:1-2; Dan 8:18; 10:11-12)

17:9-13. Jewish people believed that Elijah would return before the time of the end to make matters right (Mal 4:5-6); the *resurrection of all the righteous dead was to follow his coming, at the end. Malachi 4:6 speaks of Elijah "restoring" families (not just their genealogies, as in later rabbinic tradition). Jesus interprets the promise of the end-time Elijah more figuratively than most of his contemporaries would have.

17:14-23
Inadequate Faith for Exorcism

17:14-18. See comments on Mark 9:14-29 for more detail. It might be relevant that, like Moses, Jesus must deal with the failure of those he left in charge once he comes down from the mountain (Ex 24:14; 32:1-8, 21-25, 35), though Jesus has not been absent as long. In some cases of spirit possession noted by anthropologists, persons become violently out of control and risk injury to themselves, as here. Although some compare symptoms here with epilepsy, Matthew does not always associate that affliction with *demons (Mt 4:24).

17:19-21. The disciples might inquire privately to avoid further increasing their public shame. "Removing mountains" was apparently a Jewish figure of speech (attested among later *rabbis for extraordinary mastery of the Torah) for that which was incomparably difficult. Mountains were thought to be the most stable of all things (cf. Ps 46:2; 125:1; Is 54:10); mustard seeds were used to define a proverbially small quantity. Jesus is thus telling the disciples that nothing God asks them to do will be impossible if they trust him; the issue is not how small their faith might be, but how large is the

God in whom their faith rests. Most relevant here may be Zechariah 4:6-9; before God's servant, God would bring down all obstacles against the tasks God designates.

17:22-23. Jesus predicts what would have been obvious to the disciples had they known that he planned to drive the moneychangers from the temple courts without either flight or resistance: he would die (cf. Mt 18:31; 19:22; 26:22). Because the disciples understand his resurrection to mean the general resurrection at the end of the age (17:9-10), they miss his point. In ancient parlance, "after the third day" could mean parts of three days.

17:24-27
The Children Are Exempt

17:24. Although Capernaum apparently had a customs post (see comment on Mt 8:5), the tax at issue here was paid by free adult Jewish males throughout the world. They showed their solidarity with the temple and the Holy Land by paying a half-shekel tax (Ex 30:13-16). Though the literal Greek double drachma seems no longer to have been in circulation, scholars argue that "two drachmas" was now an expression for the payment of the half-shekel tax (Ex 30:13-16). So much was gathered that the keepers of the temple eventually began using the excess to construct a massive, golden vine. After 70, in Matthew's time, the Romans confiscated this tax for the upkeep of a pagan temple, and some Jews may have refused to pay it on principle. In Jesus' day, most Jews loyal to Judaism would have paid it, but *Sadducees disapproved and *Essenes believed they need pay only once in a lifetime. The local collectors of the tax may have wondered about Jesus' position on the matter if he had already hinted God's judgment on the temple (as later in 21:12-14; 23:38–24:15); moreover, collectors did not force those living off charity (as they could assume Jesus to be—27:55; Lk 8:3) or beggars to pay. Or they may have simply been wondering if he would pay it in this locality or elsewhere, because the disciples were moving about. (At the least, they know that Jesus sometimes disagrees with mainstream views.)

17:25-26. Like a good prophet, Jesus responds to Peter before Peter even brings up the matter (1 Sam 9:20; 1 Kings 14:6; 2 Kings 5:26; 6:32).

In tax contexts, "free" normally means "free from obligation" concerning tax or tribute (e.g., 1 Esdras 4:49-50). Since a royal family did not tax itself, Jesus' point is that the *Son of God should not be taxed for the upkeep of his Father's house. (The principle of an exemption was known: Roman provincial taxes often exempted Romans or high-class Greeks from payment. The principle was also known in Judaism: the temple's attendants, the priests, applied it to themselves, to the chagrin of some of their Pharisaic contemporaries—Mishnah *Sheqalim* 1:3-4.) For Matthew's readers this saying might mean: It is not because Jesus is not in solidarity with Judaism (for he is), but rather because he is the *hope* of Judaism, that he is not obligated to pay.

17:27. On the basis of solidarity with the rest of the Jewish community, however, Jesus pays the tax. If some of Matthew's Jewish Christian readers were looking for an excuse to avoid paying the tax in their own day, this text would encourage them to pay it instead.

A stater was worth four drachmas (4 denarii); hence it covered the tax for both Jesus and Peter. Jewish teachers had several stories describing how God rewarded faithful Jews who bought fish and found gems in them; if these stories are as early as the first century (their date is not certain), Peter might be surprised that something similar had actually happened to him. Some fish in the Lake of Galilee had mouths large enough to hold staters; one such fish was what is now called the *Chromis simonis* (named after Simon Peter).

18:1-6
Offending the Children

See comment on Mark 9:33-37 for more information.

18:1. Some Jewish texts speak of different rewards and ranks in the *kingdom. Rank and status were issues that members of ancient society confronted daily. Jewish sources valued the virtue of humility, often extolling *rabbis who humbled themselves, for example, before other rabbis or before their parents. Yet such humility was rarely expressed toward children or by exalting children.

18:2-4. The most powerless members of ancient society were little children; in most of

ancient society, age increased one's social status and authority. In Jewish culture, children were loved, not despised; but the point is that they had no status apart from that love, and no power or privileges apart from what they received as total dependents on their parents. The posture of children as dependents may recall 6:9. "Converted" may allude to the Jewish idea of turning, returning or repenting, often found in the biblical prophets.

18:5. On receiving representatives, see 10:40-42 (on the name, cf. also comment on Jn 14:12-14).

18:6. Both Greeks and Jews used "stumble" figuratively; for Jews, it often meant "sin" or "fall away from the faith." Millstones were used to grind meal. They were extremely heavy, and the term here refers to the heavier kind of millstone turned by a donkey, rather than the lighter kind a woman would use. One of the most horrible punishments executed by Romans (abhorred by Jews) was to tie a person in a sack and throw them into a large body of water. Death at sea was considered terrible; some pagans believed that the ghost of the unburied would hover forever over the spot where the person had drowned. Others could apply this image to judgment (cf. **1 Enoch* 48:9). Jewish teachers sometimes warned of judgments with, "Better for a person who . . . than if . . . " (cf. also Mt 26:24).

18:7-14
Offenders of the Powerless

This passage extends the metaphor to all the weak in the *church, certainly including children. Church leaders and members must seek not only to avoid causing stumbling but also to bring back anyone who has stumbled.

18:7-9. Judaism also balanced God's sovereign plan with human choice and responsibility. To the extent that one's poor eyes could cause one to trip, they could be viewed as a sort of stumbling block; on stumbling blocks, see comment on 18:6. An apparently widespread Jewish belief was that God in the future would raise the dead initially in whatever form they had (e.g., with missing limbs) before restoring them to wholeness; on the removal of limbs, cf. comment on 5:29-30 or Mark 9:42-47.

18:10. Jewish readers would generally recognize here the concept of the guardian angel; it was typically believed that every Jewish person had one (cf. Tobit 5:22; Pseudo-Philo, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 11:12; 59:4; Tosefta *Shabbat* 17:2-3; *Sifre Numbers* 40.1.5). Further, angels received their orders from God's throne; but unlike lower angels and mortals, the very highest angels (normally not thought to be guardian angels) regularly saw God's glory. Those who mistreated these "little ones" would hence be reported directly to God by the greatest angels, and the report would stand them in bad stead in the day of judgment.

18:12-14. One hundred was an average-sized flock in Palestine. Greek and Jewish literature affords other examples of pasturers who had to leave the flock or herd to look for a lost animal (cf. 1 Sam 9:3); a shepherd could leave his own flock with the other shepherds with whom he worked, who would be watching over their own flocks (cf. Lk 2:8). Shepherds did often graze flocks on mountains or in hill country, and sometimes became capable mountaineers. Religious leaders who failed to care for the broken and powerless are rejected by God (Ezek 34:2-10), and God himself would then seek after the sheep (34:11-16). God's people were commonly described as sheep in the *Old Testament (cf. comment on Jn 10:1-18).

18:15-20
Disciplining Offenders

We should keep in mind that the whole context of this passage on church discipline is mercy and forgiveness; forgiveness qualifies (but does not annul) the force of this passage on disciplining unrepentant offenders in the Christian community. The contextual emphasis is the hope of bringing back the erring, not confirming them irreparably in their guilt.

18:15. This procedure reflects standard Jewish custom; the *Dead Sea Scrolls, the rabbis and others demand that one begin with private reproof. Publicly shaming someone unnecessarily was considered sinful, and Jewish teachers stressed the importance of receiving reproof.

18:16. Deuteronomy 19:15 (cf. 17:6-7) was the standard text Jewish authorities cited for requiring two witnesses. (Later rabbis took this principle so far that one eyewitness was

not sufficient even if the eyewitness caught the murderer with the bloody knife in hand.) A final warning was merciful (e.g., Deut 25:8). Strict judicial procedures are being followed at this point because a judicial action is about to take place; Jesus here agrees with the Jewish practice of private rebuke, witnesses and finally, if *repentance is not forthcoming, the judicial assembly (18:17).

18:17. A church by definition would function as an ancient *synagogue would, and ancient synagogues were not only assembly halls for prayer and study but community centers where discipline would be inflicted on an erring member of the community. (Both "synagogue" and "church" ultimately render the same Hebrew expression for God's community.) This discipline could take a variety of forms, including public beating, but the most severe were several levels of dismissal from the community. After the most severe level of discipline the offending member would be treated as a pagan instead of as a Jew. Pagans and *tax gatherers alike—tax gatherers were seen as agents of a pagan government—were excluded from the religious life of the Jewish community. Giving a person a final warning before a court would take action (e.g., Deut 25:8) was an act of mercy.

18:18. Continuing the judicial thought of 18:15-17: many Jews felt that the Jewish high court acted on the authority of God's tribunal in heaven, in a sense ratifying its decrees (the verb tenses here probably indicate that the heavenly court has decided first). Those who judged cases on the basis of God's *law accurately represented his will.

"Binding" and "loosing," terms normally used for tying up or imprisoning versus freeing or releasing, provide a natural metaphor for condemning or acquitting in a court. As terms regularly used for rabbis' legislative authority in interpreting Scripture, they could naturally apply to judicial situations as well.

18:19-20. The "two or three" must refer to the "two or three witnesses" of 18:16. These verses may refer to the prayer of execration given at a Jewish excommunication; or they could represent prayers for the repentance and consequent forgiveness of the excommunicated person (see 1 Jn 5:16). In either case, it is of interest to note that the witnesses in the Old Testament were to be the first to execute the judgment of the court (Deut 17:7); here they are the first to pray.

Later sources report that ten Jewish males was the minimum quorum to constitute a synagogue assembly, but also (probably reflecting a more widespread tradition) that God's presence was with even two or three who met together to study his law (cf. Mishnah *ʾAvot* 3:2, 6; *Mekilta Bahodesh* 11). Jesus' presence is thus presented here as identical with God's (cf. also Mt 1:23; 28:20). (Indeed, one of the most common names for God among the later rabbis was "the Place," i.e., the Omnipresent One.)

18:21-35
Forgiving the Forgivers

18:21-22. Seventy times seven (some interpreters read seventy-seven; cf. Gen 4:24) does not really specify 490 (or 77) here with mathematical precision; it is a typically graphic, hyperbolic way of saying "Never hold grudges." Because true *repentance should involve turning from sin, some later rabbis limited opportunities for forgiveness for a given sin to three times; Peter might have thought his offer of seven times was generous, until hearing Jesus' further expansion.

18:23. On "the kingdom may be compared," see comment on 13:24. The story here is about a *Gentile king, such one of the Greek, Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt before the Romans conquered it. "Servants" here could mean his upper-level slaves—who were better off than nearly all the free people of Egypt, most of whom were peasants. In this case, however, "servants" might refer to free provincial satraps, who functioned as the ruler's tax farmers in various regions; they too were vassals of the king. The ruler would allow them to collect taxes for him at a profit, but he demanded efficiency. If they collected taxes after the harvests, the king might settle accounts with them afterward.

18:24. Many peasant agricultural workers struggled to pay taxes, especially after droughts, but this difficulty did not mitigate the tax collectors' responsibility to submit the requisite amount to the king. Some of the *disciples and perhaps Jesus himself could have smiled as the master storyteller told how far

the king had let one of his servants get in debt: ten thousand talents (cf. Esther 3:9) probably represented more than the entire annual income of the king, and perhaps more than all the actual coinage in circulation in most kingdoms (such as Egypt) at the time! In one period, the silver talent represented six thousand drachmas, or six thousand days' wages for an average Palestinian worker; ten thousand talents would thus be roughly sixty million days' wages (in another period, one hundred million). Although taxes were exorbitant in those days, especially for rural peasants, *Josephus reports the annual tribute from Galilee and Perea under wealthy Herod to be only two hundred talents, with perhaps six hundred more from Judean territories; it was thus inconceivable that one official could get so far in debt.

Ancient Judaism often viewed sins as debts before God (see comment on 6:12).

18:25. Enslaving family members for the man's debt was a Gentile practice that the Jewish people in this period found abhorrent. The math does not work here; the price of an average slave was between five hundred and two thousand days' wages, hence the king cannot recoup even one-thousandth of his losses on this sale. But the *parable is deliberately hyperbolic, to speak of guilt before God. A king with better math skills would not have let the man get so far in debt to begin with! The point here in any case is not economics but anger.

18:26. "I will repay" was a standard promise in ancient business documents. But given the debt of ten thousand talents, however (18:24), this promise is as absurd as the hope of recouping the loss by debt enslavement in 18:25.

18:27. Jesus' humorous *hyperbole continues. Given the ruthlessness of ancient Near Eastern kings and the greatness of the debt, that this ruler would forgive his servant is almost as impossible in the real world as the size of the debt. Sometimes rulers had to forgive Egyptian peasants' past tax debts when failed crops rendered them simply unable to pay, but the sums involved were comparatively small.

18:28. One hundred denarii represented one hundred days of a common worker's wages, which would be a small sum for his fellow tax farmer, after he had finished his accounting with the king (18:23). It was also a ridiculously minuscule sum compared to what the first servant had owed the king. But apparently the forgiven slave, instead of internalizing the principle of *grace, had decided to become ruthlessly efficient in his exacting of debts henceforth. Such extreme actions as choking are reported of angry creditors elsewhere in antiquity as well.

18:29-30. Someone in prison could not pay back what he owed (v. 34), unless friends came to his aid with the requisite funds. In pre-Roman Egypt, no one could charge a servant of the king, a policy the aggressor neglects.

18:31-33. The king is naturally angry; the forgiven servant has put another of his servants out of active commission, hence costing the king more lost revenues. The king had gained more advantage by convincing his people of his benevolence than he would have gained profit from the sale of the first servant; but once it was rumored that this first servant, his agent, was acting mercilessly, it reflected badly upon his own benevolence.

18:34. Jewish *law did not permit torture, but Jewish people knew that Gentile kings (as well as Herod) practiced it. Because this servant had fallen from political favor, he would have no allies who would dare come to his aid; and even if he had, given the sum he owed, his situation would have remained hopeless. He would never be released. (On liability for all sins if one did not stay righteous, cf. Ezek 18:24.)

18:35. The great contrasts of the parable are humorous and effective in relaxing the ancient listener's guard, but the horrifying details of debt slavery, torture and so forth bring home the point forcefully. This story would have communicated effectively for the ancient hearer. For a parable's sudden conclusion challenging the hearer, cf. 2 Sam 12:7.

19:1-12
Grounds for Divorce

This passage follows the sequence of a rabbinic debate.

19:1. *Pharisees (19:3) were more common in Judea than in Galilee. Sometimes Galilean pilgrims to Judea crossed the Jordan into Perea (to avoid Samaria), then crossed it again into Judea.

19:2-3. The Pharisees themselves debated the grounds for divorce implied in Deuteronomy 24:1-4: the school of *Shammai, predominant in Jesus' day, argued that the passage allowed divorce only if one's spouse was unfaithful; the school of *Hillel, which eventually won out, said that a man could divorce his wife if she burned the toast (a later *rabbi of this school added, "Or if you find someone more attractive"!); see Mishnah *Gittin* 9:10; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 269.1.1; more generally for the freedome to divorce, see, e.g., Sirach 25:26; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.253; *Life* 415, 426; Philo, *Special Laws* 3.30 Although Shammai's school was generally dominant before A.D. 70, other sources indicate that the more liberal position of Hillel's school was closer to general practice on this issue (though Pharisees apparently widely regarded divorce as tragic). The success of a protagonist's wisdom under "testing" with difficult questions was an ancient theme (cf. 1 Kings 10:1); some questioners had hostile intentions.

19:4-6. It was standard interpretive practice to counter one proof text by appealing to another. Like the sectarians who wrote the *Dead Sea Scrolls (who used the text against royal polygamy, CD 4.20–5.2; 11QT 56.18-19), Jesus appeals to God's original purpose in creation in Genesis 1:27; 2:24.

19:7. They cite Deuteronomy 24:1, the basic text Jewish interpreters used to discuss grounds for divorce.

19:8. Jewish teachers of the *law recognized a legal category called "concession": something that was permitted only because it was better to regulate sin than to relinquish control over it altogether. Given God's purpose in creation (Gen 2:24), divorce naturally fell into such a category (cf. Mal 2:14-16). (Cf. similarly the law's regulation rather than abolition of polygyny and debt slavery.)

19:9. The exception stated here (the spouse's unfaithfulness) is one that counted as a charge in much ancient law. The school of Shammai (see comment on 19:1-3) did not permit divorce except for the wife's unfaithfulness (whether successful or attempted), but they did not consider remarriage afterward adulterous. Because all ancients recognized that one could not remarry unless one's divorce was valid, so Jesus presses the Shammaite position to its logical conclusion: if one divorces one's spouse without valid grounds (unfaithfulness or analogous sins; cf. 1 Cor 7:10-13), the marriage is not truly dissolved and subsequent marriage is adulterous. This statement (that all subsequent unions are invalid unless the first marriage was dissolved by infidelity) may be hyperbolic rather than literal, but *hyperbole is stated the way it is to make its point forcefully. Divorce must never be taken lightly.

Because men could divorce women unilaterally but women could demand a divorce only under certain very narrow conditions (and then needed the court's help), Jesus' opposition to this sort of divorce was also a defense of married women. Unmarried women had limited access to economic support.

19:10. Jewish men took the right to divorce for granted. Parents arranged marriages; marriages created kin ties and social pressure to stay married, but if the marriage failed, people counted on having a way out. Ancient marriage contracts often included advance arrangements in case a divorce occurred.

19:11-12. Later rabbis recognized different categories of eunuchs—those born without sexual organs (i.e., made eunuchs by God) and those made eunuchs by people, such as served in Eastern courts. But particularly offensive to Jewish sensitivities was making someone a eunuch, a practice that would exclude him from the people of God (Deut 23:1). Jesus uses this graphic language figuratively (cf. Mt 5:29-30) to describe a call to singleness for the *kingdom, although singleness too was generally outside the mainstream of Jewish social life (see comment on 1 Cor 7). Cf. Isaiah 56:4-5.

19:13-15
Blessing the Kingdom's Children

See comment on Mark 10:13-16 for more details; Matthew's form of the story is abbreviated, but abbreviating such accounts was a common practice in ancient writing.

Children were socially powerless and dependent. Some people in the *Old Testament would lay hands on others to bestow a blessing in prayer. Insensitive *disciples trying to keep from the master those seeking his help might remind Jewish hearers of Gehazi, a disciple of Elisha who eventually lost his position (2 Kings 4:27; cf. 5:27).

19:16-22
The Price Was Too High

See Mark 10:17-22.

19:16. Greek traditions also reported aristocratic young men who wanted to study under a famous teacher but were too spoiled to carry out what the teacher demanded.

19:17. Jewish tradition emphasized the goodness of God (e.g., *Philo: "God alone is good") and even used "the Good" as a title for him (as well as for the *law); by emphasizing God's unique goodness, Jesus hopes to confront the man with his own need. "Enter into life": "life" was sometimes used as an abbreviation for "*eternal life"—the life of the world to come.

19:18-19. These commandments include the humanward (vs. Godward) ones among the Ten Commandments (except the humanly untestable prohibition of coveting) and the summary of humanward commandments: Love your neighbor as yourself (Lev 19:18; cf. Mt 22:39).

19:20. With the possible exception of the less specific "Love your neighbor as yourself," most Jewish people could claim to have kept the specific commandments just mentioned. "Young man" probably places him between twenty-four and forty years of age.

19:21. Only a few radical Greek teachers demanded such things of would-be disciples. Jesus' demands are more radical than later Jewish charity laws permitted (lest the benefactor reduce himself to poverty); later regulations limited charity to twenty percent (which was nonetheless considerable on top of tithes and taxes). This was a severe test, not only of whether the disciple would value the teacher above earthly possessions, but even of his claim to love his neighbor as himself.

19:22. The young man responds as most aristocrats would have responded and did respond when confronted with such demands. The *kingdom is not meant to be an extra benefit tagged onto a comfortable life; it must be all-consuming, or it is no longer the kingdom.

19:23-29
A Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Kingdom

See Mark 10:23-31.

19:23-26. Here Jesus clearly uses *hyperbole. His words reflect an ancient Jewish figure of speech for the impossible: a very large animal passing through a needle's eye. On regular journeys at twenty-eight miles per day, a fully loaded camel could carry four hundred pounds in addition to its rider; such a camel would require a gate at least ten feet high and twelve feet wide. (A needle's eye in Jesus' day meant what it means today; the idea that it was simply a name for a small gate in Jerusalem is based on a gate from the medieval period and sheds no light on Jesus' teaching in the first century.)

Mainstream Judaism never denied the rich a place in the *kingdom of God; many of its benefactors and leaders were rich. Jesus allows that the rich may, by God's mercy, enter in, but only by giving their abundance to the destitute.

19:27-29. "Regeneration" was a term used for the future renewal of the world in Greek circles and naturally applied to Jewish expectations of a new world order (such expectations appear in Is 65:17; 66:22; and in the Dead Sea Scrolls). That the twelve tribes would be restored was one of the standard Jewish beliefs about the end times. Judges were those who ruled Israel in the *Old Testament before the institution of Israelite kingship.

19:30–20:16
The Last and the First

The agricultural setting of this *parable agrees with what is known from other ancient Palestinian Jewish sources. Other *rabbis also told parables like this one, although Jesus' point is different from the one preserved in similar rabbinic parables; both, however, typically portray God as a king or landowner.

19:30. Ancient literature often employed a framing device called *inclusio* to bracket off sections of material on a particular topic; 19:30 and 20:16 bracket off this parable, which follows naturally on the message of sacrificing in this age in 19:23-29. Most Jewish people believed that the day of judgment would set all things right. It would reverse the injustices of the present age; most notably, the *Gentiles would be cast down and Israel exalted.

20:1. The agricultural setting of 20:1-15 fits with what we know of much life in Galilee. Although Jesus told parables with

agrarian settings more often than did most other rabbis whose parables are preserved, both could portray God as king or landowner. On "the kingdom is like," see comment on 13:24. Wealthy landowners often had tenants to work their estates, but both they and less wealthy landowners hired extra workers temporarily to gather in the harvest. Work began around sunrise, about 6 a.m., before the day became hot. Some day laborers were also tenant farmers, with small plots of their own land; others were sons of those owning small pieces of land and had not inherited any of their fathers' land; still others had lost their land and traveled from place to place seeking employment.

20:2. A denarius was an average day's wage (though landowners often paid extra to get workers during the harvest). The daylong workers would probably develop a sense of camaraderie, often singing together during reaping.

20:3. Daylight during this season began a little before 6 a.m.; the "third hour" of daylight was complete a little before 9 a.m.. If it was harvest season and these men had any land of their own, they might have spent the morning gathering in their own ripe harvest. Idlers as well as people looking for work would gather in the marketplace.

20:4. These workers would expect less than a full day's wage.

20:5. The "sixth hour" is the period just before noon, and the "ninth hour" shortly before 3 p.m. About the sixth hour was the hottest time of the day, when workers would normally find a place in the shade to rest, eat or even nap for an hour or two; given the urgency of the harvest, they keep working (20:12). The laborers would finish by 6 p.m., so those newly hired would expect to receive considerably less than a full day's wages.

20:6-7. These laborers are hired for only a single hour of work; but the harvest must be gathered in quickly, before the day ends, and the work is not yet done. These verses express the typical urgency surrounding the harvest in ancient times.

20:8. Jewish *law mandated that laborers be paid the same day, because the wages were often little more than sufficient for a day's needs (Deut 24:14-15).

20:9-12. The wealthy throughout the Mediterranean world often bestowed significant gifts on society that were widely praised as beneficent, increasing the public status of the donors. Because status defined roles in ancient society, those who complained about receiving a day's wage for a day's work would be viewed as rude and ungrateful.

20:13-14. Orators could focus on a representative member of the crowd. Hired workers were not landowners' "friends," and certainly not in this case; the respectful title might shame the complainers for their own lack of respect (cf. Mt 22:12; 26:50).

20:15. An "evil eye" (literally; cf. KJV) meant a "stingy eye" in common idiom (cf. Prov 28:22). The landowner had been fair to those who worked all day and generous to those who had not; by charging the complainers with ingratitude (socially equivalent to hubris) he shamed them. Jewish people all affirmed that God, who alone rightfully owned all things, was beneficent whatever he gave; they acknowledged that only his attribute of mercy would enable even Israel to survive the day of judgment.

Jewish teachers employed a similar folk story about the day of judgment, but they used it to make the opposite point. Israel, who had worked hard, would receive high wages; the Gentiles, who had labored little, would receive little (*Sifra Behuqotai* pq. 2.262.1.9). In this context, however, Jesus' point challenges those who have wealth and status in this world, Jewish or Gentile, and promises that in the world to come God will redress those who have been oppressed in this world.

20:17-19
Jesus as the Last

In this context of those with low status being exalted, Jesus gives the extreme example: voluntarily submitting to ridicule and execution as a common criminal at the hands of the Romans, to be vindicated by God in the *resurrection. Jewish people generally expected a victorious leader—not a martyr. Against some who doubt that Jesus could have foreknown his death: even apart from Jesus' knowledge of the future, he provoked the hostility of the ruling authorities, publicly challenging their virtue and honor in 21:12-13.

20:20-28
The Greatest Is the Servant

See comments on Mark 10:35-45.

20:20-21. The indirect intercession of a motherly woman (cf. Mt 15:22) was often more effective than a man's direct petition for himself, in both Jewish and Roman circles (see also 2 Sam 14:2-20; 1 Kings 1:15-21; cf. 2 Sam 20:16-22). Women also could get away with making some requests that men could not. In this case, however, it does not work.

20:22-24. The "cup" represents Jesus' death (Mt 26:27-28, 39); Jesus may borrow the image from the "cup of wrath" in the *Old Testament prophets (see comment on Mk 10:38 for references).

20:25. Like many ancient teachers, Jesus offers both negative (20:25) and positive (20:28) examples. *Gentile ways are as negative an example as possible in Jesus' setting (5:47; 6:7; 18:17). Israelite kings had been bound by stricter moral conventions than neighboring pagan rulers (cf. Jezebel's more ready abuse of power than Ahab's). Jewish people recognized that most pagan rulers of postbiblical times were tyrants as well, including in their own time.

20:26-27. Inverting the role of master and slave was radical anywhere in antiquity; even the few masters who believed that slaves were theoretically equals did not go as far as Jesus goes here. (Even the temporary reversal during the Roman festival of Saturnalia served more to reinforce the traditional pattern than to overthrow it.) Jewish *disciples served their rabbis; in the *Qumran community, those of lesser rank obeyed those of greater rank.

20:28. Here Jesus probably alludes to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, who offered his life on behalf of the many. It is also a standard Jewish "how much more" (*qal vahomer*) argument: if their master served, how much more ought they to do so.

20:29-34
Taking Time for the Blind

20:29-30. Although the road from Jericho to Jerusalem was notorious for robbers (Lk 10:30), it was widely used, and larger companies (such as Jesus') would face no threat. Jericho was one of the wealthiest cities of Judea, but beggars nevertheless remained at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale (if on the scale at all)—"nobodies" who were dependent on the pity of passersby. Judaism did value care for beggars, but had such a high work ethic that only the truly destitute, such as (in that society) the blind, would take this role. "Son of David" indicates that they acknowledge Jesus as *Messiah. "Have mercy on us" could be a common cry for alms, though here they seek more.

20:31. Those believing that their trek to Jerusalem was leading to the establishment of the *kingdom might well feel that Jesus had more important things to do than to be stopped by these beggars, whether they just want alms or are seeking something more.

20:32-34. The beggars want more than alms, and Jesus again demonstrates the difference between his kingdom and the militant kind most people were expecting.

21:1-11
The Meek King

See Mark 11:1-10 for some other details.

21:1. Bethphage was a suburb of Jerusalem at the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem; it lay on the east side of Jerusalem, on the route from Jericho (cf. Mt 20:29).

21:2-3. This borrowing of a donkey may be seen in terms of royal emissaries temporarily impressing (demanding the service of) an animal; Jesus as Lord has the right to whatever his followers claim to own. On the historical level, the donkey's owner might have viewed it as helpful hospitality to visitors to the feast or as the honor of helping on his way a famous *rabbi. Some commentators have also suggested that the owner was away and those who kept the house, hearing that "the master" had need of the donkey, thought they were sending it to its real owner; but they surely would have recognized that the *disciples were not part of the household.

21:4-7. Colts that had not yet been ridden sometimes accompanied their mothers. Following a common Jewish practice of reading the Hebrew text for all one can get from it, Matthew reads Zechariah 9:9 as referring to two animals instead of referring to the same animal in two ways. The text is messianic, as

ancient interpreters generally acknowledged, but applying this part to himself redefines Jesus' messiahship: officials used donkeys for civil, not military, processions (e.g., 1 Kings 1:33). Thus this text is not a "triumphal entry" in the sense of Roman triumphal processions; it is Jerusalem's reception of a meek and peaceful king. With respect to leaders the term translated "meek" or "gentle" involved compassion and mercy as opposed to exploiting one's power.

21:8. Festal pilgrims were often welcomed in this way, though the acclamation of 21:9 suggests that in Jesus' case the welcome was on a larger and more significant scale. Cf. Psalm 118:27 (NIV).

21:9. Except for the acclamation "Son of David!" which indicates a recognition of Jesus' ancestry and a hope that he is the *Messiah, their cry is taken from Psalm 118:25-26 ("Hosanna!" means "O save!"). The Hallel, composed of Psalms 113–118, was sung regularly during Passover season and would be fresh on everyone's mind; later generations applied these psalms to the future redemption for which they hoped. Jesus cites Psalm 118 messianically in Matthew 21:42.

21:10-11. Jesus was better known in Galilee than in Judea; ancient sources often note regional divisions between the two.

21:12-17
Challenging the Temple Aristocracy

Like Jeremiah's smashing the pot in the temple centuries before (Jer 19), Jesus' demonstration there was a prophetic act inviting *repentance and warning of the temple's imminent destruction (see comment on Mt 24:1-2). Jesus' act may have been brief enough to prevent the temple's Levite police (or the Roman garrison, concerned about riot control) from intervening.

21:12. *Old Testament *law required visitors to the feast to purchase their sacrifices in Jerusalem, hence sellers of doves and other sacrificial animals were necessary. Because visitors would come with foreign currencies—even most Galilean towns had their own coinage—moneychangers had also become necessary. Although ancient moneychangers normally managed to turn an honest profit, those in the temple reportedly made very little. The issue appears to be not the commerce per se, and possibly not even whether it involves economic exploitation under the guise of religion, so much as *where* the commerce is occurring. Scholars have proposed several theories on the basis of later evidence, including that the sale of animals had been introduced into the Court of the *Gentiles very recently; but this theory is uncertain. Some other groups (like the *Essenes) believed that the corrupt priestly leadership had morally desecrated the temple.

21:13. The Old Testament temple did not officially restrict the access of women or non-Jews, but by extending Jewish purity laws the architects of Herod's temple had excluded Jewish women from the Court of Israel, placing them on a lower level, and non-Jews outside even the Court of Women. Non-Jews could enter the Jewish part of the temple (including the Court of Women) only on pain of death, yet the noisy crowds around the merchants' tables no doubt consumed a significant part of the large space in the Court of the Gentiles at the crowded festivals. Jesus here cites Isaiah 56:7, which goes on to speak of the temple being for the Gentiles as well, a subtlety some of Matthew's more skillful readers might have caught. Matthew might emphasize especially Jesus' second text, Jeremiah 7:11 ("den of robbers"), which addressed religious leaders of Jeremiah's day who thought their vested interests in the temple would protect them from God's wrath and the temple's destruction. It did not.

21:14. Even hereditary priests who were blind or lame were not permitted in the sanctuary (Lev 21:18); at least some extended this rule in time to exclude all the blind and lame (cf. the Greek version of 2 Sam 5:8; see also the *Dead Sea Scrolls). Second-century rabbis permitted but did not require blind and lame men to attend the feasts like other men. Although those who controlled the temple would not have opposed their presence in the outer court (see, e.g., Acts 3:2), Jesus' emphasis on ministry to them here makes a countercultural statement.

The powerful Sadducean priests who ran the temple were generally not looking for a *Messiah; but had they expected him, they would have expected him either to challenge their power militarily or to seek an alliance with them. From the aristocratic standpoint, seeking

followers among the weak was dishonorable and a foolish way to try to establish a kingdom.

21:15-17. Messianic claims threatened the stability of the temple hierarchy as much as overturning the tables would (cf. 27:11). Most of the Sadducean families were the elite priests who exercised most control over the city and temple; most were not looking for a "Messiah." This Galilean prophet had challenged their honor, and normally they would seek to avenge it by the challenger's public discipline—or at this level of public insult, his death. (A generation later another prophet merely announced judgment against the temple; the leading priests handed him over to the governor, who had him flogged until, *Josephus reports, his bones showed.)

Because the *high priests probably spoke Greek as their first language (as suggested by their tomb inscriptions), Jesus quotes to them from the Greek translation of Psalm 8:2, which reads "praise," rather than the Hebrew, which has "strength" (slightly less appropriate here). Jesus may argue *qal vahomer* ("how much more"): if God can bring strength or praise from the mouths of infants, how much more can he confound the powerful by the mouths of these children (cf. Mt 11:25; 18:3; 19:14)?

21:18-22
The Power of Faith

21:18. Jerusalem was full of visitors during Passover season—perhaps as many as five hundred thousand (Josephus even estimated more than five times that figure)—and many of the visitors consequently had to lodge in the countryside. "Morning" may mean as early as 6 a.m.

21:19-20. By this time of year fig trees near the Mount of Olives would have leaves, but only green fruit with an unpleasant taste appeared this early; edible figs appeared around early June. Often the green fruit would fall off, so that only leaves remained.

The sequence of events here differs from Mark (cf. Mk 11:12-14, 20-26); ancient biography was not required to be chronological, and Matthew's changes in Mark's sequence would have been considered negligible. For further details, compare comment on the Markan passage.

21:21-22. "Removing mountains" was a figure of speech for doing what was virtually impossible. From where Jesus and his disciples are standing, the Mount of Olives (cf. Zech 14:4, 10) and (from its slopes) perhaps the Dead Sea would be visible; thus Jesus' illustration would have been vivid to his disciples. The Gospels' own audiences might not know that, but Jesus, his disciples and the Gospel audiences all could have thought of Zechariah 4:6-9, where the *Spirit of God would remove all obstacles to God's purposes; the obstacles appear as a mountain.

21:23-32
The Right Authority

The conflicts with the authorities in the next several chapters reflect standard methods of debate in antiquity: questions and answers, witty responses, and attempts to trap opponents in their own words. The temple courts, the city's most public venue, were a popular place for teaching and discussion. See comment on Mark 11:27-33 for more details.

21:23. Teachers in Jerusalem often lectured in the temple courts. Those who were publicly dishonored would seek to recoup their honor by publicly challenging their opponent. The next few chapters include many examples of the format of ancient public debate: questions, witty retorts and attempts to use a speaker's words against him.

21:24. Jesus replies to the authorities' question with a counterquestion, which was common in Jewish debate.

21:25-27. Jesus argues that his authority and John's derive from the same source—"heaven" (one Jewish way of saying, "from God"). This response follows the Jewish legal principle that a commissioned messenger acts on the full authority of the one who sent him. The rest of the interaction follows the standard debate procedure of the period.

The chief priests, mostly *Sadducees, were elite politicians—less popular than the politically powerless *Pharisees—who had to balance the interests of both their people and the Roman authorities. They belonged to a hereditary elite whose power was backed by Rome; such groups usually despised popular teachers like Jesus as demagogues. At the same time, the aristocratic priests would also keep popular opinion in mind when making deci-

sions that might incur the displeasure of the people (21:26).

21:28-30. That a father should have asked his son to go work in the vineyard was natural. That the son should have refused to go would have offended Jewish moral sensibilities: this was an openly disobedient son, and disobedience was a punishable offense. But failing to go after promising to go was worse than not having promised; this son violated his word to his own father. The son who refused to go but repented acted preferably (cf. Ezek 18:21-24).

21:31-32. The pious regarded *tax gatherers and prostitutes as outside practicing Judaism. Jesus could not have chosen a much more offensive comparison. The rhetorical question or invitation to reconsider at the end of the *parable was a long-standing technique for challenging hearers (e.g., Is 5:4; cf. 2 Sam 12:1-7). On tax gatherers, see comment on 9:9; Jewish religion despised prostitution but it did exist in Judea. "Way of righteousness" means a righteous lifestyle (Prov 8:20; 12:28; 16:31), which was both John's practice and his message.

21:33-46
The Evil Tenants and the Benevolent Landowner

Much of the rural Roman Empire, including parts of rural Galilee, was controlled by wealthy landowners, whose income from the land allowed them lives of complete leisure. Their estates were generally worked by tenant farmers, who were usually free peasants (as in Egypt), but sometimes by slaves (as in much of Italy). Although landowners gained great honor among the poor if they were benevolent, such landowners normally had little incentive to do so. They generally lived far away, often in cities, and had little personal contact with their workers. But the landowner in this *parable is so benevolent that aristocrats would have considered him naive.

Jesus addresses those who fancy themselves rulers of Israel (21:23), reminding them that they are merely custodians appointed by God (like the shepherds of Jer 23 and Ezek 34) over his vineyard.

21:33. Jesus' description follows the normal way to prepare a vineyard, but he clearly alludes to Isaiah 5:1-2, where Israel is the vineyard.

21:34. Payments were rendered at harvest time, either by percentage (usually at least twenty-five percent) or a predetermined amount; this would have been specified in the initial contract. Ancient business documents often called profit "fruit," but here a proportion of the harvest seems likely to be meant. (Although probably not relevant to the point of the story, it might take a vineyard four years after planting to become profitable for the planter.)

21:35-37. Landowners in the ancient Mediterranean world always had power, socially and legally, to enforce their will on the tenants; a few reportedly even had squads of hired assassins to deal with troublesome tenants. Here the tenants act as if *they* are the ones with power, and they exploit it mercilessly (as opposed to the ideal of a *benevolent* landowner). Contrary to what some modern commentators have supposed, ancient sources show that their behavior would have horrified ancient hearers. This attitude fits the Jewish tradition that Israel martyred many of the prophets God sent. Peasants tended to praise benevolent landowners, but no ancient landowners would have patiently appealed to their sense of honor this long; people would have regarded such benevolence as folly.

21:38-39. The tenants presume too much about the inheritance. Although they could have seized it under certain legal conditions, the owner could also stipulate—and after their misdeeds certainly would—that someone else inherit the vineyard; or representatives of the emperor could have seized it. The story paints the tenants as incomparably wicked and stupid; yet the tenants are a transparent metaphor for the religious leaders who serve their own interests rather than yielding to God's appointed heir—as Jesus' hearers know (21:45).

21:40-41. Ancient hearers would wonder why the landowner had not intervened earlier to throw out the tenants. Landowners could replace tenants. Asking questions was a standard rabbinic way of involving hearers in the story or teaching; getting hearers of *parables to pronounce judgment on themselves was familiar from the biblical prophets (2 Sam 12:5-7; 14:8-17; 1 Kings 20:40-42).

21:42. Jewish parables often included a Scripture passage that the parable illustrated. This text is from Psalm 118:22-23, part of the

Hallel, like 118:25-26 cited in Matthew 21:9. The building referred to seems to be the temple (see Ps 118:18-21, 25-27); as the cornerstone of a new temple, Jesus poses a threat to the builders of the old one (Jerusalem's aristocracy). (Interpreters disagree as to whether the "cornerstone" refers to the stone located in the corner of the foundation or to the capstone of an arch, but this point is not crucial to the interpretation of the passage.)

21:43. Early Jewish parables especially often focused on the relationship between God and Israel. Israel was a "holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6), but the threat of transferring their status to others had been made before (Ex 32:10; Num 14:12). God rejected the builders' rejection (Mt 21:42), and he could replace them (cf. 3:10). "Producing" fruit (cf. 3:8) here means turning over the fruit to the landowner (God), in contrast to the tenants in the parable (21:33-42).

21:44. Assuming that this verse is original in Matthew (as in Lk 20:18), "falling on" the cornerstone reflects Isaiah 8:14-15 (probably interpreted in conjunction with Is 28:16, which also mentions a cornerstone); the stone falling on the offender alludes to Daniel 2:34, 44, where God's *kingdom, portrayed as a rock, crushes its earthly challengers. Jewish interpreters often explained texts by citing other texts employing the same term or idea (here, God's powerful stone); Jesus here expounds a text (Mt 21:42) by citing others sharing the same concept of the divine stone. A later rabbi warned, "If a pot falls on a rock, woe to the pot; if a rock falls on the pot, woe to the pot—either way, woe to the pot!"

21:45-46. The priestly leaders were shrewd politicians who would be careful not to act *publicly* against the people's wishes; the Pharisees were popular with the people but not popular enough to directly challenge Jesus' own popularity here. The priestly aristocracy and the Pharisees acted in concert only when necessary to preserve their people against dangerous revolutionary sentiments; challenging a common adversary like a messianic claimant would fit this category.

22:1-14
Honor the King's Son—or Die

22:1-2. On "the kingdom is like," see comment on 13:24. In *parables *rabbis often compared God to a king, whose son represented Israel (though not necessarily here); the setting was also sometimes a wedding feast for the son. Wedding feasts were frequently large gatherings; a very wealthy person could invite an entire city to one. Coming to a wedding feast required some commitment of valuable time on the part of guests (Jewish hearers could assume a feast lasting seven days, and a king might expect his guests, unlike those in lesser circumstances, to remain throughout the feast); this commitment would be difficult for peasants working the land. But the honor of being invited by a king—and the terror of displeasing him—would have motivated intelligent invitees to attend; refusal constituted an insult. The invited guests may have been aristocratic landowners anyway (22:5), who had the leisure for such activities. Many Jewish people expected a "messianic banquet" in the time of the *kingdom (cf. Is 25:6).

22:3. *Papyri attest the custom of a preliminary invitation and response. These guests had apparently already confirmed plans to attend (hence "those who had been invited") but now refused. To refuse the first invitation was rude and offensive; to refuse in concert after having agreed to come would be no accident, but a deliberately treasonous insult.

22:4. Astonishingly, the generous king responds with a further invitation rather than punishment. Because those preparing the food could not calculate the exact time it would be ready, guests had been told only when it was ready. But now it was ready, and if the meat were not consumed quickly, it would spoil.

22:5. See comment on 22:3.

22:6. This behavior would obviously have been illegal even had the servants not belonged to the king; but servants of a king had higher status than most free persons, and as a king's messengers they represented his person. Ancient peoples universally despised the mistreatment of heralds, or emissaries. In addition, the mistreatment of royal representatives was outright treason, constituting a declaration of revolt. Yet this was the treatment God's servant-messengers, the prophets, were known to have received.

22:7. Kings did not always live in the same place as most of their subjects (e.g., Rome's emperor vs. Jerusalem); the burning of the city

probably alludes specifically to the destruction of Jerusalem, which was burned in A.D. 70 (see 24:15). Burning a city was the final step in its complete destruction. That the king would delay the feast to accomplish this (despite the risk of the meat spoiling) bursts the bounds of realism to reinforce a point.

22:8-10. Preparations for the wedding of a king's son would be massive, and it would dishonor the son not to have guests present. Thus, as a last resort, the king redefines "worthy" guests and invites commoners. The lower a person's status, the more punctual they might be expected to be!

22:11. Even commoners knew better than to enter the king's presence without appropriate (at least clean) attire; this would be a sign of insolent disrespect to the host (who at this point in the story is in no mood for further disrespect!). Even peasants often had a set of good clothes for special occasions, besides their work clothes (the latter would be soiled and not easily cleaned in time). (Some scholars also suggest that special attire was provided at the door.) Thus even some of those who showed up for the feast (perhaps representing Jesus' purported followers, like Judas) dishonored him.

Scholars have suggested a parallel with a later Jewish story in which a king invited guests to a feast without advance notice of the date. In this story, only the diligent subjects were dressed and ready at the door when the date came; the others had to wait outside in shame.

22:12-13. Again Jesus bursts the bounds of realism to drive home his point. Porters would screen invitees at the door; on outer darkness and gnashing teeth, see comment on 8:12.

22:14. The last part of the story illustrates the point that many are invited ("called") to a feast (22:3, 8), but few are in the end among the chosen.

22:15-22
Caesar and God

Here Jesus' opponents seek to force him to choose between revolution—which would allow them to charge him before the Romans—and accommodation with the Romans—which they suppose he opposes (because he opposed their own leadership in the temple). The success of a protagonist's wisdom under "testing" with difficult questions was an ancient theme (cf. 1 Kings 10:1); Jesus' superior wisdom is demonstrated in Matthew 22:15-46.

22:15-16. *Pharisees tended to be nationalistic, whereas Herodians were clients of Herod, the Roman vassal; they worked together only in extraordinary situations. Pharisees would be concerned about Jewish legal requirements to have witnesses for a charge but would be ready to investigate charges concerning Jesus' disloyalty to the *law. The Herodians, who apparently wished for a restoration of Herodian rule in Judea (which *Pilate currently governed), were naturally disturbed by messianic figures who might cause Rome to tighten its direct control over the land.

22:17. The Pharisees pit the obligations of peace with Rome against the nationalistic, messianic fervor that they assume Jesus promotes; a disastrous tax revolt two decades earlier had shown where such fervor could lead. If he publicly takes the view characterized by those later called *Zealots (no king but God), the Herodians can have him arrested; if he rejects that view (which he does), he may compromise his following.

22:18-20. In contrast to King Agrippa later, at this time both Herod Antipas and Judea mostly circulated copper Roman coins without the deified emperor's image, which was offensive to Jewish sensitivity (though after A.D. 6 they were nonetheless *Roman* coins). The strictest Jews avoided images altogether. But foreign coins, which bore the emperor's image and mention of his divine status, were in common circulation in Palestine, where neither gold nor silver coins were permitted to be struck. The silver denarius, probably minted in Lyon, was required to pay taxes in Palestine as elsewhere in the empire, and Jewish people had to use it whether they liked it or not. In this period the side with the emperor's image read, "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus."

Revolutionaries in A.D. 6 had violently protested the tax involving such coins and incurred terrible Roman retaliation that destroyed Galilee's largest city (walking distance from Nazareth). If Jesus' questioners here are concerned about paying Roman taxes, they obviously ought not to be carrying this coin.

22:21-22. Some scholars think that Jesus

alluded to people made in God's image (Gen 1:26-27), hence says to give Caesar the less important matter of money, but to give one's life to God. Repartee that put one's interrogators in a bad light was characteristic of popular teachers in both Jewish and Greek traditions, and Jesus proves himself among the most effective of ancient teachers. In a society that emphasized honor and shame, Jesus' witty responses put them to shame.

22:23-33
The God of the Living

22:23. In ancient Judaism the *Sadducees were especially notorious for not believing in *resurrection; later *rabbis who considered themselves successors of the Pharisees often classified Sadducees as heretics for this view (although the Sadducees, who vanished in the years after A.D. 70, were probably no longer around to respond).

22:24. The Sadducees' question concerns the law of levirate marriage, a custom practiced in many cultures both in antiquity and today (see Deut 25:5). It provides economic and social protection to widows in certain kinds of family-oriented societies where women cannot earn adequate wages. Students of Jewish *law were still expounding this *Old Testament principle in Jesus' day and afterward, though rabbinic rules differed from the Old Testament in some respects (e.g., the brother married the widow and the children she bore him were now his own).

22:25-27. The Sadducees borrow the story line from the Jewish book of Tobit, where righteous Sarah's first seven husbands died, slain by the jealous *demon Asmodeus. Some second-century rabbis proposed that a two- or three-time widow should not marry again, lest she bring harm on her next husband too (cf. Gen 38:11).

22:28. In defining Jewish law, teachers often debated hypothetical situations. But later *rabbinic literature is also full of examples of mocking questions posed by pagans, apostates or those they considered heretics, like the Sadducees.

22:29-30. Most Jewish people did not believe that angels needed to procreate (since they did not die, and some believed that God also regularly created new angels), or (normally) to eat or drink. Sadducees reportedly denied the developed angelology of some of their contemporaries.

"Marry" refers to the groom, whereas "be given in marriage" refers to the bride betrothed by her father.

22:31. Jewish teachers sometimes contested their opponents' points by appealing to Scripture with phrases like, "Go and read." The accusation implied in "Have you never read?" was even harsher (22:31; cf. 12:3; 19:4; 21:16, 42).

22:32-33. Arguing against their Sadducean opponents, the Pharisees commonly tried to prove the resurrection from the law of Moses (one rabbi even suggested that the resurrection was taught in every passage in the law; cf. also *4 Maccabees 7:18-19; 16:25; 18:19). Jesus here does the same. He argues that God would not claim to be the God of those who no longer exist; indeed, his faithfulness to his covenant demands that if he is their God after death, death is not the final word for them. Some other ancient Jewish writers used similar arguments to show that the patriarchs remain alive. One of the most common Jewish prayers of the period recites God's faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a living reality for their own time.

22:34-40
The Greatest Commandments

Jewish teachers often debated which commandments were the greatest or could summarize much of the *law; among options were honoring parents or loving neighbors as oneself. Following Jewish interpretive technique, Jesus links the two commandments (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18) by a shared key expression in Hebrew: "And you shall love" (*ve'ahavta*). Jewish ethics repeatedly stressed love of God and of others.

22:34-38. This commandment was so important to Judaism that it was regularly recited. Deuteronomy 6:5 demanded loving God with all one's "heart, soul and might"; "might" here becomes "mind" (which was implicit in the Hebrew understanding of "heart"), but the image is still "with one's whole person." (*New Testament writers apparently revocalized the Hebrew term for "might" as "mind," a Hebrew term that sounded similar; such revocalization was a common Jewish interpretive practice.)

22:38. Koine Greek sometimes used "great" (NASB) to mean (NRSV) "greatest."

22:39. Jewish tradition sometimes joined the second commandment with the first.

22:40. Some other teachers also used these commandments as summaries of the law, which is how they also appear in their contexts in the *Old Testament.

22:41-46
David's Lord

By definition, the Christ, or anointed one, was the royal descendant of David (Is 9:7; 11:1; Ps 2; 89; 132). Yet people typically thought of a son as a subordinate, a perspective inappropriate concerning Jesus. The one who would reign in God's *kingdom was David's "Lord," not merely his descendant; he would thus be greater than the resurrected David.

Jewish people agreed that the *Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures (22:43). When Jewish teachers challenged their hearers to resolve apparent discrepancies in Scripture, they assumed that both texts were true (in this case, Jesus knows that he is both David's son and David's Lord; Mt 1:1) and were simply asking how to harmonize them. Jesus' opponents apparently have no answer to his question, perhaps because Jewish interpreters did not apply Psalm 110:1 to the *Messiah.

Those silenced by a speaker's wisdom had been publicly shamed and would be careful before engaging in such a public battle of wits with the speaker again. When contemporary literature reports hearers being overawed by a wise speaker's (usually the protagonist's) wisdom, the readers are meant to respect the speaker's wisdom too (e.g., 1 Esdras 4:41-42).

23:1-12
Serve More Humbly Than Pharisees

The other Gospels also record Jesus' disputes with *scribes and *Pharisees (Mk 12:38-40; Lk 11:39-52), but many scholars believe that Matthew focuses greater attention on these disputes than do Mark and Luke because scribes and Pharisees constituted the chief Jewish opposition his readers faced in Syria-Palestine (see the introduction to Matthew). That is, on this view, Matthew sometimes focuses on parts of Jesus' life and teachings most relevant to Matthew's audience, just as we sometimes do for our hearers today. Scribes and Pharisees were originally distinct though overlapping groups (Lk 11:39-52), but those who threatened Matthew's readers were the joint successors of both these groups. Matthew also intends this warning to apply against these opponents' counterparts in the *church (Mt 24:45-51).

23:1-2. Some scholars have pointed to a prominent seat in many *synagogues as a "seat of Moses" (cf. 23:6), but Jesus presumably means this expression figuratively. The Pharisaic scribes who articulated the *law believed their traditions were rooted in Moses' own teaching and fancied themselves Moses' successors for their own generation.

23:3. Pharisaic teachers normally taught that knowing Scripture took precedence over obeying it, because knowing it was the prerequisite for obeying it; but they themselves would have agreed that one must obey it and not just learn it.

23:4-5. "Phylacteries" are *tefillin,* small boxes affixed by a leather strap to one's head and left hand during morning and evening prayers; Scripture passages were inserted in these boxes (the practice is based on an overly literal reading of Deut 6:8). These passages were then recited as part of the prayers; rules concerning this later became stricter under the *rabbis. For the tassels, see comment on 9:20 and 14:36.

23:6. Everywhere in Mediterranean antiquity, seating was a matter of honor or dishonor; in Jewish circles, seating was according to rank in the *Qumran assemblies, traditions about the Sanhedrin and later rabbinic schools. This practice also obtained at banquets; those assigned seats in lower-status places frequently complained, as ancient literature amply attests. The most prominent seats in the synagogue perhaps varied in this period before synagogue architecture was standardized; one first-century synagogue seems to suggest a lack of seating rank. Probably in most synagogues the most honored seats were on the bema, the platform for the reading of the Law; elders and people of status may have often been seated in benches along the walls. At least some synagogues had other benches as well; in some

synagogues, however, many hearers may have remained on mats on the floor.

23:7. Greetings were an essential courtesy in Greek and Jewish cultures. Greetings ("Peace be with you") were so important socially that specific rules developed how to greet whom when; for example, the person of lower status coming upon a person of higher status should be first to offer a greeting. Not to hail a person superior in understanding the *law was a grievous insult. Marketplaces were the most crowded places in town.

23:8. "Rabbi" means "my master" and came to be commonly applied to teachers as a title of respect (something like "Reverend" or "Father" today); they were especially "masters" of their pupils. They were venerated in a variety of ways.

23:9-11. People in antiquity often addressed elders or community leaders as "fathers"; for this reason, some also called their teachers (cf. 23:8) "Abba," or "Papa," and teachers sometimes addressed their *disciples as their children. Society emphasized respect for honor and rank, often hereditary, and rabbis' authority and honor placed them on a higher level than the disciples. Jesus says that only God is to receive such superior respect; all other Christians are peers.

23:12. The principle stated here occurs in Proverbs 25:6-7 with reference to seating at banquets, and elsewhere the principle refers to the future time when God equalizes everyone (Is 2:11-12; 5:15; cf. Ezek 17:24; 21:26).

23:13-28
Woes to the Hypocrites

Like beatitudes (see Mt 5:3-12), woes were an *Old Testament form of prayer. The prophets commonly employed them to pronounce judgment, and they are akin to "alases" or, perhaps here, curses ("Cursed be . . . " in contrast to the blessing formula, "Blessed be . . . "; cf. Deut 27–28).

Pharisees were not all of one kind, and the later rabbis, who generally considered themselves spiritual heirs of the Pharisees, report criticisms of several sorts of Pharisees whose hearts were not right (e.g., "the bruised Pharisee," who kept bumping into things because his eyes were closed to avoid seeing a woman). These reports emphasize that motives are critical; the best motive is fear of the Lord, or (in the more refined version) love of God. *Rabbinic literature regularly condemns hypocrisy and demands proper motives. Jesus' opponents would have agreed with most of his ethics, and perhaps protested that they were not really violating them.

Hypocrites originally meant play-actors but by this time the term was also used pejoratively for two-faced people, whose behavior either differed from their belief or varied when they were with different people.

23:13. The image of power to shut someone out is the image of the doorkeeper with the keys to the house; see comment on 16:19.

23:14. This verse is not in all Greek manuscripts of Matthew; for background on its content, see comment on Mark 12:40.

23:15. Pharisees did not have missionaries as such, but Jewish people outside Palestine were always eager to make converts among the *Gentiles, and the wing of Pharisaism most influenced by *Hillel was said to be especially open to converting non-Jews to Judaism. Judaism continued to make many converts for centuries, until it was finally stifled by the legislation of Roman Christendom, with which it was in competition (although the Romans had always resented and tried to limit Jewish proselytism, including in pre-Christian times).

"Child of hell" means someone destined to go there. The problem here is not making converts (28:19) but teaching them wrongly.

23:16-22. Jews were no longer allowed to pronounce the sacred name of God in this period. By swearing lesser oaths, some people hoped to avoid the consequences of swearing by God's name if they could not keep their vow or if their oath turned out to be mistaken. As people swore or vowed by things related to God instead of by God himself, more and more things became substitutes for the divine name and thus became roundabout ways of seeming to swear by God while hoping to buffer the consequences. See comment on 5:33-37.

23:23. The principle that virtues like justice, mercy and faith are most important is familiar from Scripture (Deut 10:12-13; Mic 6:8), and the rabbis themselves sometimes summarized the law in terms of general principles like love. Most Pharisees and other Jewish interpreters

like Philo agreed that there were heavier and lighter parts of the law. They would have responded to Jesus that they attended to minutiae only because even the smallest detail of the law was important to the pious; they taught that one should devote as much attention to the little details as to the principles. But Jesus was not against the law (see Mt 5:19); his point is that they should have learned justice, mercy and covenant faithfulness first (9:13; 12:7).

Tithes were especially used to support the priests and Levites (and for a celebration shared by the entire community every third year). "Dill" and Luke's "rue" (Lk 11:42) are similar words in *Aramaic, possibly reflecting an original Aramaic source here. The law did not explicitly require tithing these dried green plants. Different groups of Pharisees debated among themselves whether to tithe cummin.

23:24. The *hyperbole here is humorous and would certainly catch ancient hearers' attention. Wanting to avoid the impurity caused by a dead insect in their drink, Pharisees would strain out any insect larger than a lentil before it could die in order to preserve the fluid (cf. Lev 11:32, 34). Pharisees considered gnats, which were smaller than lentils, exempt from this impurity, but the scrupulous Pharisee of Jesus' hyperbole would not have taken any chances. Yet Jesus charges hyperbolically that they would leave a camel (the largest animal in Palestine and also ritually unclean, Lev 11:4) in the cup and gulp it down. Their attention to the law's details was fine, but they had missed the main point (Mt 23:23). (The similarity between the Aramaic terms for camel [*gamla*] and gnat [*kamla*] may have also caught their attention.)

23:25-26. Ritual purity was important to the Pharisees, so they washed their vessels as well as themselves in ritual baths. The school of *Shammai—the Pharisaic majority in this period—said that the outside of a cup could be clean even if the inside were not; the minority view of Hillel's followers was that the inside of the cup must be cleansed first. Jesus sides with the school of Hillel on this point, but does this so that he can make a figurative statement about the inside of the heart.

23:27-28. Nothing spread ritual impurity as severely as a corpse (it made anyone who touched it unclean for a week—Num 19:11); Pharisees believed that one contracted impurity if even one's shadow touched a corpse or grave. Inconspicuous tombs (or limestone ossuaries) would be whitewashed each spring before Passover to warn passersby to avoid them and so avoid impurity; the Pharisees either lacked this telltale warning (Lk 11:44) or pretended that it was a mark of distinction rather than evidence of impurity. Matthew emphasizes instead whitewash's function as a beautifying agent employed to conceal corruption. "Whitewash" probably alludes to Ezekiel 13:10-12 and 22:28; it may have covered over a wall's weakness but would not stop its collapse.

23:29-39
Killing the Prophets

This is the final woe (23:29).

23:29-30. Ancient Judaism emphasized more often than the *Old Testament had that Israel had martyred its prophets (e.g., Jer 26:20-23; cf. 2 Chron 36:15-16). The Jewish community in this period built tombs as monuments for the prophets and righteous (including some who were not martyred, like David or Huldah).

23:31. Jesus' point here is, "Like father, like son"; corporate sin and guilt continued among the descendants of the wicked unless they repented (Ex 20:5; Deut 23:2-6; 1 Sam 15:2-3; Is 1:4; etc.).

23:32. This is an ironic challenge, typical of the prophets (Is 6:9; Jer 44:25; Amos 4:4-5): Go ahead and sin if you must, but God will judge you for it (Eccles 11:9)!

23:33. Being called vipers, or a kind of venomous snake, was bad enough (Ps 58:4; 140:3; cf. Gen 3). But the offspring of a viper was reputed to eat its way out of its pregnant mother's belly, so calling someone the offspring of vipers could imply that one was guilty of the universally horrifying crime of matricide. In other words, this was worse than just calling someone a viper!

23:34. Prophets were sent by God according to the Old Testament, or by Wisdom (cf. Lk 11:49) in some Jewish traditions; here they are sent by Jesus.

Some Jews allowed that *prophecy still happened, many doubted that prophets in the

Old Testament sense remained active (a notion apparently challenged here). Here Jesus mentions several clerical categories: prophets, wise men (wisdom teachers who circulated proverbs, etc.) and scribes to explain Scriptures (cf. 13:52). Crucifixion was the severest Roman punishment, reserved for the lowest classes of non-Romans; any Jew who delivered another Jew over to such a punishment was naturally despised by his people. Synagogue scourgings were a form of discipline inflicted on errant members of the Jewish community (see comment on 10:17); on "city to city," see comment on 10:23.

23:35. Bloodguilt was a serious matter, affecting the whole community and not just the individuals directly responsible (Deut 21:1-9). God himself would avenge it (Deut 32:43; Ps 79:10).

Insofar as one can speak of the sequence of the Hebrew Bible at all (it was then on separate scrolls), it was traditionally arranged in a different sequence than our modern English versions of the Old Testament. In it Zechariah is the last martyr (2 Chron 24:20-22), and Abel is the first, as in our Bibles (Gen 4:8). Jewish tradition expanded the accounts of both martyrdoms, declaring that after Zechariah's death a fountain of blood appeared in the temple that not even the slaughter of thousands of priests could appease. Abel's blood cried out for vengeance (Gen 4:10), and in this tradition Zechariah's did the same (biblically, he explicitly prayed for judgment; 2 Chron 24:22). From the first martyr to the last, Jesus says, their judgment is saved up for the particularly wicked generation.The Zechariah murdered in the temple was son of Jehoiada the priest (2 Chron 24:22), not Zechariah son of Berechiah (Zech 1:1), who lived much later in Israel's history. But Matthew apparently uses the Jewish interpretive technique of combining key words to coalesce two Zechariahs, referring to one and alluding to the other, as he did with Amon/Amos and Asa/Asaph in his genealogy in chapter 1. (The suggestion of some scholars that "Zechariah" also alludes to a prophet martyred in A.D. 67 is unlikely.)

23:36. "This generation" occurs also in Matthew 11:16; 13:39, 45; and 16:4; see comment on 24:34. This is the generation that would see the destruction of the temple. For the image of generations of guilt climaxing in the guiltiest generation on whom the whole judgment is poured out, see Jeremiah 16:10-13.

23:37. Jewish tradition claimed that Jewish people were under God's wings (cf. **1 Enoch* 39:7; **2 Baruch* 41:4; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 296.3.1; 306.4.1; 314.1.1-6), and when a Jewish person converted a *Gentile, he or she brought that Gentile "under the wings of God's presence" (*Sifre Numbers* 80.1.1). The Old Testament also portrays God as an eagle hovering over its offspring (Deut 32:11; cf. Ex 19:4), protecting Israel under his wings (Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4) and terrifying Israel's foes in the same way (Jer 49:22). This is one Old Testament image of God's love for his people; here Jesus fills this divine role.

Prophets sometimes addressed Jerusalem directly (Jer 13:27), and repetition of a name in direct address is common in Jewish texts. On "killing the prophets," see comment on 23:29-30.

23:38. The "house" could mean Israel (Jer 12:7), but in this context almost certainly means the temple (e.g., Judith 9:13), which would also be left "desolate" (Mt 24:15) in A.D. 70. In the Old Testament, the temple was called God's house; perhaps it is called "*your* house" here to declare that God's presence has exited it, as in Ezekiel 10–11.

23:39. On the significance of this citation, see comment on 21:9. The Old Testament prophets and subsequent Jewish tradition suggested that the redemption would not come until after Israel's widespread *repentance (cf. Is 30:19; Jer 31:18-19; Hos 14:1-7).

24:1-3
Introduction to the Judgment Discourse

Chapter 23 began Jesus' warning of God's judgment against certain elements of the religious establishment; this chapter extends that judgment to the temple itself. After it was destroyed in A.D. 70, many of the Jewish people saw God's hand of judgment in the destruction.

24:1. Although Greeks counted Ephesus's Artemis temple as one of the seven wonders of the world, Jerusalem's temple was actually far larger and more magnificent. The Jerusalem temple was one of the most splendid structures of all antiquity and seemed strong and invincible (cf., e.g., **Letter of Aristeas* 100-101).

It was the central symbol of Judaism and was renowned for its beauty. See further comment on Mark 13:1.

24:2. Some Greek philosophers were unimpressed with magnificent structures, but Jesus' response goes far beyond this attitude—he speaks of judgment. Some other Jewish groups (including the *Qumran sect) also expected the temple to be judged; but most Jews, regardless of their other differences, found in the temple a symbol of their Jewish unity and would have been appalled to think that God would allow it to be destroyed (as in Jer 7:4-15). Some stones were left on others (e.g., part of one wall still stands), but this fact does not weaken the force of the *hyperbole: the temple was almost entirely demolished in A.D. 70.

24:3. *Old Testament prophets often grouped events together by their topic rather than their chronology, and in this discourse Jesus does the same. He addresses what in Matthew are grammatically two separate questions: the time of the temple's destruction and the time of the end. The *disciples may have viewed these questions as integrally related, but Jesus will distinguish them: when will the temple be destroyed (within a generation)? What will be the sign of his coming (at an hour known to no one)?

24:4-14
Coming Events

Preliminary signs indicating the nearness of the end appear in many Jewish *apocalyptic writings (e.g., **2 Baruch* 70:7), but much material characteristic of such texts (the final war, Rome's destruction, mutant babies, etc.) is missing here. Most of the preliminary signs that other apocalyptic thinkers expected for the end are explicitly *not* indicators of the end here (Mt 24:6-8).

24:4-5. Many false messianic figures arose in the first century (and subsequently); they often attracted large and devoted followings. Although *Josephus, writing for *Gentile readers, describes them as "false prophets" rather than as messiahs, their political aspirations are usually apparent in his descriptions.

24:6-8. These troubles were associated with the sufferings many Jews thought would immediately precede the end (e.g., **4 Ezra* 9:3; 13:31-32; *2 Baruch* 27:7; 70:3; **Sibylline Oracles* 2:22-24; 3:660-61). Some compared these troubles to "birth pangs," or the "birth pangs of the *Messiah" or of the messianic era (e.g., in the *Qumran *Hymns;* cf. Is 13:8; Hos 13:13). For Jesus, they are only the "*beginning* of birth pangs" and characterize life as normal in this age. He describes some of them in Old Testament language (2 Chron 15:6; Is 19:2; Jer 51:46).

24:9-14. Universal persecution, apostasy and worldwide missions revival mark the final era. These events began to characterize Jesus' movement in the first century, although not yet on a worldwide scale.

Under pressure, many converts to Judaism reverted to paganism, and Jewish texts warn of many Jewish people turning from God in the end time as they had just before the rise of the *Maccabees in the second century B.C. Apostasy and especially handing over friends to persecutors were considered horrible crimes.

Thus Jewish readers would have readily understood Jesus' warning about persecution and apostasy here; his teaching concerning the spread of the good news of the *kingdom among all nations, however, runs counter to prevailing Jewish teaching. Although apocalyptic writers expected persecution by the nations (cf. Dan 7:21, 25), they did not anticipate a widespread conversion of Gentiles before the end. (Some did envision the subjugation and/or conversion of nations during the end; others envisioned their destruction.)

24:15-22
The Events of 66–70

One prerequisite for Christ's return was the series of events fulfilled in A.D. 66–70, events accurately predicted by Jesus.

24:15. The "abomination that brings about desolation" in Daniel 9:27 occurs after the cutting off of the Messiah (a passage subject to various interpretations); Daniel 11:31 sounds as if it should have occurred in the second century B.C., and 12:11 at the time of the end, so some interpreters have felt that the *prophecy was accomplished in stages. Some interpreters believe that parts of Daniel's prophecy remain to be fulfilled; others believe that all of it was fulfilled in the first century.

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus felt that Daniel was fulfilled when revolution-

aries slaughtered the priests in the temple in A.D. 66, committing a sacrilege for which God brought about the desolation of the temple (human bloodshed in the temple desecrated it; cf. comment on 23:35). This sacrilege would have been the signal for Christians to flee Jerusalem (24:16); early Christian historians tell us that Christian prophets warned the Jewish Christians to flee Jerusalem at this time.

Three and a half years later, the temple was left "desolate" in 70, when the Romans destroyed it with fire and then erected their own standards on the site. As Jewish people knew (it is lamented in the *Dead Sea Scrolls), these standards bore the insignia of the Roman emperor, who was worshiped as divine in the Eastern Mediterranean; they would thus have sealed the site's desecration. Jerusalem's citizens had felt that even bringing these standards into Jerusalem temporarily (as *Pilate had done roughly three and one-half years before Jesus uttered this warning) defiled the holy city. On several occasions the Jerusalemites had shown that they preferred death to their temple's defilement.

24:16. The mountains were the easiest place in Judea to hide; armies had often used them for waging guerrilla warfare (cf., e.g., 1 Sam 23:26; 1 Maccabees 2:28). Early Christian tradition indicates that the Jerusalem Christians fled to Pella at the base of mountains to the north; although the Judean hill country lay all about Jerusalem, the route northward to Pella would be through the Jordan Valley. Both the mountains and the route to Pella could have provided places of refuge, but the flight to Pella shows that the mountain saying in 24:16 was not made up after the event.

24:17. The roof, which was flat, was used for prayer, drying vegetables and other functions. The staircase from this roof was on the outside of the house; one could thus descend without entering the house. Even if there is an element of *hyperbole, it graphically underlines the point of urgency.

24:18. Workers would wear an outer cloak to the fields when they began the day about 6 a.m.; as the day grew warmer, they left their cloaks on the edge of the field. Because people needed them as blankets to stay warm at night, creditors could not seize these outer cloaks overnight (Deut 24:13). Here haste (hence preserving life) takes priority over even the most crucial possesions.

24:19. Mothers may have nursed infants for their first two years before weaning them. Being pregnant or nursing a child made travel much more difficult. Famine would also make pregnancy and nursing much more problematic. Indeed, Josephus reports that the siege of Jerusalem became so difficult that some women ate their children (as in Lev 26:29; Deut 28:57; 2 Kings 6:29). Similar language elsewhere can refer to grief over the loss of young children, physically unprepared for the hardships.

24:20. Winter restricted conditions for travel, immobilizing even most armies. In the winter, the otherwise dry creek beds (wadis) were flooded with water and became difficult to cross; this was even more true of the Jordan River. In spring 68 some Jewish fugitives from another city did try to escape the Roman army during the war and, delayed by Jordan's flooded waters, were mostly slaughtered.

Jewish *law prohibited riding horses, mules and other means of transportation on the sabbath; even one's walking distance was regulated. Transportation and passage would thus be difficult to obtain on the sabbath, especially if residents of Jerusalem wished to flee secretly without being challenged by the patriotic *Zealots. The sabbath could be violated to save life, but those who did not recognize the situation's urgency would not cooperate.

24:21. Here Jesus borrows the language of Daniel 12:1, referring to the final era of tribulation necessary before the dead would be raised (12:11-13). "Never before or again" was sometimes hyperbolic (cf. Josh 10:14 with Ex 8:13; Num 14:20; 2 Kings 6:18), although Josephus concurs that the sufferings of 66–70 exceeded any before them in human history.

24:22. Jesus might mean the 1,290 days of Dan 12:11-12; the time would be shortened to ensure survivors.

24:23-28
Beware of False Messiahs

24:23-24. Some Jewish false prophets in first-century Judea drew large followings by claiming that they could perform miracles, such as parting the Jordan or making the walls of Jerusalem fall down; they failed to make

good on such promises. In addition, many magicians claimed to work miraculous cures, and some Jewish false prophets probably made similar claims. Some others reportedly prophesied that Jerusalem or the temple would not fall—some of them right up until their deaths in the burning temple.

24:25. Advance warning encouraged trust in God (Is 48:5).

24:26. Would-be messiahs most often came in the wilderness, trying to imitate Moses, who had long ago led his people through the wilderness. (Jewish people expected a deliverer like Moses, as in Deut 18:15.) After A.D. 70 and especially after the crushing defeat in A.D. 135, many Palestinian Jews grew more skeptical of messianic claimants (*Sadducees already had been).

24:27. False messiahs could not duplicate this sign. This is the coming of the Lord described by passages like Zechariah 14:3-8, with Jesus filling the role most Jewish readers expected God to fill.

24:28. Jesus' return will not be a secret event; it will be the place of the last battle, leaving his enemies as food for vultures (Ezek 32:4-6; 39:17-20). Being eaten instead of buried was considered a horrible fate (Deut 28:26; 1 Sam 17:44; Ps 79:2). Greeks sometimes believed that such lack of burial precluded entrance into the underworld.

24:29-31
Final Signs

24:29. This reference to astronomical events is *Old Testament language for the time of God's judgment at the final battle (e.g., Is 13:10; 24:23; 34:4; Ezek 32:7-8; Joel 3:14; Zech 14:6). Similar cosmic language was sometimes applied to judgments or other divine acts in history as well (e.g., Ps 18:6-19; Jer 4:20-28; **Sibylline Oracles*). Many in antiquity viewed darkness as a frightful judgment (cf. Ex 9:21-23); eclipses also usually generated fear. Both Jew and Gentile regarded signs in the heavens as portentous, and Josephus reports some signs in the heavens (on a much smaller scale) in connection with the fall of Jerusalem.

24:30. This heavenly appearance of the sign of the *Son of Man is the ultimate sign of Jesus' coming (24:3)—too late to prepare. The text combines Zechariah 12:10-12, where in the end God brings his people to repent of the pain they have caused him, and Daniel 7:13-14, where a representative of suffering Israel would receive the *kingdom from God and reign forever. (Cf. also Rev 1:7.) In the Dead Sea Scrolls, "clouds" refer to the hosts of angels at God's coming; in the Old Testament, this image could refer to the cloud of God's glory or to literal clouds.

24:31. Trumpets were used to announce the accession of kings and other great events. In the Old Testament they were especially used to gather God's people (most frequently for war); the prophets often used the trumpet as a symbol warning of impending battle and devastation (e.g., Jer 4:5, 19, 21; Zeph 1:16). The trumpet had already been used for the gathering of God's people in the end time (Is 27:13), a gathering associated with Israel's salvation (Is 11:12; 43:5; 49:5; 56:8; and commonly in Jewish tradition) and God's final war (Zech 9:14-16). A regularly recited Jewish prayer from this period mentions this future gathering of Israel at the sound of the trumpet; various other ancient Jewish texts agree. It was thus a natural image for the gathering of believers (cf. 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16).

"From one end of heaven to the other" may communicate in a popular image of the day: heaven was a dome over the earth, so this phrase is similar to our equally figurative "from one end of the earth to the other"—i.e., everywhere (cf. Mk 13:27).

24:32-35
Certainty of the Coming

24:32-33. This is the first of seven future-kingdom *parables, paralleling the seven parables on the presence of the *kingdom in chapter 13.

Unlike most Palestinian trees, fig trees lose their leaves in winter; they would have been in leaf by this time of year, however, predicting the fruit that should appear on them in the summer. Jesus had earlier used this tree as a parable for the temple's destruction (see Mk 11:12-25). But the meaning is ultimately decided by the context: when the signs he had listed (including the temple's destruction) were fulfilled, his coming would be imminent.

24:34. The temple was destroyed roughly forty years after Jesus spoke these words

(which refer to the temple's demise rather than to the Second Coming—see comment on 24:3). The Dead Sea Scrolls anticipated a final, forty-year generation of tribulation before the end; Jesus apparently leaves the period between the final earthly sign (the temple's demise) and his return indeterminate.

24:35. Even Jewish prophets would not speak thus of their own words (Zech 1:5-6); such a claim was made only for God's words, spoken through Moses and the prophets (cf. Jer 31:35-37). Those who claimed that their words were unchangeable believed that they spoke infallibly for God (cf. Zech 1:5-6; comment on Rev 22:18-19; *rabbis spoke thus concerning the authority of the Old Testament).

24:36-44
Uncertainty of the Time of His Coming

24:36. See perhaps Zechariah 14:7. Although God had made the crucial things known to his people, he always kept some mysteries secret (Deut 29:29; cf. **4 Ezra* 4:52).

Jewish teachers struggled with a tension between two positions: (1) one could predict when the *Messiah would come, in a time ordained only by God; and (2) one could not predict his coming, but he would come whenever Israel repented and wholly followed God.

24:37-39. Jewish tradition emphasized the evils of Noah's generation in much fuller detail than the Bible had, but the emphasis here is on their unpreparedness.

24:40-41. In the context of 24:37-39, "taken" may mean "taken to judgment" (cf. Jer 6:11 NASB, NRSV). Women worked together grinding at a shared handmill, perhaps in a courtyard shared with other houses, and often became as close as relatives. Wives of *Pharisees were allowed to work together with unreligious women (provided they did not involve themselves in any infringements of Pharisaic purity rules); thus the scenario of women of different convictions working together is not unusual.

24:42. "Watch" involves staying alert and ready the way a night watchman or guard would (cf. 24:43).

24:43-44. Thieves could "break in" by digging through the clay wall of the average Palestinian Jewish home, or by (more quickly but loudly) breaking in a door. (A more well-to-do householder with stronger walls would often have servants to watch the doors for him.) A thief who broke in at night, unlike one who broke in during the day, could be killed with impunity because he was regarded as potentially dangerous to life, expecting people to be home at night (Ex 22:2-3). God's judgment, of course, would be more dangerous than the average night thief (e.g., Jer 49:9; Obad 5).

24:45-51
Watchful Servants

Often a well-to-do householder had a slave who was a "manager," or "steward," managing his estate. Such a high-level slave could be in charge of giving rations to the other servants and could abuse his authority only if the master were not present. (Absentee landowners and householders were common, especially if they owned other estates at a great distance. In some stories of the period, absentee kings, landowners or husbands posed temptations to those remaining behind.)

Some laws viewed slaves as persons, while other laws viewed them as property (for economic matters). Although masters were allowed to beat slaves, it was in their economic interests not to do so often or severely. A slave who abused the other slaves was mistreating his master's "property"; often these other servants were also objects of the master's personal concern. Drunkenness was despised, especially if slaves drank wine and banqueted at the master's expense without his knowledge. Dismemberment (normally after death) was a punishment considered too cruel by Jews but nevertheless practiced by some Gentiles.

25:1-13
Watchful Bridesmaids

Being a bridesmaid was a great honor; to be insultingly unprepared and shut out of the feast was the stuff of which young women's nightmares were made. Professed believers must endure in faith to the end (24:13).

25:1. On "the kingdom is like," see comment on 13:24. Weddings were held toward evening and torches were used as part of the celebration, which focused on a procession leading the bride to the groom's house. It is unlikely that "lamps" refers to the small Herodian oil lamps, which could be carried in

the hand; all the evidence points instead here to real torches, which were also used in Greek and Roman wedding ceremonies. For many people, these torches may have been sticks wrapped with oil-soaked rags. In many traditional Palestinian villages in more recent times, the wedding feast occurs at night after a day of dancing; the bridesmaids leave the bride, with whom they have been staying, and go out to meet the bridegroom with torches. They then escort him back to his bride, whom they all in turn escort to the groom's home.

25:2-7. Torches like these could not burn indefinitely; some evidence suggests that they may have burned for only fifteen minutes before the burnt rags would have to be removed and new oil-soaked rags would need to be wrapped on the sticks of which they were made. Because not all the details of ancient Palestinian weddings are known, it is not clear whether the *parable envisions the lamps as burning while the bridesmaids slept (to avoid the delay of having to rekindle them) or as being lit only after the first announcement of the bridegroom's coming (as many scholars think). Either way, if the bridegroom delayed longer than they anticipated, their lamps would not last unless they had an extra reserve of oil. Bridegrooms were often late, and their comings were repeatedly announced until they arrived.

25:8. The bridesmaids needed sufficient oil to keep the torches lit during the procession to the groom's home and the dancing.

25:9. Trying to share the oil would have left too little for any of the torches and ruined the wedding ceremony. It would have been difficult to find dealers at this time of night, however (although some catering shops could have been open if they were near a large city); the foolish bridesmaids were definitely going to be late.

25:10. The young women were supposed to meet the bridegroom, who would then fetch his bride from her home and lead the whole procession back to his father's house for the feast. Some suggest that by portraying himself as the bridegroom, Jesus implies his deity (Is 54:5; Jer 2:2; Hos 2:14-20). Although people would often come and go during wedding feasts, the bolt used to shut doors was noisy and cumbersome; perhaps it represents an effort to be repeated only if necessary, making new visitors unwelcome (cf. Lk 11:7).

25:11-13. The foolish bridesmaids missed the entire procession back to the groom's house, their primary role, along with the festive singing and dancing. They also missed the critical element of the Jewish wedding, in which the bride was brought into the groom's home under the wedding canopy. "I do not know you" could be used in deliberate refusals to recognize someone indeed known. As they had (through lack of seriousness about their responsibility) insulted the wedding families, so now they receive a deliberate insult. Weddings typically lasted seven days, and much of a village would be welcome; these foolish girls, however, were unwelcome, and might carry this shame in village gossip for years. In one later rabbinic parable, a king invited guests to a banquet without specifying the date. Only the most conscientious invitees were dressed and waiting at the door when the banquet arrived, leaving the others outside in shame. Rabbinic parables also address readiness for death (though Jesus refers here to his return).

25:14-30
Making Use of the Interim Time

Wealthy landowners usually delegated the control and multiplication of their wealth to trained accountants, who could be free persons or, as here, servants. In view of the impending day of reckoning, believers must make the wisest use of all that the Lord has entrusted to them, to make it count for him; they must never take their stewardships for granted (24:45-51).

25:14. Well-to-do masters often went on long journeys, sometimes to oversee properties elsewhere or on government assignments. Given the uncertainties of transportation in those days, the time of return for even a well-planned trip would be uncertain. Wealthy persons usually depended on trained accountants to multiply their capital; such workers could be either free or (as here) slave. (Slaves could also be managers of estates.) In antiquity, slaves could often earn money and even buy property.

25:15. Although the exact value of a talent varied from period to period and place to place, we may estimate the values of these in-

vestments at roughly thirty to fifty thousand, twelve to twenty thousand and six to ten thousand denarii. Since one denarius was close to an average day's wage in this period, this would be a "small sum" (25:21, 23) only to a very rich master.

25:16-17. Those with sufficient capital could invest it at a profit; for instance, they could lend it to moneychangers who would use it to turn a profit and give them a substantial share. Lending money at interest directly was also profitable, given the exorbitant interest rates of the period. The normal Roman rate for private loans was twelve percent, though one *patron is reported to have lent to an entire city at roughly fifty percent interest! Because most people did not have capital available for investment, those who did could reap large profits.

25:18. One of the safest—and least profitable—ways of protecting one's money was to bury it in the ground; such buried reserves are still occasionally found where someone never returned to retrieve his or her deposits. (Lk 19:20 portrays a worse method.)

25:19-23. One could normally at least double one's investment; those with capital could often accomplish far more. The principle that integrity in smaller matters qualified one to prove one's integrity in larger matters was often invoked in antiquity. Some have suggested that Jesus used an *Aramaic term for "joy" that also means "festival" (cf. 25:10); the master threw a feast at his return and honored his helpful servants.

25:24-25. The smallest possible investment, providing some interest on a savings deposit, could not have endangered the deposit; it would have been as safe as burying the money. The third slave should have known better; he simply did not care what happened to his master's property (see comment on 25:15-17). The phrase "You have what is yours" was used in Jewish transactions to say, "I am not responsible for this any further."

25:26-27. Although usury, charging interest on a loan or a deposit, was technically against Jewish *law (Ex 22:25; Lev 25:36-37; Deut 23:19-20; Neh 5:7; Ps 15:5; Prov 28:8; Ezek 18:8, 13, 17; 22:12), *Gentiles were not bound to refrain from it; further, Jewish people could charge Gentiles, and many wealthy Jewish aristocrats followed Greek custom more than official Jewish teaching anyway. In any case, Jesus could expect his Jewish hearers to grasp the full imagery of this *parable, just as other *rabbis could tell parables about kings long after kings had ceased in Jewish Palestine.

25:28-30. Darkness is elsewhere used as an image for hell (8:12).

25:31-46
Judging Sheep and Goats

25:31. The *Son of Man was going to come to reign for God (Dan 7:13-14; cf. the **Similitudes of Enoch*, of uncertain date), and some Jewish *apocalypses (perhaps following Greek images of the realm of the dead) described human judges before the final day of judgment. But the description of absolute authority afforded Jesus here fits most precisely the standard Jewish picture of God judging the nations in the day of judgment. For the angels, see comment on 16:27.

25:32. God judging the nations (e.g., Is 2:4; Mic 4:3) was a standard part of Jewish expectation for the future. God would distinguish among the sheep (Ezek 34:17). Although sheep and goats grazed together, some scholars write that Palestinian shepherds normally separated sheep and goats at night because goats need to be warm at night while sheep prefer open air. Certainly sheep were considered more valuable than goats, so that owners usually had many more sheep than goats (though this is not part of Jesus' analogy here; cf. 7:13-14). The greater profitability of sheep may have influenced how these terms would be heard figuratively; for instance, in a pagan dream handbook sheep were associated with good while goats were associated with trouble. Most people in the eastern Mediterranean preferred goats' and sheep's cheese to that made from cows' milk. Sheep were shorn for wool twice a year; people used both sheepskins and goatskins for leather when the animals died, but preferred goatskins.

25:33. The right is the preferred side in ancient texts; in the few scenes of judgment where it occurs, the right side is for the righteous and the left for the wicked (e.g., the *Testament of Abraham* recension A).

25:34. "Inherit the kingdom" is a familiar phrase; in Jewish tradition, the *kingdom was

prepared for Israel, who had been predestined by God. The king in Jewish parables is virtually always God; here it refers to Jesus.

25:35-36. Except for visiting the imprisoned, the deeds Jesus lists are standard righteous deeds in Jewish ethics. Providing for the poor, giving hospitality to the stranger and visiting the sick were basic to Jewish piety.

25:37-39. An unclear statement followed by a counterquestion was a standard method of moving an argument forward (see, e.g., Mal 1:6-7).

25:40. In some Jewish apocalyptic texts, the nations would be judged for how they treated Israel. In the Bible, God also judged people for how they treated the poor (e.g., Prov 19:17). But given the use of "brothers" or "sisters" (12:50; 28:10; the Greek term can include both genders) and perhaps "least" (5:19; 11:11; cf. 18:4; 20:26; 23:11) elsewhere in Matthew, many argue that this passage refers to receiving messengers of Christ. Such missionaries needed shelter, food and help in imprisonment and other complications caused by persecution; see comment on 10:11-14. Receiving them was like receiving *Christ (on the Jewish principle of agency, see comment on 10:40-42). The judgment of all nations thus had to be preceded by the proclamation of the kingdom among them (24:14).

25:41-45. Some Jewish traditions (like the *Qumran War Scroll) report that Belial (*Satan) was created for the pit; destruction was not God's original purpose for people (**4 Ezra* 8:59-60). In many Jewish traditions, the *demons were fallen angels (cf. comment on 2 Pet 2:4). Jewish tradition was divided on the duration of hell; this passage's description of it as "eternal" was certainly not merely a concession to a universal image in Judaism.

25:46. *Eternal life was promised to the righteous after their *resurrection at the end of the age (Dan 12:2). Some Jewish teachers believed that hell was temporary and that at the end some people would be burned up and others released; other Jewish teachers spoke as if hell were eternal. Jesus here sides with the latter group.

26:1-16
How Much Is Jesus Worth?

See comments on Mark 14:1-11 for further details on this passage. Ancient writers and speakers often communicated points by contrasting characters. This *narrative provides three contrasting evaluations of Jesus' worth: lavish devotion (26:7); less devotion (26:8); and the biblical price of a slave (26:15). Regarding the passion narrative more generally, ancient biographers generally devoted greater attention to a person's death when it was particularly significant (e.g., martyrdom), as is certainly the case with Jesus.

26:1-2. Inhabitants of the Roman Empire, especially in places like Jewish Palestine, saw crucifixion as the cruelest, most painful and most degrading form of common criminal execution. Passover commemorated God redeeming Israel through the blood of lambs.

26:3-5. Rome ruled through local aristocracies; the leading priests and elders of Jerusalem largely belonged to the social elite there. Jerusalem's Sanhedrin, or municipal ruling council, drew from the local elite; despite their influence, their sentiments should not be confused with those of the rest of their people, and certainly not with Jesus' Jewish followers from Galilee. Most other Jewish groups, including *Pharisees and *Essenes, had conflicts with this group. A private meeting to plot the execution of a person not yet convicted violated conventional Jewish ethics (and Roman ethics as well). Their fear of a riot at the festival (v. 5), however, was entirely reasonable: under the crowded conditions of the festivals, riots were more likely than at any other time, and hundreds of people had been trampled in tumults at some previous festivals. The Roman governor came from Caesarea at the feasts to forestall any trouble, and Roman security was increased during this season. The priestly aristocracy were, above all, guardians of the status quo, and they would have to deal with messianic claimants in the most politically expedient way; they dare not arrest Jesus publicly (26:55). On Caiaphas, see comment on John 11:47-48.

26:6. Bethany was one of those villages near Jerusalem where Passover pilgrims could spend the night with hosts (though Jesus will eat the Passover within the city, 26:18). On Simon the "leper," see comment on Mark 14:3.

26:7. It was customary to anoint the heads of important guests, but this woman's

anointing of Jesus is extraordinary. This perfume (undoubtedly imported from the East) was expensive, worth a year of a common laborer's wages, and had probably been kept in her family as an heirloom. Its fragrance was preserved by its sealing in alabaster (the favored container for perfume). Once the flask was broken, the freshness could be lost, and the contents would have to be used quickly.

26:8-9. Although Judaism valued charity toward the needy at all times, some Jewish tradition suggests that people thought about this virtue even more during festival seasons (Tobit 2:2; Mishnah *Pesahim* 9:11; 10:1).

26:10-11. Jesus' reply probably contains an allusion to Deuteronomy 15:11, which urges generosity to the poor, who will always be in the land. Ancient comparisons did not always denigrate the lesser element in the comparison. He does not play down giving to the poor but plays up what follows: devotion to Jesus himself must precede and inform all other important and godly agendas.

26:12. In Jewish tradition, kings (including, by definition, the *Messiah, or "anointed one"), priests and others had to be anointed for service. But Jesus here stresses a different kind of anointing undoubtedly unintended by the woman: anointing a body for burial (see Mk 16:1); he will soon wear a different crown. Similar flasks found in tombs show that such ointments were often used for the dead.

26:13. Ancients applied such statements to those whose memory was preserved in epics or other famous works.

26:14-16. People in antiquity usually viewed betrayal (e.g., of one's people or friends) as a heinous crime. Chief priests would be easily located, but they would not have been accessible to Judas (especially during the festival) had his mission been less in line with their interests. The average price of slaves varied from place to place and period to period, but Matthew's biblically informed readers would probably recognize thirty pieces of silver as the average *Old Testament compensation for the death of a slave (Ex 21:32); Judas sells his master cheaply. Matthew also thinks of the rejected but faithful shepherd in Zechariah 11:12-13 (see the quotation in Mt 27:9-10). Ancient writers often made use of irony; Matthew's use of the term *paradidomi* ("betray," "hand over") ironically connects the guilt of Judas (26:15-16, 21, 23-25, 45-48), Jerusalem's elite (27:2, 18) and *Pilate (27:26).

26:17-30
Betrayal and Death in the Passover

See comments on Mark 14:12-26 for further details.

26:17. By this period "the Feast of Unleavened Bread," which immediately followed Passover in the Bible, had been extended in popular parlance to include the Passover itself. Representatives from each family would "prepare the Passover" (i.e., have the priests slaughter a lamb for them in the temple), then return with it for the later meal, eaten after sundown. Others would prepare the other dishes.

26:18-19. Because the Passover was supposed to be eaten within Jerusalem's walls (or its immediate environs), most homes included guests during the night of the feast. Bethany (21:17) lay outside the city's larger boundaries.

26:20. The Passover was to be eaten at night. In April, at the time of the Passover, sundown in Jerusalem came by 6 p.m., so their meal could have started then. Table fellowship was intimate at the feast; one or two families normally shared the meal (later sources, probably reflecting at least an average minimum, stipulated a minimum of ten persons); here Jesus and his closest *disciples make up the family unit. The usual posture at meals was sitting, but reclining on couches (if available), originally a Greek practice, was customary for feasts.

26:21-23. Bitter herbs were dipped into a mixture of nuts, fruit and vinegar to lessen their bitterness. That someone who was betraying a person would "dip in the bowl" with that person would have horrified ancient readers, who saw hospitality and the sharing of table fellowship as an intimate bond establishing a covenant of friendship. Based on the *Dead Sea Scrolls, some suggest that if "with me" refers to timing, Judas's dipping would have also been a deliberate mark of rebellion, since the group's leader should dip first.

26:24-25. Those lamenting in Greek tragedies and in the Bible often mourned the day of their birth (Job 3; Jer 20:14-18). Such laments were rhetorical expressions of deep grief, but Jesus here uses the same language as

a statement of fact. Other Jewish teachers also observed that it would have been better for a person never to have been born than to have denied the eternal God, been unfaithful to the *law, or the like; it seems to have been a common statement of Jewish wisdom (*rabbis; **4 Ezra* 7:69; **1 Enoch* 38:2; *2 Enoch* 41:2).

26:26. It was customary for the head of the household to give thanks for the bread and wine before any meal, but special blessings were said over bread and wine at the Passover meal. We should not understand "This is my body" literally, in a chemical sense, just as Jesus' contemporaries did not take literally the standard Jewish interpretation spoken over the Passover bread: "This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate when they came from Egypt." (Taken literally, that bread would have been centuries old, and it had already been eaten anyway.) Rather, Jewish people were in a sense reenacting Passover so as to participate in the experience. The lifting up and explanation of the unleavened bread took place after the first cup.

26:27. Adapting some Greek banquet customs, four cups of red wine came to be used in the annual Passover celebrations, and if these were in use by the first century (as is likely), this cup may be the third or fourth. The leader of the group would take the goblet in both hands, then hold it in his right, a handbreadth above the table.

26:28. In the *Old Testament, covenants were ratified by the blood of sacrifice; God had also redeemed his people from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb. The language alludes especially to Exodus 24:8, when Moses sprinkled the people with sacrificial blood at Mount Sinai. "On behalf of the many" probably alludes to Isaiah 53 (see comment on Mt 20:28). Passover ritual interpreted the cup but did not interpret it as blood, because Jewish law and custom were revolted by the idea of drinking any creature's blood—especially human blood.

26:29. Jewish people often offered vows of abstinence: "I will not eat any such and such until this happens," or "I vow that I will not use this until that happens." Jesus vows not to drink wine again until the kingdom comes, and he apparently abstains from the fourth cup. Jewish tradition commonly portrayed the time of the kingdom as a banquet (based on texts like Is 25:6), when the Bible had promised an unending supply of wine (cf. Amos 9:13-14).

26:30. Jewish tradition suggests that after the meal, it was customary to sing psalms antiphonally from the Hallel, which consisted of Psalms 113–118. The walk to the Mount of Olives took at least fifteen minutes.

26:31-46
The Other Betrayers

See comment on Mark 14:27-42.

26:31-32. On "stumbling" ("fall away"—NASB), see comment on 18:6. Zechariah 13:7 (the shepherd quotation) is not clearly messianic (Zech 13:1-9 refers to striking false prophets in judgment, following Deut 13:1-11; cf. Zech 10:2; 11:3, 15-17), but the principle of sheep scattering from a smitten shepherd certainly applies equally well to the divine shepherd (Mt 25:32; cf. 18:12-14). Some other ancient Jewish readers understood Zechariah 13:7 positively (CD 19.5-9).

26:33-35. Ancient sources typically regarded the rooster as a reliable reporter of the advent of dawn, and night guards, shepherds and others who were awake at night were also familiar with other crowings, which, depending on the time of year, varied between 11:30 p.m. and 3:30 a.m. The point is that the denial was imminent.

26:36. They may have arrived at Gethsemane by 10 or 11 p.m. (which was well into the night in that culture). Gethsemane seems to have included an olive grove and probably an olive press (hence its name, which means "oil press"); it was on the western slope or base of the Mount of Olives, facing Jerusalem. Because Passover night had to be spent within the larger boundaries of Jerusalem, which did not include Bethany, they would not return to Bethany that night (21:17).

26:37-38. Jesus' description of his grief draws on *Old Testament language (Ps 42:5-6, 11; 43:5; Jon 4:9; cf. Ps 142:3-6; 143:3-4); compare Matthew 27:46. Greek philosophers emphasized facing death calmly, but Jesus, like the OT tradition (and most people), approached the experience of death with anguish.

26:39. The cup (20:22; cf. 26:27; 27:48) may allude to the Old Testament image of a cup of judgment given to the nations; see comment on Mark 10:39. Jewish readers would regard

applauding God's will even to one's own hurt as virtuous (e.g., 1 Maccabees 3:59-60; rabbis; Dead Sea Scrolls).

26:40. The disciples were to "stand watch" like the porters, slaves in charge of the door, in the *parable in Mark 13:34-36. It was customary to stay awake late on the Passover night and to speak of God's redemption. They should have been able to stay awake to keep watch; they had probably stayed up late on most other Passovers of their lives. According to one Jewish teaching, if anyone in the Passover group fell asleep (not merely dozed), the group was thereby dissolved; the teaching may, however, be too late for relevance to this period.

26:41. On watching and praying in the night, compare perhaps Ps 63:6; 77:6; 119:148. "Temptation" here is "testing"; given the common Jewish religious uses of the word, Jesus is saying: "lest you fall prey to the testing you are about to face." The contrast between "spirit" and "body" simply means that one may mean well on impulse (26:33; cf. the use of "spirit" in many cases in Proverbs), but the body is susceptible to exhaustion.

26:42-46. Romans appreciated loyalty to one's sense of duty; Judaism stressed faithfulness to God's law even to the point of dying for it. Thus all ancient readers would have recognized heroism in Jesus' intense faithfulness to his calling.

26:47-56
Completion of the Betrayal

See further comment on Mark 14:43-52.

26:47. Because they are sent by prominent men of Jerusalem, the band that comes to arrest Jesus is probably the temple guard. They come prepared for armed resistance from one they suppose is a messianic revolutionary.

26:48. Although there may have been a full moon, a sign would make it easier to find the right person, especially since they had to act quickly before confusion ensued. Arresting others might not be necessary (see comment on Jn 18:8). Judas' kiss might also delay the other disciples' suspicions of the large party approaching them.

26:49-50. A kiss (usually a light kiss on the lips in that culture) was a sign of special affection among family members and close friends, or of a disciple's honor and affection for his teacher. Judas's kiss is thus a special act of hypocrisy (cf. Prov 27:6). Given ancient values concerning hospitality, friendship and covenant loyalty, any of Matthew's readers encountering this story for the first time would have been horrified by the narration of the betrayal. Judas appears as the most contemptible of traitors; Jesus appears as one unjustly betrayed.

26:51. Although this servant is probably not a Levite and thus unable to minister in the temple anyway, some point out that those who were missing appendages such as ears were barred from serving in the sanctuary. (Jesus' disciple is probably *aiming* for the neck or something more substantial than an ear, however.)

26:52. These are not the words of a violent revolutionary (26:47). End-time schemes often included a great battle between the people of light and the people of darkness, and Jesus certainly expected violence (24:1-2); but his own followers were to stay clear of it. Matthew's readers might hear this possibly familiar saying (cf. the *Sentences* of the Syriac Menander 15-19) ironically: the temple authorities' behavior, perhaps partly motivated by the desire to keep peace for the Romans (Mt 26:1-5), invited the sword of judgment at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 66–70.

26:53-54. Legions normally had six thousand soldiers, so Jesus is saying that he could summon around seventy-two thousand angels (a legion per disciple). Even a human force of this size could have easily crushed the whole temple guard and the Roman garrison in the fortress Antonia, many times over; rarely did any nation field such vast armies in one place. The whole of Syria had only three legions (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.286). Such an angelic force could have easily defeated any human army raised against them. God's heavenly armies occasionally appear in the *Old Testament, and they were invincible (e.g., 2 Kings 6:17; cf. 2 Sam 5:24; 2 Kings 19:35). *Qumran's War Scroll expected angelic help at the final battle.

26:55-56. Subversives (like the later assassins who slew Jewish aristocrats under cover of the crowds in the temple) did their acts secretly or in a way that would enable

them to avoid capture; the Romans and their local agents were always concerned about such groups. Far from being hidden, Jesus' teaching had been public and unconcealed—unlike his enemies' current action under the cloak of night.

26:57-68
Jesus' Trial

See comments on Mark 14:53-65. Brutal as the narrative appears, it depicts how justice was sometimes carried out in antiquity, including by the Sanhedrin. *Josephus recounts another prophetic figure, Joshua ben Hananiah, who predicted the temple's destruction a few years before it came about. The priestly leaders arrested him, handed him over to a Roman governor, and he was flogged, Josephus says, until his bones showed. Joshua was then released, because he had no following and was considered insane (Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.300-305). By contrast, Jesus had followers and could appear to the elite as a challenge to their political power; he could not be safely released.

26:57. Later tradition recounts that the full Sanhedrin normally met in their special meeting hall in the temple, the Chamber of Hewn Stone; writing in the first century, Josephus suggests that they met instead very close to the temple. In this case, many members of the Sanhedrin hold a secret night meeting without advance notice in the *high priest's home, though they are investigating what they will claim is a capital offense. At least according to later Pharisaic legal ideals, such a meeting was illegal on all these counts: capital trials had to meet during the day, and only after a day had intervened might the court render a verdict. Only the worst criminals could be executed at festivals. Pharisaic rules forbade executions at feasts except for the most heinous crimes. But the priestly aristocracy would pay little attention to Pharisaic scruples, and they had to hurry before Jesus' popularity with the crowds forced his release or made him more of a hero. Given the short notice, possibly many members of the Sanhedrin not inclined to consent were not invited. Most ancient ethics prohibited such a sudden, nocturnal trial, but political necessity often trumped legal ethics.

26:58. Trespassing on the high priest's private property required much courage from a Galilean fisherman. The guards are presumably members of the temple guard, probably waiting to see the results of the trial inside. Regardless of whether they had all been assigned guard duty that night, they may have stayed up later than usual because it was Passover.

26:59-60. The virtuous Jewish tradition of diligent cross-examination of witnesses brings the false testimony into question. But once these witnesses had contradicted one another, they should have been declared false and the case against Jesus regarded as fabricated; under Jewish (and Roman) law, in a capital case, false witnesses were supposed to be put to death (see Deut 19:16-21; also the Dead Sea Scrolls). Even though Rome had not given the Sanhedrin jurisdiction to execute false witnesses, the Sanhedrin should have at least disciplined them; that the case continues uninterrupted demonstrates severe bias among the council members gathered there.

26:61. Many Jewish people expected that God would establish a new, purified temple when he put down the Romans. Outsiders had naturally misinterpreted Jesus' teaching about a new temple and warning about the old temple's destruction as the threat of a mad, messianic revolutionary or end-time prophet, hence as a threat to public security. But they still fail the cross-examination.

26:62. In the *Old Testament, a judge would normally stand to render the verdict. At least according to later rabbinic law, the high priest could not legally force Jesus to convict himself out of his own mouth, but the priestly aristocracy would pay little attention to Pharisaic regulations even if this rule were already widely held. The official finally asks whether Jesus thinks of himself as a *messiah—hence, to a high priest's mind, as a revolutionary.

26:63. The high priest tries to compel Jesus to speak by appealing to the divine name; thus the phrase "adjure" (KJV, NASB, RSV), "charge under oath" (NIV; cf. NRSV; cf. also 1 Sam 14:24; 1 Kings 22:16). False oaths in God's name were forbidden in the Old Testament as "taking his name in vain." From the Jerusalem aristocrats' standpoint, a false messiah was a threat to peace with Rome, which allowed no kings except Caesar and his approved vassals.

26:64. "You say so" may indicate that this is their choice of wording and not his. Jesus' statement here is a claim to be not only a mortal messiah but the cosmic ruler of Daniel 7:13-14, the embodiment of Israel's call, the one who would come in glory and reign forever; the phrase "from now on" is especially offensive, because he thereby claims this role in the present, which would imply that he is their judge rather than they being his judges. "Power" was one Jewish title for God. (See "*Son of Man" in the glossary.)

26:65. One would tear one's clothes as a sign of mourning or *repentance, including when hearing the sacred name blasphemed. According to stricter Pharisaic standards, unless Jesus mentions the sacred Hebrew name of God, or summons them to idolatry (e.g., by calling himself God, which he does not do at this point) or in some other way insults God's dignity, he is not technically guilty of blasphemy (see comment on 9:3). Jesus' association of himself with God could be considered offensive, but the high priest had not proved it untrue. The priestly aristocracy had fewer restrictions against conviction than Pharisees did, however.

26:66. The high priest was not permitted to judge a case alone; he had to solicit the council's vote. (If later rabbinic sources give any indication concerning how the Sanhedrin may have functioned, the clerk may have called for each member's vote by name, but such technicalities may be out of place in this less formal hearing.) Judicial excuses aside here, Jesus clearly poses a threat to the temple establishment, and as a messianic claimant he threatens their power and the nation's stability (cf. Jer 26:9, 11).

26:67-68. Unlike public flogging, the behavior represented here—spitting on, striking and taunting a prisoner—was against Jewish law. Abuse of prisoners was common but violated ancient ethics. Ironically, while they mock Jesus as a false prophet, his *prophecy about Peter is being fulfilled (26:69-75).

26:69-75
Peter's Final Betrayal

See comment on Mark 14:66-72.

26:69-72. As a servant in an aristocratic household near the temple, this woman may have been near the temple and could have gotten a good look at Jesus' *disciples in the temple courts. Peter's evasive answer in verse 70 is not precisely betrayal—in contrast to verse 72. "I do not know what you say" is the standard form for denial in Jewish legal texts; calling a known person "the man" was sometimes used contemptuously. Taking God's name in vain (Ex 20:7) involved the swearing of false oaths (Mt 26:72), which essentially invited God's punishment if one were lying.

26:73. Galilean accents differed from Judean accents; Galileans were careless with their vowels and failed to clearly differentiate the various guttural consonants. The high priest's servants and temple guard would have lived in Jerusalem and viewed themselves as Judeans. Some scholars have suggested that Judeans associated Galileans with revolutionaries, but the evidence for this suggestion is at best ambiguous; given the ancient mistrust between urban and rural dwellers, however, it is not unlikely that many Jerusalemites looked down on Galileans. But the point here is simply that the hearer assumes—rightly—that disciples of a Galilean teacher were themselves Galileans.

26:74. The "curses" Peter utters are not vulgar words; rather, he swears by various things that he does not know Jesus (cf. 5:33-37), invoking curses on himself if he is lying.

26:75. For most people in the ancient Mediterranean, rooster's crowing marked daybreak. Those who were awake much earlier may have recognized an earlier Palestinian rooster crowing between 12:30 and 2:30 a.m. In any case, it was fulfilled speedily.

27:1-10
The Other Betrayer's Remorse

Ancient writers often laid contrasting pictures of characters side by side. Peter's remorse (26:75) contrasts here with that of Judas, who killed himself instead of repenting (27:5).

27:1-2. To provide legality, the leaders have a brief, early morning "official" hearing to ratify the night's decision; only daylight hearings were legal. Presumably this meeting was in the Sanhedrin's regular meeting place near the temple. Jerusalem's authorities have to bring Jesus to *Pilate, because they were not authorized by the Romans to execute the

death penalty themselves. Pilate would be available as early as sunrise; like other Roman officials, he would finish his regular public day before noon.

27:3-4. Some later Jewish teachers held that even the recantation of a false witness for the prosecution could not reverse the verdict; the officials here seem less concerned with legal theory than with political expediency, however.

On thirty pieces of silver, see comment on 26:15. Those who dealt in bribes were accursed under the *law (Deut 27:25), and a false witness was liable to the punishment appropriate for the alleged crime of the accused (Deut 19:18-19). Having innocent blood on one's hands meant that one was guilty of murder; in the *Old Testament, this guilt could be expiated only by the blood of the murderer or, if the murderer was unknown, through a sacrifice (Gen 4:10; 9:6; Num 35:33; Deut 21:1-9). God could, however, grant mercy to the repentant (Gen 4:15; 2 Sam 12:13-14).

27:5. Judas's suicide is an act of despair (cf. Saul—1 Sam 31:4; the traitor Ahithophel—2 Sam 17:23). Roman tradition considered suicide a nobler way to die than letting others kill one. To some Jewish people it was likewise noble if it was performed to avoid falling into the hands of torturers or to avoid being defiled (e.g., in *Josephus and in *4 Maccabees, possibly under Greek influence). But Judaism, especially strict Palestinian Judaism, normally regarded it as evil. (Ancient readers would thus view Judas's act in a more negative light than they would view that of the jailer in Acts 16:27.) Hanging was often viewed as a dishonorable form of suicide.

According to ancient thought, if Judas had hanged himself in the sanctuary he would have defiled it (though he may have just "gone away" to locate a more convenient place). Flinging the money in the temple alludes to Zechariah 11:13 (see comment on Mt 27:9).

27:6. Ancient writers often used irony, and Matthew is no exception: the chief priests are more concerned about the legal technicality of blood money for the treasury than that they issued the money for a judicial murder or that Judas is about to kill himself (cf. 23:23-24). Although the Old Testament did not explicitly prohibit the use of such money, they are careful to use it for something possibly doubly unclean (burying strangers). Some commentators have suggested that the mention of the treasury could reflect a Hebrew pun on the word translated "potter" (27:7; by a slight change of Hebrew spelling one could read "potter" as "treasury"), but this suggestion is not certain.

27:7-8. Burying people who had no one else to bury them was an act of piety (cf. the story of Tobit). Many Jews from around the world visited Jerusalem or moved there in their old age, and if they died without sufficient funds others would need to pay for their burial; the "strangers" might also include unclean *Gentiles. (There is also a Jewish tradition of burying condemned criminals in such a field.) Thus the *high priests no doubt saw their behavior as pious!

27:9-10. Jewish scholars could cite some texts while simultaneously alluding to others. Matthew here quotes Zechariah 11:12-13, but by attributing it to Jeremiah he also alludes to a similar text that he wishes his more skillful readers to catch (Jer 32:6-10; cf. 19:1-4, 10-11). (Because the composite quotation is nearly verbatim from these texts, and because large works like Matthew's Gospel normally went through multiple drafts tested before audiences, Matthew probably was well aware of what he was doing, rather than merely accidentally citing the wrong author, unless he is using a list of standard messianic proof texts instead of citing directly from Zechariah. He probably deliberately evokes both texts.) Zechariah 11:12-13 refers to the low valuation God's people had placed on him; they valued him at the price of a slave (Ex 21:32).

27:11-26
The Messiah or the Revolutionary

27:11. The governor had complete latitude in his decisions, though he would normally respect custom. This interrogation presumably occurs at Herod's old palace, where Roman governors resided when in Jerusalem. The charge presented to Pilate is clearly that Jesus claims to be a king, i.e., that he is a revolutionary acting for the overthrow of Rome. The charge "King of the Jews" interprets Jesus' messianic role for Pilate as treason against the emperor's majesty; calling oneself "king" was a

capital offense. Under Tiberius (the current emperor), even suspicion of minor forms of treason led to execution, and Tiberius' agents dare not fail to prosecute such offenses.

27:12. A defendant who offered no defense was normally convicted by default.

27:13-14. Jewish martyr stories also report rulers' amazement at martyrs' refusal to compromise. Although most of these stories are fictitious, they reflect not only the genuine astonishment of *Gentiles unfamiliar with Jewish commitment to the details of their law but also the ancient ideal of bravery in standing against tyrants.

27:15-18. Customs like this release of a prisoner varied locally. Roman law recognized two kinds of amnesty: acquittal before the trial and pardon of the condemned; this is the latter. Pilate was not required by law to cooperate, but governors often followed local traditions. Moreover, Pilate had severely irritated the priestly aristocracy and Jerusalemites at the beginning of his tenure and may have wished to avoid further problems; several years later, his further actions led to complaints and his recall from Judea. (If the trial is as late as October of A.D. 31, Pilate's main political supporter in Rome had just been executed, and he was on shaky ground politically; but the events of Mt 27 probably occurred before then.) Having heard of Jesus' popularity, he may miscalculate whom the crowds would choose.

27:19. The "judgment seat" seems to have been outside the palace. Although traditionally governors had to travel without their wives, by this period they were allowed to take their wives with them to the provinces. Further, although Roman matrons were ideally quiet, many stories praised aristocratic Roman women who privately influenced their husbands to some noble course of action. Dreams were respected in all Mediterranean cultures as sometimes being revelatory (see comment on 1:20; 2:12).

27:20-23. These events occur early in the morning (see 27:1-2), and much of the crowd may not be those whom Jesus had been teaching after arriving from Bethany each day. Jesus' primary supporters were probably especially fellow Galileans. But ancient literature also reports how quickly the masses often changed allegiances (e.g., in *Tacitus; 1 Sam 11:12). The chief priests were well respected and more visible than Jesus, especially to local Judeans and to foreign Jews visiting Jerusalem for the feast and unfamiliar with local politics. Barabbas would also appeal to those drawn to more militant responses to Roman oppression than Jesus provided. The leaders view Jesus, who has a significant following, as a greater political threat than Barabbas.

27:24. Washing hands was a typically Jewish (but also sometimes Gentile) way of declaring one's innocence (Deut 21:6; **Letter of Aristeas* 306), but Pilate's words and action absolve his guilt no more than the exactly parallel words of the chief priests in Matthew 27:4, or those of others who acceded to subordinates' unjust demands for the cause of political expediency (e.g., Jer 38:5). This was not the first time that the threat of riots had forced Pilate to relent; he had brought Roman standards (viewed by Jews as idols because they venerated the "divine" emperor) into Jerusalem, and withdrawn them only because mass protests forced him to either slaughter the populace or relent.

27:25. Once the responsibility for a murder or crime was attached to one person, another was considered free (cf. Gen 27:13; 2 Sam 3:28-29). Matthew probably relates this cry of the crowd to the judgment of A.D. 66–70 that crushed the next generation of Jerusalemites; he would not have approved of the anti-Semitic use to which this verse was subsequently put (cf., e.g., Mt 5:39, 43-44).

27:26. One would be stripped before a scourging or execution. Crucifixion was prefaced by scourging, either on the way to the cross or before the victim began the trip to the cross. Tied to a post, the condemned person would be beaten with the *flagellum:* a leather whip with metal knotted into its thongs. This whipping bloodied the victim's back, leaving strips of flesh hanging from the wounds. By weakening the victim's constitution, it would shorten the time it would take the condemned person to die on the cross.

27:27-44
Executing the King of the Jews

Crucifixion was the most shameful and painful form of execution known in antiquity. Stripped naked—especially shameful for Pal-

estinian Jews—the condemned would be hanged in the sight of the crowds, regarded as a criminal, unable to restrain the excretion of wastes in public and subjected to excruciating torture. Sometimes the victim would be tied to the cross with ropes; in other cases, as with Jesus, he would also be nailed to the cross. His hands would not be free to swat away insects attracted to his bloodied back or other wounds. The victim's own weight would pull his body into a position that eventually prevented breathing, if he did not die by dehydration or (if nailed to the cross) blood loss first. A footstand on the cross allowed him some support, but sooner or later his strength would give out, and (usually after several days) he would die from suffocation or (usually more quickly) dehydration.

27:27. The Praetorium in this period was Herod the Great's old palace, where the Roman prefect stayed when he visited Jerusalem. A cohort of six hundred men was normally stationed in Jerusalem (at the fortress Antonia on the Temple Mount), reinforced by additional troops who accompanied Pilate to the feast in case they were necessary for riot control.

27:28. Nakedness was especially embarrassing to a Jewish person in antiquity. Red robes would be those most readily available, because soldiers wore red capes; this garment could resemble the purple robe of the pre-Roman Greek rulers of the East. Roman soldiers often played games to pass time: they carved on the stone pavement of the fortress Antonia, where they were garrisoned on the Temple Mount, and knucklebones used as dice have also been recovered there.

27:29. The soldiers' kneeling before Jesus parodies royal homage in the Greek East. The reed is meant to parody a scepter; military floggings often used bamboo canes, so one may have been on hand among the soldiers. "King of the Jews" is an ironic taunt but may also reflect some typical Roman anti-Judaism; as auxiliaries in this region, the soldiers are probably ethnically Syrian. "Hail!" was the standard salute to the Roman emperor.

27:30. Spitting on a person was one of the most grievous insults short of violence; Jewish people considered the spittle of non-Jews particularly unclean. Some think that the soldiers' spitting on Jesus might parody the kiss of homage expected by rulers of the Greek East, but it could be simply pure contempt.

27:31. Those being crucified by the Romans were stripped naked; Jewish *law on stoning stripped a man of all but a loincloth. An actual execution squad on average consisted of four men, but is perhaps more here given the multiple victims.

27:32. Cyrene, a large city in what is now Libya in North Africa, was ethnically divided among Libyans, Greeks and Jews; the Jewish community probably included some local converts. "Simon" is a Greek name commonly used by Jewish people (because of its resemblance with the biblical "Simeon"). Like multitudes of foreign Jews, Simon had come to Jerusalem for the feast. Roman soldiers could impress any person into service to carry things for them. The condemned person himself normally had to carry the horizontal beam (Latin *patibulum*) of the cross out to the site where the upright stake (Latin *palus*) awaited; but Jesus' back had been too severely scourged for him to continue this (see comment on 27:26).

27:33. The likeliest site for Golgotha (near the Holy Sepulcher) used the remains of an ancient rock quarry.

27:34. The women of Jerusalem had prepared a painkilling potion of drugged wine for condemned men to drink; Jesus, committed to the full agony of the cross, refuses it (cf. 26:29). Psalm 69:21 speaks of both "gall" and "vinegar" (Mk 15:36 emphasizes the latter). The *Aramaic term for "myrrh" (Mk 15:23) resembles the Hebrew term for "gall."

27:35-36. Romans completely stripped the person being executed. Roman law permitted the execution squad any minor possessions the executed person carried (cf. also Ps 22:18). The custom of casting lots, common in both the *Old Testament and Greek culture, was a common ancient way to make decisions of this nature.

27:37. The condemned person sometimes carried the charge (Latin *titulus*) to the site of execution.

27:38. The word for "robbers" here is the standard term in Josephus for revolutionaries; presumably they had been colleagues of Barabbas. Executing criminals at festivals increased the publicity, hence the deterrent value, of their deaths.

27:39. The Gospel writers purposely describe the ridicule in the language of the righteous sufferer of Psalm 22:7.

27:40. Those who pass by repeat *Satan's taunt of Matthew 4:3, 7, still emphasizing their expectation of a political *messiah. Ironically, even those within the *narrative should have realized how closely the accusers' words echo the mocking words of the *wicked* in Wisdom of Solomon 2:18: "If the righteous person really is a son of God, God will help him and deliver him from those who resist him."

27:41-42. Compare 4:3, 6.

27:43-44. The language of the religious authorities exactly parallels Psalm 22:8; the righteous sufferer himself quotes this psalm in Matthew 27:46 (Ps 22:1).

27:45-56
The King's Death

27:45. The "sixth hour" begins by noon, the "ninth hour" by 3 p.m.; crucifixions rarely ended so quickly. The latter time, when Jesus dies, was close to the time of the evening offering in the temple. Darkness was one of the plagues in Egypt (the one preceding the sacrifice of the first paschal lamb) and occurs in the prophets as a judgment for the end time; both Jews and most pagans considered darkenings of the sky (especially eclipses) bad omens. Cf. Amos 8:9.

27:46. Here Jesus quotes Psalm 22:1, which may have been part of the Scripture recitation at this time of day. His opponents do not pause to consider that the psalm ends with the sufferer's vindication and triumph (Ps 22:25-31). Whereas Mark's quotation is in Aramaic, Matthew's is mainly in Hebrew.

27:47. Because Elijah was thought never to have died, some *rabbis felt that he was sent on errands like the angels, often to aid or deliver pious rabbis from trouble. Matthew's Hebrew version of the prayer (*Eli*, 27:46) sounds closer to "Elijah" (*Eliyahu*) than Mark's Aramaic version (*Eloi*).

27:48. This offer of a wine-soaked sponge may have been an act of mercy, because the wine could act as a painkiller. Perhaps the man thinks Jesus is delirious from pain. But sour wine was usually a remedy for thirst, and it may have been an attempt to revive him to perpetuate his suffering.

27:49. See comment on 27:47.

27:50. "Giving up one's spirit" is used elsewhere to refer to death.

27:51-53. Stories were told of catastrophes occurring at the deaths of pious rabbis, especially those whose intercession had been vital to the world; on rare occasions, Greek writers also applied such stories to the deaths of prominent philosophers. These events would have communicated Jesus' importance quite well to ancient observers and readers.

27:51. The veil (or curtain—NIV) is probably the one between the holy of holies—inhabited only by God—and the sanctuary where the priests ministered (Ex 26:33). Matthew might intend this tearing of the veil to recall the rending of clothes at the hearing of blasphemy (Mt 26:65). The point of the veil's rending may be that by the cross God provides access for all people into his presence, or it may indicate the departure of God from the temple (as in Ezek 10–11). *Apocalypses sometimes mentioned a major earthquake shortly before the coming of the *kingdom.

27:52-53. Although these raisings of the dead *saints, like those in the *Old Testament, do not mean that they will not die again, they prefigure Judaism's anticipated final *resurrection, when the dead will be raised never to die again. Archaeological evidence indicates that in popular (not official) Judaism, the tombs of saints were venerated. Gentiles sometimes understood appearances of the (not-raised) dead as omens of coming disaster (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.797).

27:54. Here pagans—the executioners—are the first people after Jesus' death to recognize, to some extent, his identity, although they may mean "*Son of God" quite differently than Jewish people and Christians (including Matthew) would have (cf. Dan 3:25, 29): a semidivine hero, son of a deity, rather than *Messiah.

27:55-56. Although an execution squad might restrict close access (lest the crowd's view be obstructed), family and close friends might be present to lament at an execution; only the male *disciples would have been in danger as suspected allies of a revolutionary. Women often (though much less than men) performed the office of *patron, or benefactor, supporting religious or other groups;

it became problematic only for critics already opposed to a group. But in ancient Jewish Palestine, critics could have denounced as scandalous these women accompanying Jesus' disciples.

27:57-61
Jesus' Burial

27:57. Arimathea was only about twenty miles from Jerusalem; given the location of Joseph's tomb (27:60) and his historic membership in the Sanhedrin (Mk 15:43), Joseph's primary residence is apparently now Jerusalem. Even if the sabbath had begun (hence "evening"), the urgent washing and preliminary burial were permitted even on the sabbath (before decomposition would begin).

27:58. Joseph is said to have been wealthy; he must have been prominent to have secured an audience with Pilate after his official public hours (which ended at noon). When Romans crucified persons, they usually denied them burial (leaving them to be eaten by vultures or dogs); Jewish scruples in Palestine demanded burial (Deut 21:23), but for the first year this could be in a dishonorable grave site for criminals, not a family tomb. Exceptions were often made when relatives asked for the body, but in the case of treason (as claiming to be the Jewish king would be) an exception would not be made unless the deceased had a prominent advocate. Jesus had a posthumous ally in this man of influence, who was not ashamed to go on record as his follower. Because prominent people viewed as allies of a condemned revolutionary could risk their lives by speaking up for him, Joseph risks a great deal to come forward.

The term used for "evening" included late afternoon as well as just after sundown. In any case, in this hot climate under Jewish *law the preliminary disposal of the body (including its washing, also practiced by other peoples) took precedence over celebration of the sabbath, even if the rest of the treatment of the body had to wait. Burying the dead was an important duty of the pious in Judaism. Public mourning was important for all the dead but was illegal for anyone who had been executed.

27:59-60. Being wrapped in a fine linen shroud would mark an honorable burial. To bury someone in one's own family tomb was a special act of reverence and affection (cf. 1 Kings 13:30-31; cf. Is 53:12). (Cemeteries and burial plots in this period nearly always belonged to families.) In the first century, the body would normally be left to rot in the tomb's antechamber for the first year; at the end of the year, the bones would be gathered into a box, which would slide into a slot on the wall. This practice probably related to the standard Jewish hope in the resurrection of the body at the end of the age. The stone rolled in front of the tomb was a carved, disk-shaped stone probably about three feet in diameter, rolled into place in a groove and moved back from the entrance only with great effort.

27:61. Women generally took part in preparing bodies for burial in the ancient world. The oldest tradition for the site of Jesus' grave (the Roman Catholic location of the Holy Sepulcher) is a clearly first-century tomb located inside the walls of Jerusalem since the forties of the first century, even though the *New Testament and Jewish law required that the crucifixion happen outside the city walls. But King Agrippa I expanded the city walls during his reign (A.D. 41–44); at the time of Jesus' crucifixion, that area was still outside the walls. Thus the tradition of the approximate site of Jesus' burial and resurrection goes back to within roughly ten years of the event. (The traditional Protestant site contains tombs from a much later period and has no evidence to commend it.)

27:62-66
Making Sure He Stayed Buried

The priestly aristocracy, ever politically astute, takes no chances, and despite the sabbath and festival they obtain an audience with Pilate to secure the tomb. It is debated whether Pilate here provides them with Roman guards or tells them where the tomb is and permits them to post some of their temple guard; the guards' fear of Pilate's reprisals (28:14) could indicate that they are Roman guards, but they also answer to the *high priests (28:11) and it seems unlikely that Pilate would put his own soldiers at the chief priests' disposal. The seal on the stone would make any tampering obvious. That the Jerusalem authorities would have acted thus on the sabbath indicates their special interest in the case as well as suggests the selectiveness of their piety.

28:1-10
The First Witnesses of the Risen Jesus

That women are chosen as the first witnesses is highly significant; both Jewish and Roman law severely minimized the value of their witness. It fits Jesus' countercultural and counterstatus ministry and certainly runs counter to what outsiders would have valued or anything the later *church would have chosen to invent.

28:1. Sabbath ended at sundown on Saturday evening; the women are on their way to the tomb by 6 a.m., as soon as there is enough light for them to see. Jewish mourners as well as pagans were often known to visit tombs within the three days after the burial, to ensure that their relative was dead; given the nature of crucifixion, however, such a precaution would be unnecessary here, and their primary interest is undoubtedly mourning.

28:2-4. Angels, especially visibly fiery ones (many ancient Jewish people believed that angels consisted of fire), generally terrified people (e.g., Judg 6:22-23; 13:19-20; cf. **4 Ezra* 10:25-27; **3 Enoch* 22:4-9). Jewish *apocalyptic literature sometimes portrayed angels or other figures with superhuman radiance. Jewish people normally expected angels to be clothed in white (though this was also true of priests and of some others). Stones closing tombs were usually extremely heavy and disk-shaped, so rolling it back singlehandedly and sitting on it underlines the superhuman character of the angel.

28:5-8. Jerusalem was the religious center of Judaism; Judeans sometimes still looked on Galilee as a place of former non-Jews (4:15). Yet Galilee was where some of Jesus' revelations to his *disciples would take place; all four Gospels report that Jesus was better received there.

28:9-10. Whereas reports of ghosts were not very controversial in antiquity, bodily *resurrection differed and was, in the Roman empire, distinctively Jewish (see Dan 12:2). The witness of women was generally considered unreliable in that culture; *Josephus even claims that the Torah rejects women's testimony in view of the weakness of their gender. Jesus, however, goes against the culture by revealing himself to the women and telling them to bear his message to the other disciples. This detail is definitely not one that ancient Christians would have invented; it did not appeal to their culture.

28:11-15
The Final Subversion

Guards faced serious consequences for falling asleep on the job (indeed, Roman guards could be executed), including jobs guarding the corpses of crucifixion victims (see the first-century Roman writer *Petronius *Satyricon* 112). But the priestly aristocracy had enough influence to protect their own interests. Like Judas (26:15), the guards act partly on mercenary motives; the bribe and the potential penalty they face for allowing Jesus' body to disappear ensures their cooperation. (The officials' promise to protect the guards from *Pilate may involve more bribery; despite Roman policy, Pilate is known to have been susceptible to this form of persuasion.) Matthew would be unlikely to report a charge against the resurrection that had not actually been made (28:15), and his report indicates that the Jerusalem authorities had sought to explain the empty tomb—but had never tried to deny it.

28:16-20
Jesus' Final Orders

Ancient works sometimes contrasted characters: the true testimony of the women (28:1-10), in contrast to the false testimony of the guards (28:11-15), offers the proper model for the testimony of the church (28:16-20). Ancient works sometimes summarized major themes in their conclusions; Jesus' closing words in 28:18-20 connect many dominant themes in Matthew's Gospel, including Jesus' authority, his commandments, his identity and God's interest in even *Gentiles (cf. 1:3-5; 2:1-2; 3:9; 4:15; 8:5, 11, 28; 11:21-22; 12:41-42; 15:22; 24:14; 25:31-32; 27:54). Some have pointed out that Matthew 28:16-20 resembles some *Old Testament "commissioning narratives."

28:16. God had often revealed himself on mountains in biblical tradition, especially in the *narratives about Moses.

28:17. Some who see Jesus' appearance are doubtful, perhaps because it does not fit current expectations of the end time: all the dead were

to be raised together, not the *Messiah first.

28:18. Here Jesus alludes to Daniel 7:13-14 (going beyond Mt 9:6 and climaxing a *kingdom theme in Matthew's Gospel).

28:19-20. "Making *disciples" was the sort of thing *rabbis would do, but Jesus' followers are to make disciples for Jesus, not for themselves. Subordinate participles explain the command, "Make disciples," suggesting that making disciples involves three elements:

(1) Going, presumably to "the nations" who are being discipled. Many Jews outside Palestine sought converts among the "nations" (which can also be translated as "Gentiles" or "pagans"). But only a few converts ever studied under rabbis, so the idea of making Gentiles full disciples—followers of Jesus who would learn from and serve him—goes beyond this Jewish tradition. Isaiah predicted that Israel would be a witness to (or against) the nations in the end time (e.g., 42:6; 43:10; 44:8).

(2) Baptizing them. Because *baptism was an act of conversion (used for Gentiles converting to Judaism), it means initiating people to the faith. Jewish people recognized God as "Father" and his *Spirit as divine (sometimes as an aspect of God), but would find shocking "the Son" named between them.

(3) Teaching them Jesus' commandments recorded in Matthew. Rabbis made disciples by teaching them.

Jewish literature called only God omnipresent; Jesus' claim that he would always be with them (cf. also 1:23; 18:20), coupled with his being named alongside the Father in baptism (Jewish people did not baptize in the names of people), constitutes a proclamation of his deity.

Mark

Introduction

Authorship. Large *narrative works rarely circulated anonymously, especially in the first generation when the recipients generally knew the authors. The titles of the Gospels, which unanimously attribute them to particular authors, circulated in diverse parts of the Roman world from an early period; their wide circulation without contradiction indicates that the tradition is early. Although "Mark" was a common name, early *church tradition attributes this Gospel to John Mark (Acts 15:37; Col 4:10; 1 Pet 5:13), who was said to have derived his information from Peter. Because there is no evidence against this attribution, many scholars support Mark as the most likely candidate for the author. A relative of Barnabas (Col 4:10), John Mark may have had stronger ties with the *Diaspora than with Judea even when living in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 4:36). Similarly, some believe that this Gospel's writer was more familiar with Diaspora Judaism than with details of Galilean geography or Pharisaic customs.

Date, Setting and Purpose. The most common suggestions are that Mark wrote his Gospel to Roman Christians during the time of the great persecution in Rome, about A.D. 64 (for more discussion see 1 Peter), or that he wrote shortly before the conclusion of the Judean-Roman War (A.D. 66–70). The earlier of these dates helps explain the emphasis on suffering and may allow more easily for the most probable dating of Luke (who wrote after Mark), but certainty remains elusive.

Place of Writing. Various proposals for Mark's provenance have been offered: Galilee, Alexandria and, most often, Rome. Mark's audience probably lived outside Palestine and most of them were non-Jewish; Rome is the most likely of these proposals (favored by some early Christian traditions), though it is not certain. Internal evidence confirms that Mark himself comes from the eastern Mediterranean world.

Genre. See the introduction to the Gospels in this commentary.

Why Mark Wrote. Those who heard Mark read in the churches already knew many of the stories about Jesus, whom they worshiped as Lord. Mark connects these stories into a sort of biography of Jesus, perhaps following some of the plot movements familiar from Greek tragedy, except with a happy ending, like tradi-

tional Jewish stories that emphasized the faithfulness of God. Ancient biographies often made particular moral points through the example of their heroes, and Mark is no exception: he wants his fellow Christians to understand that Christ's call involves both power and suffering in their conflict with *Satan's forces.

Thus Mark wrote to a community that needed to be reminded that God heard prayers and would work through their witness and faith; they also needed to be reminded that this might cost them their lives in persecution. Finally, they could be reminded through the failure of the disciples in Mark that if they had not yet achieved the radical lifestyle their Lord's words demanded, he would still work with them patiently to help them get to that level of commitment. Along with external evidence for Rome as the place of writing, such factors may support viewing Mark as addressing the suffering of Roman Christians under Nero starting in A.D. 64. Again, however, this hypothesis, like many reconstructions of Gospels' "target audiences," remains simply a best guess.

Mark's Message. Mark is written in the most basic Koine Greek from the eastern Mediterranean world; I have tried to keep Mark's more basic approach in mind by making this part of the commentary simpler than, say, comments on Luke-Acts or Hebrews. Some themes are especially prominent in Mark. One such theme is the so-called messianic secret (noticed as early as the church fathers): Jesus conceals his messianic identity, insofar as possible, from the public. This secrecy may be due to several factors. First, the Christ, or *Messiah, was the Davidic king and officially took this title only at his enthronement. Thus in Mark Jesus is finally "coronated" on the cross. Ancients typically despised unjustified boasting. Second—and this is probably more important—Jesus' mission was completely different from any of the political views about messiahs circulating at the time; "messiahship" was thus an inadequate category for him until he could define it by the character of his mission. His mission could be understood only retrospectively, in the light of his death and *resurrection (9:9). One might further compare Jesus' attempts to secure privacy when possible with some prominent *Old Testament prophets. Such prophets often worked clandestinely, not seeking their own glory but only to accomplish their mission (e.g., 1 Kings 11:29; 13:8-9; 21:18; 2 Kings 9:1-10); more of their time may have been spent in the humble lifestyle circles of their own *disciples whom they were training (1 Sam 19:20; 2 Kings 4:38; 6:1-3). Perhaps most important was a logistical issue: the larger the crowds grew (e.g., Mk 1:45; 2:2; 3:9-10, 20), the greater the demands on Jesus' limited time, constrictions on his mobility and unwelcome attention of potentially hostile rulers.

A related theme in Mark is the failure of the disciples. In comic works, characters' failings could provide comic relief; in tragic works, characters' obtuseness could underline the tragedy of the outcome. Likely more relevant, ancient writings would sometimes play down the sensibility of secondary characters to make them foils for

the main hero. In Mark, the disciples are obtuse with regard to Jesus' and their own mission, both the charismatic part (miracle working—4:40; 9:18-19, 28-29) and, more significantly, the suffering part. This theme is so pervasive that the Gospel apparently ends on this note (16:7-8). The opening proclamation of the kingdom climaxes in Jesus' crucifixion as king of the Jews, Mark concisely teasing his audience with the resurrection that lay beyond it. This pattern fits the hiddenness of Jesus' Messiahship. Mark knows that the kingdom will come in its fullness but recognizes that in the present it is visible only to some (4:11-12, 30-32). Jesus focuses on the sick, the poor, the morally and socially marginalized, and others, rather than cultivating the favor of the powerful. Yet as Paul emphasizes, God's power is revealed in the epitome of human weakness, in the cross (1 Cor 1:18-25).

Commentaries. Useful commentaries for cultural information include William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark,* NCB (1976; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary,* Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). Among special studies, see particularly Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark,* trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Wendy J. Cotter, *The Christ of the Miracle Stories: Portrait Through Encounter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); for one literary treatment in historical context, see Rob Starner, *Kingdom of Power, Power of Kingdom: The Opposing World Views of Mark and Chariton* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

1:1-15
Introduction of the One Who Brings the Kingdom

Ancient writers often mentioned the main themes of their works in their introductions (in Mark, this runs from 1:1 to perhaps 1:15, give or take a few verses). The opening of the Gospel of Mark introduces Mark's presentation of Jesus as the proclaimer and bringer of God's *kingdom. In this passage Jesus, endowed with the *Spirit, enters into conflict with *Satan and defeats him; in the rest of the Gospel Jesus drives out *demons and heals the sick, is opposed by Satan's religious and political agents, and ultimately overcomes Satan's opposition by the *resurrection. This passage promises that Jesus endows his followers with this same Spirit for the same conflict they must face in proclaiming God's kingdom.

1:1. The Greek term translated "*gospel" refers to the good news a herald would bring, and the Greek translation of Isaiah used the related verb to refer to the good news that God was restoring his people and bringing the reign, or kingdom, of God (Is 52:7; cf. 40:9; 41:27; 61:1). (Because Jewish readers often named books for their first word or words, some scholars suggest that "the good news of Jesus Christ" is the title of Mark's Gospel; but these words are also simply a natural way to start off a book like this one.)

1:2-3. Jewish teachers often combined several texts or parts of texts, especially if they had a key word or words in common (here, "prepare the way"). Because they were so learned in the Scriptures, they did not have to say which texts they were quoting and often assumed the context without quoting it. Thus Mark cites both Isaiah (40:3) and Malachi (3:1) here, although he names only Isaiah. Isaiah refers to preparing the way for God, who is coming to restore his people; Malachi refers to God coming in judgment to set matters straight among his people. Mark applies these texts about God to Jesus (cf. also 1:7).

1:4-5. Like many other ancient peoples, Jewish people practiced ceremonial washings. Their only once-for-all ceremonial washing, however, was the immersion that non-Jews had to go through when they converted to Judaism. Non-Jews who were converting to Judaism would immerse themselves in water, probably under the supervision of a religious expert. John's baptizing activity fits this model.

Jewish people also practiced "*repentance" when they did something wrong, asking God's forgiveness and determining to change. (The *Old Testament prophets often used this Hebrew idea of "turning" from sin; it involves more than just a "change of mind," which is the literal sense of the Greek term used here.) But the ultimate example of repenting, or turning from a wrong way of living to a right way of living, was when a non-Jew decided to obey the teachings of Israel's God.

To tell Jewish people that they had to be baptized or repent the same way non-Jews did would have been offensive, because it challenged the prevalent Jewish belief about salvation. Most Jewish people thought that if they were born into a Jewish family and did not reject God's *law, they would be saved; John told them instead that they had to come to God the same way that non-Jews did. A key point of John's *baptism is that everyone has to come to God on the same terms.

The "wilderness" stretched about seventy-five miles north and south, but only about ten miles east and west, between the hill country of Judea and the Jordan Valley. Only one familiar with Palestine's topography would speak of people going into the "wilderness" to be baptized in the Jordan. The Jordan River was the most natural venue for John to have the people immerse themselves, but this location may have also evoked Israel's history of salvation (Josh 3–4). John's coming in the "wilderness" could evoke Israel's history too, especially because Isaiah 40:3 predicted the herald of a new exodus there, and many Jewish people expected the *Messiah to come as a new Moses there. Various Jewish groups withdrew into the wilderness to wait for a new exodus or to evade interference from authorities.

1:6. Some other poor people in John's day dressed the way he did and ate locusts and honey (the *Dead Sea Scrolls even give directions concerning the eating of locusts). But what is most important here is that the Old Testament emphasizes that Elijah dressed this way and, like John, did not depend on society for his sustenance (cf. 1 Kings 17:4, 9). Elijah

was expected to return before the end (Mal 3:1; 4:5-6; Sirach 48:10); cf. comment on Mark 1:2-3.

Many Jewish people believed that there had been no true prophets since Malachi and that prophets would not be restored till near the time of the end. But Mark wants us to understand that John is definitely a prophet, and indeed, the predictor forerunner for God (here, Jesus).

1:7. *Disciples often served their teachers in the same ways that slaves would serve their masters, except for the most menial chores like taking off their masters' sandals. Even though earlier prophets were called "servants" of the Lord John feels unworthy even to be the coming one's slave.

1:8. Some passages in the Old Testament speak of the Spirit being poured out like water; only God, however, could pour out God's Spirit. These passages refer especially to the time of God's kingdom, when he would cleanse his people and endow them with power to speak for him (Is 44:3; Ezek 36:25-27; 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; cf. Zech 12:10). Some Jewish traditions in Jesus' day still stressed that the Spirit would cleanse and provide prophetic anointing in the end time.

1:9-10. The tearing of the heavens may also indicate that the kingdom is near (Is 64:1; 65:17). Opened heavens could also accompany heavenly revelations (see Ezek 1:1). Although ancient writers used the dove symbolically in many diverse ways (most often for Israel; rarely, the Spirit), it might here allude back to God's promise of a new world (Gen 8:10-12).

1:11. Jewish teachers who believed that God no longer spoke through prophets believed that he now spoke to them by means of a voice from heaven (*bath qol*) although this was not considered as important as *prophecy. Here Mark shows that both a voice from heaven *and* John's prophecy testify to Jesus.

In Jewish stories the voice from heaven occasionally quoted Scripture, and most scholars think that the voice here refers to two or three Scriptures: Psalm 2:7, applied to the royal Messiah, the *Son of God; Isaiah 42:1, about the suffering servant; and Genesis 22:2, about Abraham sacrificing his beloved son. The wording of Mark's text is closest to Psalm 2:7 and Genesis 22:2.

1:12-13. Sources suggest that many believed that demons were especially attracted to places like pagan temples, bathhouses, graveyards and deserts. Readers would thus sense the suspense as Jesus battled with Satan on Satan's own turf. Safety among beasts showed God's protection (Ezek 34:25; Dan 6:22).

1:14-15. The summary of Jesus' message may also be the summary of Mark's Gospel, or good news (1:1): people should turn their lives over to God (on repentance, see comment on 1:4-5) if they believe the good news that God is getting ready to fulfill his promises to his people (see Is 52:6; comment on Mk 1:1).

The Jewish people recognized that God ruled the universe in one sense now, but they prayed daily for the day when his kingdom, or rule, would be established over all peoples of the earth. Because the Gospels affirm that Jesus must come twice, they recognize that the kingdom comes in two stages: God's future rule is already established when Jesus dies as king (15:26), but over all the world when Jesus returns. John, however, was not yet in a position to make this distinction.

1:16-20
Downward Mobility and Jesus' Call

Ancient writers often liked to illustrate their teachings with examples, and Mark is no exception. After telling how Jesus summoned people to turn their lives over to God, he reports a particular example illustrating how some followers of Jesus did so. The "Sea of Galilee" was a lake that only people from the region called a sea; Mark's language here reflects early memories about Jesus.

Only a few people in Jewish Palestine were rich; most were relatively poor. Scholars often estimate that seventy to ninety percent of the empire consisted of rural peasants. Some people, however, like many fishermen, tended to fall between the rich and the poor (distinctions were less clearly drawn in Galilee than in much of the empire); Galilean fishermen were not peasants. James and John were clearly not poor—they had "hired workers" (v. 20), as only somewhat well-off people did (although some translations could suggest that they were rented slaves, the term probably simply means free hired workers). Peter and Andrew were probably in business with James and John (Lk 5:7-10); we know of other fishing

partnerships at that time. This text suggests that none of these *disciples left their business behind because it was going badly; they left behind relatively well-paying jobs.

Even the departure of hired servants could be a hardship for a family business; departure of family members would be more difficult. Many Jewish teachers in Jesus' day felt that the greatest commandment was to honor one's parents. To abruptly leave behind one's family and the family business was a great sacrifice that went against most of the culture's values.

Disciples usually sought out their own teachers. Only the most radical teachers called their own disciples (e.g., 1 Kings 19:19). Because discipleship sometimes involved temporarily laying aside one's livelihood and being apart from one's wife and children for a time, the decision to choose a teacher would have normally been made only after much deliberation, especially when the teacher traveled from place to place instead of staying in one town to teach. Galilee was not so large as to require long journeys, however; they would be able to return to stay in their home towns periodically (see e.g., 2:1). Much instruction was also seasonal (especially for those needing to be home for planting and harvest), but it is not clear that this would have been the case with Jesus' disciples.

1:21-28
Authority over Demons

For Jewish hearers the following succession of miracle stories might evoke the *Old Testament narratives about Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kings 17–19 and 2 Kings 1–8. The account of the fishermen demonstrates the claims Jesus' authority makes on his followers' lives, but the verses that follow it demonstrate his authority over evil spirits (cf. 1:12-13). The only recorded possible exorcist in the Old Testament was David (1 Sam 16:23), but *Josephus and the *Dead Sea Scrolls suggest that some other Jewish people in this era practiced exorcism. Although wandering *demons appear frequently in Jewish literature, the only demons that appear in the Gospels (except Satan—Mk 1:13) are in people they possess (or, as a second choice, in pigs—5:12). The place that Jesus encounters his first demon may shock Mark's readers: it is in a religious setting.

1:21. Most *synagogues were community centers and places of prayer and study. When visiting teachers were present, local synagogue leaders (priests, *scribes, large donors, or other respected members of the community) would invite them to lecture, especially on the sabbath. Archaeologists have found the site of Capernaum's synagogue, which was built from basalt blocks. Although later synagogues were more ornate, most people in this first-century Galilean synagogue probably sat on mats on the floor.

1:22. Synagogue services were conducted by priests or by what we would call "lay leaders," but those most skilled in the Scriptures undoubtedly contributed their share when the Old Testament was to be expounded. Many local teachers were village scribes who also wrote down and interpreted legal documents for their village; some of them taught children the Bible. Most teachers would try to expound the *law (normally from their Scripture reading) by explaining the proper way to translate and apply it or by appealing to their traditions. More advanced teachers would also appeal to earlier traditions; this was especially true for those who belonged to the Pharisaic movement. Jesus' teaching went beyond this kind of exposition.

1:23-24. Demons (also occasionally called "unclean spirits," e.g., **Jubilees* 10:1) were often associated with *magic, and magicians tried to subdue other spiritual forces by invoking their names. If the demon here is trying to subdue Jesus in this way ("I know who you are" was used to subdue spiritual powers in magical texts), as some scholars have suggested, this ploy does not work. Ancients often recognized that demons had access to supernatural knowledge; it is not surprising that these demons perceive Jesus' true identity, which the people there still do not recognize. "Holy One" was normally a title of God, but "Holy One of God" here probably means something like "God's right-hand agent"; in Jewish literature, demons recognized their inability to harm those who walked close to God.

1:25-27. Jesus' action illustrates his authority (1:22, 27). Demons were apparently rebuked and subdued with orders like "Be

silent" (the later **Testament of Solomon*); rebukes in the *New Testament and other ancient literature never involved a *formal* statement like "I rebuke you." Exiting demons usually caused a commotion to make clear that they were leaving, regardless of the person who was casting them out.

Although exorcists—people who tried to chase demons out of other people—also occasionally used phrases like "Come out of so-and-so!" they used the phrases as parts of elaborate magical incantations. They had two main methods of expelling demons: (1) revolting or scaring the demon out (e.g., by putting a smelly root up the possessed person's nose in the hope that the demon would not be able to stand it); (2) using magical formulas or invoking the name of a higher spirit to get rid of the lower one. The people are thus amazed that Jesus can be effective by simply ordering the demons to leave. Jewish tradition praised teachers who could draw special insights from the law and sometimes attributed miracle-working powers to popular teachers; but Jesus seems to earn a category by himself ("new teaching").

1:28. Galilee's villages were close together, and close kin and trade connections among them would allow word to spread rapidly.

1:29-34
The Healer's Popularity

1:29-31. A newly married couple often lived with the husband's family (perhaps in a shack on the flat roof) until they made enough money to move out on their own. Many parents died while their children were young adults, so it is possible that Simon and Andrew took over their parents' home. In any case, Simon's father-in-law had probably passed away, and Simon and his wife had taken her widowed mother into their home. Caring for one's extended family was more common in Mediterranean antiquity then than it is in the West today.

1:32-34. The sabbath ended Saturday at sundown. Mark mentions that it was "after sunset" to let us know that the sabbath is over, because it would have violated the sabbath for anyone to have carried someone on the sabbath. The whole town gathers "at the door" because most homes around Capernaum had only one room, and even a larger home could not have accommodated many people. The doorway may have opened to a courtyard shared with other homes, as often in Galilean towns, but this door may be to an outside street. The few teachers reputed to work miracles rapidly drew large crowds.

1:35-39
Prayer Alone

1:35-37. This crowdedness also leads to another problem: it would be nearly impossible to find a place to be alone in such ancient towns, with their narrow streets and sometimes ten or twenty people living in the common one-room houses; most town blocks consisted of four homes all facing a common courtyard. Galilee was also heavily populated, and villages were commonly close together. But one could find a place alone in the hills outside one's village if one arose early enough. People got up for work as soon as the sun rose, so Jesus has to get up well before dawn to go out and find a solitary place for prayer.

1:38-39. The word used for the other "towns" suggests large agricultural towns still governed according to regular village structures; these were apparently places that had not yet heard of Jesus. He probably could have drawn the largest crowds in the synagogues on market days and sabbaths, and in late afternoons or early evenings when laborers had finished their day's work.

1:40-45
Cleansing a Leper

Leprosy was an unattractive skin disease (or diseases) for which the Bible had prescribed quarantine from the rest of society (Lev 13:45-46). Some later Jewish teachers blamed the disease on the leper's sin (often the sin of slander). Lepers were thus outcasts from the rest of society, the kind of people most healthy people preferred to ignore. People ordinarily avoided touching lepers, lest they contract impurity.

The leper approaches Jesus with humility, which was the proper *Old Testament way to approach God for prayer, although the fact that he even approaches Jesus also indicates a measure of holy boldness. Acknowledging that God had the right to refuse the prayer and that

one depended on his mercy was not in any way a lack of faith (Gen 18:27, 30-32; 2 Sam 10:12; Dan 3:18).

The *law had prescribed particular sacrifices if someone's leprosy were cured (Lev 14:1-32). By complying with these regulations, Jesus does nothing to violate the law or to offend the priests. (Later Jewish laws also insisted that the leper be checked by a local priest before going to the temple, but it is not clear whether these prescriptions were in effect in Jesus' day.)

Teachers thought to perform miracles would normally have large followings, because many people were sick; the number of people suffering from various afflictions is attested by how many people flocked to hot springs in Galilee that were thought to relieve ailments. Jesus, who performs miracles without the common pagan use of magical incantations, acquires such a large following that for a period of time he cannot accommodate them inside a town (v. 45).

2:1-12
Healed and Forgiven

Just as Jesus violates his culture's religious sensibilities by touching a leper (1:41) and claims more authority than a normal *rabbi would dare accept (cf. 1:17, 27), and just as Mark's *narrative challenges cultural religion by beginning with a demoniac in a house of study and prayer (1:21-28), Jesus' role in this passage challenges the theological categories of his culture's religious establishment.

2:1-2. The capacity of the average Capernaum home may have allowed only about fifty persons standing close together (the longest span in excavated homes is eighteen feet). We thus should not think of literally the whole town inside or just outside the door.

2:3-4. Poorer people often had only mats for "beds"; thus the paralytics' friends may have carried him on the bed on which he lay all the time. Some homes in Capernaum were private dwellings, but others were built around courtyards shared with neighbors. Houses often had an outside staircase, so they could reach the roof unimpeded. The roof of single-story homes was sturdy enough for walking on but was normally made of branches and rushes laid over the roof's beams and covered with dried mud; thus one could dig through it, though it would make a mess and presumably leave the diggers liable to cover subsequent repairs.

2:5-7. Undeterred determination to get to Jesus counts here as "faith," as similar determination counted in the *Old Testament (e.g., 2 Kings 4:27-28). In a positive way, teachers called *disciples, and older men could call younger men, "son" or "child." Sins were to be *atoned for by offerings in the temple. Judaism taught that only God could forgive sins, but most Jews allowed that some of God's representatives might speak on God's behalf. The passive form, "are forgiven," could be interpreted in this way (Jewish teachers often used the passive form to describe God's activity); but Jesus was not a priest, no one had offered sacrifice, and the *scribes had heard no basis for the pronouncement of forgiveness, not even clear indication of *repentance.

The Old Testament penalty for blaspheming God's name—reproaching rather than honoring it—was death (Lev 24:10-23). According to later rabbinic sources (known for restricting capital cases as much as possible), blasphemy involved pronouncing the divine name or inviting people to follow other gods. But the term was used much more broadly in popular parlance in this period, and these legal scholars may view Jesus as claiming a divine role and so dishonoring the divine name.

2:8. Because supernatural knowledge was especially attributed to prophets (e.g., 2 Kings 6:12), Jesus' hearers would probably view him here as a prophet; "speaking in one's heart" may be idiomatic (Deut 15:9; 18:21; 30:14). Most Jewish teachers believed that "prophets" in the Old Testament sense had ceased, but most of the people were happy to entertain new prophetic figures, many of whom they saw as harbingers of the end.

2:9-12. Some Jewish teachers accepted miracles as verification that a teacher was truly God's representative; others did not regard miracles as sufficient proof if they disagreed with the teacher's interpretation of Scripture.

Jewish teachers knew that only God could ultimately forgive (on the Day of Atonement in response to sacrifice); but they also recognized that healing ultimately came from God. Both were from God but could be announced

through God's agents acting according to his will. *Josephus shows us that some false prophets in Jesus' era promised to work miracles but actually failed to work them; some of Jesus' critics may have placed him in this category. His act in front of these witnesses, however, should have challenged them to rethink their case.

2:13-17
A Tax Gatherer Follows

As in 2:1-12, Jesus' behavior here runs counter to standards of piety among his Jewish contemporaries.

2:13. Most prominent local teachers taught regular groups of *disciples and also performed other local services in their town. Translocal teachers who had large followings, however, could threaten the establishment as potential revolutionaries.

2:14. Because Levi was situated at an office in Capernaum, many suspect that he was a customs agent, charging import duties on wares brought through this town on important nearby trade routes. This is possible, but others' disdain (2:16) might point toward him being a more general tax farmer working for Herod Antipas. In any case, even more than the fishermen, he has a secure and prosperous job, which he abandons to follow Jesus' call.

Some taxes went directly to the Roman government, but tolls and customs taxes (usually levied at two to three percent, but multiplied for traders who passed through many territories) supported the cities where they were taken. Even if Levi is a locally valuable customs agent, however, this *narrative shows that many still regarded his activity as unwholesome; the municipal aristocracy supported Roman interests against those of the Jewish poor.

2:15. Many religious people despised *tax gatherers as collaborators with the Romans or agents of oppressive aristocracies who collaborated with Rome. Some commentators have argued that "sinners" may refer specifically to those who did not eat food in ritual purity, but the term probably refers to anyone who lived sinfully rather than religiously, as if they did not care what the religious community thought of them.

2:16. Table fellowship normally established a bond of friendship. Upright people would not want to appear to approve of those who may not have tithed on the food, much less with outright and publicly known sinners. To eat with such would seem to overlook their actions and embrace shame in the eyes of one's peers. Teachers sometimes contrasted tax collectors with *Pharisees, models of piety. Here they presumably expect that Jesus, being a wise teacher, ought to share their religious convictions.

2:17. Jesus' reply plays on a common image of the day (comparing physicians and teachers) to make his point.

2:18-22
The Right Time to Fast

Again (see 2:13-17) Jesus does not appear religious enough for the traditionalists; but he has a new kind of religious lifestyle in mind.

2:18. The *law required fasting only on the Day of Atonement, but Jewish tradition had added many other fasts. Pharisees were said to often fast twice a week, without water (at least in the dry season). Fasting was an important practice to join with prayer or penitence, so it would have been unusual for *disciples (prospective rabbis) to have avoided it altogether. A teacher was usually regarded as responsible for the behavior of his disciples.

2:19-20. Wedding feasts ideally involved seven days of festivity; one was not permitted to fast or engage in other acts of mourning or difficult labor during a wedding feast. Here Jesus makes an analogy about the similar inappropriateness of fasting in his own time. If Jesus compares himself with the bridegroom (one should not press comparisons into every detail in *parables), it may be significant that God is the bridegroom in some *Old Testament images (e.g., Hos 2:14-20).

2:21-22. Again the issue is the inappropriateness of fasting in the present circumstance. Jesus uses two ordinary facts to make his point. Older clothes had already shrunk somewhat from washing. Wine could be kept in either jars or wineskins; the latter would stretch. Old wineskins had already been stretched to capacity by fermenting wine within them; if they were then filled with unfermented wine, it would also expand, and the old wineskins, already stretched to the limit, would break.

2:23-27
The Right Use of the Sabbath

Jesus' conflicts with the religious establishment in the preceding passages come to a head over details of sabbath observance (2:23-3:6). Their religious priorities differ; whereas the religious establishment may think that Jesus questions the Bible's authority, he demands instead a different way to understand it and so apply it.

2:23-24. Many argue that few *Pharisees lived in Galilee and question whether they would be in a grainfield on the sabbath; on this view, it is possible that Mark applies the more specific term *Pharisees* to local religious teachers responding to reports about what Jesus' *disciples had done. Others recognize that some Pharisees may have lived in Galilee, and suggest that some Pharisees had been investigating or traveling with Jesus, or that some had come even from Judea to investigate him. Others could also allow that this narrative occurred during one of the festival visits to Judea.

In any case, they would not be more than a "sabbath day's journey" from wherever they were staying—that is, two thousand cubits (about 960 yards or 1120 meters; i.e., over half a mile or over a kilometer). Thus the disciples, who encounter Pharisees, are surely within walking distance of food in a village, if it had been properly prepared the preceding day. Teachers were held responsible for the behavior of their disciples, and many rabbis considered it proper to defend the honor of their disciples.

2:25. Whether or not his opponents agree with Jesus' argument, he has cited biblical precedent for hunger overriding a standard biblical rule; therefore they could not have him disciplined by a local court for defying Torah. Because Jesus is defending his disciples, he mentions "those who were with" David. Even if David was actually alone (1 Sam 21:1), the point is that the priest accepted and acted on David's word that there were others (21:2). Hunger was allowed to take priority over ritual law.

2:26. Abiathar was not yet *high priest when David was given the bread, but Mark employs the term in the standard manner of his day: "high priest" was applied to any member of the high priestly family with administrative power, which would have included Abiathar when David came to Ahimelech, Abiathar's father.

2:27-28. Although Jesus claims the right to interpret sabbath rules as the authoritative *Son of Man (Dan 7:13-14), his opponents probably understand him to mean that because the sabbath was made for people (other Jewish teachers also mentioned this point), human beings had authority to do what they needed on the sabbath. ("Son of Man" was a standard *Aramaic term for "human being," and his hearers may have assumed he meant this, whereas his authority suggests that he claimed to be the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13-14.)

3:1-6
Healing or Killing on the Sabbath

3:1. The muscles and nerves of a "dried" or "withered" hand were inactive; thus the hand, smaller than usual, did not function (see 1 Kings 13:4; cf. *Testament of Simeon* 2:12). No cure was known for this paralysis.

3:2. Although some *Pharisees allowed for medical treatment, especially if the medicine was prepared before the sabbath, some others believed that cures were permitted on the sabbath only to save a life. (Even the strictest observers of the sabbath allowed compromising the sabbath to save life or to fight in a defensive war.) Their rule against cures applied to physicians, however, not to healings performed by God, and Pharisees disputed among themselves whether prayer for the sick was permitted on the sabbath. Fundamental human animosity more than technical Pharisaic principles are at work here.

3:3-5. Jesus might mean that "killing" is permitted on the sabbath, as it was during the Maccabean warfare (second century B.C.); more likely he draws a legal analogy from the principle that one could violate the sabbath to save life but not to kill except in self-defense; by extension, one could do good but not harm (cf. 2 Kings 5:7).

3:6. Unintentional violations of the sabbath or issues of disagreement about what constituted work (matters that were debatable in Jewish courts) were normally treated lightly; capital punishment (Ex 31:14; 35:2) was thought appropriate only for those who willfully rejected the sabbath. Punishments ac-

tually inflicted rarely exceeded fines or public beatings in the *synagogues. The majority school of Pharisees in this period, the *Shammaites, prohibited prayer for the sick on the sabbath, but did not seek to kill the minority school of Pharisees, *Hillelites, for allowing such prayer (though conflicts occasionally did escalate). Again, like many human beings, Jesus' opponents go far beyond their own traditions here. On the Herodians, see comment on 12:13.

3:7-12
Increasing Popularity

3:7-8. Idumea was south of Judea; east of the Jordan River was Perea, and Tyre and Sidon were to the northwest. Like Galilee, Idumea and Perea were religiously Jewish territories once dominated by *Gentiles; Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities, although it seems most likely here that Jewish residents of those cities are intended (cf. 7:27).

3:9-12. Finally Jesus has to find another way to deal with the growing crowds (3:9). Any prophet supposed to perform signs drew large crowds in Jewish Palestine, and Jesus seems to have drawn larger crowds than most others. Other "signs prophets" sometimes tried miracles like making the walls of Jerusalem fall down or the Jordan part (they failed), but no prophets since Elijah and Elisha had been reported as doing as many miracles as Jesus.

3:13-19
Commissioning Twelve Representatives

3:13. Mountains were often considered places for communion with God (cf., e.g., the experiences of Moses and Elijah; Ex 3:1-2; 1 Kings 19:8, 11-18).

3:14-15. Israel consisted of twelve tribes, and if groups chose twelve leaders (as apparently those who wrote the *Dead Sea Scrolls did), they did so because they believed that their own group was the true, obedient remnant of Israel, perhaps a source of renewal for all Israel. "*Apostles" means commissioned representatives, the point here being that Jesus' authority to proclaim the *kingdom and expel *demons continues through his agents who act on his behalf.

3:16-19. Luke (and possibly "Q," a source he shares with Matthew) lists "Judas son of James" rather than Matthew's and Mark's "Thaddeus." Ancient business documents show that people were commonly known by more than one name. (The differences in the lists do show that the lists were not copied from one another or standardized, and thus that the tradition of Jesus choosing twelve is older than the particular lists themselves.) Nicknames were common, appearing even on tomb inscriptions.

As one of the most popular male names in this era, "Simon" needed a distinguishing epithet. (Although a Greek name, Simon was popular among Jews as a close equivalent to Simeon.) "Cananaean" is *Aramaic for "zealot" (Lk 6:15); thus some translations simply read "Simon the Zealot" here. In this period, this term could just mean "zealous one," but it might suggest that he had been involved in revolutionary activity (some revolutionaries soon after this time came to be known as "*Zealots"). "Boanerges" is apparently a Greek rendering of the Aramaic for "sons of thunder" (*rgs* for Aramaic *r'm*). "Iscariot" may mean "man from Kerioth," but this is unclear; yet most other proposals (e.g., a Greek transliteration of an Aramaic corruption of the Latin *sicarius,* "assassin," but the title arose later; see comment on Acts 21:38) appear even weaker.

3:20-30
Jesus Raids Satan's House

3:20-22. Exorcists often invoked a higher spirit to get rid of a lower one, so Jesus' opponents accuse him of gaining his power for exorcism from sorcery—relying on *Satan himself. Insanity (3:21) was sometimes associated with *demon possession (3:22), though his family itself need not have made this connection. Because false teachers were sometimes thought to be inspired by demons and the official penalty for misleading God's people this way was death (Deut 13:5; 18:20), Jesus' family (probably the meaning here; see 3:31) may have felt they had reason to want to reach him before the legal experts did. (The legal experts could not enforce the death penalty, because Palestine was under Roman domination; in some places, mental incompetence could even shield one from prosecution. But the public charge alone would humiliate the family.) Teachers offended

by reports of the events of 2:1–3:6 may now be taking the offensive.

3:23-27. Magical texts sometimes speak of "binding" demons by incantations (to manipulate them), but this is not the idea here (nor does Jesus ever say, "I bind you" to a demon). Rather, this is a *parable, and Jesus has conquered the strong man by resisting temptation (1:13) and/or expelling demons (1:25-26). (If Jesus alludes to Is 49:24-25, in that passage *God* freed his people from captivity to the strong man.)

3:28-30. "Blaspheming the Spirit" here means opposing Jesus' *messiahship so firmly that one resorts to accusations of sorcery to get around the *Spirit's signs confirming his identity. Different teachers debated whether some sins were eternally unforgivable; Jesus probably means that by rejecting even the Spirit's testimony to Jesus' identity and mission, expressed through exorcisms, Jesus' accusers show themselves dangerously close to being incapable of *repentance.

3:31-34
Jesus' Real Family

Thinking of one's coreligionists as brothers and sisters was common; respecting older persons as mothers or fathers was also widespread. Some even felt that teacher-*disciple relations took precedence over family ties, but never to the extent that appears here. (In later rabbinic teaching, when a pagan converted to Judaism, he or she valued Judaism above previous family obligations; but Jewish people were not supposed to neglect genetic kin. Still, Jesus was not the only Jewish teacher to employ *hyperbole, or rhetorical exaggeration. He is not rejecting his earthly family altogether but stating his priorities. This may be the case especially if, as some suggest, they want to declare him mentally incompetent to rescue him from the dangers he is sure to face from religious authorities if he continues on his present path; cf. 3:21.)

4:1-20
The Parable of the Sower and Four Soils

4:1-2. The acoustic setting from the boat would have been ideal for Jesus' voice to carry to the crowds. Some places in Palestine have natural acoustics. One cave near Capernaum allowed as many as seven thousand people to hear a person speaking in the center of the cove.

Rabbis commonly taught in *parables; although the subjects of many parables centered on royal courts, teachers explaining points to common folk probably often used more down-to-earth parables like the harvest stories Jesus uses here.

4:3-7. When seed was sown before the ground was plowed up (as it often was), it commonly befell one of the fates reported here. The "road" (NASB) is probably the footpath through the field (cf. NRSV: "path").

4:8. Thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold are tremendously good harvests from Galilean soil. The fertile Jordan Valley normally yielded between ten- and (less often) a hundredfold, so a hundredfold need not be a miraculous harvest (though it is an astonishing one; Gen 26:12); but for more of Palestine, the average yield was seven and a half to tenfold (meaning that seven and a half to ten seeds were harvested for every seed sown), and all the figures Jesus reports here are very good yields. The yield is worth the sown seed that was wasted (cf. Eccles 11:1-6).

4:9. "Ears to hear" reflects the motif in the *Old Testament prophets that many had ears but were deaf to God's voice (e.g., Is 6:10; 43:8; 44:18; Ezek 12:2).

4:10-11. Jewish teachers typically used parables to illustrate and explain points, not to conceal them. But if one tells stories without stating the point they were meant to illustrate, as Jesus does here, only those who listen most astutely (4:9) and start with insiders' knowledge could possibly figure out one's point. They would function instead as sages' riddles. The members of the *Qumran community believed that God gave secrets to the prophets that they encoded in the Bible, and that God revealed the interpretation of those biblical texts to their own teacher, who shared it only with them. Greek teachers like *Plato and sometimes Jewish teachers would leave certain points obscure to keep them from outsiders; only those who were serious enough to persevere would understand. God revealed mysteries to Daniel (Dan 2:18-19, 27-30, 47), including about God's *kingdom (2:44).

4:12. The point in the context of Isaiah 6:9-10, which Jesus quotes here, may be that God's people had hardened their hearts so that they could not hear him; God thus chose to harden them further (what some have called "penal blindness") by sending them his message anyway. They thus held some moral responsibility for their inability to hear. For ears without truly hearing, see comment on 4:9.

4:13-14. This most basic message is the foundation for the rest: Jesus' message must be embraced with endurance and without distraction from the world to produce its intended effect. Others had also compared words to seeds. Agricultural images predominate in Jesus' parables more than in the later *rabbis, presumably because Jesus' largest audience probably consisted of Galilean farmers.

4:15. Judaism recognized *Satan's role as the ultimate accuser and tempter; Jesus thus shows his *disciples the seriousness of forgetting his word. Other rabbis also taught that forgetting a teaching of Scripture was a serious offense, but they would have resented a teacher who claimed unique authority for his own message.

4:16-17. Judaism valued its heroes of the past who had refused to compromise God's word, even in the face of death. Jesus' description of apostasy when persecuted for the message of the kingdom thus might evoke the disciples' discomfort and self-examination.

4:18-19. Jewish tradition valued seeking wisdom above earthly treasures (e.g., Prov 2:3-4; 3:13-14; 8:10, 19; 16:16; 20:15).

4:20. Well-trained disciples of rabbis were supposed to multiply disciples when they became teachers in their own right; part of the goal was to increase obedience to the *law. Concerning these yields, see comment on 4:8.

4:21-25
Accountability for the Word

Had another rabbi uttered the words of 4:21-25 in this context (contrast the setting in Mt 5:15), it would normally mean bringing forth treasures (special insights) concealed in Scripture. Thus Jesus claims to reveal God's message; he calls his disciples to understand and build on his teaching.

4:21-23. Jesus is a master of the graphic illustrations in which Jewish teachers sought to excel: invisible light is pointless (cf. Sirach 41:14: concealed wisdom is as useless as invisible treasure), and God wants the light of his word to be received. The lamps were small clay lamps that had to be set on a stand to shed much light in a room; an external wick led into the oil they contained. A bushel basket placed over the lamp would conceal and probably extinguish it.

4:24-25. Some later rabbis claimed that those who heeded some of the *law would learn more of it. The conventional wisdom was that each person is accountable for what he or she does with what he or she had originally been given; Jesus applies this principle to his own teaching. Thus if the crowds did not obey what light they had received, they would never receive more. The language of "measuring" is the language of weighing food and other commodities at the market; Jewish texts sometimes use it for God's measuring out just judgments in the final day.

4:26-32
A Microcosm of the Future Kingdom

It was commonly realized that God would someday establish his *kingdom, or rule, unchallenged over all the earth. Jesus and his small band of close followers may have seemed too obscure to contain the future glory of the kingdom, but the seed of the word would continue to spread from them until the final coming of the kingdom. Jesus' teaching challenges prevailing views of how the kingdom would come.

4:26-29. Every farmer would have agreed that God's providence, not the farmer's power, made the grain grow. (Thus pagan and Jewish farmers alike sought divine help for their crops; pagan farmers relied heavily on sacrifices. Some see an allusion to Joel 3:13, but emphasizing hope rather than Joel's final battle; more likely, harvesting with sickles was simply a familiar image.)

4:30-32. Scholars still dispute what plant is meant by the "mustard seed." Nevertheless, by no conjecture is it the smallest of all seeds that Jesus' listeners could have known (the orchid seed is smaller). The point is that it was proverbially small and yet yielded a large shrub. Around the Sea of Galilee, the plant that many

scholars currently think Jesus meant can reach a height of ten feet and has sometimes reached fifteen feet, although its usual height is about four feet. Because it would grow anew in spring each year, birds could not nest in it when they built nests in early spring; but small birds could light on it, all that is necessary to fulfill the language here (language borrowed as an allusion to a larger tree in Dan 4:12, which refers to a different kingdom destined to be replaced by God's). The *hyperbole Jesus applies to the best image of growth from tiny to large that he had available does not change the point, however; the kingdom might begin in obscurity, but it would culminate in glory.

4:33-34
Secret Teachings

Sometimes Jewish (and other ancient) teachers had some special esoteric teachings that they could confide only in their closest pupils, because they were not for public knowledge. People could not be ready to grasp the secret of the nature of Jesus' *kingdom until the secret about the nature of his *messiahship had been revealed (see the introduction to Mark in this commentary). Parables were normally sermon illustrations, but illustrations without the sermon would normally remain obscure.

4:35-41
Lord of Creation

Rousing a sleeping prophet to secure his prayers may have reminded the *disciples or first hearers of Jonah 1:5-6, but Jesus appears quite different from Jonah here. Some ancient pagan stories told of powerful individuals able to subdue even the forces of nature, but these were nearly always gods or, rarely, heroes of the quite distant and unverifiable past. Many Jewish people believed that angels controlled the forces of nature, such as winds and sea; yet such angels did have one to whom they must answer. In Jewish tradition, the one who ruled the winds and sea was God himself (Ps 107:29; cf. Jon 1:15). The disciples' surprise at Jesus' power is thus easy to understand.

Storms often rose suddenly on the lake called the Sea of Galilee; these fishermen had usually stayed closer to Capernaum and are unprepared for a squall this far from shore. Presumably the one place least inundated in a small fishing boat during a storm would be on the elevated stern. Commentators suggest that one could use the wooden or leather-covered helmsman's seat, or a pillow kept under that seat, as a cushion for one's head. Jesus' sleep during the storm may indicate the tranquillity of faith (Ps 4:8; cf. 2 Kings 6:16-17, 32; Prov 19:23); in some Greek stories, the genuineness of philosophers' faith in their own teachings on tranquility was tested in storms.

5:1-20
Overpowering a Legion of Demons

Jesus could bind the strong man no one else could bind (cf. 3:27; 5:3-4).

5:1. Matthew's "Gadara" (Mt 8:28), nearly eight miles from the lake, is more precise than Mark's "Gerasa," a prominent city over thirty miles southeast from the lake by a straight line and a longer journey by road. (Some, however, think that Mark intended Gergesa, modern El Koursi, adjoining the lake, as suggested even in some manuscripts and early Christian tradition.) But the mention of either Gadara or Gerasa would identify the general region for people who did not live there: that is, the area of the Decapolis, a predominantly non-Jewish area. Matthew apparently identifies the vicinity by reference to a nearer city, and Mark, writing for readers farther from this area, prefers a better known city as an identifier even though it is farther away.

5:2. Jewish people considered tombs unclean and a popular haunt for *demons. People in many ancient cultures brought offerings for the dead, which might also appeal to these spirits (demons were associated with pagan religion; see comment on 1 Cor 10:20). The time is night (4:35), when evil spirits were thought to exercise the greatest power. Mark thus sets the stage for ancient readers to feel the suspense of the ensuing conflict.

5:3-5. Some pagan worship had involved cutting oneself with stones (1 Kings 18:28), and anthropologists report both self-mortification and supernatural strength in conjunction with some cases indigenously defined as spirit possession in various cultures today.

5:6-8. In ancient *magic, practitioners often invoked higher spirits to drive out lower

spirits, and the demons here appeal to the only one higher than Jesus to keep Jesus from driving them out: "I adjure you by God" (not "Swear to God"—ESV). This language invokes a curse on Jesus if he does not comply. (Phrases like "I adjure you" and "I know you"—Mk 1:24—appear in ancient magical exorcism texts as self-protective invocations to bind the spiritual opponent.) The attempt at magical self-protection proves powerless against Jesus. Not only Jews but also *Gentiles sometimes called Israel's God "the Most High."

5:9. Identification of spirits' names or the names by which those spirits could be subdued was standard in ancient exorcism texts (see ancient magical texts and the **Testament of Solomon*); but this case, where many demons are present, is the only recorded example of Jesus seeking a name, and here he does not seem to use it in the exorcism.

A legion (perhaps meant here hyperbolically) included five thousand four hundred to six thousand troops. This man is therefore hosting a large number of demons; they probably outnumber the pigs (5:13).

5:10. Ancients were familiar with demons pleading for mercy or other concessions when they were about to be defeated (e.g., **1 Enoch* 12–14; *Testament of Solomon* 2:6). Perhaps they wish to stay in the area only because of the tombs, but in ancient lore spirits were often associated with particular local areas.

5:11-12. Although Jews lived in the Decapolis, most of its residents were Gentiles. Only Gentiles (or very nonobservant Jews) raised pigs, and Jewish readers would think of pigs as among the most unclean animals and perhaps thus as obvious hosts of unclean spirits. Ancient (and some modern) exorcists found that demons often asked for concessions if the pressure for them to evacuate their host was becoming too great for them to stay.

5:13. In some Jewish traditions demons could die, so some ancient readers may have assumed that the demons had been destroyed (or at least disabled) with their hosts. (Some traditions also portrayed at least some demons as fearing water—*Testament of Solomon* 5:11-12; but in other traditions, certain demons lived in water.) In other early traditions, demons were sometimes imprisoned in bodies of water. In any case, their activity here shows their continued destructiveness. Demons depend on their hosts in the Gospel accounts much more than in most other sources from the period.

5:14-17. The opposition to Jesus arises from both economic interests—the loss of a large herd of swine—and some Greek conceptions of dangerous wonderworking magicians, whom the people would fear.

5:18. In ancient stories, those recovering from madness might be unaware of their prior state (e.g., Leucippe in *Achilles Tatius, or Heracles in an ancient drama), but this was not always the case (Dan 4:34-37).

5:19-20. The Decapolis was a loose confederation of ten *Hellenistic cities (predominantly Gentile, though many Jews lived there), with ties also to the Nabatean Arabs. Perhaps because his *messiahship would be misunderstood, Jesus kept it a secret in predominantly Jewish areas. In the predominantly non-Jewish Decapolis, however, where people would perceive him as a magician, he urges his new *disciple to spread word about what *God* had done, thereby correcting the people's misunderstanding (cf. 2 Maccabees 3:36).

5:21-43
Healing a Girl and an Outcast Woman

This passage includes two cases of reversing uncleanness: a woman with a continual flow of blood and a corpse (see Lev 15:19-33; Num 19:11-22). Even after the flow stopped, the first woman would be counted unclean for seven days (Lev 15:28); the dead girl was even more unclean, so that one who touched her contracted impurity for a week (Num 19:11).

5:21-24. The precise duties of "rulers of the *synagogue" probably varied somewhat from one place in the empire to another; sometimes the title designates simply benefactors, perhaps to honor them, but elsewhere they were the chief officials in synagogues (perhaps not unrelated to their social influence); virtually always they were prominent members of their communities. Jairus's daughter had been a minor until that year and on account of both her age and her gender had little social status apart from her family. One would fall at the feet of someone of much greater status (like a king) or prostrate oneself before God; for this

prominent man to humble himself in this way before Jesus was thus to recognize Jesus' power in a serious way.

5:25. This woman's sickness was reckoned as if she had a menstrual period all month long; it made her continually unclean under the *law (Lev 15:25-28)—a social and religious problem on top of the physical one. Sometimes this condition starts after puberty; if that was true in her case, given a common ancient life expectancy of about forty years and the "twelve years" that she had been ill, she may have spent even half or all her adult life with this trouble. Since she could not bear children in this state, and Jewish men often divorced women who were incapable of bearing (cf., e.g., Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 42:1), this woman probably had never married or (if the sickness began after marriage) had been divorced and remained single. In a society where single, celibate women could not easily earn much income, the illness affected virtually every area of her life.

5:26. Although some remedies were genuinely empirically based, many practices of both Jewish and Gentile physicians in biblical times were no more than superstitious remedies, which not surprisingly often proved ineffective (cf. 2 Chron 16:12; Tobit 2:10; *Qumran *Genesis Apocryphon* 20:19-20). Although many physicians in the Greek world were slaves, Palestinian Jewish sources suggest that physicians in Palestine had ample incomes. Some Palestinian Jews were skeptical of physicians' value.

5:27-29. If this woman touched anyone or anyone's clothes, she rendered that person ceremonially unclean for the rest of the day (cf. Lev 15:26-27). Some uncleanness was unavoidable, but it was inconvenient to fulfill the required bath, and men avoided uncleanness when they could. Because she rendered unclean anyone she touched, she should not have even been in this heavy crowd. Later Jewish tradition made this danger even more serious than Leviticus had (e.g., Mishnah *Toharot* 5:8), so many teachers avoided touching women (other than their wives) altogether, lest they become accidentally contaminated. Thus she could not touch or be touched, was probably now divorced or had never married, and was marginal to Jewish society.

5:30-34. Jewish people believed that only teachers closest to God had supernatural knowledge. Jesus uses his supernatural knowledge to identify with the woman who had touched him—even though in the eyes of the public this would mean that he had contracted ritual uncleanness. (By law, she was still counted as unclean for seven days after her flow of blood stopped; Lev 15:28.) Given the frequent failure of the male *disciples' faith (8:17-21; 9:19), Mark's record of this woman's faith (cf. 7:29; 12:44; 15:40-41) is all the more striking, especially for readers whose culture considered women less stable and emotionally weaker than men.

5:35-39. Childhood deaths were common (in Egypt, which was poorer, perhaps half the children born did not survive into adulthood). Tradition expected at least two or three professional mourners (two flutists and a mourning woman) to facilitate grief at the funeral of even the poorest person; more mourners would assemble at the death of a member of a prominent family like this one. Because bodies decomposed rapidly in Palestine, mourners had to be assembled immediately upon someone's death (presumably especially when it had been expected), and in this case they had gathered before word even reached Jairus that his daughter had died. Messengers were normally dispatched immediately to bring a parent or spouse the sad news.

5:40-43. In that culture, at the age of twelve the girl was a virgin probably soon to be married (with very rare exceptions, women were not able to continue in education as they do today). Young girls usually looked forward eagerly to their wedding day as the most joyous event in their life, and to die unmarried—especially just short of it—was lamented as a particularly great tragedy. Jewish interpreters sometimes linked texts by a common word; that this girl had lived the same number of years as the woman with the flow of blood had been ill (5:25) provides a useful literary connection. Whereas contact with the bleeding woman would render Jesus unclean for a day in the eyes of others (Lev 15:19-33), touching a corpse led to seven days of uncleanness (Num 19:11-22, esp. 19:11). Jesus spoke to her in *Aramaic, perhaps her first language, although Greek was widely

spoken in Palestine. (On the use of Aramaic in healings, see comment on 7:34-35.)

6:1-6
Jesus' Rejection in His Hometown

The *Old Testament often reiterates the principle of the prophet without honor: Jeremiah, Moses, Joseph and so forth; subsequent Jewish tradition emphasized this concept even more. That Jesus is "unable" to do works because of their unbelief (6:5) presumes a limitation not of his power but of his mission: to heal without morally directed faith would be to act like the pagan magicians of antiquity.

In 6:3, Jesus is called a "carpenter." In A.D. 6, early in Jesus' childhood, Sepphoris, then Galilee's capital and most prominent city, had been destroyed by the Romans, and rebuilding had begun immediately. Thus carpenters (mostly working in wood), like stone masons, were no doubt in demand in Nazareth, a village four miles from the ruins of Sepphoris. Joseph, Jesus' father, probably taught his son his own trade, as was common for fathers to do. After Sepphoris had been rebuilt, they probably did most carpentry work from their home, as most Galilean carpenters did. The observation that Jesus is a carpenter is meant to identify him, not to suggest the unlikelihood of a carpenter being a teacher, for we also have traditions about other carpenters who became famous teachers (e.g., *Shammai).

"Brothers" and "sisters" are the usual terms for siblings; a different term for more general "kinfolk" (e.g., Rom 16:11) is not used with regard to Jesus' siblings. The majority of scholars today, Catholic as well as Protestant, recognize that this text probably refers to children born to Mary after Jesus. Large families were common, with children often spread over a wide age range.

Jesus' "inability" to do miracles in Nazareth (6:5) indicates a limitation not of his power but of his mission. In Scripture, God can act sovereignly, but the goal is relationship, not merely impressing people.

6:7-13
Traveling Representatives of Jesus

6:7. On the "twelve," see comment on 3:14-15. It was customary to send heralds, or messengers, by twos, in both Greek and Jewish culture. In Judaism, such pairing also provided validation for their testimony (Deut 17:6; 19:15). Authority could be delegated.

6:8-9. They are to travel light, like some other groups: (1) some urban Greek philosophers, called *Cynics (although none were Jewish, and their presence is barely attested in Palestine); (2) perhaps more relevantly, peasants, who often had only one cloak (though they did not travel much); (3) most relevantly, some prophets, like Elijah and (probably Jesus' most immediate model) John the Baptist. They are to be totally committed to their mission, not tied down with worldly concerns. The "bag" may have been used for begging (like the Cynics' bags), or likelier just carrying supplies; Jesus forbids it here.

6:10. Antiquity in general and Judaism in particular highly valued hospitality. The mission here is apparently a short-term one; in normal circumstances, hospitality (which included taking a person in) usually lasted at most a few weeks. Like some of the early *synagogues, early *churches found it most practical to meet in homes (with no overhead cost) and to use them as a base of operation in reaching the rest of the community.

6:11. When entering the holy land or the temple, some scrupulous Jewish people would shake off the defiling dust of less clean soil; here the *disciples must treat apostate Jewish cities as if they are unclean *Gentile territory (cf. Mt 10:14-15).

6:12-13. Oil was sometimes used medicinally, and in the *Old Testament it was often associated with divine commissioning. Such associations could make it a useful symbol in prayer for healing (Jas 5:14).

6:14-29
The Politician Murders the Prophet

6:14-16. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great and Malthace, a *Samaritan (Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.562), was technically tetrarch (with Matthew and Luke), not "king"; Mark may use the latter term loosely or possibly even ironically: it was precisely Herod's appeal for the title "king" under Herodias's influence that ended his tetrarchy and led to his banishment in A.D. 39 (cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.250-255).

Reincarnation is not in view in this passage.

Some Greeks (and Jews influenced by them) did believe in reincarnation; but John's return is said instead to be a "rising from the dead" (as a few persons had been raised through *Old Testament prophets); Elijah had never died, and many Jewish people anticipated his *eschatological return (Mal 4:5).

6:17-19. Herod's affair with his sister-in-law, whom he had by this time married, was widely known. Indeed, because Herodias insisted that Antipas divorce his first wife before marrying her, the first wife fled to her father, king of the Nabatean Arabs, who later went to war with Antipas and defeated him. John's denunciation of the affair as unlawful (besides being adultery, it violated biblical incest prohibitions; see Lev 18:16; 20:21) was an attack against Herod's adultery, but Herod could have perceived it as a political threat, given the political ramifications that later led to a major military defeat. (*Josephus claims that many viewed Herod's humiliation in the war as divine judgment for his executing John the Baptist; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.116-119.)

Some scholars suggest that Herod's half-brother Herod Philip may be called by the secondary name Philip here to avoid confusing him with the main Herod in the story, Herod Antipas.

6:20. Despite Antipas's grounds for animosity toward John (6:17-19), it is not incredible that he would enjoy hearing him (cf. Ezek 33:31-33; Lk 23:8). Many well-to-do Greeks, fancying themselves *patrons of intellectual pursuits, supported philosophers more for respectable cultural and entertainment purposes than for ethical edification. Influenced by upper-class Greek ideals, Herod undoubtedly considered himself as open-minded culturally as he was brutal politically.

6:21. Celebrating birthdays was at this time a Greek and Roman but not a Jewish custom, although the Jewish aristocracy had imbibed plenty of Greek culture by this period. Herod held tight, centralized control over Galilee, and the officials he invites probably include local village and regional leaders loyal to his government; in all Galilee, only Tiberias and probably Sepphoris were cities organized after the Greek model.

6:22. Other ancient sources testify that the Herodian court was given to the sorts of astonishing excesses described here. Whereas Vashti refused to appear naked before Xerxes's guests, Herodias' daughter Salome offers Herod's guests a lewd dance. Some scholars suggest that Herodias's daughter Salome is at this point no longer a young girl and is already married to the tetrarch Philip. Other historical data about her, however, suggest that she may be no older than twelve or fourteen (which was a common age for virgins to marry in Jewish Palestine); it is possible that she is even slightly younger. On any reading, Herod's vulgarity is perverse; after taking his brother's wife (cf. Lev 20:21), he lusts after his wife's daughter (cf. Lev 20:14).

6:23. This is the sort of oath one might make while drunk, but it is especially reminiscent of the Persian king stirred by Queen Esther's beauty (Esther 5:3, 6; 7:2), though the depravity of this girl's request ironically contrasts with Esther's virtuous request. But Herod's oath is not backed up with genuine authority; as a Roman vassal he has no authority to give away any of his "kingdom." Salome will need to think of a more practical request.

6:24. The girl has to go "out" to ask her mother. Excavations at Herod's fortress Machaerus suggest two dining halls, one for women and one for men. Herodias has thus presumably not been present to watch Herod's reaction to the dance. Josephus characterizes Herodias the same way Mark does: a jealous, ambitious schemer (she and Antipas ultimately did themselves in; see comment on 6:14-16).

6:25. Beheading by the sword was the method of executing Roman citizens and other individuals of status; lower-class individuals were usually executed by crucifixion or other means, unless the matter were urgent. Salome's asking for John's head on a platter suggests that she wants it served up as part of the dinner menu—a ghastly touch of ridicule. It was the sort of grisly touch that ancient writers often associated with horrible abuses of power (e.g., of Nero).

6:26-28. Although an oath like Herod's was not legally binding, breaking an oath before dinner guests would have been embarrassing in a culture that highly valued honor; it is known that even the emperor would not lightly do it. Ancient sources report various

rulers or governors who had people visibly executed during dinner to please those to whom they were attracted; all those who report these actions view them as despicable. Unlike Judean Jewish leaders who needed *Pilate's approval to enact legal executions, Herod Antipas was acting ruler in his own domain.

6:29. If a man had sons, the eldest son was normally responsible for his father's burial; here John's *disciples must fulfill this role for him. Those who sought the body of a person who had been executed could risk being identified with the crime, especially if they were not family members; while Antipas had executed John only reluctantly, these courageous disciples may not know that. (Contrast the absence of Jesus' apparently less courageous male disciples in 15:42-47!)

6:30-44
A Shepherd Feeds His Sheep

The true ruler's gracious meal in this passage contrasts starkly with Herod's wicked banquet in the previous passage.

6:30-34. "*Apostles" were Jesus' commissioned agents, representatives authorized with his authority. Jesus' care for the sheep (6:34) is modeled on God's care for his people in Ezekiel 34:5, 15; this care is likewise expressed by providing sound teaching (cf. Ezek 34:4; Jer 23; Num 27:17). The traditional leaders were not giving them what they needed, including truth (cf. Ezek 34:1-10; Jer 23).

6:35-38. Fish (particularly around the lake) and especially bread were central components of the Palestinian diet; meat was probably rarely available for most people except at feasts, when large numbers of animals were sacrificed. Food was always sold in village markets, and the Galilean countryside was full of villages (6:36); but Jesus had withdrawn his followers some distance from the nearest villages (6:32). Even the largest villages would have under three thousand inhabitants; despite Galilee's agricultural self-sufficiency, feeding this crowd in the villages would thus have been difficult. But it would have taken more than two hundred days of an average person's wages (around seven months of hard labor) to feed the great multitude that had assembled. Compare the analogous instruction, astonished question from a *disciple, and following miracle in 2 Kings 4:42-44.

6:39. That the grass is green indicates that it is spring, around Passover (cf. Jn 6:4), and might explain the better conditions for sitting.

6:40. The purpose is to facilitate the distribution of food, but some scholars suggest that some people in the crowd may have thought that Jesus was organizing them as ranks for a messianic army (cf. Jn 6:15). (The *Old Testament and *Dead Sea Scrolls show such organization into ranks for armies. Mark records this organizing, however, simply to emphasize the great numbers fed.)

6:41. People sometimes looked up to heaven when they prayed. It was customary to begin a meal by giving thanks for the bread and then dividing it.

6:42-44. The multiplication of food is reminiscent of the miracle of God supplying manna for Israel in the wilderness (of hopes for a new Moses), and especially of Elisha multiplying food (2 Kings 4:42-44, where some was also left over). Ancient ethics frowned on wasting leftovers, although aristocrats often flaunted such waste. The term for "baskets" here was often used for wicker food baskets but could also mean the large baskets in which Roman soldiers carried their supplies.

6:45-52
Walking on Water

6:45-48. The language of "passing by" may refer to how God's glory "passed by" in the *Old Testament (Ex 33:19; Job 9:11), which also (in one of the same contexts) described God as "treading" upon the waves (Job 9:8); see also comment on 6:50-52. God parted waters for others, but in the Old Testament only God himself is said to walk on them (cf. Ps 77:19).

6:49. Although not all Jewish teachers sanctioned a belief in ghosts, it existed on the popular level and ultimately contradicted the more common Jewish (and *New Testament) teaching that the righteous and wicked dead are separated at death in view of the coming *resurrection. Some Hellenized Jews accepted a common Greek notion of souls persisting in the air; many people also thought that the souls of those who died at sea, hence were unburied, hovered around the site of their death.

6:50-52. "It is I" (NIV, NASB, KJV, etc.) is literally "I am." Although the former is the

primary meaning here, in this context it is possible that Jesus (or Mark) also intends to allude to a particular nuance of the latter meaning: "I am" may refer back to the God of the Old Testament (Ex 3:14; Is 41:4; 43:10; see comment on Mk 6:45-48).

6:53-56
Crowds Seek Healing

Carrying the sick on their mats or touching Jesus' cloak imitated earlier expressions of faith (see comment on 2:3-5; 5:27-29). Evidence from ancient pagan healing shrines suggests that once someone was healed in a particular way or at a particular place, others often tried to get healing by the same method. The marketplaces (6:56) constituted the largest open area of a town or village, where larger crowds could gather. In contrast to Greek cities, market areas in Galilean towns were not always located in the center of the town.

7:1-23
True and False Religion

Controversy over Jesus' treatment of uncleanness (1:40-45; 5:21-43) and other religious issues (e.g., 2:1–3:35) climaxes in a confrontation over the failure of Jesus' *disciples to wash their hands.

7:1. Most *Pharisees and the most elite *scribes were centered in Jerusalem. Some commentators have suggested that they came to evaluate Jesus' teaching, to see if he were a false teacher leading people astray (see Deut 13:13-14), or to evaluate the teaching more generally. Perhaps these represent a small number of Pharisees who did live in Galilee. Plenty of scribes already lived in Galilee.

7:2-3. The Pharisees were scrupulous about washing their hands as part of ritual purity, though this rule was not found in the *Old Testament and may have originally derived from Greek influence. Mark gives his *Gentile readers only a cursory summary of a much more complex custom (which some scholars think was limited to particular days), although his readers may have been familiar with related Jewish purity practices in their own parts of the world (*Diaspora Jews were known for washing their hands).

7:4. Washing the hands removed partial ceremonial impurity picked up in the marketplace; hands were apparently immersed up to the wrist or purified by having water poured over them from a pure vessel. The Pharisees also had rules about immersing vessels to remove impurity.

7:5. People held teachers responsible for the behavior of their disciples. The Pharisees were known for observing the traditions of their predecessors; unwilling to innovate more than necessary, they grounded everything they could in tradition. Thus they want to know where Jesus, as a popular teacher, stands on issues on which their tradition commented (such as washing hands), so they can evaluate his teaching accordingly.

7:6-8. Jesus quotes a *prophecy of Isaiah decreed against the Israel of Isaiah's day (Is 29:13), which had been religious in form but not close to God in heart (Is 1:10-20). The very thing the Pharisees prized as spiritual—traditions derived from many pious and wise teachers who had tried to interpret and apply God's *law—Jesus claims is undercutting the plain message of God.

7:9-13. Many Jewish teachers regarded the commandment to honor father and mother as the most important in the law. Jewish interpreters included in this commandment providing for one's parents when they were old. At the same time, tradition allowed that various items could be sacrificed or dedicated to the use of God's temple. ("Corban" appears on sacrificial vessels and means "consecrated to God"; in popular usage, it could also mean "forbidden to so-and-so.") One school of Jewish teachers in Jesus' day declared that a vow that something was consecrated and forbidden to others applied even to family members, even if those to whom it was forbidden included them only accidentally.

Some apparently religious people had been using this practice to withhold what should have otherwise gone to the support of their parents—against the otherwise firm Pharisaic belief that one should support one's parents. Jesus attacks here not the Pharisees' religious theory but these Pharisees' inconsistency with that theory in practice: their love for the law had led them (like some modern Christians) to such attention to its legal details that it created loopholes for them to violate the spirit of the law.

7:14-15. Other teachers are occasionally reported to have uttered sayings similar to Jesus' statement here, but only rarely and in private, perhaps to avoid anyone disobeying the literal rules of the law. If Jesus' words are taken literally, they declare the whole clean/unclean distinction emphasized in the law as of only symbolic value. Because this distinction constituted one of the main barriers between Jews and Gentiles (see Rom 14), Jesus' statement opens the way for cultural unity in table fellowship.

7:16-19. Jesus says that food does not affect what a person really is; writing in a day of conflict between the customs of Jewish and Gentile Christians, Mark applies this point to the kosher laws of Leviticus 11: pigs, dogs, bats, owls and so on are now "clean," or acceptable to eat. Mark's understanding of Jesus' teaching would not have been popular among most Jewish people. Liberal Alexandrian Jews who no longer believed in literal observance of the food laws (Lev 11; Deut 14) were particularly despised by their more conservative colleagues in Egypt and certainly found few allies in Palestine.

7:20-23. Other Jewish teachers would have agreed that the vices listed by Jesus were evil and that they came from the heart. (Vice lists were also a common teaching technique of ancient moralists.) But teachers would not have agreed with Jesus that most of themselves were more concerned about legal details than ethics, even though as experts in the law they necessarily had reason to spend more time focusing on legal issues than on God's work of transforming the heart.

7:24-30
A Gentile Woman's Faith

If "unclean" foods such as pigs and dogs were no longer unclean (7:16-19), neither were Gentiles. Although Jesus wins all his controversies with the religious authorities in Mark, he allows himself to be persuaded by a Gentile woman's desperate retort. This story would encourage Mark's Gentile readers, who were being persecuted for a faith that many others simply regarded as a Jewish heresy.

7:24-26. Jewish people did not expect much faith from pagans. Like Sidon, Tyre belonged to ancient Phoenicia, and the most prominent woman from Phoenicia in the *Old Testament was the wicked Jezebel. But another Phoenician woman who petitioned Elijah in the same generation received God's favor for her son (1 Kings 17:17-24). "Syrophoenicia" distinguishes this region from Libophoenicia, the region of north Africa settled by Phoenicians as Carthage. Greek culture had long influenced Syria, and after Alexander's conquests many Greeks had settled there; the citizen class of the Phoenician republics Tyre and Sidon considered itself Greek and was thoroughly Hellenized. Thus she is both Syrophoenician and Greek.

7:27-28. Members of the Greek ruling class of Syrophoenicia exploited the labors of Syrians and some Jewish settlers in the surrounding countryside; the woman belongs to a group that in a sense has been taking other children's bread. Jewish people did not regularly call non-Jews "dogs," as some commentators have argued. Rather, Jesus is making his point by way of illustration, as teachers in his day often did. Worthless food would be cast to the dogs (cf. Ex 22:31). Applied to either gender, "dog" was one of the gravest and most common insults in antiquity, although here it functions more as an analogy. In Jewish Palestine, dogs were regarded as scavengers, but in well-to-do households influenced by Greek custom (more familiar to the Syrophoenician woman), dogs were sometimes pets. Jesus is making an illustration: the children must be fed before the pets, and the Jewish people therefore had first claim (e.g., Ex 4:22). The statement would still sound offensive, but the woman surmounts the obstacle. Sometimes obstacles were provided to give opportunity for exercising faith.

He is saying that he will not heal like pagan magicians; he wants her to demonstrate faith, specifically faith in the supremacy of the true God. (Her reply takes up his illustration: she concedes the salvation-historical priority of the Jewish people, the children, but protests that even the dogs get to eat crumbs. In so arguing, she indicates her faith that only the smallest fraction of his power is necessary to heal her daughter.)

7:29-30. In the Old Testament, faith was often expressed in bold zeal, holy chutzpah, by women of faith (2 Kings 4:14-28), prophets (Ex 33:12–34:9; 1 Kings 18:36-37; 2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6, 9)

and other heroes (Gen 32:26-30). These examples all combine humble respect for God or his prophet with boldly urgent entreaty, and God answers these prayers. Because most of Jesus' ministry was to Israel and Mark's audience included Gentiles, this Gentile's deliverance by faith would encourage them that they were not excluded.

7:31-37
A Deaf-Mute Healed

7:31. The Decapolis, literally "ten cities" (see 5:1-20), was (like Tyre and Sidon) predominantly inhabited by non-Jews, though many Jews also lived there.

7:32-33. Deaf and mute persons were protected under Jewish *law but classed with other groups (women, slaves, imbeciles, minors) not educated enough to keep the law. Crowds gathered to see magicians do their tricks, and this crowd would have preferred to have seen Jesus heal a man in front of them, but he does not do so. On the spittle see 8:22-23. Magicians employed gestures, but Jesus, who does not regularly employ them, has a different reason here. Jewish people knew that deaf people could use signs to communicate, so here Jesus may be acting out "healing," "speech" and (7:34) "from God," to encourage the man's faith in what he is about to do. Mark's term for "mute" occurs in the *Septuagint only at Isaiah 35:6, referring to the blessings inaugurated in the messianic era.

7:34-37. Some scholars point out that magicians often spoke unintelligible phrases during healings. Here, however, Jesus speaks *Aramaic, which would have been known to most people, Jewish or *Gentile, from Syria-Palestine (cf. also Mk 14:36). It was probably particularly common in the villages and rural areas.

8:1-13
Feeding the Four Thousand

See 6:30-44 for more background on this passage. Jesus was not limited to doing a miracle only once; he could repeat them whenever necessary (8:19-21; cf. 2 Kings 2:19-22; 4:1-7, 38-41, 42-44; 7:16).

8:1-4. Galilee was full of towns and villages, so Jesus purposely withdraws his *disciples some distance away, presumably to secure privacy for instructing his disciples. Villages could not provide sufficient food for such a crowd (see comment on 6:36), but in view of Jesus' earlier miracle in 6:41-42 the disciples' question of 8:4 displays obtuseness.

8:5-7. Bread and fish were basic staples; it was customary to give thanks before a meal. The standard blessing later preserved is: "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has brought forth bread from the earth."

8:8-10. The term for basket here (different from the one in chap. 6) refers to a reed basket often used for carrying fish, presumably available. This feeding miracle, like the earlier one, is reminiscent of Elisha (including leftover food; 2 Kings 4:42-44).

8:11-13. A sign "from heaven" could refer to any sign from God (cf. 8:12; Jewish people sometimes used "heaven" as a circumlocution for "God") or could request that Jesus perform a heavenly sign (e.g., fire falling). But it also might refer to predicting a sign in heaven (cf. 13:24-25). Most ancient peoples, including most Jewish people by this time, believed that signs in the heavens could portend events about to take place; unusual signs could portend the death of a ruler, the fall of a city and so forth. Deuteronomy 18:10 forbade divination, which would include astrological prognostication, but many Jewish people in this period accepted astrology.

In view of Mark 8:1-10, the reader recognizes how foolish Jesus' opponents are. Ancient *narratives sometimes cited the conspicuous denseness of opponents to highlight the protagonist's virtue.

8:14-21
Disciples Still Blind

Mark's Christian readers are confronted with a point less comfortable than the one in 8:11-13: not only Jesus' opponents but even his *disciples are dense.

8:14. One loaf would not feed all those in the boat. If they are headed for the less populated east side of the lake, it would be difficult to find bread; it would be simple, however, in Bethsaida (8:22). Their concern is heightened because bringing provisions had been their responsibility; teachers often delegated such matters to some of their disciples.

8:15. Yeast is used to represent various things in the Bible (unleavened bread in Ex 12:15-17 represents haste; in Mt 13:33, the *kingdom; in 1 Cor 5:6-7, someone's sin); the point here seems to be that it is something that spreads (as in Mt 13 and 1 Cor 5). Both Pharisaic piety and Herod as an agent of political power are corrupting influences.

8:16-18. The disciples are still spiritually half-blind, which is a moral fault in Mark 4:12 (and in the *Old Testament: e.g., Is 29:9-10; 42:19-20; 44:18; Ezek 12:2).

8:19-21. The disciples should have seen enough bread miracles not to worry about earthly bread and to catch Jesus' plain point. Instead, they are acting more like the Israelites in the wilderness, who never learned faith despite manna from heaven.

8:22-26
Blindness Half-Cured

In view of 8:17-21, scholars often view Jesus' use of two stages in healing as a sort of acted *parable, meant to illustrate a point while healing the man.

8:22-23. Some sources suggest that spittle was sometimes associated with healing; it was also often considered disgusting and may have tested the blind man's desire to be healed.

8:24-25. This is the only two-stage healing in the Gospels, and miracle stories in antiquity usually stress the suddenness of the miracle; emphasis on healing by degrees was quite rare. Many therefore believe that Jesus provided here an acted parable: unlike Jesus' opponents, the *disciples have begun to see but remain blind (8:16-18) until he touches them again at his *resurrection (9:9). The *Old Testament prophets sometimes acted out parables to get people's attention and communicate their point (e.g., Is 20:2-6; Jer 19:1-15; Ezek 4:1–5:17; 12:1-11).

8:26. Prophets usually presented healed persons to their families (1 Kings 17:23; 2 Kings 4:36), but Jesus' private action here emphasizes the messianic secret (see the introduction to Mark in this commentary). Had the man returned to the town, everyone would have known of the miracle.

8:27-30
The Disciples Half-See

This narrative may illustrate how the *disciples remain half-blind regarding the nature of Jesus' identity.

8:27. Caesarea Philippi was a pagan city known especially for its grotto dedicated to the worship of Pan, a Greek bucolic god. (Jesus thus chose to raise the question of his own identity in a largely *Gentile area.) "Villages of Caesarea Philippi" accurately depicts the area; throughout the *Hellenistic world, surrounding villages normally had a close relationship with the city in whose territory they were located.

8:28. Because some Palestinian Jews (particularly among the educated elite) believed that prophets in the *Old Testament sense had ceased, ranking Jesus among the prophets could have seemed radical—but it was not radical enough to grasp his true identity.

8:29-30. The "*Messiah," or "Christ," is literally the "anointed one"—not just any anointed one but the anointed king, descended from David, who would restore sovereignty to Israel (Is 9:6-7; 11:1-10; Ps 2). There were many different views of the Messiah (or messiahs) in Jesus' time, but they all revolved around an earthly deliverance and earthly *kingdom. Peter is right to call Jesus "Messiah," but what Peter means by the term and what Jesus means by it diverge widely at this point (see 8:31-32). Jesus may wish to avoid arousing the authorities' hostility prematurely; on the messianic secret (8:30) see the introduction to Mark.

8:31–9:1
Jesus Explains His Messianic Mission

8:31. People throughout Greco-Roman antiquity commonly believed that someone about to die could make predictions about the future, and many believed that holy men could forecast their own death. This background may be less relevant here, however. In addition to knowing *Old Testament examples of prophets' martyrdom (emphasized by his contemporaries) and texts such as Isaiah 52:13–53:12, Jesus knew the character of the temple authorities and what he planned to do in the temple (11:15-18). His actions virtually *provoked* his death.

8:32. Disciples were expected to respect their teachers and certainly never to reprove them. The *New Testament writers interpreted

some Old Testament texts as referring to the *Messiah's suffering, but most Jewish people in the first century did not recognize these texts as referring to the Messiah, who was to reign as king. Most Jewish people believed in the resurrection of all the righteous dead at the end of the age, and the inauguration of a *kingdom under God's appointed ruler afterward. Jesus' explanation of his mission in 8:31 thus seems to Peter to contradict his confession of Jesus' messiahship in 8:29.

8:33. "*Satan" originally meant "adversary" and in a few sources could even be used in the plural (though the plural is extremely rare); but in early Christian and most early Jewish writings it refers specifically to the devil. One could be said to act like someone else, however (e.g., John "in the spirit and power of Elijah"—Lk 1:17), and Jesus apparently uses *hyperbole to make the point: Peter is just like Satan in preferring the worldly to the divine (cf. Mt 4:8-10). Calling Peter by the name of the ultimate tempter and accuser underlines the seriousness of his failure as a disciple at this point.

The proper position of a disciple is "behind" his master, "following" him; "get behind me" may call Peter (who reproved Jesus; see comment on 8:32) back to his rightful position of subservience. In Greek circles as well a person could be reproached for thinking in human rather than divine terms.

8:34-37. To "come after" Jesus is to be his disciple (see comment on 8:33). Although some used "crucifixion" figuratively for great suffering, Jesus' means of death in this Gospel indicates a more demanding understanding. The cross was an instrument of violent and painful execution. To "take the cross" was to carry the horizontal beam of the cross out to the site of execution, generally past spectators, often a jeering mob. In rhetorically strong terms, Jesus describes what all true disciples must be ready for: if they follow him, they must be ready to face literal scorn and death, for they must follow to the cross. Because life is worth more than the world itself, giving one's life in this world to gain it in the world to come is a wise transaction (cf. **2 Baruch* 17:2-3; 51:15-16); there was nothing else one could give in exchange for it (Ps 49:7, 15). Ironically, Jesus' executioners later draft a bystander to fill the role of carrying the cross that none of his disciples are willing to undertake (Mk 15:21).

8:38. The coming "*Son of Man" here alludes to Daniel 7:13-14. Many others in Jesus' day believed that a period of great suffering and sin would precede the kingdom; but Peter and his colleagues prefer the easier view that it would not, or at least that their side would triumph supernaturally at no cost to themselves.

9:1. This verse points to the future glory mentioned in the preceding verses by way of an anticipatory revelation of that glory they are to experience in 9:2-13. Because the future *Messiah had already come, the glory of his future kingdom was also already present.

9:2-13
Glory on the Mountain

Ancient texts as diverse as Greek myth and Jewish *apocalypses speak of various radiant supernatural figures (deities, angels, etc.) and transformations, but by far the most obvious shared background for all those familiar with the *Old Testament (as Mark's hearers were) was Moses. God had revealed his glory to Moses on Mount Sinai, so that Moses had come down from the mountain reflecting God's glory (Ex 32–34). In Mark 9:2-13, the glory of Jesus, who is greater than Moses and Elijah, is revealed on the mountain; he is thus the ultimate spokesperson for God (Deut 18:18-19).

9:2. Mount Sinai was where God revealed his glory. Jesus waits "six days" to ascend a mountain to make the same point (Ex 24:16). That Jesus takes three companions may allude to Exodus 24:1, 9, although this possible allusion is less clear (seventy elders were also present in that account). (The *Qumran scrolls might speak of twelve leaders, with three being most prominent, though three is a small enough number to allow coincidence here.) Transformation or transfiguration appears in both Greek myth and Jewish apocalyptic literature, but the most obvious background of Jesus' transformation here must be Moses' glorification on Mount Sinai.

9:3. Jewish literature often described angels and other heavenly beings as being clothed in white. Cleaning clothes (cf. NIV "bleach") was normally a housewife's task, but this text refers to the widespread ancient profession of cloth refiners, who could be

men or women. They had facilities that homes lacked and prepared fabrics for cloth, by means that included combing, cleaning and thickening them before spinning. These refiners often treated the fabric with urine (a practice for which fullers were consequently notorious) and clay, brushing it with brushes or thistles. They bleached white fabrics with chemicals, and often brightened and softened them by stretching them on a frame over burning sulfur. They also cleaned existing clothing, and could often remove stains from white garments.

9:4. Jewish people understood Scripture as denying that Elijah had ever died; Moses was buried by God himself, and some (unbiblical) Jewish traditions even claimed that Moses was still alive (cf. comment on Rev 11:6). These two figures were both expected to return in some sense before the end (Deut 18; Mal 4).

9:5-6. Israelites annually built tabernacles, or booths, commemorating the time when God's presence was with them in the wilderness, so Peter would know how to build one.

9:7. The cloud probably recalls the cloud of God's presence, for example, on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:15-16). The heavenly voice repeats the basic message of Mark 1:11 but may add another biblical allusion. "Hear him" may refer to Deuteronomy 18:15, where the Israelites are warned to heed the "prophet like Moses," the new Moses who would come.

9:8. One may compare Elijah and Moses' vanishing with a Jewish belief assumed especially by the later *rabbis that Elijah could come and go at will, like an angel. In any case, angels were thought able to appear and disappear.

9:9-10. Given their cultural presuppositions, it was difficult for the *disciples to understand what had happened; they assumed that all the righteous dead would be resurrected simultaneously at the end of the age (cf. Dan 12:2).

9:11. The Jewish people expected Elijah to come at the time of the end (Mal 4:5), to prepare the Lord's way (Mal 3:1; Sirach 48:1-10), though they held different views on his exact function.

9:12. Elijah would come "to restore all things," that is, to reconcile families (Mal 4:6; although later rabbis interpreted this restoration as straightening out Israel's genealogies, people understood the text more broadly in this period; Sirach 48:10).

9:13. Most Jewish people were expecting the real Elijah (whom the disciples saw speaking with Jesus), but by applying the promise of Elijah to John, Jesus interprets it much more figuratively than most of his contemporaries would have.

9:14-32
Insufficient Faith for Exorcism

9:14-15. Like Moses, Jesus must deal with the failure of those he left in charge once he comes down from the mountain (Ex 24:14; 32:1-8, 21-25, 35). Most *scribes did not claim the power to work miracles, in contrast to Jesus' disciples (6:12-13). Teachers of the *law presumably knew the Hebrew Bible on a more sophisticated level than the disciples did, so if the disciples could not demonstrate God's power in other ways, they risked their credibility. Foaming at the mouth also appears in an analogous ancient example.

9:16-18. The possessed person's lack of control over his own motor responses is paralleled by examples of spirit possession in many cultures through history and is attested in anthropological studies of spirit possession today. Some writers have noted parallels between the form of demonized activity depicted here and epileptic behavior, but epilepsy has a neurological basis (epilepsy and demonic possession are distinguished in Mt 4:24). The parallels could indicate that the spirit interfered with the same centers in the brain where seizures could also be induced by other means. Brain research shows that neurological parallels to possession trances on some level occur even in REM sleep, sleepwalking, and a variety of other states; the brain is neurologically susceptible to altered states of consciousness, not all of which directly require the activity of alien spirits. Some of these states may, however, facilitate spiritual experiences (positive or negative); likewise, it would not be surprising that spirits invading some aspects of the personality could overload the human nervous system.

9:19. Mature disciples were supposed to be able to carry on in their teacher's absence;

sometimes a teacher would delegate lectures to his advanced pupils. The matter at hand requires a different sort of preparation than lectures did (9:29), but Jesus had already prepared them (6:7-13).

9:20-22. Demoniacs were often self-destructive (cf. 5:5), which again characterizes a number of cases of spirit possession attested in diverse cultures. See also comment on 9:16-18.

9:23-27. Exorcists usually tried to subdue *demons by incantations (often invoking higher spirits), by using smelly roots or the like. Jesus here uses only his command, showing his great authority.

9:28-30. Jewish teachers often explained more mature subjects (too risky for the public to hear) to their disciples in private. In a culture dominated by honor and shame, rebukes and admissions of failure were also better carried out in private. The few reports of miracle-working sages do not suggest that such sages usually expected their disciples to be able to emulate their power (though Elisha carried on Elijah's work), certainly not on the same level. Nevertheless, teachers often prepared their advanced students to become teachers themselves. Few rabbis were seen as miracle workers, and few who were expected their disciples to be able to emulate their power (though Elisha carried on Elijah's work), certainly not on the same level, and certainly not in the rabbi's name (v. 39). Exorcists' methods normally focused on their own power or, more precisely, their ability to manipulate other powers; Jesus here emphasizes prayer instead (9:29).

9:31. The context of Daniel 7:13-14, which speaks of God entrusting his *kingdom to one like a *Son of Man, declares that suffering at the hands of the evil world ruler precedes exaltation (7:18-27).

9:32. Suffering was not part of the contemporary expectation for the *Messiah; to understand Jesus' message, the people need a paradigm shift in their categories and values (cf. 8:29-33). Disciples always strove to be respectful toward their rabbis. They would regard their fellow disciples as their peer group and thus might not include the rabbi in a dispute among themselves; confronting him would also cost them honor (cf. 8:32-33).

9:33-37
The Greatest Is the Child

9:33-34. Competition for honor was important in many ancient societies. Those with capital could advance economically, but most people in ancient society lacked sufficient capital for advancement and were thus locked into roles determined by birth. Even those who improved economically could not break into the aristocracy. In other circles, rank was assigned by noble birth, by age, by being the academically most advanced pupils in a school, or by advancement in the law; thus, for example, the *Qumran sect annually reevaluated each member's rank, which determined their seating and speaking order. Most groups seated people according to social rank. By whatever means it was determined, rank was a critical issue in ancient life (cf. comment on 1 Cor 14:27). Many Jewish people hoped for a new status in the world to come, based not on noble birth but on faithfulness to God's covenant.

9:35. In antiquity, as today, heroes or benevolent people with power were preeminent. Rabbis stressed humility but expected their disciples to serve them.

9:36. Much more than today, in antiquity children were especially powerless in society and dependent on parents.

9:37. In Jewish custom, a person's agent, similar to a modern business representative, could act on behalf of the person who sent him. To the extent that he accurately represented the one who sent him, the agent was supported by the sender's full authority; the principle was applied in the *Old Testament to God's messengers, his prophets (1 Sam 8:7). How one treated the poor could also show one's treatment of the Lord (Prov 19:17).

9:38-41
Turning Away a True Believer

Here the *disciples, who shortly before could not cast out a *demon by using Jesus' name, criticize one of the "little ones" who did act in his name (cf. 9:37) by casting out demons (cf. Num 11:28). The format of this discussion resembles ancient *narratives in which a famous teacher refutes the contentions of the less informed.

9:38. Like individuals, different schools and sects often competed against each other. Sectarian attitudes were common in Judaism, as the *Dead Sea Scrolls testify. (Some Jewish groups would break away from others over such issues as the correct day for Passover.) Their zeal is misplaced (cf. Num 11:28; the reader may also recall other disciples' recent failure to expel a demon, 9:28).

9:39. Merely recognizing Jesus' name is one thing, but having the faith to do a miracle in that name indicates that this man was not just a typical exorcist trying to use a more powerful name to accomplish miracles, as exorcists often did (Acts 19:13-16; cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.47). This exorcist probably seeks instead to act as Jesus' agent (cf. comment on Acts 3:6).

9:40. "He who is not against you is for you" may have been a proverb (cf. several sources, including *Cicero, a first-century B.C. Roman author); Jesus adapts it to make his point.

9:41. Jesus had spoken of welcoming his disciples (Mk 6:8-11); here Jesus refers to those who are so poor that they have only water to give when a disciple comes to them. Such people are very poor even by ancient standards (1 Kings 17:12). This action reflects faith and hospitality one would normally show to teachers one respects (1 Kings 17:12-16; cf. Lk 11:5-6) but not to those one thought to be false (2 Jn 10). Some ancients even told stories of people judged because they did not give even water or other available provisions to strangers, some of whom turned out to be divine or divine agents. Jewish teachers often spoke of receiving one's "reward" when God judged the world.

9:42-50
The Penalty for Turning a Believer Away

9:42. "Stumble" was often used metaphorically to refer to sinning or falling away from the true faith. Millstones were extremely heavy; one would certainly drown with a millstone tied around one's neck. Further, this term refers to the heavier kind of millstone turned by a donkey, rather than the lighter kind a woman would use. Jewish people regarded drowning as the awful sort that pagans might execute; thus the image is all the more dreadful. Death without burial (including death at sea) was regarded as the worst kind of death; pagans even believed that the spirit of the deceased hovered eternally over the waters where the person had died (see comment on Acts 27:20).

9:43-47. The imagery here may be corporal punishment (cutting off appendages, e.g., Ex 21:24-25) versus a form of divine capital punishment. Some Jewish thinkers believed that one would be resurrected in exactly the form in which one had died (e.g., with limbs missing, as in the case of many martyrs) before being made whole (cf. **2 Baruch* 50).

9:48. Here the imagery is from Isaiah 66:24. Although one could read Isaiah as applying only to the eternal destruction of corpses (cf. Sirach 10:11; 19:3), the imagery had nevertheless apparently already begun to be applied to eternal torment (Judith 16:17).

9:49. Salt was used on sacrifices (Lev 2:13; Ezek 43:24; cf. **Jubilees* 21:11), so the image might relate to the burning of 9:48 (though salt is positive in 9:50). Or cf. perhaps Deut 29:23.

9:50. Here Jesus apparently changes salt to a positive metaphor, perhaps meaning "peace." That real salt (as opposed to the impure salt mixtures from some inland sea deposits then known) by definition does not lose its saltiness only reinforces the strength of the image (see comment on Mt 5:13). Being "at peace with one another" contrasts with the divisiveness related in 9:33-38.

10:1-12
Divorce Forbidden

Because 10:1-12 addresses the treatment of spouses, 10:13-16 deals with the treatment of children, and 10:17-31 relates to one's true household in the *kingdom, some scholars have compared 10:1-31 to the ancient literary form "household code," except that this passage is in *narrative form. If this comparison is at all relevant, it is interesting that Mark's point runs counter to the values of those codes in his culture, which stressed the absolute submission of wives, children and slaves (see comment on Eph 5:21-33).

10:1. Most teachers who taught in public did so in specific localities. Only figures popular with the masses drew such crowds as

Jesus did wherever they went, and these popular teachers would naturally arouse the envy of many local professional scholars and the discomfort of the authorities.

10:2. Matthew's wording (Mt 19:3; see comment there) is closer to the exact wording *Pharisees would normally have used at that time; the issue was the *grounds* for divorce, not whether divorce was ever valid. Because Moses had assumed the practice of divorce (Deut 24:1), Jewish interpreters debated only the grounds for divorce; to ask whether Jesus thinks divorce is permissible at all is to ask whether he knows or agrees with Moses' *law.

10:3-5. Rabbis distinguished between what Scripture commanded and what it allowed as a concession; by asking what Moses "commanded" Jesus invites them to recognize that Moses explicitly only "permitted," not "commanded," divorce, on any grounds.

10:6-9. Taking for granted the unity of the law, Jewish interpreters commonly appealed to one clear text of Scripture to counter or explain another's use of a text that they felt unclear. Some interpreters, like the scribes who wrote the *Dead Sea Scrolls, appealed to the creation *narrative to show God's original plan for marriage. These interpreters used Genesis 1–2 to argue against polygamy; Jesus uses it to argue against divorce. (Reflecting Greek custom against polygamy, the *Septuagint had substituted "two" for the original Hebrew "they" in Gen 2:24.)

10:10. After a teacher offered an unsatisfying public response, *disciples could seek more detailed explanations from their teachers privately.

10:11. No one else in antiquity spoke of divorce in such strong terms. (Because most Jewish teachers allowed polygamy, they would not have seen marrying a second wife as adultery, even if they had agreed that the man was still married to the first wife. But Jesus eliminates the double standard; a man consorting with two women is as adulterous as a woman consorting with two men.)

Ancients allowed remarriage after valid divorces; this saying thus regards divorces as invalid in God's sight (hence subsequent unions as adulterous). That Matthew (Mt 5:32; 19:9) and Paul (1 Cor 7:15) state exceptions may suggest their recognition that the saying functions as *hyperbole, or as a general principle allowing exceptions (like many proverbs or other sayings of Jewish sages), reinforcing the literal point of 10:9. That he does not actually teach the ontological indissolubility of marriage—i.e., that a divorced person remains genuinely married even once divorced—is clear from the exhortation in 10:9 (cf. Jn 4:18). Hyperbole was a common teaching technique, but it was always meant to underline a point—here, that Jesus' followers must uphold their marriage covenants to the fullest extent in their power (as in 10:9). Jesus' point is to advocate fidelity to one's spouse, not to break up existing polygamous or remarried unions.

10:12. Unlike Roman law, Pharisaic interpretation of biblical law did not permit a woman to divorce her husband (although under extreme circumstances she could request that the court force him to divorce her). The only Jewish women known to have flouted this law were aristocrats like Herodias (6:17), who paid more attention to Greek custom than to Palestinian Jewish custom. Mark, who writes for readers living where wives could divorce their husbands, may be bringing out the implications of Jesus' teaching for them too. (Like modern preachers, ancient writers were expected to paraphrase sayings when needed to bring out their meanings.)

10:13-16
Images of the Kingdom

10:13. Children were loved but were socially powerless; the high childhood mortality rate meant that they were physically powerless as well, many dying before attaining maturity. (In the poorest places, like Egypt, perhaps as many as half of those born died by the age of twelve. Poorer *Gentile families often discarded babies if they thought they could not support them.) Eager to get on with the business of setting up the *kingdom, the disciples have little time for people who do not wield political power—compare the disciples' response, and Jesus' rebuke, with 2 Kings 4:27.

10:14-15. Some thought that the kingdom would be achieved by force of arms; others, by radical moral reform; and many, simply in God's time. But although Jewish people (unlike Greeks) respected humility, no one expected the kingdom to come by becoming

powerless like children. The totally powerless might learn to simply depend on a heavenly Father.

10:16. In Genesis some of the patriarchs conferred blessings by the laying on of hands (Gen 48:14), and their prayers were answered.

10:17-31
A Rich Man and the Kingdom

10:17. A pious man customarily sought out his own teacher; a man of wealth could normally find the best or most popular teacher for himself. For a man of wealth to bow before a teacher indicated tremendous respect. Ancient sources show that at least some disciples asked their teachers questions like the one this rich man asks Jesus. To "inherit *eternal life" meant to share in the life of the coming world, the life of the *kingdom of God.

10:18-19. Without denying that he himself is good, Jesus reminds the man of the standard Jewish conception of God's goodness (others could be good, but no one compared with God); he then lists select commandments from the *Old Testament (five from the Ten Commandments) dealing with human relations (rather than directly with God) that people could test (not, for instance, a prohibition against a sin of the heart, coveting).

10:20. If only God is good, the man will have to admit he has broken some commandment; but the commandments Jesus had listed were kept by most well-raised, educated Jewish people.

10:21-22. Judaism stressed charity heavily, but ordinary Jewish teachers did not require a prospective disciple to divest himself entirely of funds. Several teachers, especially some radical Greek teachers, made such demands on rich students to see if they would value true teaching above their wealth; a few rich persons would give up their goods, but most disappointed such teachers. Jewish *Essenes relinquished property when they joined their movement; some Old Testament prophets also made radical sacrifices to follow God's call (see, e.g., 1 Kings 19:19-21).

10:23-24. Jesus turns the social order upside down. The well-to-do were often hailed for their generosity (though they had more to give); being less educated in the *law, the poor were sometimes seen as less pious (although poverty itself was certainly not seen as a sign of impiety, especially by the poor themselves). Others saw the "poor" as more pious, the oppressed who depended on God.

10:25. This image reflects a Jewish figure of speech for doing something impossible (Babylonian Jews spoke of an elephant going through a needle's eye, but camels were the largest animal in Palestine). The saying, a *hyperbole, refers to a literal needle. (Those who think Jesus refers here merely to a gate in Jerusalem called the "eye of a needle" are mistaken; the alleged "needle's eye" gate was built in medieval times.) A wealthy person could relinquish wealth only by God's *grace (10:26-27).

10:26-30. Fishermen and *tax gatherers had some economic independence; these disciples had abandoned their economic position to follow him. Their reward would be found in believers sharing possessions as a family in this world (cf. 6:10; Mt 10:42; Acts 2:44-45) and receiving the life of the *kingdom in the world to come.

10:31. Most Jewish people understood that the day of judgment would turn things upside down (cf., e.g., Is 2:11-12, 17); those who appear great in this world will be nothing in the next, and those who were nothing in this world will be great in the next. Jewish people applied this principle especially to the exaltation of Israel over the other nations, the oppressed righteous over their wicked oppressors, but Jesus applies it also to individual rank and status.

10:32-34
Third Passion Prediction

10:32. Despite their expectation of the coming *kingdom, the *disciples recognize the danger of going to Jerusalem and confronting the *high priestly aristocracy there (perhaps based on experience with others, such as *Pharisees who debated with Jesus, or from earlier festivals). Perhaps they are aware of Jewish traditions about a terrible war preceding the final establishing of the *Messiah's kingdom—a war in which, according to some marginalized groups, the Jerusalem aristocracy would prove as evil as the Romans (cf. the Dead Sea Scrolls). Or perhaps they fear primarily the Roman garrison in Jerusalem.

10:33-34. Jesus warns against both the Jewish aristocracy and the Romans, who will

execute him in the manner customary for revolutionaries. On the suffering *Son of Man, see comment on 9:31. Many Jews condemned the corruption of the priestly aristocracy of this era.

10:35-45
The Greatest Is the Servant

10:35-37. James and John want the status of viceroys in an earthly *kingdom; this desire again reflects a popular conception of the *Messiah and God's kingdom that Jesus has repeatedly repudiated (see comment on 8:31-38).

10:38. Jesus elsewhere refers to the cross as his cup (14:23-24, 36), which may allude to the cup of judgment that appears often in the *Old Testament (Ps 60:3; 75:8; Is 51:17-23; Jer 25:15-29; 49:12; Lam 4:21; Zech 12:2). His *baptism in some way also prefigures his death (see comment on 1:11; cf. Lk 12:50; Ps 69:2, 14-15).

10:39-40. The positions on either side of a king's throne (especially the right side) were the most prestigious in a kingdom. (Jesus might, however, be alluding instead to those crucified on his right and his left; 15:27.) James was later the first of the twelve martyred (Acts 12:2), but according to *church tradition John lived into the nineties.

10:41-42. Competition for status was rife in Mediterranean antiquity. Jewish people knew well the *Gentile model of authority: many ancient near Eastern kings had long claimed to be gods and ruled tyrannically; Greek rulers had adopted the same posture through much of the eastern Mediterranean. The Roman emperor and his provincial agents (who often showed little concern for Jewish sensitivities) would have been viewed in much the same light: brutal and tyrannical. Jesus' reminding the disciples that seeking power was a Gentile (i.e., pagan) practice was tantamount to telling them they should not be doing it; Jewish teachers used Gentile practices as negative examples.

10:43-44. It was radical for Jesus to define greatness in terms of servanthood; despite Jewish rules requiring that slaves be well treated, Jewish free persons, like their Gentile counterparts, considered slaves socially inferior. Although both slaves and free persons varied in rank, slaveholders treated their slaves as inferior in rank to themselves.

10:45. By calling himself a "servant" and defining his mission as "giving his life a ransom for the many," Jesus probably identifies himself with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:10-12 (despite contemporary debate surrounding this claim). Although the servant's mission had been given to Israel as a whole (Is 41:8; 43:10; 44:2, 21; 49:3), Israel through disobedience could not fulfill it (42:19), so that the one who would fulfill it had to restore Israel as well as bring light to the Gentiles (49:5-7; 52:13–53:12). Because hardly anyone else had yet applied this passage to the *Messiah, Jesus is trying to redefine their expectation about his messianic mission. On the "many," see comment on Romans 5:15. Some also compare traditional Jewish language for the deaths of martyrs assuaging God's wrath against Israel (see "*atonement" in glossary).

10:46-52
Stopping for a Blind Beggar

The *disciples want to get on with the business of setting up the *kingdom (10:37; 11:9-10), not understanding that stopping for a blind beggar is the sort of thing Jesus' kingdom is all about (cf. 10:13-14).

10:46. The blind, the severely disabled and others who could not engage in the traditional occupations of the day could support themselves only by begging, normally on a busy roadside. Judaism considered it righteous to help them. Jericho was a prosperous town with a good climate, and Timaeus's son no doubt received adequate support there. "Bartimaeus" means "son of Timaeus" (*bar* is *Aramaic for "son"); Mark clarifies that this was literally true in his case (not simply a name or title as in some *bar* names in 15:7; Acts 1:23; 4:36; 13:6; 15:22).

10:47-48. Except for what they had learned from listening to others recite, blind people in that time were largely illiterate in the *law (Braille had not been invented yet, so they could not read, although like vast numbers of other illiterate Jews they could hear the Torah read). Although they were protected under the law of Moses, they were largely socially and economically powerless, and Jesus' followers view this blind man's loud pleas as an intrusion, the way they had viewed the children (10:13). The disciples may have viewed Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem as a royal pro-

cession, and it was foolhardy and impudent to interrupt a royal procession.

10:49-52. Perhaps by "stopping" and standing still, Jesus allows the blind man to come to where Jesus' voice had last sounded. The "cloak" (10:50) is an outer garment, used as a coat in cold weather and as bedding at night, and possibly might have been spread before him for use in his daytime begging if he had no pouch. On the narrative level, the act of casting it aside may signify his forsaking dependence on anything else and trusting only in Jesus.

11:1-11
Jesus Enters Jerusalem

Although later Jewish teachers understood "the king coming on a donkey" (Zech 9:9) messianically, it is not clear that the whole crowd understands Jesus' claim to *messiahship here (he would not be the only person to ride a donkey). Had members of the Roman garrison been present outside the gates and recognized the implications of Jesus' claim, they would have arrested him.

11:1-2. Heralds or messengers were typically sent two by two (6:7; cf. 14:13). That Jesus chooses a colt over a grown donkey might reinforce Mark's portrayal of his humility (cf. also the final line of Zech 9:9). Also custom frequently preferred animals for divine use not yet used by people (Num 19:2; Deut 21:3; 1 Sam 6:7). In second-century Egypt, donkeys ranged in price from 50 to 350 drachmas—roughly between two and ten months' complete wages for a worker. Obviously borrowing an animal for the occasion was more economical than seeking to buy one!

11:3. Residents of the area around Jerusalem had to be particularly hospitable with their property around Passover season, when Jewish pilgrims from the whole ancient world came for the feast. The response to the potential question could have meant, "Lend these to Jesus, the teacher" (*Aramaic *rab* can be translated as "master" or "lord"), or "Lend these to the service of God." A king (or even Roman soldiers) could "impress" an animal for use (see comment on Mt 5:41).

11:4-6. In many cities, the doors of homes faced a courtyard shared by neighbors; in a small village, the doorway may have just faced a dirt road through the town. People would normally ride the adult, not the colt never before ridden, so the *disciples' purpose in untying the colt may not have been immediately obvious even had they owned it themselves.

11:7. A king "coming on a donkey" evokes Zech 9:9 (construed messianically by some later *rabbis), though it is not clear that the crowds recognize the allusion. The Romans would have arrested someone they suspected as a claiming to be a ruler, but no one would expect a genuine messianic claimant to enter Jerusalem peacefully and unarmed, since certain death would await such a person.

11:8. The spreading of garments represents what could be construed as royal homage (2 Kings 9:13). Branches were also waved in homage to rulers (cf. 1 Maccabees 13:51; 2 Maccabees 10:7). Jericho was 17 miles (about 27 km) uphill to Jerusalem, and possibly some larger branches were carried from there, though local ones (still smaller in the spring) might be easier for the colt to walk on. (Carrying branches was also part of the worship at the feast depicted in Ps 118:27.)

Pilgrims to the feast were typically welcomed by crowds already there, so it is unlikely that the whole crowd recognized the significance of Jesus' entry. Nevertheless, Jesus was well-known especially among the Galileans who had come to the festival. In view of the crowd's acclamation in 11:10, the image that may have come most readily to the minds of Mark's ancient hearers is probably that of a royal entrance procession.

11:9. "Hosanna" means "O save!" and both this and the next line of verse 9 come from Psalm 118:25-26. Psalms 113–118, called the Hallel, were regularly sung at Passover season, so these words were fresh in everyone's minds (cf. also comment on 12:10-11). Hopes for the restoration of the Davidic kingdom also ran high at this time of year; Rome thus had extra troops on hand at this season to control any unrest.

11:10. The coming of the *kingdom when David or his descendants would again reign (e.g., Is 9:7; 11:1; Jer 23:5-6) is here associated with the hope of one coming in the Lord's name. (David is their "father" in the sense of

"deliverer," not their ancestor: cf. Is 9:6; 2 Kings 13:14.) Passover commemorated God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt; consequently, Jewish hopes for a future deliverance from their current problems ran high during this season, and the Roman governor had some extra troops in Jerusalem ready in case riot control became necessary. By treating Jesus as the object of any of these hopes, the crowds are beginning to see in this teacher a possible messianic figure who could, on many views, lead them against the Romans.

11:11. The ancient workday began at sunrise; the "evening" offering in the temple was what we call afternoon (about 3 p.m.); people normally wanted to be near home by dark. "Late" may mean not "dark" but rather that the daily activity in the temple had begun to subside. Although eating the Passover in Jerusalem, as was expected, Jesus lodged in Bethany (11:11-12), about three kilometers east of Jerusalem on the southeastern slopes of the Mount of Olives.

11:12-25
The Temple and the Tree: Judgment Coming

Jesus' prophetic act against the temple is enclosed by the story of his cursing the fig tree, also an acted *parable of judgment. Fig trees were one of the most common kinds of trees in Palestine.

11:12-14. At this time of year, edible figs were still about six weeks away, but the bland fruit had recently appeared on the tree in late March; they would become ripe by late May. These were the early figs that preceded the main crop of late figs, which were ripe for harvest from mid-August into October. If only leaves appeared, without the early figs, that tree would bear no figs that year—whether early or late. Because everyone would know that it was "not yet the season for [real] figs," Jesus seems to be making a point about trees that only pretend to have good fruit (cf. Jer 24). In some Jewish stories, exceptionally holy men could curse others or objects and so destroy them; Jesus exerts genuine authority to curse only here, as an acted parable to his disciples.

11:15. Jewish people from other parts of the empire or even from different towns in Galilee would have local currencies that needed to be converted to some standard for use in the temple. Further, one was not to bring sacrifices from long distances but to convert their resources into money first (Deut 14:24-27) and buy the sacrifices in Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 7:17). The temple providing offerings (like pigeons here; Lev 1:14; 5:7; 12:8) locally was a service helpful for pilgrims. Moneychangers and sellers of doves were thus necessary and in some sense biblical. The issue is not whether there should have been moneychangers; it is whether it was valid to turn much of the outer court into a place emphasizing commerce to the detriment of worship. With hundreds of thousands of pilgrims at Passover, the merchants' strip in the temple must have been quite large, consuming much attention. The Sadducean priests who ran the temple establishment would see actions challenging the peace of the temple as also direct challenges to their own honor; such challenges were usually met with arrest and its consequences.

11:16. Later rabbinic teaching also complained against defiling the temple courts by carrying unnecessary items through them (although it is not clear that anyone would have enforced this principle in the first century). But no one protested as strongly as Jesus does, and no one seems to have questioned the necessity of commercial activity in the outer court at a feast.

11:17. Jesus cites two texts as the basis for his challenge. The first is Isaiah 56:7. In context, Is 56:7 shows that God-fearing *Gentiles will be welcome in the restored temple (always God's purpose for the temple; cf. 1 Kings 8:41-43), and in the *Old Testament the only separation in the temple was between priests and people. But in Jesus' day the temple was also segregated by ethnicity and gender for purity reasons, with Jewish women on a lower level outside the Court of Israel and non-Jews in the outermost court. Jesus shows his concern for the worship of the Gentiles and protests ethnic segregation in a divine institution.

The second text he cites is from Jeremiah 7:11, where Jeremiah condemns the idea that the temple is a safe haven for Judah in its sin; although those who have exploited the poor think that the temple will protect them, God will destroy his temple (Jer 7:3-15). Robbers' "dens" were the sort of places where robbers

kept their loot. Some also point out that in A.D. 66 rebel brigands or "robbers" (for whom *Josephus uses the same term as Mark) took possession of the temple and slaughtered the priests, further inviting God's impending wrath (see comment on 13:14).

11:18. The priestly aristocracy undoubtedly saw in Jesus' attack on the temple establishment a threat to their own economic and social interests (see comment on 11:15). The priestly aristocracy maintained their power and prestige by maintaining peace for the Romans, and the foundation of their priestly power was the temple. Most other Jewish groups (excluded from power), including Pharisees, Essenes and reports in Josephus, portrayed the priestly aristocracy as abusive and corrupt.

11:19. Many pilgrims lodged in the surrounding villages and countryside. Jerusalem was too crowded at Passover season to accommodate all the pilgrims during this period, though as many pilgrims as possible would seek to eat the Passover meal itself within or near the city's walls.

11:20-24. Some Jewish texts speak of "removing mountains" as an infinitely long or virtually impossible task, accomplished only by the most pious (later rabbis applied it to mastering studies that appeared humanly impossible to master). Thus Jesus is saying that nothing will be too hard for the person who trusts God (cf. Gen 18:14). The image of God's *Spirit bringing down a mountain before a faithful servant also appears in Zechariah 4:6-9; before God's servant, God would bring down all obstacles opposing the tasks God designates. The promise of one's commands coming to pass probably presupposes God's leading or authorization (cf., e.g., 2 Kings 2:21-22; 4:3-7, 41-44; Lam 3:37; Acts 3:6, 16).

11:25. Standing (often with uplifted hands) was the normal posture for prayer; though kneeling occurred, it was much rarer.

11:27-33
By Whose Authority?

11:27-28. As guardians of the temple and the status quo with the Romans, the chief priests would see Jesus' act as a direct challenge to their authority. Were Jesus not so popular, they might have already arrested him.

11:29. Counterquestions were common, and here one allows Jesus the opportunity to remain coy about the messianic secret (see introduction to Mark). An agent acted on the delegated authority of the sender.

11:30. Here Jesus argues that his authority and John's derive from the same source, from "heaven" (one familiar Jewish way of saying "God"). This argument follows the Jewish legal principle that a commissioned messenger acts on the full authority of the one who sent him. If John's authority were merely human (cf. Deut 18:20; Jer 23:16), they should have taken a firmer stand against him (Deut 13:1-11); if it was divine, God would hold them to account for not having listened (Deut 18:18-19; 2 Chron 20:20).

11:31-32. The chief priests were politicians—less popular than the politically powerless *Pharisees—who had to balance the interests of both their people and the Roman authorities. Holding most local political power, they had great incentive to prevent unrest. Thus they had to keep popular opinion in mind when making decisions that might incur the displeasure of the people (11:32).

11:33. Public admission of ignorance on an important matter would count against their honor, but offered less trouble than outrightly condemning John. Counterquestion (11:29) was a legitimate means of debate; their withdrawal from the rules of debate *rhetorically frees Jesus from the responsibility to continue in dialogue with them.

12:1-12
The Greedy Tenant Farmers

On "*parables," see the glossary. Jesus still addresses those who fancy themselves rulers of Israel, reminding them that they are merely custodians appointed by God (like the shepherds of Jer 23 and Ezek 34) over his vineyard.

Much of the rural Roman Empire, including parts of Galilee, was controlled by wealthy landowners, whose land was worked by tenant farmers. Landowners had great status in society, whereas tenant farmers had little except, perhaps, among their own peers.

12:1. Here Jesus describes a normal way to prepare a vineyard, but he clearly alludes to Isaiah 5:1-2, where Israel is the vineyard. Some Jewish interpreters by the time of Jesus saw Isaiah 5 as a prediction of the temple's de-

struction in 586 B.C.; if such an allusion was in the mind of any of Jesus' hearers, it would communicate his warning all the more forcefully.

Vineyards, unlike grain fields, often had walls to protect their fruits from animals and people. According to the most likely reconstructions, the "wall" was a rugged stone hedge, and the vat was a pit into which juice would run when workers trod down newly picked grapes. The top of the "watchtower" was a sentry post against intruders, but the building itself, sometimes a crude hut, may have also housed workers during harvest season.

12:2. Payments were normally rendered at harvest time, often one-quarter to as much as one-half the produce. (Landowners technically could be said to own all the produce until tenants paid their rent.)

12:3-5. Ancients appreciated the ideal of benevolent landowners, but also knew that landowners always had power, socially and legally, to enforce their will on the tenants; a few reportedly even had hired assassins to deal with troublesome tenants. They could displace the tenants if they chose. Here the tenants act as if they are the ones with power, and they exploit it mercilessly, without thought for consequences. Their behavior fits the Jewish tradition that Israel martyred many of the prophets God sent.

12:6. In the light of 1:11 and 9:7, the "beloved son" clearly represents Jesus and probably alludes to Genesis 22:2, where similar Hebrew words were used by Jewish readers to emphasize the pathos involved in Abraham's willingness to give up his precious son Isaac. No ancient landowner, no matter how benevolent, would have gone to such ends to satisfy tenants who had already killed messengers; ancient hearers would view him as naive, but recognizing in his behavior God's continued mercy to Israel would also lead to affirming that God would be right to judge his people.

12:7-8. "Come, let us kill him" probably echoes Joseph's brothers in Gen 37:20. The tenants presume too much about the inheritance; although they could have seized it under certain legal conditions, the owner could also stipulate—and after their misdeeds certainly would—that someone else inherit the vineyard; or representatives of the emperor could have seized it. The story paints the tenants as more wicked and stupid than one would expect any *real* tenants to be; but it is transparent that the tenants represent the religious leaders who serve themselves rather than God (Mk 12:12).

12:9. Ancient hearers would wonder why the landowner had not come and thrown out the tenants earlier, after 12:3-5.

12:10-12. This text is from Psalm 118:22-23, part of the Hallel, like 118:25-26 cited in 11:9-10. The Hallel was particularly fresh on people's minds for the Passover. If the larger context is in view, the building referred to is presumably the temple (Ps 118:18-21, 25-27); as the cornerstone of a new temple, Jesus is a threat to the builders of the old one.

12:13-17
Caesar and God

Rabbis dealt with questions concerning legal, moral and exegetical issues as well as mocking questions posed by opponents (e.g., *Sadducees, *Gentiles, apostates and schismatics). Parallels to these basic categories of questions appear in 12:13-37, where Jesus' answers prove him a proficient *rabbi.

12:13. *Pharisees tended to be nationalistic, whereas Herodians were clients of Herod, the Roman vassal; they worked together only in extraordinary situations. Pharisees would be concerned about Jewish legal requirements to have witnesses for a charge but would be ready to investigate charges concerning Jesus' disloyalty to the *law. That they would try to test his teaching here is not surprising. The Herodians, who hoped for a restoration of Herodian rule in Judea (which *Pilate currently governed), were naturally disturbed by messianic figures who challenged their idea of Herodian rule and might cause Rome to tighten its direct control over the land.

12:14-15. Knowing that much of the populace resents Roman taxation and that many may look to Jesus for deliverance, they know that Jesus cannot accept taxes without alienating his constituency. If Jesus denounces Roman taxes (as they probably hope), accepting no king but God, the view characterized by those later called *Zealots, he can be arrested as a threat to public order and handed over to Rome for execution on the charge of sedition and treason. A disastrous tax revolt

two decades earlier had shown where nationalistic fervor could lead.

12:16-17. Jewish Palestine circulated copper coins that omitted the image of the deified emperor, which was offensive to Jewish tastes. (Although King Agrippa later used both the image of the emperor and his own, Herod Antipas, current ruler in Galilee, avoided any images on his coins, and so did local Judean coinage.) But Jesus' opponents have a silver denarius—which bore the emperor's image—available when he requests one. They are therefore hardly in a position to challenge his lack of nationalistic zeal. As for rendering to God what is God's, some commentators believe that Jesus appeals to what is made in God's image: humans should give themselves to God (Gen 1:26-27).

12:18-27
Sadducees and the Resurrection

12:18. One of the basic points of contention between Pharisees and *Sadducees was that the latter did not accept the future *resurrection of the bodies of the dead.

12:19. The Sadducees' question to Jesus concerns the custom called levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-6), which was meant to protect widows economically. In various forms, both ancient Middle Eastern cultures and many traditional societies today employ levirate marriage. It helps widows in societies where women cannot earn adequate wages.

12:20-23. The Sadducees take this story line from the Jewish book of Tobit, where seven successive husbands of pious Sarah die (though they were not brothers).

12:24-27. Jesus' response resembles standard Pharisaic responses. When Pharisees debated this issue with Sadducees, they argued for the resurrection from the *law of Moses, and typically read a text for all they could get out of it. Standard Jewish interpretive technique would have read Exodus 3:6 as present tense, "I *am* the God of the patriarchs"—implying that the patriarchs still lived (cf. similarly 4 Maccabees 7:18-19; 16:25; Philo, *Abraham* 50–55). Phrases such as "in the passage about the bush" were standard, because the Bible had not yet been divided into chapters and verses.

12:28-34
The Love Commandments

12:28. A common issue of discussion among ancient rabbis was the question of which commandments were heavier (i.e., more important) and which were lighter (cf. comment on Mt 5:19).

12:29-34. Following Jewish interpretive technique, Jesus links the two commandments (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18) by a common key expression, "You shall love." Some others also linked these passages (e.g., *Philo) and also summarized the *law in terms of devotion to God and to others. Some other teachers ranked these among the greatest commandments that summarized the law (e.g., Rabbi *Akiba in the early second century viewed Lev 19:18 as the greatest commandment; cf. *Sifra Qedoshim* pq. 4.200.3.7). This was especially true of "Love the Lord your God," which followed directly on and applied the basic confession of Judaism, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord . . . is one" (Deut 6:4). Many Jewish teachers affirmed that the best motive for serving God was love. That many of Jesus' hearers would recognize the plausibility of his reply makes it all the more difficult to dispute with him on the matter.

12:35-37
David's Lord

When Jewish teachers challenged their hearers to resolve apparent discrepancies in Scripture, they assumed that both texts were true (in this case, Jesus knows that he is both David's son, as in 10:47-48, and David's Lord) and were asking how to harmonize them.

12:35. By definition, the Christ, or anointed one, was the royal descendant of David (Is 9:7; 11:1; Ps 2; 89; 132). But this view of *messiahship could lend itself to a primarily revolutionary view of the *kingdom (see 11:10) and was thus inadequate by itself.

12:36-37. Jesus' opponents apparently have no answer, because extant sources do not suggest that Jewish interpreters applied Psalm 110:1 to the Messiah. Yet who else might the psalmist's second "lord" be, since Jewish tradition (reflected in the psalm's superscription) viewed David himself as the author? The one who would reign in God's kingdom was Da-

vid's "lord," not merely his descendant; he would thus be greater than the resurrected David. Writing in Greek, Mark might want his hearers to connect this verse (Ps 110:1) with a verse he has cited in the preceding section, because Jewish interpreters often linked verses with a key word—there was only one Lord: God (12:29). If so, Mark offers another claim for Jesus' deity here (cf. 1:3).

12:38-44
The Pious Poor and Their Religious Oppressors

12:38. Like their Greek counterparts, some Jewish teachers wore a special identifying garb; this seems to have been a long, white linen robe, similar to those of priests and temple officials. Teachers were normally greeted with titles of honor; marketplaces, which were full of people, would provide many opportunities for these teachers to receive such recognition. Custom demanded greeting social superiors before the superior could greet the required greeter.

12:39. Synagogues were not all of the same shape or size, but in many later *synagogues, teachers could take a seat in full view of most of the rest of the assembly (like ministers in most churches today). In some, many people probably sat on the floor, with persons of greater status on benches around the wall and sometimes other benches, and the best seats on the raised platform where this existed. What is significant is their status in a status-conscious society; synagogues were the most important assembly places for the community. At banquets, those seated nearest the host were in positions of honor; ancient literature is full of complaints from those snubbed by being given socially inferior seats.

12:40. Widows had little means of support, were socially powerless and honorless in a society emphasizing status and honor, and were to be protected under Jewish *law. In legal cases they normally needed advocates to speak on their behalf.

Jesus could mean that these teachers exploit widows' resources by abusing the letter of the law in legal decisions rather than showing special mercy to the poor, or by favoring more powerful relatives, or by seeking extensive contributions (or insisting on tithes, which Pharisees could set at twenty to thirty percent, on top of the heavy land taxes levied by the government). Whatever their specific crime, the charge of "devouring widows' houses" portrays them as no better than the *tax gatherers.

They may have lingered long in their individual or public prayers in the synagogues (apparently covering up the lack of private relationship with God); it is not the longevity of prayers but the motive of this longevity that Jesus criticizes here. Like the *Old Testament prophets, Jesus denounces both social injustice and religious hypocrisy (e.g., Amos 2:7; 8:5-6), and he stands on behalf of the economically powerless (Is 1:17).

12:41-44. Jerusalem's massive temple had a large treasury, reportedly adjacent to the Court of Women. A later tradition claims that thirteen receptacles for such gifts stood in the Court of Women, accessible to Israelite women as well as to men. Already probably the most massive temple in the Roman empire, supported by an annual temple tax on all adult male Jews (including in the *Diaspora), the temple sported ostentatious wealth (such as a massive golden vine). Its officials would probably waste this widow's money; but this powerless woman, ignorant of that likelihood, acts in good faith in her devotion to God and is the greatest giver in God's sight. Even if all else failed, the widow would not starve, given provisions for the poor in Jewish synagogues (cf. comment on Acts 6:1-4). The widow's "mite," or *lepton,* represented the lightest and least valuable coin of the period.

13:1-4
Setting of Jesus' End-Time Discourse

Mark may have risked serious trouble with the Roman authorities for writing this chapter, if he wrote publicly in his own name; Jewish underground tracts about the time of the end usually included Israel's exaltation, and Rome distrusted any threat to its power. Prophecies favoring Rome's greatness were welcome, but not those implying its demise. But this chapter before Jesus' arrest climaxes Jesus' warnings to his *disciples in Mark: true followers must be ready to follow to the cross and share his sufferings.

13:1. Greek texts sometimes portray Greek philosophical teachers conversing with their disciples while strolling about; this may have been a common teaching technique at least in particular schools (e.g., that of *Aristotle).

The temple complex consisted of many buildings and was perhaps the largest, most magnificent structure in the ancient world; it was twice the size of Solomon's temple. (Probably only anti-Jewish prejudice kept it from being ranked among the seven wonders of the ancient world, for it was larger than the Ephesian temple of Artemis, which was so ranked.) Construction had begun under Herod the Great before Jesus' birth and was still continuing at this time. Jewish people all over the world contributed to the temple, and so much was received that officials kept adding on to a golden vine that was part of its ostentatious glory. It was sacred to Herod's enemies as well as to his allies.

13:2. Many or most Jews considered the temple invincible, but forty years after Jesus spoke these words, in A.D. 70, the Romans destroyed the temple. The wording here is only slightly *hyperbolic: some stones in the retaining wall remained in place, but the temple proper was obliterated. As exemplified in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, some other groups also expected God to judge the temple authorities; but no one before A.D. 66 was as accurate concerning the timing as Jesus was (13:30).

13:3-4. Although Greek teachers often instructed their pupils while walking (13:1-2), they also often instructed them while sitting in front of a temple (a common form of public building in antiquity). The disciples' question to Jesus about the sign of the temple's destruction sets the scene for Jesus' answer in the rest of the chapter, in which he apparently describes both the imminent end of the Jerusalemites' world and the ultimate end of the age. In biblical prophets (e.g., Joel), nearer judgments sometimes prefigured more distant ones.

13:5-8
Not Yet the End

13:5-6. False messiahs often drew significant Jewish followings in Palestine, including known figures over the next few decades (see comments on Acts 5:36; 21:38) and as late as Bar Kochba, whom Rabbi *Akiba hailed as the *Messiah around A.D. 130. Within the decades immediately following Jesus some sought to emulate Moses or Joshua, perhaps viewing themselves as messianic.

13:7-8. Ancient Jewish *prophecy teachers usually listed events like these (often along with some that Jesus does not list, such as mutant infants) among the signs of the end; the end was often portrayed as preceded by great sufferings or a final war, and was sometimes compared with birth pangs. Jesus says that instead these sorts of events characterize all of life until the end; history until the final time is only the *beginning* of birth pangs.

13:9-13
Sufferings to Expect Before the End

13:9. Before A.D. 70, local courts, or councils deciding cases, were probably run by local elders or priests; in later times *rabbis would staff them. Synagogues were the local places of public assembly and thus provided the natural place for hearings and public discipline. Sometimes discipline was administered in the form of flogging, with thirty-nine lashes (cf. 2 Cor 11:24). Under rules dating back to at least the second century rules, this meant thirteen harsh strokes on the breast and twenty-six on the back; the smiter was to strike as hard as possible. These words would have particularly pained Jewish Christians, because they signified rejection among many of their own people.

13:10. In context, this preaching will be carried out before officials of all nations ("kings"—v. 9—could refer just to Rome's vassal princes, but "all nations" suggests that Parthian and other rulers from the East are also in view). Distant kingdoms already then known included Parthia, India and China to the east; Scythia, Germany and Britain to the north; and Subsahara Africa to the south. The context connects this universal proclamation with universal persecution.

13:11. Jewish people thought of the *Holy Spirit especially as the Spirit of *prophecy who had anointed the prophets to speak God's message, and biblical prophets suggest this Spirit's abundance in the end-time.

13:12. See Micah 7:5-7 (more explicit in Mt 10:35-36).

13:13. Enduring to the end might mean

survival (cf. *4 *Ezra* 6:25), but more likely means avoiding apostasy, which was often associated with end-time sufferings.

13:14-23
The Prerequisite for the End

About a decade after Jesus uttered these words, his *disciples had good reason to remember them. When the Roman emperor Caligula declared himself divine and tried to set up his image in the Jerusalem temple (A.D. 39), Jesus' sayings about the impending abomination that would cause desolation must have been circulated with renewed vigor. Paul evoked these sayings a decade later (2 Thess 2:1-12) and to Mark when he wrote his Gospel (perhaps A.D. 64). The abomination that would bring about desolation was finally fulfilled in A.D. 66–70 (cf. earlier cases in e.g., Ps 74:3-7).

13:14. *Josephus, who lived through the war of 66–70, thought the "abomination of desolation" (the reference is to Dan 9:27; cf. 11:31; 12:11) happened in A.D. 66, when *Zealots shed the blood of priests in the temple. Others date the abomination of desolation three and one-half years later, in 70. The Jerusalemites had considered it a sacrilege for the Roman standards, which bore the image of the worshiped emperor, to enter Jerusalem (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.59; cf. 1QpHab 6.4). But in the year 70, when the temple was destroyed, the Romans erected these standards over the eastern gate of the temple and sacrificed to them, as they proclaimed Titus, their general, the supreme leader (Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.316). Both views may be true: if the phrase means "abomination that *causes* desolation," then the abomination of A.D. 66 may have led to the desolation of A.D. 70.

The mountains were full of caves and represented the safest place to flee. Earlier David eluded Saul there; the second-century B.C. Jewish revolutionaries, the *Maccabees, practiced guerrilla warfare from the mountains; later, Jewish refugees hid there in the war of A.D. 132–135. Later Christian sources report that the Jerusalem Christians, warned by prophecies before Jerusalem's fall, fled to a place called Pella in the Decapolis, far to the north.

13:15. Housetops were flat and could be used for prayer, drying vegetables, chatting with neighbors and so forth. Because one approached them by an outdoor staircase or ladder and not from indoors, one who fled in haste would descend without entering the house to retrieve any possessions. Even if there is an element of *hyperbole, it graphically underlines the point of urgency.

13:16. Workers would wear their outer coats in the cool of the early morning but leave them on the edge of the field as the day grew warmer. Because poor people depended on these cloaks for warmth at night, loss of the cloak represented a serious difficulty (Ex 22:26-27). This exhortation again indicates haste; preserving life takes priority over even the most crucial possesions.

13:17. The difficulties of bearing or nursing a child under these circumstances are obvious in any culture, especially to mothers. Mothers often nursed their babies for the first two years of life before weaning them (most Judeans would not have had wet nurses). The text could also indicate grief over the loss of the children (cf. *2 *Baruch* 10:13-15), physically unprepared for the hardships.

13:18. Winter brought colder nights, rains and (in the mountains) sometimes even snow; it also sometimes filled the dry Judean creek beds without warning with rainwater from the hills, making them difficult to cross. The melting of mountain snow in spring also could provide problematic flooding. Thus Josephus wrote of a group of Jewish fugitives (during the Judean War, but not from Jerusalem) who were delayed by the recently flooded Jordan in the spring of 68. As a consequence thousands were slaughtered by Roman soldiers (*Jewish War* 4.433-35).

13:19. Daniel 11 ends with Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C., and the final distress to which no other tribulation could be compared (spoken of in Dan 12:1) seems to occur at that time, to be followed by the *resurrection of the dead (Dan 12:2). But sometimes events in Israel's history (like the full promise to Abraham or the conquest of Canaan) were deferred until conditions were right (often Israel's obedience); moreover, Daniel 9:24-27 sounds as if it better fits a date in the first century A.D. than in the time of Antiochus.

Jesus' addition of "never shall be" (Joel 2:2) to Daniel's "such as never occurred" suggests

that other tribulations could follow in history after the designated tribulation of A.D. 66–70.

13:20. "The days" refers presumably to Daniel's days of tribulation (Dan 12:11-12); given the severity of sufferings, the full period would have been too long to permit survivors.

13:21-22. False prophets and false messiahs had gained Jewish followings all through this period and usually challenged the authority of Rome, generally leading to the death of their followers. Josephus reports that some such prophets continued claiming that God would deliver Jerusalem up to their slaughter by the Romans at the fall of Jerusalem. After the temple's demise, hopes for the *Messiah's coming were presumably even more intense.

13:23. Knowing about events beforehand could give one the assurance that God did know and remain in control (e.g., Is 41:26; 48:5).

13:24-27
The End of This World

13:24-25. Here Jesus uses the language many of his contemporaries would have applied to the end or transformation of the present order that would lead to God's eternal *kingdom (Is 13:10; 34:4; cf. 24:23; Ezek 32:7-8). Sometimes this graphic, cataclysmic language was used for historical events (the **Sibylline Oracles* use it for an earthquake; cf. Ps 18:7-16; Jer 4:20-28), but usually ancient literature reserves it for the end or transformation of the present world order and the establishing of God's eternal kingdom.

On this reading, the end Jesus predicted could have been deferred, as perhaps in Daniel; the temple was destroyed just as Jesus predicted, but he did not then return. *Old Testament prophecies sometimes blended together events according to the kind of event rather than the time they would occur. Jesus' point need not be the immediacy of the end after that period, though it might perhaps indicate its imminence, that is, its potential nearness at all times thereafter (see comment on 13:19).

13:26. Jewish texts sometimes speak of God's *eschatological coming with angels (as in Zech 14:5). Jesus thus depicts the *Son of Man in terms that Jewish literature usually reserved for God. The text especially alludes, however, to Daniel 7:13-14, where "one like a son of man" (i.e., like a human being) receives the kingdom from God. This Son of Man functions as a representative on behalf of Israel, who in the same context suffers and also receives the right to rule the world (7:25-27).

13:27. One of the most prominent features of Jewish future expectation was the regathering of the dispersed tribes of Israel (as in the prophets, e.g., Is 11:12; 43:5; 49:5; 56:8). (Mark probably applies the image to the dispersion of believers in Jesus here; cf. 2 Thess 2:1).

13:28-31
The End Is Imminent

13:28-29. The signs Jesus lists show that the end is imminent, just as a fig tree's leaves show what season it is: because fig trees lack smaller branches they appear barren in winter, but they bloom in late March and are ideal for shade in the summer. Some apply this image to Jesus' acted-out *parable with a fig tree, implying the imminent destruction of the temple (see comment on 11:12-25).

13:30. The length of generations varied but was often represented in the *Old Testament by forty years (in the Dead Sea Scrolls, forty years represents the suffering of the final generation). Jesus speaks these words near A.D. 30; the temple would be destroyed in A.D. 70.

13:31. Others also noted that it was easier for heaven and earth to pass than for God to forget his covenant or his words (e.g., promises in Jer 31:35-37; warnings in Zech 1:5-6). Here Jesus speaks of his own words in the same manner.

13:32-37
The Time of the End Is Unknown

13:32. Jewish teachers were divided as to whether God had fixed the future time or whether Israel's *repentance could hasten it; most relevantly here, they were divided as to whether they could predict the time (offering a vast range of divergent predictions) or whether God alone knew it.

13:33-34. Other Jewish teachers also told parables of kings or householders going away and returning to find spouse or servants faithful or unfaithful. First-century readers heard enough stories about such events (including in the Bible—Prov 7:19-20) to relate to the image well. Slaves held many different roles, but in a household with enough slaves

for specialization the doorkeeper's role was a prominent one, because he held the master's keys, kept out unwanted visitors and checked other slaves leaving the premises. But with the relative prestige of the doorkeeper's position (some were even married to freedwomen) came great responsibility as well.

13:35. The times of night that Jesus mentions represent the Roman division of the night into four watches (when enough were available, guards might take shifts on these watches). Jesus' only guarantee is that he will come at night while the servant is posted on guard duty. In most of the ancient Mediterranean a rooster's final crowing could function like a modern alarm clock, signalling the advent of dawn; but in this context it might refer to the "watch" by that name, the quarter of the night after midnight (see comment on 14:30, 72).

Because the roads were infested with robbers, one would not expect the master to travel at night when it was unnecessary. Thus a slave could be caught off guard if the master returned at night.

13:36-37. Falling asleep at one's guard post would lead to punishment.

14:1-11
Anointed for Burial

14:1. In this period, the adjacent festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread were often viewed together (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 14.21; 17.213; 18.29; 20.106; *Jewish War* 2.10). Jewish literature (from *Essenes, *Josephus and later *rabbis) reports that many aristocratic priests bullied those who opposed them. Thus they would certainly not tolerate someone who challenged their temple cult (cf. 11:15-17) or who threatened impending judgment on its unwatchful servants.

14:2. Jerusalem was crowded during the feast, with perhaps five times its usual population. Riots were known to occur; Josephus (who often inflated figures) reported that at one Passover several decades after the events of this verse, thirty thousand persons were crushed or trampled during a stampede in the temple. For this reason, extra Roman troops were garrisoned in Jerusalem during the feast, and the Roman governor came from Caesarea to be on hand in case of trouble. The danger of arresting Jesus at the feast (i.e., during the festal time, in public) reflects an important concern for the temple leadership.

14:3. Bethany was one of those villages near Jerusalem where Passover pilgrims could spend the night with hosts. One "sat" at normal meals; one "reclined" on couches (if they could afford them) at special meals like feasts or banquets. If Simon had been a "leper" (nicknames usually had some basis but were not always meant literally; e.g., a tall family was nicknamed the "Goliaths"), he was certainly not one by this point, if present; no one would have joined him for dinner if he had been. Jesus may have healed him.

14:4-5. It was customary to provide olive oil to anoint the heads of important guests, but this woman's action is extreme. Whatever her economic status, this perfume (an oil from a root probably imported from India or South Arabia) was worth a year of a common laborer's wages; her family had probably kept it as a status symbol. ("Myrrh" was technically a resin from a shrub-like balsam in north Somaliland and south Arabia, but Mark uses the term more generically and specifies it as spikenard, a pleasant-smelling oil from the root of the nard plant native to mountains in north India.) Many people preferred semi-transparent alabaster bottles for expensive ointments; sealing it in such a container would preserve its fragrance, but once the bottle was broken, one would need to use up the perfume immediately. Her anointing of Jesus represents a major sacrifice and indicates the depth of her love, but given the great numbers of landless or tenant-farming peasants, some people present think the worth of the perfume could have been put to better use.

14:6-7. Jesus' reply probably contains an allusion to Deuteronomy 15:11, which in context urges generosity to the poor, who will always be in the land. He does not play down giving to the poor; rather he plays up what follows.

14:8. In Jewish tradition kings (including, by definition, the *Messiah, or "anointed one"), priests and others had to be anointed for service; one anointed even honored guests. But Jesus here stresses a different kind of anointing, which the woman undoubtedly had not intended: anointing a body for burial. Long-necked flasks appear in many first-

century tombs near Jerusalem, suggesting that others lavished such expensive ointments on their deceased loved ones. This woman's act of love was the only anointing Jesus would receive (16:1).

14:9. This commemoration does not mean that every individual would know about her; similar *hyperbole appears for writers or heroes whose memories would be preserved in epics by or about them.

14:10-11. Betrayal by a *disciple would shame the teacher, and would be seen as an especially heinous violation of trust. Judas could easily find contacts for the chief priests, although they would not have been accessible to him had his mission been less in line with their plans. His mercenary motives would have appeared as vile to ancient readers as they do to us, and they contrast with the behavior of the unnamed woman of 14:1-9.

14:12-26
The New Passover and the Betrayer

14:12. By this period the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately followed Passover, had been extended in popular parlance to include the Passover itself. Representatives from each family would have the priests slaughter a lamb for them in the temple, then return with it to feed the whole family that night.

14:13. Many commentators point out that water jars (as opposed to wineskins) were nearly always carried by women (often the matron of the home); a man carrying one would therefore be noticeable. Well-to-do households (as probably here), which could afford servants, had them carry the water. Running water was a great luxury, and in many cities, servants were sent to the public fountains to bring rainwater.

14:14-16. Unless the house was unusually large (some were), the upper room would provide an intimate environment for just a few disciples (say, the Twelve; not many more). Nevertheless, anyone with a two-story house, the second story containing a "large" upper room, would be considered well-to-do. This family presumably resided in the area of Jerusalem known as the Upper City, near the temple, rather than the poorer Lower City, downwind of Jerusalem's sewage. Because the Passover had to be eaten within Jerusalem's walls, most homes would be crowded with guests; but the accommodations for Jesus' last meal with his disciples would be quite adequate.

14:17. The Passover was to be eaten at night. April's sundown in Jerusalem came by 6 p.m., so the meal could have started then. Table fellowship was intimate at the feast; one or two families normally shared the meal, but here Jesus and his closest disciples make up the family unit.

14:18-20. Dipping bowls were particularly used at Passover; the dish here is probably Passover's dish of bitter herbs. That someone "dipping in the bowl" with a person would betray that person would have horrified ancient readers, who saw hospitality and the sharing of table fellowship as an intimate, covenantal bond (cf. Ps 41:9, cited in Jn 13:18). (In one extreme example in a Greek epic, two warriors on opposing sides of a battle, learning that one's father had hosted the other's for dinner, decided to avoid fighting each other.) Some scholars have also suggested that someone dipping "with" Jesus could mean that the person was denying Jesus' superior rank, because some Jewish groups required the leader to act (hence to dip) first (see the *Dead Sea Scrolls; cf. Sirach 31:18), and many ancient banquets seated people by rank. This interpretation would be likeliest if Judas reclined near Jesus, on the same couch (cf. Jn 13:26).

14:21. Most of Judaism acknowledged both God's sovereignty and human responsibility. "Better that the person never have been born" was a frequent lament or pronouncement of judgment. Various biblical (Job 3:3-26; Jer 20:14-18), early Jewish and Greek lamentations spoke of never having been born alive being preferable to selected worse fates.

14:22. The head of the household customarily gave thanks for the bread and wine before any meal, but special blessings were said over bread and wine at the Passover meal (though probably not in quite the same form as became standard later). Jewish people broke rather than cut their bread. We should not understand "This is my body" literally (in *Aramaic the phrasing would be ambiguous: "is" or "represents" would not be distinguished), just as we do not take literally the standard Jewish interpretation spoken over the Passover bread: "This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate

when they came from Egypt." No one assumed that the bread they were eating was 1300 years old, or had been digested by the ancestors; rather, they reenacted those events and felt that they participated in them.

14:23. Four cups of red wine came to be used in the Passover meal; if this custom was practiced as early as Jesus' day, this cup may be the fourth, which followed the blessing of the bread. (Other scholars have suggested that the third cup is in view. By the end of the first century the four cups seem to have been both Jewish and Greco-Roman practice at feasts.) Each person did not have an individual cup; they customarily passed around one cup.

14:24. Covenants were ratified by the blood of sacrifice, and Jesus' mention of the "blood of the covenant" evokes Exodus 24:8. God had redeemed his people from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb; "on behalf of the many" probably alludes to Isaiah 53 (see comment on 10:45). Passover ritual interpreted the cup but did not interpret it as blood, because Jewish *law and custom were revolted by the idea of drinking any creature's blood—especially human blood.

14:25. Vows of abstinence were common in Palestinian Judaism: "I will not eat any such and such until this happens," or "I vow that I will not use this until that happens." Jesus apparently vows not to drink wine again until the *kingdom comes, and he perhaps abstains from the fourth cup. Jewish tradition commonly portrayed the time of the kingdom as a banquet (developing the image from Is 25:6), when the Bible had promised an unending supply of wine (Amos 9:13). Jewish blessings over the wine called it "the fruit of the vine."

14:26. After the meal and lengthy discussion about the Passover, it was customary to sing psalms from the Hallel, which consisted of Psalms 113–118. (Music was common fare at many ancient banquets.) Walking from a home in the Upper City to the Mount of Olives presumably took fifteen minutes or longer.

14:27-31
Other Betrayers Predicted

14:27. Here Jesus cites Zechariah 13:7, which is not clearly messianic; Jesus may refer to the principle it reports: a flock is scattered without the shepherd to guide them. (The Dead Sea Scrolls do, however, apply this text to the future time.)

14:28. Jewish people in this period were not expecting a *resurrection of a given person distinct from the resurrection of the whole nation. Further, they certainly would not have expected a migration to Galilee to follow it: God's people would gather in Jerusalem in the time of the end (cf. Joel 2:32). These expectations may be why the *disciples appear to ignore this part of Jesus' statement.

14:29-31. Ancient sources typically regarded the rooster as a reliable reporter of the advent of dawn (e.g., the second-century A.D. Roman writer *Apuleius in *Metamorphoses* 2.26; *3 Maccabees 5:23; Babylonian Talmud *Berakot* 60b), but commentators report that in Palestine nocturnal crowings are familiar to the night watchmen beginning at 12:30 a.m.; the second was about 1:30 a.m. Roosters crow periodically through the night. People sound asleep at those times may have been more familiar with the crowing at dawn because they were readier to awaken then. In either case the point is that the denial is imminent.

14:32-42
Watchmen Asleep

14:32-34. Jesus and his *disciples may have arrived at Gethsemane by 10 or 11 p.m. (which was late in that culture). It was customary to stay awake late on Passover night and to speak of God's redemption. The disciples should have been able to stay awake to keep watch; they had probably stayed up late on nearly every other Passover of their lives.

14:35-36. "Abba" is the *Aramaic word for "Papa," a term of great intimacy and affectionate respect. It was typically the first word a child would utter, but adults could use it for their fathers as well, and students sometimes used it of their teachers. Perhaps because it implied such intimacy, Jewish people never used it of God (though they did call him a heavenly father) except in a very rare *parable by a charismatic teacher (as reported in later sources). On the cup of judgment, see comment on 10:38; for a prayer for God to protect one's life cf., e.g., Psalm 116:3-4, 13-15.

14:37. People often stayed awake late on Passover to discuss God's redemption, but on this particular Passover the disciples slept!

Teachers and leaders often reproved those who slept at inappropriate times; most dangerous, however, were sentries who failed to keep watch (cf. also servants in 13:34-36).

14:38. "Temptation" here is "testing"; given the common Jewish religious uses of the word (as in a common Jewish evening prayer), Jesus is probably saying: "lest you fall prey to the testing you are about to face." The contrast between "spirit" and "body" is not meant in the later *Gnostic or Neo-Platonic sense (in which the soul is good and the body is evil); rather that though one may mean well on impulse (14:31; cf. the use of "spirit" in many cases in Proverbs, e.g., 16:32; 25:28), the body is susceptible to exhaustion.

14:39-42. Jesus' use of "sinners" (v. 41) to refer to the men dispatched by representatives of the Sanhedrin is strong language, especially in view of the way most people would use the word (2:16).

14:43-52
The Betrayal

14:43. Because they had been sent by prominent men of Jerusalem, the band that comes to arrest Jesus probably belongs to the temple guard. This guard is known to have possessed the weapons mentioned here (swords and clubs); clubs were said to have characterized the corrupt priestly aristocracy in charge of the temple, as well as being useful in controlling rioters. Based on some second-century sources, some argue that clubs were not supposed to be carried on holy days, including the Passover festival.

These men come prepared for armed resistance from one they suppose is a messianic revolutionary—because they had interpreted Jesus' act in the temple in terms of the cultural categories of their day, rather than in terms of the rest of his teaching (14:48).

14:44-46. A light kiss on the lips was a sign of special affection among family members and close friends. Teachers could kiss disciples as a special sign of favor or approval, and disciples could kiss teachers to show honor and affection for them. Thus Judas's kiss is a special act of hypocrisy (cf. Prov 27:6).

Initially the band would not expect the disciples to know the specific object of their approach. Although there may have been light from a new moon, this band believed they needed Judas to lead them in person to the appropriate spot; had they searched for Jesus only on the basis of general directions, their search would have become evident and given Jesus time to escape. The kiss is necessary because darkness made it harder to recognize Jesus; under normal conditions the guards could have recognized him (he had been teaching in the temple).

14:47. Being well-to-do, *high priests had ample servants. Although the object of the expedition was only to arrest Jesus, had the sword struck again many of the disciples would likely have been killed in the ensuing conflict. In antiquity authorities sometimes settled for executing a movement's leader if they thought this action sufficient to destroy the movement, but any resistance would be met with force.

14:48-49. Subversives (e.g., the later assassins who slew Jewish aristocrats under cover of the crowds in the temple) did their acts secretly or so as to avoid capture; by contrast, Jesus' alleged subversion had been public and unconcealed. An arrest in the temple would have been politically disadvantageous and possibly aroused a riot (see comment on 14:1-2).

14:50. In antiquity, the loyalty of one's followers normally brought one honor; their abandonment brought one shame.

14:51-52. At night, one might have expected the disciple to have an outer garment as well as the linen cloth, and he is probably already chilly (cf. 14:54). (Although one could sleep naked inside one's home in Palestine in April, Jerusalem's higher elevation makes 14:54 a likely indication that it was a cool night; Passover pilgrims who camped outdoors had coverings.) Others in antiquity left behind cloaks when fleeing. Except for some Jews overwhelmed by Greek culture and considered apostates, Jewish people generally abhorred nakedness. The point is that the man is in a hurry to escape.

14:53-65
The Sanhedrin's Miscarriage of Justice

This trial breaks a number of Jewish legal principles, if later documents correctly indicate the

state of Jewish *law in this period. Mark probably knew most of these rules, and many of his hearers probably suspected them, since these principles of ethics were widely honored. Elites, however, did not always feel bound by such principles.

One might ask how Jesus' earliest followers knew what happened in a closed meeting of the *Sanhedrin. Even in the most private meetings of assemblies, however, leaks were common, especially when sympathizers had associates who were present (cf. 15:43); one may provide examples both from the Roman Senate and from Jerusalem's Sanhedrin. (Moreover, from a Christian perspective, the disciples later had access to the report of a major participant: Jesus.)

14:53. "Leading priests," "elders" and "*scribes" were all represented in Israel's chief Sanhedrin, the ruling religious court of Israel. A Sanhedrin was a senate, or municipal assembly; Judea's chief assembly was in Jerusalem. Later tradition claims that the full Sanhedrin, with seventy-one members, normally met in the assembly hall in the temple called the Chamber of Hewn Stone, where they sat in a semicircle with the *high priest in the center. The number may have been simply an average, and *Josephus suggests that they met quite close to the temple, but not in it. In this case, many members of the Sanhedrin (of whom perhaps half would have been necessary for a quorum) hold a secret night meeting without advance notice in the high priest's home (14:54), although they are investigating what they will claim is a capital offense.

By the more careful legal principles of later rabbis and most general legal principles of antiquity, the meeting that Mark describes would have been illegal on all these counts: a secret meeting, held at night, and in a private home. The leaders would have probably explained it as merely a preliminary inquiry before a real investigation (cf. Lk 22:66). The lack of advance notice could have been excused because it is during a feast and all necessary officials are present; but because Jewish law forbade trials on the sabbath, they were probably also forbidden on feast days (though executions were not). The officials who gather, probably predominantly *Sadducees (note the prominent role of the aristocratic priests in 14:55), seem more concerned with convicting Jesus quickly than with legal technicalities.

14:54. Peter's trespassing on private property—that of the high priest himself—required serious commitment from a Galilean fisherman. The guards could be the priest's night watchmen, but presumably they would immediately recognize that Peter does not belong there. They could also be members of the temple guard, waiting to see the results of the trial inside. They may have planned to stay up late for Passover anyway, though under better circumstances.

14:55-56. Despite the high priest's certainty of Jesus' subversiveness, at least some members of the council, perhaps scribes, follow the virtuous Jewish tradition of diligent cross-examination of witnesses. But once these witnesses had contradicted one another, all understandings of Jewish law unanimously demanded that they be declared false and the case be rejected as contrived; under Jewish law, in a capital case, false witnesses were to be put to death (see Deut 19:16-21 and the Dead Sea Scrolls). Even though Rome had not given the Sanhedrin jurisdiction to execute false witnesses, the Sanhedrin should have at least disciplined them. That the case continues simply underlines the corruption of those in control (other ancient Jewish sources, from the *rabbis to the *Dead Sea Scrolls, also complain of the corruption of the priestly aristocrats; *Josephus reports concrete examples of it).

14:57-59. Many Jewish people expected that God would establish a new, purified temple at the time he established the *kingdom. Outsiders had naturally misinterpreted Jesus' teaching about a new temple and warning about the old temple's destruction as the threat of a mad, messianic revolutionary. But the witnesses still fail the cross-examination.

14:60-61. Jesus' refusal to answer fits the ancient Jewish model of a martyr showing contempt to a corrupt judge. At least according to later rabbinic practice, the high priest could not legally force Jesus to convict himself out of his own mouth, but the testimony of other witnesses is so far not working; if the later rabbinic practice was valued by many teachers in Jesus' day, the priestly aristocracy might choose to simply not observe it. The high priest finally asks whether Jesus thinks of

himself as a *messiah—hence, to the high priest's mind, as a revolutionary.

"The Blessed One" was a common paraphrase for "God." "*Son of God" (see glossary) was an unusual phrase for a high priest to use, but not an impossible one (the Dead Sea Scrolls interpret 2 Sam 7:14 as messianic). Although Mark could have put the high priest's question in his own words (a common technique in writing at that time), the high priest had probably heard that Jesus had adopted the title for himself, possibly in a messianic sense (12:6).

14:62. Jesus' statement is a claim to be not only a mortal messiah but the cosmic ruler of Daniel 7:13-14, the embodiment of Israel's call, who would come in glory and reign forever. (The seating may allude to Ps 110:1.)

14:63. Tearing clothes was a sign of mourning or *repentance, and was required if one heard the sacred name blasphemed. Jesus would not be deemed guilty under later rabbinic procedure; unless Jesus mentions the sacred Hebrew name of God or summons them to what would be presumed to be idolatry (e.g., by calling himself God, which he does not at this point), he is not technically guilty of blasphemy (here not even by the broader popular sense; cf. 2:5-7). A Jewish court would have been more likely to have pronounced him insane; how could this arrested upstart teacher from Galilee think that he would come in the clouds of heaven? Again, elites (throughout the Roman empire) were not always interested in legal technicalities.

14:64. Under Jewish law, the high priest is not permitted to judge the case alone; he has to solicit the council's vote (if later recorded rules were already in effect, which might not be the case, this vote would begin with the youngest and conclude with the high priest, lest anyone feel intimidated by their elders). Although they cannot have genuinely believed that Jesus has committed blasphemy according to its technical Jewish definition, they have an important reason to deal with him quickly: he poses a clear threat to the temple establishment (11:15-18), and as a messianic claimant he threatens the whole Roman power structure that they, the Jewish aristocracy, represent.

14:65. Unlike public flogging, the behavior represented here—spitting on, blindfolding, striking and taunting a prisoner—was, of course, against Jewish law. While they ridicule Jesus as a false prophet, Peter fulfills Jesus' *prophecy concerning him (14:66-72); Jesus thus passes an important test for true prophets (Deut 18:22).

14:66-72
Peter's Denials

14:66-69. Leading slaves in the most powerful aristocratic households exercised more power and status than did the average free person. Female slaves did not normally wield such power, but her life might still well be more comfortable than that of average citizens. Although the high priest undoubtedly had many servants, similar cases from antiquity show that the slave girl would have recognized that Peter was not from the high priest's household. Peter would also be clothed differently from the guards. As a servant in an aristocratic household near the temple, this women had perhaps been at the temple and could have gotten a good look at Jesus' disciples in the temple courts. Peter's withdrawal from the court to the vestibule perhaps anticipates the need to escape.

14:70. Galilean accents differed from Judean accents, certainly in *Aramaic and presumably (as is probably the case here) in Greek. The high priest's servants and temple guard would have lived in Jerusalem and regarded themselves as Judeans. Regional accents were hard to conceal (cf. Judg 12:6).

14:71. The "curses" Peter utters are not vulgar words; rather, he vows that he does not know the man, invoking curses on himself if he is lying. The temple hierarchy is interested in eliminating the ringleader; followers would be viewed as a threat only if they continued to follow—as Peter had thus far.

14:72. For most people in the ancient Mediterranean world, a rooster's crowing marked daybreak. Some scholars have suggested that this refererence is to an earlier Palestinian rooster crowing between 12:30 and 2:30 a.m.

15:1-15
Pilate and the King

15:1. The night trial having been illegal, the officials reconvene somewhere around the first light (about 4:30 a.m.) or dawn (about 5:30 a.m.) to quickly make their conclusion official.

Local elites could try cases and accuse people before the Roman governor, but only the governor could order executions. (This was partly to guarantee that local elites did not remove Rome's supporters behind Rome's back.) Roman officials like *Pilate would meet with clients and members of the public from dawn till about noon, so they must have Jesus ready for Pilate very early; their office would give them priority over others wishing to see him. Pilate lived in Caesarea, on the Judean coast, but during the Passover stayed in Herod the Great's old palace in Jerusalem; the Roman governor needed to be in Jerusalem to forestall troubles at Passover.

15:2-4. Claiming to be the Jewish king, the *Messiah, would lead to a charge of sedition and treason against the emperor, especially under the paranoid emperor Tiberius. The only offense for which the Jewish leaders could automatically execute any transgressor was profanation of the temple; to them, Jesus' act in the temple might appear to have at least approached that, but the leaders know that his claim to messiahship would threaten Pilate more. Pilate had not been particularly cooperative with these leaders in the past, and they need to have a strong case for him now.

15:5. Jewish accounts of martyrs testify frequently concerning *Gentile judges' astonishment that the martyrs refuse to cooperate (e.g., 2 Maccabees, *4 Maccabees). Roman law did not interpret silence as an admission of guilt, but a defendant who persistently refused to answer could be convicted by default.

15:6-10. Roman governors might take into account precedent but were free to decide cases as they thought best. Releasing a prisoner at the feast is one local custom on which the surviving historical records are silent, but it fits the culture of the time (e.g., a governor in Egypt in A.D. 85 handed someone over to "the multitudes"). Unlike Jesus, Barabbas is a violent revolutionary; but so far as we know he did not claim to be a king or boast such a large following. Jesus' accusers painted him as a revolutionary, but Pilate apparently regards Jesus as both more popular and less harmful than the revolutionary Barabbas. If the people ask for Jesus, Pilate can release Jesus without offending the local political leaders (on his prior conflicts with them, see comment on 15:15).

15:11. Ancient writers often criticized the fickleness of crowds. Historically, most of the crowds gathered here are Judeans who do not know Jesus well, in contrast to the Galilean pilgrims who did (probably the bulk of his supporters in 11:9-10).

15:12-15. A severe flogging normally preceded crucifixion, but it was often administered along the way or even after the condemned was fastened to the cross. The condemned would be stripped and often tied to a post; soldiers would use "flagella," leather whips with iron or bone woven into their thongs, that left skin hanging from the back in bloody strips. Crucifixion was considered the most agonizing and degrading form of criminal execution known in antiquity. It was meant to be death by slow torture; although a victim could die faster from shock due to blood loss, they could spend a few days dying of dehydration or perhaps asphixiation. Hanging naked before crowds, unable to hold back one's bodily waste or swat flies from wounds, was also meant to humiliate the victim.

When Pilate became governor, he immediately enraged Jerusalem by bringing the imperial standards into the city; more recently, he had built an aqueduct with funds from the temple treasury. His insensitivity had only provoked Jewish hostility, and he had apparently become less eager to clash with the local officials. Local charges against a governor, if believed, could cause him to be recalled, and public order often trumped justice for individuals. Although Pilate remained politically secure until the demise of his possible *patron in Rome, Sejanus, in October of A.D. 31, he must have learned to cooperate with the local elite, for he survived in office for several more years, until A.D. 36. (At that time, according to *Josephus, local complaints did bring his recall.)

15:16-20
Hailing the King

15:16. The Praetorium was Herod the Great's enormous palace, which Roman governors used when they came to Jerusalem.

15:17. Purple was always expensive (see Acts 16:14), but more significantly here, purple robes and garlands of leaves marked the Greek vassal princes. The soldiers may have had to improvise from a scarlet Roman cloak.

Many scholars think that the crown of thorns, perhaps from the branches of the thorny acanthus shrub or from the date palm (which would look more like a crown), may have been meant to turn mainly outward rather than painfully inward; thus the crown would have mimicked the wreaths worn by *Hellenistic rulers. Because the wreath was twisted, however, some thorns or spikes must have scraped inward, drawing blood from Jesus' scalp. Only the highest king would wear an actual crown instead of a wreath, so they are portraying Jesus as a vassal prince.

15:18. The Roman emperor was greeted with "Hail . . . " Thus the Roman soldiers (probably Syrian auxiliaries) mock Jesus ("King of the Jews") here; they would have had little respect for a Jewish king even had they believed Jesus was one. On other reported occasions *Gentiles dressed people up to mock Jewish kings or abused prisoners physically and with mockery.

15:19-20. One paid homage to a king (including Caesar) by falling on one's knees. The reed might be on hand for military floggings.

15:21-32
The Crucified King

15:21. Cyrene was in what is now Libya in North Africa and included a large Jewish community. "Simon" was a common name among Jews (its resemblance to the patriarch Simeon made it popular). Devout Jewish pilgrims from throughout the Mediterranean world (and presumably a few God-fearers) came to Jerusalem during Passover. Roman soldiers could impress anyone into service to carry things for them. Because it is a feast and work is forbidden, Simon is not coming from "the field" (literally) as a worker; perhaps he is late for the festival, only now arriving from Cyrene or from where he is residing temporarily in the countryside.

15:22. The site of the crucifixion might have been named "Place of the Skull" because so many deaths occurred there, or from the shape of the hill left from surrounding quarried rock. (Nevertheless, the purported site of Calvary proposed by Charles Gordon around 1884, which then had the shape of a skull, acquired those contours long after Jesus' day. In contrast to the traditional site, "Gordon's Calvary" has no claim to reliability.)

15:23. It is said that pious women of Jerusalem normally prepared a solution like this one and offered it to those being executed to dull their pain (cf. Prov 31:6-7); Jesus chooses to endure the full force of the agony of crucifixion. Many scholars suggest that the myrrh had narcotic effects; others demur, but at the very least, the alcohol in the wine could help deaden sensitivity to pain.

15:24. A person being executed would be stripped naked; nakedness was particularly shameful in the East and for Jews. Roman soldiers could normally retain the executed criminal's final belongings. Casting lots was a frequent method of making decisions (see comment on Acts 1:26). Often a unit of four men would be dispatched to oversee a crucifixion (although more are possible in this case, since multiple prisoners are executed here).

15:25. The third hour began shortly after 8:30 a.m. and ran till shortly after 9:30 a.m. (The exact time of hours would vary according to the time of sunrise from which they were reckoned, hence according to the season of year.)

15:26. A soldier would sometimes carry in front of or alongside the prisoner a tablet announcing the charge (the *titulus*) for which one was being executed. Occasionally it could then be posted above the head of the person being crucified, if they were executed on the sort of cross whose vertical beam extended above the horizontal one. The claim to be a king would be sufficient to incur Roman wrath (see comment on 15:2); ironically, however, Jesus is called not a false royal claimant but "King of the Jews," perhaps reflecting an anti-Jewish sentiment of Pilate or his agents.

15:27. The term for "bandits" here (NIV; ESV; NRSV, cf. "robbers," NASB) is the same one Josephus used for revolutionaries. Thus these two men may be former colleagues of Barabbas, originally meant to be executed with him that day. Authorities often liked to conduct executions at busy festivals, to provide maximum warning value against potential transgressors.

15:29-32. Some people observing a crucifixion cursed those being crucified; for the temple charge (15:29), see comment on 14:57-59. Many ancient writers used irony, including narrative irony, and Mark is no ex-

ception, reporting unintended truth in the words of Jesus' enemies (v. 31).

15:33-41
The Death of the King

15:33. The "sixth hour" began before noon, the "ninth hour" before 3 p.m. Jesus dies around the time of the normal evening offering in the temple. Stories were told of catastrophes occurring at the deaths of pious *rabbis, especially those whose intercession had been vital to the world; but the biggest point of these signs is that judgment is imminent. Darkness had signified judgment in the past (Ex 10:21-23) and would in the future (Is 13:10; Ezek 32:7; Joel 2:2, 10, 31; 3:15; Amos 5:18; Zech 14:6). In Amos 8:9, darkness falls at noon; cf. Deut 28:29.

15:34. Jesus' cry is an *Aramaic quotation of Psalm 22:1, which was sometimes recited at this time of day in prayer but receives special significance when Jesus prays it. For biblically literate ancient hearers, the first line could evoke this entire psalm of the righteous sufferer—and its hope of divine vindication. (Jesus probably quoted the psalm in Hebrew, as in Matthew, though cf. Aramaic prayer in Mk 14:36; Mark uses the Aramaic form probably because the saying was transmitted in an Aramaic milieu. "Eli" could be mistaken for "Elijah" much more easily than "Eloi"; cf. 15:35-36.)

15:35-36. Not only was Elijah expected to come at the end (Mal 4:5), but some circles (attested in later rabbinic sources) believed that God sent Elijah like an angel to help or rescue famous teachers.

15:37. Scholars have often argued that crucifixion generally killed by asphyxiation: one became too weary to keep pulling one's frame up on the crossbeam, the diaphragm was increasingly strained, and eventually one became unable to breathe. But other scholars have recently argued that most victims would die of blood loss (if they were nailed to the cross) or dehydration first. In any case, death typically took a few days—much longer than the few hours Jesus suffered. Perhaps he died quickly due to the severity of the precrucifixion scourging.

15:38. Jewish people told stories of disasters occurring at the deaths of prominent rabbis. Scholars debate whether the temple's inner or outer veil is meant, but Mark would probably think of the inner veil. The holy of holies, which the priest could enter only once a year, was the ultimate symbol of God's dwelling place. God's rending the veil could symbolize the departure of God's presence from the temple (cf. Ezek 9:3; 10:4; 11:23) and/or broadened access to God apart from the temple. Thus he was now available apart from the temple system and the old temple order stood judged.

15:39. Roman officials or officers often delegated missions like this execution to centurions, who would take a small detachment of soldiers. Because Romans viewed the reigning emperor as a son of the deified Augustus, the centurion might be recognizing Jesus not only as "king of the Jews" (15:26) but also as a rival to even the emperor. But a non-Jew might use a phrase like "son of God" also with reference to a pious philosopher or, more commonly, a hero whose father was a deity. In Mark's Gospel, of course, "*Son of God" means much more than that (14:61). Whatever the specific nuance intended, however, Mark's irony (cf. 15:29-32) is plain enough: only a Gentile is explicitly impressed by Jesus' death.

15:40. The women followers were much less likely to be indicted than male followers, but they were still courageous to show up at the crucifixion. The epithet of James, "the Less" (NASB, KJV), is better translated "the younger" (NIV, GNT, NRSV), as the usage of the word in the ancient *papyri indicates. Mary is from Magdala; it has been identified with Tarichea, where many fishermen seem to have worked.

15:41. By the standards of the religiously strict, it could have been scandalous for women (especially married women) to travel with an entourage of male disciples (apparently usually without their wives; the case of families making pilgrimage to Jerusalem would be different); apart from members of the aristocracy, conservitive married Palestinian Jewish women were expected to limit their public activity, keep their heads covered and fulfill their domestic duties. A number of women in antiquity did function as benefactors and *patrons (sponsors), though less frequently than men. Adversaries often cited women supporters against one's movement; some had criticized *Pharisees for this practice; this case might

appear even more potentially scandalous, since these women traveled with Jesus. In this one verse Mark hints at an aspect of Jesus' ministry that challenges the conventional social order, especially if these women "followed" as disciples, which they presumably did (see comment on Lk 10:39; the common use of "follow" in the Gospels).

15:42-47
The Burial of the King

15:42. The sabbath would begin at sundown, within several hours of Jesus' death. It was not lawful to prepare the body for burial on the sabbath (see comment on Mt 27:57-58 for what was permitted). One could anoint, wash and wrap the bodies with shrouds even on the sabbath, but more thorough burial preparations would have to wait.

15:43. That the Sanhedrin included pious members like Joseph, and not just the sort who appeared in the trial *narrative (as pious as even they may have supposed themselves), fits the known diversity within even the Jewish aristocracy of the period. While a range of ancient Jewish sources complain about corrupt aristocratic priests, the reports of Josephus reveal that Jerusalem's aristocracy was divided on many points. Because he awaited the future *kingdom, Joseph was probably not a *Sadducee, unlike many of his colleagues in the Sanhedrin. He valued his people's hope more than Roman rule.

15:44. Crucifixion often took several days to kill a person unless hurried along (cf. Jn 19:31-32).

15:45. That excavated tombs include few crucifixion victims suggests that the bodies were not generally made available for burial—a horror to Jewish sensitivities (Deut 21:22-23). Presumably if Pilate were accommodating local interests in the execution, however, he would also accommodate them regarding burial. One exception found in a wealthy family tomb suggests that then, as now, those with wealth and social power had extra influence, which they could use for good or ill. Still, Joseph's request was courageous; identifying with one executed for treason could appear treasonous, and the wealthy were sometimes targeted with charges so leaders could execute them and seize their property.

15:46-47. If Jesus died by 3 p.m., Joseph must have bought the linen quickly, just before sundown (about 6 p.m.) when the sabbath began. Linen shrouds were customary for burial; tombs cut from virgin rock were the best. Large disk-shaped stones could be rolled in a groove over the mouth of a tomb, obstructing entry without the difficult removal of the stone. After a body had been prepared for burial it would be left to decompose for one year; then the eldest son or other closest family member would return, gather the bones for burial in a box and deposit them in a slot on the tomb wall.

16:1-8
The Women at the Tomb

Having predicted the *resurrection appearances (14:28), the Gospel of Mark would be complete with or without 16:9-20; Mark does not need to narrate them. Many ancient documents were content simply to predict and foreshadow events certain to come after the *narrative itself had closed (e.g., the *Iliad,* perhaps the most popular book in Greek antiquity, foreshadows Achilles' death and Troy's fall without narrating them). Such suspension was a literary and *rhetorical technique in this period. Some books (e.g., the Jewish historiographic work known as *Pseudo-Philo) and speeches and essays (such as some of *Plutarch's) also end abruptly. Scholars debate whether Mark ended here deliberately and, if so, why he did so. Mark may have wished to end just short of the resurrection appearances themselves because his persecuted readers were still sharing in Jesus' cross but needed to be reminded of the foolishness of their present doubts of their ultimate triumph.

16:1. Bodies were normally anointed with oil (then rinsed with water) before burial, but because Jesus had died on Friday just a few hours before the sabbath began (at sundown, around 6 p.m.), this anointing had been postponed (they could not buy spices then; 16:1). Men were allowed to dress only men for burial, but women could dress men or women. Spices may not have been used for everyone but were often used for the bodies of special persons (e.g., Herod). They reduced the immediate stench of rapid decomposition in the normally hot Mediterranean days. After one day and

two nights, the women could expect that the body would already stink. But Jerusalem is over two thousand feet above sea level and is cool enough in April that in a sealed tomb the body should have still been approachable.

16:2. The time is around 5:30 a.m.; it was customary to arise at dawn. They bought spices from merchants (16:1) before coming to the tomb, either in the morning or (perhaps more likely) on Saturday evening after sundown. Light was insufficient to reach the tomb before Sunday morning.

16:3-4. The disk-shaped stone rolled in a groove across the entrance to a tomb, and several strong men might be needed to roll it back (comparable to many other tombs here). After the conclusion of the initial mourning period, tombs were normally opened only for the secondary burial of bones a year later and for subsequently deceased family members to be buried there.

16:5. In Jewish literature, angels are normally garbed in white. These women need not have initially assumed that this figure is an angel; the priests in the temple and some others also wore white.

16:6-8. Ancient writers often valued irony. Throughout Mark, people spread news that they were supposed to keep quiet; here, when commanded finally to spread the word, people keep quiet. If the original Gospel of Mark ends here, as is likely, it ends as suddenly as it began, and its final note is one of irony. Many other ancient works (including many treatises and dramas) also had sudden endings.

16:9-20
The Commission (An Appendix)

The manuscript tradition and style suggest that these verses were probably an early addition (not original) to the Gospel of Mark, although a few scholars (such as William Farmer) have argued the case that they are Markan. In any case, most of the content of these verses is found elsewhere in the Gospels, and the traditions seem to be fairly early.

16:9-11. The witness of a woman was deemed much less reliable than that of men, as both *Josephus and the *rabbis attest (Roman law concurred). Given this view and the fact that Judaism was not expecting an individual resurrection of the *Messiah, it is not surprising that the *disciples do not believe Mary Magdalene.

16:12-14. According to Jewish tradition, supernatural beings like angels, *Satan and Elijah were capable of disguising themselves in different forms (a feature also applicable to some figures in Greek mythology). The resurrected Jesus apparently shares this trait.

16:15-18. Among the signs of the messianic era, Isaiah predicted that the sick would be healed and that mute tongues would speak (Is 35:5-6; the idea of tongues could refer to the sort in Acts 2:4 and 1 Cor 14, however), and that God's people would be witnesses for him (Is 43:10). The powers here attributed to believers are the sort that characterize many of the *Old Testament prophets (cf. this theme in Acts).

16:19-20. Both Jewish and Greek readers could relate to the idea of an ascension of a great hero to heaven (like Heracles or, in post-biblical Jewish tradition, Moses); the closest and best-known idea would likely be Elijah. For Jesus to sit at God's right hand, however, goes beyond this idea—it means that Jesus reigns as God's agent (Ps 110:1; cf. Mk 12:36).

Luke

Introduction

Authorship. Luke mentions "we" in a way peripheral to the action in passages in Acts 16 and 20–28; contrary to some scholarly constructs, "we" in historical literature almost always meant that the author was present on the occasions specified. Early tradition, attested by second-century witnesses and the early title of the book (see the discussion of authorship in the introduction to Mark), favors Luke, traveling companion of Paul, as the author of Luke-Acts. Although the case for Luke's use of medical language has been exaggerated, the presence of educated language is consistent with the tradition of Lukan authorship.

Date, Purpose. Many views exist. See the introduction to Acts; some of the specific emphases of Luke-Acts are clearer in Acts than in the Gospel. Luke and Acts together made up a single two-volume work. Details of apologetic in Acts also suggests for Luke's second volume a date within a decade or two of the events depicted (probably no later than the 70s).

Setting. Luke writes for hearers in the Greek-speaking northern Mediterranean, probably Aegean, world. At least some of his audience is well-to-do and literarily sophisticated, and possibly desires confirmation in their faith or arguments they can use to defend it. See comment on 1:3-4 and the discussion of purpose in the introduction to Acts.

Genre. See the introduction to the Gospels. Whereas the other Gospels are closer to the *genre of Greco-Roman biography, Luke's Gospel is the first volume of a two-volume work, Luke-Acts, which is in many ways closer to a Greco-Roman history than a biography. Multivolume histories sometimes included a volume about a particular individual, hence a biographic volume within a larger history. Luke-Acts thus combines biography and historical monograph. Because Mark is one of Luke's sources, I treat many of the passages where they overlap more thoroughly in Mark than in Luke.

Luke's Message. Various themes are especially prominent in Luke: Jesus' ministry to the outcasts, the religiously unfit, the poor and women; this emphasis paves the way for his treatment of the *Gentile mission in volume two, the book of Acts.

The plot movement is from Galilee to Jerusalem in Luke (though the book is framed by scenes in the temple), and from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth in Acts. Although those who wish to date Acts very late seek to separate it from Luke's Gospel, most scholars recognize that the two volumes have a strong narrative unity and were meant ideally to be read together (see Acts 1:1).

Commentaries. Useful commentaries include I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke,* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); François Bovon, *Luke*, 3 vols., Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002–2013); John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012); F. W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel,* rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1988); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke,* 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), and Craig A. Evans, *Luke,* NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990). Besides general works mentioned in the introduction to Matthew, Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) is helpful on the background of much of Luke (especially Lk 15). Useful monographs include, among many others, Diane G. Chen, *God as Father in Luke-Acts* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006). Some chapters concerning introductory questions in my *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary,* 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–) cite some other relevant sources.

1:1-4
The Literary Preface

In Luke's day the more sophisticated writers would often introduce their books with a piece of stylish prose written in more classical style. (Those with literary pretensions generally imitated the Greek of a much earlier period than was commonly spoken.) Luke's introduction here is excellent in this regard.

1:1. Luke's word here for "account" was used for a *narrative of many events, as distinct from a narrative of a single event, and was most characteristically (though certainly not only) applied to works of history. "Events fulfilled among us" was a natural topic for histories.

Writers compiling a work sometimes started with one main source and wove in secondary material from another source or sources. Most scholars agree that Luke begins with Mark as his main source and weaves in other material, including what most scholars call "Q" (any material that Matthew and Luke share in common that is not in Mark). Writers also normally explained why they were writing a work if other books on the same subject had appeared. Some writers invoked length (see 2 Maccabees) or stylistic considerations (see *Theon) to explain the need for a new work; other authors thought earlier writers had investigated matters inadequately (*Josephus, Artemidorus) or had embellished them *rhetorically (*Tacitus); still others simply wished to compile earlier works more thoroughly (*Quintilian).

1:2. "Handed down" was sometimes a technical term in the ancient world. *Disciples of *rabbis normally passed down first-generation traditions carefully. Elsewhere in antiquity, disciples of teachers viewed communicating accurately their teachers' sayings as a central part of their mission; the school would continue to propagate the ideas of the founder. Why should anyone suppose that Jesus' disciples would be less accurate than all other disciples? Historians normally consulted key eyewitnesses, many of whom remained alive and even in leadership during the period when the Gospel's sources were being written. Ancients often trained their memories in ways that could put modern intellectuals to shame. Orators could recite speeches hours in length; one exceptional orator even claimed to recall samples of scores of practice speeches offered by classmates decades before. Such memory was not the exclusive domain of the educated; uneducated oral storytellers could recite full works like Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from memory. To object to all such examples because this one is Greek, that one is late, and so forth, is to dismiss all extant evidence in favor of pure speculation. We should expect the material to have been preserved. Because Luke writes while eyewitnesses are still alive, and because they were accorded a place of prominence in the early *church, we may be confident that his traditions are reliable. (Eyewitness sources were accepted as the best.)

1:3-4. Literary introductions often specified the purpose of the work (e.g., in Josephus's *Against Apion:* "to teach all who wish to know the truth" about the Jewish people); here Luke wishes to provide "exact information" ("exact truth"—NASB; "certainty"—NIV). The subject matter specified here ("things fulfilled among us") is appropriate for a historical preface. Luke had opportunity to acquire "thorough knowledge" of the subject during his travels with Paul hinted at in Acts (in ancient historical sources, "we" nearly always meant that the author was present). These travels included up to two years in Judea (Acts 21:17-18; 27:1).

Appeals to common knowledge were frequent in ancient *rhetoric, and Luke here appeals to Theophilus's knowledge of the subject, which Luke merely confirms. That is, the bulk of Luke's story reflects what was already widely known in the early Christian movement. Books would often open with a dedication to the wealthy *patron who sponsored the writing project. (Luke-Acts is not just a private work; Luke's Gospel is within three percent of the length of Acts, both fitting a standard size of scroll for publication.) One could also dedicate a work to a person of status that one hoped would feel honored and therefore promote the work.

Theophilus, the name of the sponsor, was a common Jewish name. (Were it a symbolic name we could translate "lover of God," but we know of no symbolic names in ancient dedications.) "Most excellent" could literally mark him as a member of a high class in Roman society (the equestrian order), although Luke might use the title only as a courtesy. A desire

for verification was reasonable in view of the many competing claims to religious truth in the Roman Empire.

1:5-25
The Angel and the Priest

After the much more classical Greek prologue of 1:1-4, here Luke establishes himself as a master of various literary styles by adapting to *Septuagint style, reflecting its Hebraic rhythms, which dominate chapters 1–2.

1:5. Historians customarily introduced a narrative by listing the names of reigning kings or governors, which provided the approximate time of the narrative. Herod the Great was officially king of Judea from 37 to 4 B.C. Twenty-four "orders" (NRSV, GNT) or "divisions" (NIV, NASB) of priests (1 Chron 24:7-18, especially v. 10) took turns serving in the temple, two nonconsecutive weeks a year. Priests could marry any pure Israelite, but they often preferred daughters of priests ("daughters of Aaron").

1:6. The terms Luke uses to describe Zechariah and Elizabeth are the same that the *Old Testament used for some other righteous people, such as Noah (Gen 6:9), Abraham (Gen 17:1) and Job (Job 1:1). One who reads those narratives understands that although they may not have been morally perfect (Gen 9:21) or complete (Job 42:3-6), they did not violate any stated commandments in the *law. Thus Luke uses these terms to challenge the misconception that could arise from conventional wisdom concerning barrenness (Lk 1:7).

1:7. To be childless was economically and socially disastrous: economically, because parents had no one to support them in old age (see comment on 1 Tim 5:4, 8); socially, because in the law barrenness was sometimes a judgment for sin, and many people assumed the worst possible cause of a problem. Most people assumed that barrenness was a defect of the wife, and Jewish teachers generally insisted that a man divorce a childless wife so he could procreate. "Aged" may suggest that they were over sixty (Mishnah *Avot* 5:21); age itself conferred some social status and was sometimes listed among qualifications or virtues.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, however, Zechariah and Elizabeth are clearly righteous (1:6; cf. Wisdom of Solomon 4:1), and the Jewish hearer would immediately think of righteous Abraham and Sarah, who was also barren. The Lord also opened the wombs of other matriarchs, Rachel and Rebekah, and those of Hannah and Samson's mother; yet Elizabeth is especially like Sarah, who was not only infertile but also too old to bear.

1:8-9. There were many more priests and Levites than necessary (perhaps eighteen thousand) for any given function in the temple, so they were chosen for specific tasks by lot, during their appointed time of service (besides service on the three major festivals, they served about two weeks out of the year). Given the number of priests, a priest might get the opportunity in 1:9 only once in a lifetime; this would have been a special occasion for Zechariah.

Incense offerings (Ex 30:7-8) had been standard in ancient Near Eastern temples, perhaps to quench the stench of burning flesh from the sacrifices in the closed buildings. This offering in the temple preceded the morning sacrifice and followed the evening sacrifice. It is said that the officer who ministered regularly in the temple signaled the time to begin the offering and then withdrew; the priest cast incense on this altar, prostrated himself and then withdrew himself—normally immediately (cf. 1:21).

1:10. The hours of morning and evening sacrifices were also the major public hours of prayer in the temple (cf. Acts 3:1). Except during a feast, most of the people praying there would be Jerusalemites; unable to enter the priestly sanctuary, they were presumably men in the Court of Israel, and some women outside that in the Court of Women.

1:11. The altar of incense was in the center of the priestly sanctuary, outside the holy of holies. Zechariah 3:1 reports an Old Testament apparition in the temple. There *Satan appears to the *high priest, standing at his right to accuse him; but the high priest stands before the angel of the Lord, who defends him and brings him a message of peace for his people.

1:12. People usually reacted with fear to angelic revelations in the Old Testament as well.

1:13. Angelic annunciations, often complete with names, also preceded some major births in the Old Testament (e.g., Gen 16:11; 17:19; Is 7:14). Childless people throughout the

ancient world entreated deities for children.

1:14-15. The closest Old Testament parallel to Luke 1:15 is Judges 13:4-5, 7, where Samson, as a Nazirite from birth, is warned to abstain from strong drink (cf. Num 6:3-4). Cf. Luke 7:33. Ancient Judaism especially viewed the *Holy Spirit as the Spirit of *prophecy.

1:16-17. Elijah was to return before the day of the Lord, turning the father's hearts to the children (Mal 4:5-6; cf. Sirach 48:10). Although later rabbis interpreted this event as Elijah, master of intricate legal questions, straightening out Israelite genealogies, the point in Malachi is probably familial reconciliation (cf. Mic 7:5-6). On "prepared for the Lord" see Luke 3:4. On coming in Elijah's measure of the Spirit, cf. Elisha's request for a "double portion" (the inheritance right of a firstborn son, but narrated with double signs; Sirach 48:12) of this in 2 Kings 2:9; although John claimed no miracles, he was a great prophet—for he was Jesus' forerunner.

1:18. Like Zechariah here, Abraham (Gen 15:8; cf. 17:17), Gideon (Judg 6:17, 36-40; 7:10-11) and others in the Old Testament (2 Kings 20:8; cf. Is 7:10-14) asked for signs in the face of astounding promises, but they were not punished. That Zechariah's sign proves harsher to him (1:20) suggests only that this revelation is much greater than those which preceded it.

1:19. Although Judaism had developed quite a list of angelic names, the *New Testament names only the two who also appear in the Old Testament: Gabriel (Dan 8:16; 9:21) and Michael (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1). These became the two most popular angels in contemporary Jewish lore, in which Gabriel was sent on many divine missions. Jewish literature typically portrayed the chief angels as before God's throne.

1:20-21. Casting incense on the heated altar of incense normally took little time, after which the priest emerged immediately. The delay here may have troubled the crowds; perhaps they thought Zechariah had been disrespectful and struck dead, or that something else had gone wrong. If Zechariah's offering had failed, their prayers were also in jeopardy.

1:22. The term here for "mute" can, but need not, include deafness. On such judgments for disobedience see, e.g., Genesis 19:11; on temporary speechlessness due to a shocking revelation, see Daniel 10:15; but see especially the silencing of a prophet until a sign was fulfilled in Ezekiel 24:27; 33:22.

1:23. Because his term of service was only two weeks a year, and he had no son to support him in his old age, Zechariah might have worked a small farm or done other work in the hill country of Judah. (Priests were supposed to be supported by others' tithes, not by working the land, but high taxes on the poor and unfair practices by the priestly aristocracy—especially in the decades just prior to A.D. 66—combined to make it harder on less wealthy priests.)

1:24-25. Praise such as Elizabeth utters here was common among the barren whom God visited (Gen 21:6-7; 1 Sam 2:1-11) but especially recalls Rachel's exultation, "God has removed my reproach!" (Gen 30:23).

1:26-38
The Angel and the Girl

Luke here contrasts the simple faith of a teenage girl, Mary, with the genuine but less profound faith of an aged priest, Zechariah (cf. the severer contrasts between Hannah and Eli in 1 Sam 1–2; though the story line is quite different, in both cases God uses a humble and obscure servant to bear an agent of revival to the coming generation). This section has parallels not only with *Old Testament birth annunciations but also with Old Testament call narratives: Mary was called to fill the office of Jesus' mother. Because it was common for writers to include implicit or explicit comparisons between major figures in their works, some charts may be helpful. More parallels among figures appear later in Luke-Acts, but I start in table 1 with some obvious ones at the beginning of Luke's work (borrowed from my Acts commentary).

1:26-27. Because Joseph was of David's line and Jesus would be his legal son, Jesus could qualify as belonging to David's royal house. In Judaism, "virgins" were young maidens, usually fourteen or younger. The term Luke uses here for "virgin" also indicates that she had not yet had sexual relations with a man (1:34-35). Nazareth in this period was an insignificant village; the early, highest estimates are sixteen hundred to two thousand inhabitants, with more recent, lower estimates of about five hundred. (One

question is naturally how far into the countryside would still count as Nazareth.) On Gabriel, see comment on 1:19.

1:28-29. God often encouraged his servants that he was "with" them (e.g., Jer 1:8). Greetings (like "hail") were normal, but rank and status within society determined whom one should greet and with what words. As both a woman and a young person (perhaps twelve or fourteen years old) not yet married, Mary had virtually no social status. Neither the title ("favored" or "graced one") nor the promise ("The Lord is with you") was traditional in greetings, even had she been a person of status.

1:30. "Do not fear" (cf. 1:13) was also common in Old Testament revelations (e.g., Josh 1:9; Judg 6:23; Jer 1:8; Dan 10:12; cf. Gen 15:1). Mary here joins the list of those in the Bible who found favor before God (Gen 6:8; 19:16, 19; Ex 33:13).

1:31. This verse follows the typical Old Testament structure for a divine birth announcement and especially resembles Isaiah 7:14, the Immanuel promise (on which see Mt 1:23).

1:32-33. This language ultimately derives from 2 Samuel 7:12-16 and also identifies Mary's future son with the "Mighty God" *Messiah of Isaiah 9:6-7 ("Mighty God" is clearly a divine title; cf. Is 10:21). On the eternal *kingdom, cf. also Daniel 2:44; 4:3; 6:26; 7:14.

1:34-35. Jewish tradition used the language of "overshadowing" for God's presence with his people (see comment on 13:34).

1:36-37. The point of 1:36-37 is that God, who acted for Elizabeth as he did for Sarah, could still do anything. On 1:37, cf. Genesis 18:14 (on Sarah having a child); Mary has more faith than her ancestor (Gen 18:12-15).

1:38. Mary expresses her submission to the Lord's will in regular Old Testament terms for submission or acquiescence (e.g., 1 Sam 1:18; 25:41; 2 Sam 9:6, 11; 2 Kings 4:2; cf. Bel and Dragon 9; see especially 2 Sam 7:25).

1:39-56
Miracle Mothers Meet

1:39-40. The journey from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea may have taken three to five days, depending on the precise location of Elizabeth's home. In view of bandits on the roads, young Mary's journey was courageous, although she probaby found others, perhaps a caravan, with which to travel; otherwise her family may not have allowed her to go. Greetings were normally blessings meant to bestow peace, hence the response of verse 41.

1:41. Like dancing, leaping was an expression of joy (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 19:9). Jewish people recognized that the fetus was able to sense and respond to stimuli. (Indeed, while occasionally suggesting that the fetus's gender could be changed by prayer up until birth, some later rabbinic tradition also affirmed that infants could sin, sing and so forth

Table 1. Early Parallels in Luke

Zechariah in Luke 1:12-80	Mary in Luke 1:29–2:52
Luke 1:12: the vision's recipient is troubled	Luke 1:29: the vision's recipient is troubled
1:13: do not be afraid	1:30: do not be afraid
1:13: reason for miracle	1:30: reason for miracle
1:13: child's name (John)	1:31: child's name (Jesus)
1:15: child will be great	1:32: child will be great
1:15: filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb	1:35: conceived through the Holy Spirit
1:16-17: mission	1:32-33: mission
1:18: question	1:34: question
1:19-20: proof or explanation	1:35-37: proof or explanation
1:20: Zechariah muted for unbelief	1:38, 45: Mary praised for faith
1:80: child grows	2:40, 52: child grows

Table 1 is adapted from Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2014), 1:557.

in the womb.) Some pagan stories also told of babies dancing in their mother's wombs or speaking in infancy, but pagans generally regarded these events as evil omens; here John's activity is instead a result of his prenatal sensitivity to the prophetic Spirit. On the *Holy Spirit, see 1:15.

1:42-44. For praising one (here Jesus) indirectly through directly blessing another, see comment on Matthew 13:16-17 (cf. also, e.g., the *pseudepigraphic **2 Baruch* 54:10-11).

1:45. Abraham also believed the promise of a son (Gen 15:6).

1:46-47. Verses 46-55 emphasize the exaltation of the poor and humble and the casting down of the proud and wealthy. This emphasis of Mary's song strongly resembles the praise song of Samuel's mother, Hannah, in 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Hannah celebrated when the Lord opened her barren womb. (Luke omits the imagery of military triumph that Hannah had applied to her rivalry with Peninnah.) The psalmist often speaks of "my soul"; to "glorify" the Lord is to praise him (Ps 34:2-3). Hebrew poetry commonly uses synonymous parallelism (in which a second line reiterates the statement of the first); thus "soul" and "spirit" are used interchangeably here, as often in Scripture; joy and praise are also linked (cf. Ps 33:1; 47:1; 95:2; 149:1-5).

Table 2 shows some possible echoes of Hannah's song (borrowed from the introduction to my Acts commentary).

1:48. Ancient Mediterranean culture emphasized honor and reputation, even after death. The *Old Testament spoke of those who obeyed God, especially the prophets, as God's servants. It also emphasized God's exalting the humble and reveals the importance ancient culture placed on one's honor and name enduring after one's death.

1:49-50. In verse 50 Mary alludes to Psalm 103:17, which in context emphasizes God's faithfulness, in spite of human frailty, to those who fear him.

1:51. This is the language of vindication through judgment; often in the Old Testament, God's "arm" would save his people and "scatter" their (his) enemies. Mary weaves together the language of various psalms.

1:52-53. The principle that God exalts the humble and casts down the proud was common in the Old Testament (e.g., Prov 3:34; Is 2:11-12, 17; cf. Sirach 10:14). "Filling the hungry" comes from Psalm 107:9, where God helps those in distress, because he is merciful.

1:54-55. God had promised to be faithful to his people Israel forever, because of the eternal covenant he had made by oath with their ancestor Abraham (e.g., Deut 7:7-8). Israel is God's "servant" in Isaiah 42–49 (cf. comment on Mt 12:15-18).

1:56. Although ancient texts sometimes speak of pregnancy as lasting ten months, it was known that it normally lasted nine; the three months mentioned here plus the six of verse 26 (and esp. v. 36) suggest that Mary was present long enough to see John's birth.

Table 2. Echoes of Hannah's Song

1 Samuel 2:1–10	Luke 1:46–55
God exalts lowly (2:1, 4-5, 8)	God exalts lowly (1:48, 52-53)
I rejoice in your salvation (2:1)	I have rejoiced in God my savior (1:47)
No one holy like the Lord (2:2)	Holy is his name (1:49)
Celebrating the humble exalted and the proud brought down (2:3-9)	Celebrating the humble exalted and the proud brought down (1:51-53)
Poor vs. rich (2:7-8)	Rich empty-handed (1:53)
Hungry vs. full (2:5)	Filled the hungry (1:53)
Poor displacing nobles (*dynaston*, 2:8)	Brought down rulers (*dynastas*, 1:52) [same term]
Shift from personal deliverance to God's anointed king (2:10)	Shift from personal deliverance to Israel's deliverance (1:50)

Table 2 is adapted from Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2014), 1:557.

1:57-66
The Birth of John

This account lacks the *hagiographic details found in many Jewish birth stories of the period, especially those about Noah and Moses, where the baby illumined the room or (newborn Noah) spoke (or, in later *rabbis, babies were born circumcised).

1:57-58. Neighbors customarily joined in celebrations (cf. 15:6), and the birth—especially an unusual one like this one—and circumcision of a son in the family home (typically performed by the father in this period) were such occasions. Some later Jewish tradition even suggests that guests may have assembled every night from a boy's birth to his circumcision. On the special cause for the celebration here, see comment on 1:7. Jewish people viewed sons as essential because they carried on the family line, although in practice they seem to have loved daughters no less.

1:59. The *law required that circumcisions be performed on the eighth day; this was a special event, and Jewish custom included a charge to raise the child according to biblical law. Jewish children had customarily been named at birth; the evidence for naming a child at circumcision is late, apart from this text. But Romans named infants eight or nine days after birth (for girls and boys, respectively), so it is very possible that many Jewish people this early named boys at their circumcision, as this text and later sources suggest. Zechariah's muteness may have delayed the normal naming, but cf. 2:21.

1:60-62. Children were often named for grandfathers and sometimes for fathers. The father rather than the mother had ultimate say in the naming. Indeed, in Roman (but not Jewish) society, the father even had the legal right to decide whether the family would raise the child or throw the infant out on the trash heaps.

1:63. The writing tablet could be a wooden board coated with wax; one would inscribe the message on the wax surface. Priests could be educated.

1:64-66. Prophetic speechlessness and the restoration of speech once the *prophecy had been fulfilled are found also in Ezekiel 24:27; 29:21; 33:22.

1:67-80
Zechariah's Prophecy

In the *Old Testament only a fine line existed between inspired praise and prophecy (e.g., 1 Sam 10:5-6; 1 Chron 25:1-3), and often, as in Psalms, one could move from one to the other (46:1, 10; 91:1, 14).

1:67. The *Spirit of God was especially (though not exclusively) associated with prophecy in the Old Testament, and this perspective continued in various Jewish circles around the time of Jesus.

1:68. "Blessed be God" occurs in Old Testament praise (e.g., Ps 41:13; 72:18; 1 Chron 16:36; 2 Chron 6:4) and became a standard opening prayer for Jewish blessings. The prophets and later writers (cf. the *Dead Sea Scrolls) spoke of God visiting his people for redemption and judgment (see, e.g., the Greek translation of Ex 3:16; 13:19; Ezek 34:11). The use of "redeem" here compares this new event to when God saved his people from Egypt (cf. the cognate verb in Ex 6:6; 15:13; Deut 7:8); the prophets had promised future deliverance in a new exodus.

1:69. Because a horn could give an animal the victory in battle, it indicated strength. "Horn of salvation" parallels the meaning of "rock" and "strength" in Psalm 18:2 (also 2 Sam 22:3; cf. the linking of "horn" and "salvation" in Hannah's song in 1 Sam 2:1). Thus the Davidic *Messiah would be their deliverer (cf. Ps 132:17). David often was called God's servant (e.g., 2 Sam 3:18; 7:5, 8, 26).

1:70-75. God had promised salvation from their enemies in his covenant with Abraham and his descendants. The language here thoroughly reflects the Old Testament. Verse 71, for example, reflects Psalm 106:10 (God saving them from the hand of those who hated them), which in context applies to God redeeming his people from Egypt. "Holy covenant" (1:72) might evoke Daniel 11:28, 30 (though it is also a natural expression); God often would "remember" the covenant with the patriarchs (Ex 2:24; 6:5; Lev 26:42, 45; Ps 105:8-9), with Israel (Ps 106:45; 111:5; Ezek 16:60) or others (Gen 9:15-16). The "oath" God swore to Abraham evokes a range of texts (e.g., Gen 26:3; 50:24; Ex 6:8; 32:13; Deut 9:5; 29:13; 30:20; 1 Chron 16:16; Ps 105:9), especially

Genesis 22:16-18 (including triumph over enemies and blessing of nations).

1:76. "Prepare his way" alludes to Isaiah 40:3 (predicting the herald of a new exodus) and probably also Malachi 3:1 (probably connected with Elijah in 4:5); cf. Luke 3:4-6; 7:27.

1:77. Future "salvation" in Isaiah includes deliverance from political oppressors; but, as here, it is predicated upon Israel's restoration to divine favor through forgiveness.

1:78. "Sunrise" (NASB) or "rising sun" (NIV) could allude to God as the Sun of righteousness in Malachi 4:2 (cf. Ps 84:11), in the context of Elijah preparing the way (Mal 4:5-6). Some commentators have suggested a Greek play on words referring to the Messiah as both a "shoot" and a "star" in the Old Testament.

1:79. Although Luke weaves in various allusions here as elsewhere in the chapter, Isaiah 9:2 is especially in view; the context of this passage is explicitly messianic (Is 9:6-7), and that context probably informs the reading of the virgin birth in Luke and Matthew (cf. Is 7:14; comment in Mt 1:23).

1:80. The summary statement is especially reminiscent of 1 Samuel 2:26 and 3:19 for the maturation of the prophet Samuel. The desert was the expected place for a new exodus and thus for the Messiah; some groups, seeking greater purity, withdrew from common Judaism into the desert. Whether John may have studied among such groups for a time is debated, although it is plausible if his aged parents died before he reached maturity (the *Essenes reportedly adopted children and trained them from age ten on). John's later public ministry differed from their private withdrawal, however.

Ancient writers sometimes compared characters; Luke compares John here with Jesus in 2:40, 52. Such comparisons did not always denigrate the inferior person in the comparison; sometimes they chose a great person to illustrate that the one with whom he or she was compared was even greater. Luke repeatedly illustrates that Jesus is greater than John.

2:1-7
Journey to Bethlehem

Tax censuses became irregular during the late Republic, but Augustus revived them. Governors adminstered them in their provinces (at first every five years, and then every twelve). By A.D. 6 wide-scale censuses were taken every fourteen years. A tax census instigated by the revered emperor Augustus initiates the contrast between Caesar's earthly pomp and Christ's heavenly glory in 2:1-14.

2:1. Censuses were important for evaluating taxation; they were generally conducted by provincial governors, so local governments probably did not implement Caesar's decree in all regions simultaneously.

2:2. Scholars often dispute whether Quirinius was governor of Syria at this time. Quirinius was certainly governor of Syria during the much-remembered later census of A.D. 6, when Sepphoris and some Galilean patriots revolted against the tax census of that year. This passage seems to refer to an earlier census while Herod the Great was still king (before 4 B.C.); thus perhaps Luke's "*first* census under Quirinius."

Some commentators have suggested that Luke blended the two events (the well-known with the obscure) or that Quirinius was governor of Syria at the earlier time Luke describes as well as in A.D. 6, for which there is some (though currently incomplete) evidence. Historians dated events by naming current officials, so Quirinius may have been in office at the time without being associated with this census. The governor of Syria is mentioned because the Roman province of Syria included Palestine under its jurisdiction at this time.

2:3. Although Egyptian census records show that people had to return to their homes for a tax census, the home to which they returned was where they owned property, not simply where they were born (censuses registered persons according to property). Joseph thus must have still held property in Bethlehem; if the tax census of A.D. 6 is any indication, he might not have had to register for any property in Galilee.

2:4. Pottery samples suggest a recent migration of people from the Bethlehem area to Nazareth around this period, so Joseph and many other settlers in Galilee may have hailed from Judea. Joseph's legal residence is apparently still Bethlehem, where he had been raised. Bethlehem was just under six miles (nine kilometers) south of Jerusalem (perhaps one reason David chose Jerusalem to begin

with), hence easily reached after one traveled south to Jerusalem.

2:5. Betrothal provided most of the legal rights of marriage, but intercourse was forbidden; Joseph is courageous to take his pregnant betrothed with him, even if (as is possible) she is also a Bethlehemite who has to return to that town. Although tax laws in most of the empire required only the head of a household to appear, the province of Syria (then including Palestine) also taxed women; but this would apply only if she owned immoveable property. Joseph may simply wish to avoid leaving her alone this late in her pregnancy, especially if the circumstances of her pregnancy may have deprived her of other friends.

2:6-7. The "swaddling clothes" were long cloth strips used to keep babies' limbs straight so they could grow properly (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 7:4). Some advised using them for forty or (more often) sixty days; others advised removing them as soon as the baby's limbs were firm. Midwives normally assisted at birth; especially because this was Mary's first child, it is likely (though not explicit in the text) that a midwife would assist her. Jewish *law permitted midwives to travel a long distance even on the Sabbath to assist in delivery.

By the early second century A.D. even pagans in the area were reportedly widely aware of the tradition that Jesus was born in a cave used as a livestock shelter behind someone's home, and they reported the site of this cave to the emperor Hadrian. (The story could have been adapted to fit a few *Gentile stories about deities born in caves, but its earliness lends some weight to its reliability.) The manger was a feeding trough for animals; sometimes these may have been built into the floor. The word traditionally translated "inn" probably means something more like "home" or "guest room"; whether because other relatives may have also been returning home for the census or for other reasons, it is easier for Mary to bear (or care for the child after birth) in the vacant cave outside.

2:8-20
The Real King's Birth

2:8. Due to the proximity to Jerusalem, some scholars have suggested that the flocks here are the temple flocks raised for sacrifice. In any case, this *narrative would have challenged the values of many religious people, who despised shepherds (the earlier examples of Moses and David notwithstanding); shepherds' work kept them from participation in the religious activities of their communities. More clearly, elites throughout the empire usually viewed contemporary shepherds negatively. Pasturing of flocks at night indicates that this was a warmer season, not winter (when they would graze more in the day); Christians may have later adopted December 25 as a time to celebrate Christmas in part to coopt a pagan Roman festival scheduled shortly before that time.

2:9. Angelic appearances, the revelation of God's glory and consequent fear among the humans present were common in the *Old Testament when God was acting in history in special ways.

2:10-12. For "Do not be afraid," see comment on 1:13, 30. "Good news" could refer to the proclamation of God's salvation (Is 52:7), but pagans applied it also to celebrations of the cult of the emperor among all people in the supposedly worldwide empire. They celebrated his birthday (pagans publicly celebrated deities' birthdays) and hailed him "*Savior" and "Lord." But Jesus' birth in a lowly manger distinguishes the true king from the Roman emperor. For the "Lord Christ," see *_Psalms of Solomon_ 17:32 (a pre-Christian Jewish work). "Signs" are common in prophetic literature (e.g., Is 7:14; Ezek 12:11) and function as much to provoke and explain truth as to prove it. Jesus' birth "to you" may evoke Isaiah 9:6.

2:13-14. This choir contrasts with the earthly choirs used in the worship of the emperor. The current emperor, Augustus, was praised for having inaugurated a worldwide peace. The inverted parallelism (God vs. people, and "in the highest" vs. "on earth") suggests that "in the highest" means "among heaven's angelic hosts."

2:15-18. The shepherds probably checked the animal stables till they found the one with the baby; Bethlehem was not a large town by modern standards (although it was much larger than Nazareth).

2:19-20. Mary kept these matters in her mind as Jacob had his son Joseph's revelations in Genesis 37:11 (for the idiom, cf., e.g., Ps 119:11; Prov 6:21; Wisdom of Solomon 8:17).

2:21-40
The Infant and His Witnesses

2:21. See comment on 1:57-59.

2:22-24. These verses refer to Exodus 13:2, 12 and Leviticus 12:8. Jesus' parents fulfill the *law of Moses properly and piously. The particular sacrifice they offer indicates that they are poor (Lev 12:8). Following the custom, Mary would lay hands on the pigeons, then a priest would take them to the southwest corner of the altar, wringing one bird's neck as a sin offering and burning the other as a whole burnt offering.

2:25-26. This encounter with Simeon no doubt cannot occur deeper in the temple than the Court of Women, since Mary is present. God's future intervention for Israel was described as "consolation" or "comfort" (cf., e.g., Is 49:13; 51:3; 52:9; 66:13). Early Judaism often associated the "*Holy Spirit" with *prophecy.

2:27-32. Simeon's praise reflects Old Testament piety such as Genesis 46:30, and (in Lk 2:32) prophecies like Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6. For being willing to die once one has seen good, see Genesis 46:30; Tobit 11:9; for living to see God's salvation, see Psalm 91:16. For seeing God's salvation more generally, see Exodus 14:13; 2 Chronicles 20:17; Isaiah 52:10; cf. Luke 3:6.

2:33-35. Prophecies in Jewish and Greco-Roman tradition were often obscure, easier understood in hindsight than at the moment they were given. Simeon's words may allude to the stumbling stone of Isaiah 8:14-15 and the anticipated *resurrection. The "sword" reflects either Mary suffering over Jesus' pain or (as in the later part of the verse) her heart being bared, probably the former (a mother's grief can symbolize a son's suffering, e.g., Judg 5:28).

2:36. Although the Old Testament did include prophetesses, they were much less prominent than male prophets in the Jewish tradition of this period. The name "Anna" (Tobit 1:9) is the Hebrew name "Hannah" (1 Sam 1:2).

2:37-38. Jewish and Greco-Roman culture often viewed widows who never remarried as pious and faithful. One famous widow in Jewish tradition, Judith, was said to have lived as a widow till her death at 105. If one adds the two numbers given in the text here, seven and eighty-four (taking eighty-four as the length of Anna's widowhood rather than her age), and she was married at the common age of fourteen, one could see her as about 105 also. But the number may refer to her age; or Luke might mean her age but retain ambiguity to allow an allusion to Judith. Scripture promised the redemption of God's people (Is 52:3; Jer 31:11).

2:39-40. See comment on 1:80 and the allusion to Samuel.

2:41-52
The Boy in the Temple

Where such information was available, ancient biographers would tell significant anecdotes about their subjects' youth, sometimes about spectacular child prodigies (e.g., Cyrus, *Josephus). In 2:21-40, Jesus intrigued prophets; in 2:41-52, he intrigues teachers of the *law.

2:41. The law required an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem at Passover (Deut 16:16), although most Jewish people living far away could not come annually. Although Jewish teachers did not always require women's attendance at the festivals, many women attended. This verse may be another allusion to Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:7 and 2:19.

2:42. "Twelve years old" would have been about one year before Jesus officially became an adult Israelite and accepted responsibility for fulfilling the law. (Although the official Jewish *bar mitzvah* ceremony may not have existed as early as Jesus' day, its analogy to Roman coming-of-age rituals supports other evidence for an official entrance to adulthood around this age.)

2:43-45. Caravans, which afforded protection from robbers, were common on pilgrimages for the feasts in Jerusalem. (Indeed, Josephus even speaks of entire towns traveling for the feasts.) Traveling with a caravan, in which neighbors from their town would watch the community children together, Mary and Joseph might assume that the near-adult Jesus was with companions, especially if by now they had younger children to attend to. If we assume a pace of twenty miles per day (though perhaps slower, depending on transportation and the children), Nazareth would be a little over three days' journey along the shortest route, so the other villagers were probably home by the time the parents found Jesus (2:46). Estimates of Jerusalem's population

vary widely; it may have been in the range of seventy to eighty thousand, making Jesus difficult to find without help.

2:46-47. Some Jewish teachers in this period reportedly conducted their classes in the temple courts; the famous *Hillel and *Shammai may have been two such teachers. Asking questions was used both in teaching and in learning, but it was important for learners to ask intelligent questions, as Jesus does. Teachers could answer questions with questions, and Jesus' answers are also intelligent. Students might begin advanced training in their mid-teens; the teachers recognize Jesus as a prodigy.

2:48-51. Mothers were responsible for children at an earlier age, but the father would be responsible for the child's education, certainly by this age. Early Judaism regarded the commandment to honor one's father and mother as one of the most important in the law, and children not yet considered adults were to express this honoring in part by obedience. On Mary's heart, see comment on 2:19.

2:52. See comment on 1:80; cf. Judith 16:23; for the wording, cf. also Proverbs 3:4, but especially 1 Sam 2:26.

3:1-6
Introduction of John

3:1-2. It was customary to begin historical *narratives by dating them according to the years of rulers and officials, when possible, both in Greco-Roman and *Old Testament historiography, and often in introducing prophetic oracles or books (e.g., Is 1:1; 6:1). Luke thus shows that John began preaching somewhere between September of A.D. 27 and October of A.D. 28 (or, less likely, the following year). Tiberius reigned as sole emperor from A.D. 14 to 37 but shared some power with Augustus from A.D. 13; Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great (see comment on 1:5), was tetrarch (governor) of Galilee from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39; Pontius *Pilate was in office from A.D. 26 to 36. Presumably Pilate was installed with the approval of Sejanus, the praetorian prefect who influenced most of Tiberius's decisions at that point; although attested in an inscription and featuring prominently in Josephus and Philo, Pilate proved of little interest to Rome's own historians except once—for his execution of Jesus. Philip of Trachonitis was son of Herod the Great and was married to Herodias's daughter Salome (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.189; 18.137); he died in Tiberius's twentieth year (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.106). Itureans were a pastoral tribe known for raiding others and initially difficult to control. Lysanias ruled Abilene (named for its leading town, Abila) but his territory, along with that of Philip, was later transferred to Agrippa (*Jewish Antiquities* 19.275; 20.138). On "Annas and Caiaphas," see comment on John 18:13, 19.

3:3. Non-Jews who wished to convert to Judaism were required to immerse themselves in water to remove their impurity as *Gentiles; John requires this act of conversion even of Jews. See comment on Mark 1:5.

3:4-6. On the quotation, see Mark 1:3; Isaiah promised a new exodus in which God would again save his people Israel. Luke extends the quote to highlight more of Isaiah 40, possibly to conclude with seeing God's salvation (cf. Lk 2:30) and probably also to include "all flesh/humanity" (cf. Acts 2:17, where Luke may look ahead to the welcoming of Gentiles).

3:7-20
John's Preaching

See comment on Matthew 3:7-12 for more details.

3:7. Vipers (e.g., the Nicander's viper) were commonly believed to eat their way out of their mother's womb; thus John's calling the crowd "viper's offspring" was even nastier than calling them "vipers." (In a context where people valued their ancestry, as in 3:8, the image of parent-murder would be all the more relevant.) Serpents would flee a burning field.

3:8-9. Jewish people often believed that they were saved by virtue of their descent from Abraham, which constituted them the chosen people. The idea of raising people from stones appears in Greek mythology, but the metaphor of people like stones appears in a range of sources. John could be making a wordplay between the *Aramaic words for "children" and "stones."

3:10-11. The poorest people (such as most people in Egypt, who were peasants) had only one outer tunic (though some had a nicer garment for special occasions). Peasants in Palestine may have been somewhat better off,

but in any case, anyone with two tunics had more than necessary for life. "What shall we do?" occurs throughout Luke-Acts as a question about how to be saved.

3:12-13. *Tax gatherers sometimes collected extra money and kept the profit; although this practice was not legal, it was difficult to prevent. In rural Egypt, where we have the fullest evidence, they were known to even beat old ladies to discover where tax fugitives were; on occasion, an entire village would even relocate to escape tax collectors.

3:14. Some commentators think these "soldiers" are Jewish police, who accompanied tax gatherers, or Herodian mercenaries, but more likely these are the light auxiliary non-Jewish troops that Rome recruited from Syria. Although the large legions were stationed in Syria, not Palestine, some soldiers were stationed in the cohorts in Caesarea and the one in Jerusalem. Some may have traveled to hear (or investigate) John's preaching. (The frequency of Roman soldiers' illegal concubinage with native women indicates that soldiers did not all remain in their garrison at all times.) Jews were exempt from required military service due especially to their dietary laws.

Soldiers occasionally protested their wages, creating trouble with the government (e.g., the frontier mutiny of A.D. 14); they were known for extorting money from local people they intimidated or for falsely accusing them (see, e.g., the *papyri, *Apuleius).

3:15-17. On John's messianic preaching, see comment on Matthew 3:11-12. The *Old Testament prophets had declared that in the end time the righteous would be endowed with the *Holy Spirit and that the wicked would be burned with fire. The Jewish people generally viewed the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of *prophecy, and some circles viewed the Spirit as a force that purified God's people from unholiness. Winnowing was familiar to all Palestinian Jews, especially to the farmers: they would throw harvested wheat into the air, and the wind would separate the heavier grain from the lighter chaff. The chaff was useless for consumption and was normally burned. Some other writers also described the day of judgment as a harvest or the wicked as chaff (Is 17:13; Jer 13:24; 15:7; etc.). Because the same Greek (and Hebrew) word can mean both "spirit" and "wind," the picture of wind and fire carries over from 3:16. That the fire is "unquenchable" points beyond the momentary burning of chaff to something far more horrible (Is 66:24).

3:18. On his "many other words," see comment on Acts 2:40.

3:19-20. John's preaching to Herod Antipas fits prophetic morality, but Herod and his advisers may view it as political meddling, especially given the political cost of Herod's illicit liaison with Herodias (see comment on Mk 6:17-20). Herod's nemesis, a Nabatean king (Aretas IV), was particularly angry about the affair, and also found ethnic allies in Herod's subject territory of Perea. Herod may thus have viewed John's preaching in that region (Jn 3:23) as especially damaging.

In ancient Israel prophets normally enjoyed an immunity from persecution that was virtually unparalleled elsewhere in the ancient Near East (prophets of other nations rarely denounced living kings; at most they suggested more funds for their temples). The ancient world did treat the abuse of heralds as treachery worthy of death, and God's prophets were his messengers (usually using the messenger formula "Thus says"). But some Israelite rulers did imprison (1 Kings 22:26-27; Jer 37–38) and seek to kill or silence them (1 Kings 13:4; 18:13; 19:2; 2 Kings 1:9; 6:31; 2 Chron 24:21; Jer 18:18, 23; 26:11, 20-23). John's costly stand prefigures Jesus' death at the hands of the authorities.

3:21-22
Jesus' Sonship Declared

Some Jewish tradition stressed that God communicated in this era by voices from heaven; many people believed that he no longer spoke by prophets, at least not as he once had. The prophetic ministry of John and the voice from heaven thus provide a dual witness to Jesus' identity. Opened heavens could accompany heavenly revelations (see Ezek 1:1). See further comment on Mark 1:9-11.

3:23-38
Jesus' Ancestry

Greco-Roman biographers often included lists of ancestors, especially illustrious ancestors, when this was possible. Like Greco-Roman

genealogies, but unlike Matthew and *Old Testament genealogies, Luke starts with the most recent names and works backward. This procedure enables him to end with "*Son of God" (cf. 1:35; 3:22; 4:3).

For more details on genealogies, see comment on Matthew 1:2-16. Scholars have proposed various explanations for the differences between the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, of which the following are most prominent: (1) one (probably Matthew) records the genealogy of Joseph, the other of Mary (given the preference for clan endogamy, both could derive from the house of David; both genealogies, however, attribute the line to "Joseph"); (2) one (probably Matthew, or his source) spiritualizes the genealogy rather than following it literally; (3) the lines of descent cross but are different because one list includes several adoptive lines through levirate marriages (Deut 25:5-10).

In Greek society, men often entered public service at the age of thirty; Levites' service in the temple also began at thirty (cf. Num 4:3-47 et passim). Like a good Greek historian, Luke says "about thirty" (3:23) rather than stating an estimate as a definite number, as was more common in traditional Jewish historiography.

4:1-13
Tested in the Wilderness

See comment on Matthew 4:1-11 for more details. Jesus here settles issues as good *rabbis did, by appeal to Scripture. But this text also shows that Jesus does not just use Scripture to accommodate contemporary views of its authority; he uses it as his authority and the final word on ethics even when dealing with a supracultural adversary. (It should go without saying that the original writer and hearers viewed the devil as a literal, personal being.)

The devil here appeals to contemporary models of power (such as magician or earthly *messiah) to define Jesus' sonship; Jesus appeals to Scripture. The three texts from Deuteronomy (6:13, 16; 8:3) cited here (4:4, 8, 12) were commands given to Israel when Israel was tested in the wilderness; the starting context in Deuteronomy addressed God's people led by him and tested in the wilderness for forty periods of time (Deut 8:2). Unlike Adam, another "son" of God, who sinned (3:38), Jesus overcomes the tests (cf. Gen 3).

4:1-2. Moses also fasted forty days and nights; Israel also was in the wilderness forty years. On fasting, see further comment on Acts 13:2-3.

4:3. The devil's first test of Jesus is the sort of feat ancient thought attributed to magicians, who claimed to be able to transform themselves into animals and to transform other substances, like stones into bread.

4:4. Other Jewish circles (evident, e.g., in the *Dead Sea Scrolls and later rabbinic texts) also used the phrase "It has been written" to introduce Scripture. The context of Deuteronomy 8:3 involves God's "son" Israel depending on God for provision (Deut 8:3-5).

4:5-7. Most of early Judaism understood that the devil ruled the present age of human rebellion, but that ultimately God remained sovereign. The world did not technically belong to the devil (Dan 4:32), who owned human hearts and societies only as a usurper (acting through powers subordinate to God, e.g., Dan 10:13). The most he could do would be to make Jesus the political, military sort of Messiah most Jewish people who expected a Messiah were anticipating.

4:8. Deuteronomy 6:13, which Jesus cites, prohibits idolatry (Deut 6:14), a commandment anyone who worshiped the devil would obviously violate. It belongs to the broader context of Jesus' earlier quotation (Deut 8:3).

4:9-11. The devil takes Jesus to a part of the temple overlooking a deep valley; a fall from there would have meant certain death. Later rabbis acknowledged that the devil and demons could handle Scripture expertly; here the devil cites Psalm 91:11-12 out of context, because 91:10 makes clear that God's protection is for events that *befall* his servants, not an excuse to seek out such dangers to make God prove himself.

4:12. In contrast to the devil, Jesus approaches biblical texts with a greater sensitivity to their context. Continuing his citations from Deuteronomy, Jesus cites Deuteronomy 6:16, which refers to how the Israelites had tested God at Massah by refusing to accept that God was among them until he wrought a sign for them (Ex 17:7).

4:13. To most ancient readers, the devil's

departure would have implied at least his temporary defeat (cf. the **Testament of Job* 27:6; *Life of Adam and Eve* 17:2-3, though of uncertain date).

4:14-30 Preaching in His Hometown Synagogue

Luke, who follows the order of his sources quite meticulously (perhaps according to the pattern of biography he is using), departs from that order here (cf. Mk 6:1-6), because this section becomes programmatic for his *gospel. (Cf. Peter's sermon in Acts 2, which analogously functions as programmatic for Acts.)

That Jesus would quote Scripture against the devil (4:1-13) would hardly have disturbed his contemporaries; that he would use it to challenge traditions that his contemporaries believe are scriptural, however, enrages them. Insofar as first-century Jewish teachers may have been like second- and third-century rabbis, they officially welcomed debate, examining all views from the Scriptures. Nevertheless, most people also generally interpreted Scripture in such a way as to support views sanctioned by tradition (a frequent practice in many churches today).

4:14-15. Visiting rabbis were often given opportunities to teach; but Nazareth, a village of as few as five hundred inhabitants, already knew Jesus and would be less open to thinking about him in new ways.

4:16. Literacy varied from one place to another in antiquity, but many estimate that on average only ten percent of the population could read and write on any significant level. The percentage was higher in some urban areas, but reading knowledge of the Torah may have also been more available in Jewish Palestine. Many *Gentiles remarked how diligently the Jewish people taught their traditions in the *synagogues and to their children; they called them a "nation of philosophers." (In contrast to most cultures today, a minimum of other material competed with it, making knowledge of Torah the primary area of expertise, and a briefer cultural "canon" than the Greeks enjoyed.) More would be able to recite lines of Torah from memory than to read and understand it, but Jesus here is able to read and expound. The people would have known that Jesus was devout and skilled in Hebrew from his previous readings in his hometown synagogue. In Jewish Palestine, respected teachers usually sat while expounding Scripture (Mt 5:1) but stood while reading it (although some reversed this custom).

4:17. Scholars debate when regular lectionary readings for the Law began in synagogues, but in this period readers were probably free to make their own selection from the prophets; still later, readers in the Prophets were even allowed to "skip" passages. The synagogue attendant (*chazan*—v. 20) may have chosen which book to read (different books of the *Old Testament were on different scrolls; Isaiah was so large that it required one large scroll by itself). "Opening" the book meant unrolling the Hebrew scroll from right to left to the desired place.

4:18-19. Isaiah in this passage (61:1-2; cf. 58:6) seems to describe Israel's future in terms of the year of Jubilee, or year of release, from Leviticus 25 (cf. esp. Lev 25:10); the *Dead Sea Scrolls read Isaiah 61 in this way. Some scholars have suggested that a recent Jubilee year may have made this text fresh in the minds of Jesus' hearers; some other scholars dispute whether this even remained a current practice in mainstream Judaism. That Luke ends the quote on a note of salvation is probably intentional, but his readers who know Scripture well would know how the passage continues (speaking of judgment).

4:20. According to the most common Palestinian Jewish custom, respected teachers normally sat to expound Scripture. The synagogue attendant was presumably the *chazan,* the official responsible for the upkeep of the building, the scrolls and so forth; this position was eventually a paid one (but lower in authority than "rulers" of a synagogue); we need not assume something so formal in small Nazareth. Synagogues were probably less formal then than *churches or synagogues generally are today, so the attentiveness of those present is significant.

4:21-22. Immediacy ("today"; cf. 2:11; 19:5, 9; 23:43) will surprise Jesus' hearers; the text Jesus reads is supposed to be fulfilled in the messianic era, and the inhabitants of Nazareth recognized neither a *Messiah nor a messianic era before them. Because they lived only four

miles from Sepphoris, they were well aware of how the Romans had destroyed that Galilean capital after a messianic-style revolt in A.D. 6; that this region was thereafter cautious about messianic announcements is suggested by the fact that the rebuilt Sepphoris did not join in the later revolt of A.D. 66.

Writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls, who believed that they lived on the verge of the end time, often stressed the immediacy of biblical prophecies, applying descriptions of Nahum, Habakkuk and others to their own day. Interpreting the Bible this way was thus not in itself offensive to first-century Palestinian Jews; the offense was implying that God's end-time activity had arrived in Jesus' own ministry.

4:23-24. The tradition that Israel rejected its own prophets was strong in Judaism, which amplified the fewer reports of martyrdoms already in Scripture (e.g., Jer 26:23). Jeremiah was persecuted even by his own priestly town, Anathoth (Jer 1:1; 11:18-23). The proverb in 4:23 is attested in some form in Greek classical and medical literature, and some rabbis cited a similar *Aramaic proverb.

4:25-27. Jesus mentions the socially weak (widows) and marginalized (lepers) here, but the main point (a helpful foretaste for Luke's second volume, Acts) is that non-Jews were the ones to accept two of the major signs prophets of the Old Testament (implicitly illustrating the principle in Luke 4:24). Sidon and Syria were among the particularly despised areas. The context of Naaman's cure (2 Kings 5) also indicates that many lepers in Israel were not cured (2 Kings 7:3; these lepers were in Israelite Samaria; cf. Luke 17:16). Jesus' point: Nazareth will not receive him, but non-Jews will. Elijah and Elisha are apt analogies for Jesus' ministry, which included raising the dead and multiplying food (similar to what Elijah did for the widow of Zarephath) and healing lepers.

4:28-29. Under Roman rule, a mob could not legally execute capital punishment in Jewish Palestine; Jewish law, moreover, required trial and conviction before execution. The crowd is thus unusually angry—especially to attempt this execution on the sabbath (v. 16). Nazareth is situated on top a hill and, like many ancient cities it was set in the hill country, with plenty of jagged rocks and cliffs nearby. Somewhat later sources suggest that stoning ideally should begin with throwing the criminal over a cliff, then hurling rocks nearly the size of one's head on top of the victim. One aimed for the chest first, but at such a distance one's aim would not be particularly accurate.

4:30. Whether the Lord hides him (cf. Jer 36:26), his attitude silences them, or his townspeople suddenly realize what they are doing to one of their own, Jesus walks through the crowd unharmed—his hour had not yet come.

4:31-37
Preaching in Capernaum's Synagogue

A pericope about Jesus' inhospitable reception in a house of prayer and study (4:14-30) is followed by his confrontation with a demoniac in one. Yet the people's response in Capernaum, which by the second century A.D. had become a center for early Jewish Christianity, contrasts with that of Nazareth in 4:14-30. See comment on Mark 1:21-28.

4:31. Archaeologists have found the site of Capernaum's synagogue.

4:32. Most teachers would try to expound the *law by explaining the proper way to translate it or by appealing to their legal or *narrative traditions; Jesus goes beyond such practices.

4:33-34. *Demons were often associated with *magic, and magicians tried to subdue other spiritual forces by invoking their names; some think that the demon tries to ward off Jesus' power in this way. (Magic also depended on its secrets not being divulged.) If the demon is trying to intimidate Jesus by threatening to subdue him in this way ("I know who you are" was used to subdue spiritual powers in some magical texts), as some scholars have suggested—his ploy does not work.

4:35-37. Among prominent methods ancient exorcists used to expel demons were the following: (1) scaring the demon out or making it too sick to stay—for example, by putting a smelly root up the possessed person's nose in the hope that the demon would not be able to stand it—or (2) invoking the name of a higher spirit to get rid of the lower one. The people are amazed that Jesus can be effective by simply ordering the demons to leave.

4:38-44
Popularity Increases

See comment on Mark 1:29-39 for more details.

4:38. Simon's father-in-law had probably passed away, and Simon and his wife had taken her widowed mother into their home. Caring for one's extended family—especially aged parents—was common.

4:39. Waiting on guests was an important element of hospitality normally assigned to the adult women of the household (most free families could not afford slaves).

4:40-41. The sabbath (4:31) ended Saturday at sundown. "As the sun was setting" indicates that the sabbath is ending; thus people could carry the sick to Jesus for healing (carrying was considered work, thus forbidden on the sabbath). Laying on hands had a rich symbolism in Jewish tradition (e.g., Gen 48:13-14; Num 27:23; Deut 34:9; see comment on Acts 6:6). Jesus could also heal without it if the people could believe (see Lk 7:6-9).

4:42-44. It was nearly impossible to find a place to be alone in ancient towns, with their narrow streets and sometimes (often in poorer places like Egypt) twenty people living in the common one-room houses. Many blocks in Capernaum consisted of four homes facing a common courtyard. Villages were also often close together, though one could find a place alone if one arose early enough (most people arose at dawn).

5:1-11
Fishers of People

Like Moses' experience as a shepherd, David's as a commander and Joseph's as an administrator, the background of these *disciples as fishermen can provide them a perspective that will help them for their new task.

5:1-2. The lake of Gennesaret is the lake of Galilee (locally called the "Sea" of Galilee). Non-Galileans (like Luke or Pliny) call it a "lake"; it was most often people of this region who called it Gennesaret (Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.463). Nets would collect things other than edible fish, thus requiring cleaning. Edible fish in the inland "Sea" of Galilee today include varieties of carp; *Josephus says that the lake of Galilee held several kinds of fish.

5:3. The shore of the lake would function acoustically like an amphitheater; withdrawing a little from the crowd and addressing them from the boat thus would have made Jesus much easier to hear.

5:4-5. Peter's obedience is exemplary; a fisherman might trust a *rabbi's teaching on religious matters but need not do so in his own field of expertise, fishing. The fishermen had labored with a casting net (see comment on Mt 4:18) or possibly a dragnet (see comment on Mt 13:47-50, where a precise term for a dragnet is used) at night, which should have caught them many more fish than Jesus' instructions here. Some said that fish were most easily caught before sunrise (Pliny, *Natural History* 9.23.56, 58). Sources suggest that fish would stay deep during the day to avoid the sun, hence were more easily caught at night in the lake of Galilee; they would be sold in the morning (ahead of competitors).

5:6. Ancient fishermen sometimes told stories of marvelous catches of fish; more importantly, Jesus' multiplication of food and of creatures has *Old Testament precedent (e.g., food—Ex 16:13; 2 Kings 4:1-7, 42-44; creatures—Ex 8:6, 17, 24; 10:13; both—Num 11:31-32). The circular cast net, for use in shallow water, was about fifteen feet wide, tightly meshed, and had lead sinkers. The dragnet (Mt 13:47-48) was dragged between two boats that moved further apart, sweeping up fish in their path. Broken nets could ruin fishermen, unless they secured (often borrowed) money to repair them.

5:7. Because the overhead cost of equipment was high, fishermen often worked together in cooperatives; families would sometimes work together to increase their profits. Other fishing cooperatives are known from ancient Palestine, so it is not unusual for Simon and Andrew to be in business with the family of Zebedee (5:10). Men working from more than one boat could let down larger nets than those working from only one; fish could then be emptied onto the boat or the nets hauled ashore.

5:8-9. Moses, Gideon and Jeremiah were all overwhelmed by their initial calls; but Peter's excuse is especially like Isaiah's (Is 6:5) and fits Luke's emphasis (Lk 5:20, 30-32; Acts 9:4).

5:10. "Fishers of people" could allude to two Old Testament texts (Jer 16:16; Hab 1:15),

transforming an image of impending judgment into one of rescue from that judgment; but Jesus might simply transform their vocation as fishermen, as God made Moses and David "shepherds" of his people.

5:11. Even if they had a bad night (5:5), fishermen made a better income than most Galileans (most of whom were peasants), so leaving their job is an act of radical commitment that they would expect to adversely affect them economically. Commercial fishermen tended to be better off than rural peasants, and were considered strong and inured to the sun.

5:12-16
Cleansing a Leper

See comment on Mark 1:40-45 for more details. Lepers were outcasts from society, and most nonlepers would not have wanted to touch them, even had Jewish *law permitted it. The Bible had prescribed particular sacrifices if someone's leprosy were cured (Lev 14:1-32). By complying with these regulations, Jesus does nothing to violate the law or to offend the priests.

Teachers thought to perform miracles usually drew large followings, because many people were sick; the number of people who flocked to hot springs in Galilee that were thought to relieve ailments attests to the large numbers of people who suffered from various afflictions.

5:17-26
Healing a Paralytic

For more details, see comment on Mark 2:1-12.

5:17. *Pharisees were apparently much more common in Jerusalem and Judea; thus probably more of the Galileans belonged to the other group Luke mentions, the teachers of the *law (cf. Mk 2:6). Larger Galilean villages would have had *scribes schooled in Jewish law, who could execute legal documents and train children in the law of Moses.

5:18-19. The average Capernaum home may have allowed only about fifty persons standing (the span of the largest excavated homes there is eighteen feet). One gained access to the roof by an outside staircase, so these men could reach it unimpeded. The roof of a single-story Palestinian home was sturdy enough to walk on but was normally made of branches and rushes laid over the roof's beams and covered with dried mud; thus one could dig through it.

Luke changes this Palestinian roof structure to the flat roof of interlocking tiles more familiar to his own readers, as preachers today change details when retelling biblical stories to make them relevant to their hearers. For the same reason, Luke does not mention their digging through the roof (indeed, in one play by Aristophanes such an action might have caved in a Greek roof). (The Roman atrium in fact had an opening in the ceiling, though Luke, who mentions tiles, probably does not envision that.) The paralytic's "bed" or "stretcher" would have been the mat on which he always lay.

5:20-21. Most Jews allowed that some of God's representatives could speak on God's behalf, but they recognized that only God could forgive sins. Technically and by the narrowest definition preserved in later rabbinic sources, "blasphemy" involved pronouncing the divine name or perhaps inviting people to follow other gods; less technically, it had to involve at least dishonoring God. Strictly speaking, therefore, these legal scholars would be mistaken in interpreting Jesus' words as blasphemy, even by their own rules. They presumably employ the term more loosely, believing that Jesus dishonored God by usurping a divine role.

5:22-26. Some Jewish teachers accepted miracles as verification that a teacher was truly God's representative; others did not regard miracles as sufficient proof if they disagreed with that teacher's interpretation of Scripture.

5:27-32
Partying with Sinners

See comment on Mark 2:13-17 for more details. In the *Old Testament, God instructed "sinners" in his way, i.e., the humble who knew their need (Ps 25:8-9).

5:27-28. Given the location of Capernaum, some think that Levi is a customs official for Herod Antipas. Whatever kind of tax collector he was, he probably had a good income and was not likely to get his job back once he left it, especially on such short notice.

5:29. Jesus' invitation for Levi to follow

him constituted a great honor, especially for one who would have normally been excluded from religious circles. That Levi should respond by throwing a party for him is not surprising; repaying honor was an important part of social life in antiquity, and Levi probably would feel honored to have a prominent rabbi in his house. Table fellowship indicated intimate relations among those who shared it, and given the nature of ancient banquets, it was natural for a well-to-do person to invite his (former) colleagues and also subordinates to a feast. The colleagues would be offended if not invited.

5:30. The *Pharisees (and the teachers belonging to their movement) were scrupulous about their special rules on eating and did not like to eat with less scrupulous people, especially people like *tax gatherers and sinners. Most people regarded tax gatherers as collaborators with the Romans, and nationalistic religious people despised them. Religious people also expected edifying conversation. Because the Pharisees here attack only Jesus' table fellowship, we may infer that Jesus and his own *disciples conduct themselves properly otherwise (e.g., they would not get drunk), whether or not all of Levi's other guests are doing the same.

5:31-39
Partying or Fasting?

See comment on Mark 2:18-22. The *Old Testament also recognized that some practices or objects once appropriate in worship or commemoration could become no longer appropriate (2 Kings 18:4; Jer 3:16).

5:31-33. Although the Old Testament commanded many more feasts than fasts, fasting had become a widespread Jewish practice; Pharisees often fasted twice a week, at least during the dry season. Although *ascetic fasting was forbidden, many people probably did fast for ascetic reasons. Fasting was an important practice to join with prayer or penitence, so it would have been unusual for disciples (prospective rabbis) to have avoided it altogether. A teacher was regarded as responsible for the behavior of his disciples.

5:34-35. Wedding feasts involved seven days of festivity; one was not permitted to fast or engage in other acts of mourning or difficult labor during a wedding feast. Jesus makes an analogy about the similar inappropriateness of fasting in his own time.

5:36-38. Jesus uses two familiar facts to make his point. Older clothes had already shrunk from washing. Wine could be kept in either jars or wineskins; wineskins, unlike jars, would stretch. Old wineskins had already been stretched to capacity by wine fermenting within them; if they were then filled with unfermented wine, it would likewise expand, and the old wineskins, already stretched to the limit, would break. Watered-down wine was drunk with meals.

5:39. Although distillation had not yet been developed and wine could achieve only a certain level of alcoholic content, aged wine was generally preferred over fresh wine that had not yet begun to ferment (a proverb, e.g., Sirach 9:10; rabbinic sources). Jesus is probably indicating why the religious people are objecting to the joy of Jesus' disciples: it is something new.

6:1-5
Lord of the Sabbath

See Mark 2:23-28 for more details. Some scholars have suggested that "rubbing with their hands" (v. 1) by extension constituted threshing, a forbidden category of work on the sabbath. Although the *law of Moses was especially authoritative for Jewish legal experts, the *narratives of other parts of the *Old Testament sometimes illustrate principles of the law's spirit taking precedence over its normal practice (e.g., 2 Chron 30:2-3).

If Jesus could demonstrate his case from Scripture, his opponents technically could not prosecute him successfully, due to the variety of Palestinian Jewish views on how the sabbath was to be observed.

6:6-11
Lawful to Do Good

See further comment on Mark 3:1-6.

6:6. The muscles and nerves of a "dried" or "withered" hand were inactive; thus the hand, smaller than usual, was incurably nonfunctional.

6:7-10. Again, Jesus does nothing to violate the *law; although some religious teachers opposed minor cures on the sabbath, "stretching

out one's hand" was not considered work, and no one could complain if God answered prayer on the sabbath. *Pharisees differed among themselves as to the propriety of "minor cures" on the sabbath.

6:11. Unintentional violations of the sabbath, or issues of disagreement about what constituted the sabbath (matters that were debated) were normally treated lightly (at most, with corporal punishment in a *synagogue). Capital punishment (Ex 31:14; 35:2) was thought appropriate only for those who willfully rejected the sabbath. Jesus' opponents go far beyond conventional Pharisaic teachings here.

6:12-16
Choosing the Twelve

See comment on Mark 3:13-19.

6:12. Jesus may here follow a pattern in Moses' ministry. Moses prayed on a mountainside, receiving instructions about helpers (Ex 19:24; 24:1-2; cf. 31:1-2) and successors (Num 27:15-23; cf. 20:23-29).

6:13-16. People often had a secondary name, sometimes a nickname, which may account for the slight differences among the Gospels' lists of the Twelve, as well as for the distinguishing of two Simons, two Judases and the second James in the list (these names were common in the holy and in this period).

6:17-26
Blessings and Woes

See comment on Matthew 5:3-12. Blessings and woes were a common literary form, especially in the *Old Testament and Judaism; here they may parallel the blessings and curses of the covenant given from the mountains in Deuteronomy 27–28. For the particular blessings and curses listed here, cf. perhaps Isaiah 65:13-16.

6:17-19. On this introduction to Luke's Sermon on the Plain (or "level place"), see comment on Matthew 4:23-25.

6:20. God was near the lowly and broken but far from the proud (Ps 138:6), and showed special mercy to the poor (Ps 113:7-8; 140:12; Prov 14:31; 21:13; Is 1:17; 58:6-7; Zech 7:10). Some of Jesus' *disciples who had not been economically poor became poor to follow him (see 18:28). Behind Luke's "poor" and Matthew's "poor in spirit" probably lies a particular *Aramaic term that means both. "The poor" had become a designation for the pious in some Jewish circles, because they were the oppressed who trusted solely in God. The piety of the poor was emphasized especially after the Roman general Pompey redistributed Jewish lands about a century before Jesus; like most other people in the ancient Mediterranean world, most Jewish people were poor. The Jewish people longed for the *kingdom.

6:21. Being "filled" (sustained) was a hoped-for blessing of the messianic era. Hunger struck poor families in times of famine (the situation in rural Palestine was better than that of rural Egypt but worse than that of Corinth or Italy). Weeping was a sign of mourning or *repentance.

6:22-23. The Old Testament tradition that most true prophets suffered rejection was amplified further in Judaism, so Jesus' hearers would have caught his point. The separation or ostracism here might allude to being officially put out of the *synagogue (cf. comment on Jn 9:22) but is probably meant more generally.

6:24-25. "Comfort" was a blessing of the messianic era (e.g., Is 40:1; cf. Lk 16:25). Most of Jesus' hearers were poor, but Luke's urban, Greco-Roman readership was probably better off (1:3-4); Luke pulls no punches for his own audience (cf. **1 Enoch* 96:4-5). Laughter was often associated with scorn.

6:26. Greek philosophers, who often scoffed at the opinions of the masses, sometimes complained if the multitudes spoke well of them. But Jesus' comparison with the prophets is even more appropriate; the burden of proof was always on prophets who told people what they wanted to hear (Jer 6:14; 28:8-9). Although the hearers often suspected some truth in the genuine prophets' claims (Jer 21:1-2; 37:3; 42:2; cf. 1 Kings 22:27), false prophets were usually more popular (1 Kings 22:12-13; Jer 5:31; 23:13-14).

6:27-38
Treat Others Mercifully

6:27. The *Old Testament specifically commanded love of neighbor (Lev 19:18), but neither it nor Jewish sages commanded love of enemies (although many taught nonretaliation and insisted on leaving vengeance to God).

6:28. Although Jesus (23:34) and his followers (Acts 7:60) practiced this rule of blessing and praying for enemies, prayers for vindication by vengeance were common in the Old Testament (2 Chron 24:22; Ps 137:7-9; Jer 15:15; cf. Rev 6:10) and in ancient execration (magical curse) texts.

6:29. The backhanded blow on the right cheek was the most grievous insult in the ancient Near East, punishable under law. Its purpose was not to shatter teeth but to insult, to challenge honor; a *disciple is not to jealously guard one's honor (or perhaps to care what the insulter thinks). The clothing in the verse refers to the outer and inner cloak, respectively; the poorest of people (like the average peasant in Egypt) might have only one of each. Deprivation of both could leave one naked, a shameful state; thus here Jesus refers, probably in hyperbolic images, to absolute nonresistance on one's own behalf.

6:30. Here Jesus may allude to beggars, quite common in the ancient East, and poorer people seeking loans. In Jewish Palestine, with its high work ethic, beggars were usually only those in genuine need, and most were unable to work; farmers generally sought loans to plant crops. Jewish society emphasized both charity and responsibility.

6:31. In its positive and especially its negative form ("Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you"; cf. Tobit 4:15; *Philo; **Letter of Aristeas* 207), this was a common ethical saying in the ancient world.

6:32-33. Ideas like loving enemies and lending without hoping to receive again were unheard of, although many *Pharisees advocated peace with the Roman state (at least, tolerating enemies in some sense).

6:34-35. In the Roman world, interest rates ran high (in an extreme case, as high as forty-eight percent), but the Old Testament forbade usury, or charging interest. Because many Jewish creditors feared that they would lose their investment if they lent too near the seventh year (when the *law required cancellation of all debts), they stopped lending then, hurting the small farmers who needed to borrow for planting. Jewish teachers thus found a way to circumvent this law so the poor could borrow so long as they repaid. Jesus argues that this practice should not be necessary; those with resources should help those without, whether or not they would lose money by doing so.

Biblical laws about lending to the poor before the year of release (Deut 15:9; every seventh year debts were forgiven; cf. Lev 25) support Jesus' principle here, but Jesus goes even farther in emphasizing unselfish giving. Although the law limited selfishness, Jesus looks to the heart of the law and advocates sacrifice for one's neighbor. A good man's "sons" were expected to exemplify their father's character; thus God's children should act like him.

6:36. That human mercy should reflect God's mercy became a common Jewish saying (e.g., the *Letter of Aristeas* 208; *rabbis). "Merciful" may reflect the same *Aramaic word translated "perfect" in Matthew 5:48.

6:37. "Judge," "condemn" and "pardon" are all the language of the day of judgment, prefigured in God's current reckonings with his people (e.g., on the Day of Atonement).

6:38. The image here is of a measuring container into which as much grain as possible is packed; it is then shaken to allow the grain to settle, and more is poured in till the container overflows. Pouring it "into the lap" refers to the fold in the garment used as a pocket or pouch. Because Jewish people sometimes used "they" as a way of avoiding God's name, some suggest that "they will pour" (NASB) may mean that God will do it; or the idea may be that God will repay a person through others. The Old Testament often speaks of God judging people according to their ways (e.g., Is 65:7). Proverbs and other texts speak of God's blessings toward the generous (e.g., Deut 15:10; Prov 19:17; 22:9; 28:8, 27).

6:39-45
True and False Teachers

6:39. Others also used this image of leading the blind. The point here is that one must learn the right way (6:40) and receive correction before seeking to teach others (6:41).

6:40. In ancient Judaism, the purpose of a *disciple's training was to make him a competent teacher, or rabbi, in his own right. By definition, a disciple did not have more knowledge about the *law than his teacher.

6:41-42. Here Jesus uses *hyperbole, and the

exaggeration would probably draw laughter—and thus attention—from Jesus' hearers.

6:43-45. See 3:9. The principle was well known (e.g., Seneca, *Epistles to Lucilius* 87.25). Figs and grapes were often cultivated together and were two of the most common agricultural products in Palestine, often linked in *Old Testament texts. Thorns and thistles were always troublesome to farmers (cf., e.g., Gen 3:18; also Is 5:2, 4 LXX).

6:46-49
Right and Wrong Foundations

Jesus again uses the image of the day of judgment. The idea of ultimately being judged for hearing but not obeying was familiar (Ezek 33:32-33). But no Jewish teacher apart from Jesus claimed so much authority for his own words; such authority was reserved for the *law itself. Later rabbis told a very similar *parable, but whereas there the foundation was the Torah, here it is Jesus' words.

Some commentators have suggested that "digging deep" (v. 48) implies that he built a cellar; although cellars were not uncommon in Palestinian houses, they were used more often in Greek architecture; cf. comment on 5:19. The passage may simply involve a deep foundation on the bedrock, however.

7:1-10
A Pagan's Amazing Faith

7:1-2. The nearest Roman legion was stationed in Syria, but many auxiliaries, mostly recruited from Syria, were also stationed at Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, with some in the Fortress Antonia in Jerusalem. They were not bound to their camps at all times, however, and after retirement some probably settled at various places in Palestine. Centurions commanded a "century" (i.e., 100), which *in practice* consisted of sixty to eighty troops. Centurions were the backbone of the Roman army, in charge of discipline. An inexpensive slave might cost a third of a soldier's pay for a year, but centurions were paid far more.

7:3-5. Non-Jews who feared God and donated substantial sums to the Jewish community were well respected. Those requesting help often sought someone respected by the benefactor to intercede on the requester's behalf. (This centurion may have also been able to intercede for their town with higher Roman officials if necessary.) Ancient Mediterranean culture stressed reciprocity; the elders now intercede on his behalf. Centurions' salaries were roughly sixteen to seventeen times those of their troops (perhaps thirty to sixty times for the highest ranking centurions), but for this centurion to have built the local *synagogue might nevertheless represent years of savings. The main point lies in the contrasting views of worthiness (7:4, 6).

7:6. The centurion was not a full convert to Judaism and thus retained some of his uncleanness as a *Gentile, especially in regard to the food in his home. To invite a Jewish teacher into such a home would have been offensive under normal circumstances, but in this case the community's elders want to make an exception (7:3), presumably because this Gentile home is not defiled by idolatry.

7:7. During their twenty or so years of service in the Roman army, soldiers were not permitted to marry. Many or most had "unofficial" local concubines; these unofficial marriages were often ratified after a soldier completed his term of service. But centurions, who could be moved around more frequently, could be less likely than ordinary soldiers to have such relationships; they sometimes married only after retirement. By ancient definitions, however, a household could include servants, and household servants and masters sometimes grew very close—especially if they made up the entire family unit.

7:8. The centurion demonstrates that he understands the principle of authority that Jesus exercises. Roman soldiers were very disciplined and except in rare times of mutiny followed orders carefully.

7:9. "Gentiles" were generally synonymous with pagans, with no faith in Israel's God.

7:10. Some Jewish stories circulated about miracle workers, but reports of long-distance healings were rare and were viewed as more extraordinary than other miracles. Thus people would view this healing as especially miraculous.

7:11-17
Interrupting a Funeral

Interrupting a funeral was a blatant breach of Jewish *law and custom; touching the bier ex-

posed Jesus to a day's uncleanness (Num 19:21-22); touching the corpse exposed him to a week's uncleanness (cf. Num 5:2-3; 19:11-20). But in Jesus' case, the influence goes in the other direction.

7:11-12. People customarily dropped whatever they were doing and joined in the back of a funeral procession when it passed by. For a widow's only son to die before she did was considered extremely tragic; it also left her dependent on public charity for support unless she had other means or relatives of means.

7:13. According to custom the bereaved mother would walk in front of the bier; Jesus, approaching from the front rather than behind, meets her first. Cf. 1 Kings 17:17-24.

7:14. By touching even the bier, a stretcher on which the body was borne (Jewish custom did not use a closed coffin), Jesus would be viewed as contracting corpse-uncleanness, the severest form of ritual impurity in Judaism (Num 19:11-20). Only those closest to the deceased were expected to expose themselves to this impurity. The young man had not been dead long, because it was necessary to wash, anoint, wrap, mourn over and then bury the body as quickly as possible to avoid the stench of decomposition.

7:15-17. God had used several earlier prophets (Elijah and Elisha) to resuscitate the dead (1 Kings 17:23; 2 Kings 4:36), but it was a rare miracle. The few pagan stories of resuscitations, especially from the third century A.D. (from Philostratus and *Apuleius), are later and not validated by eyewitnesses as the Gospel accounts are; they also often exhibit features missing here, such as reports from the underworld. The language of a prophet "among" his people (Lk 7:16) is an OT idiom (Num 12:6; Deut 13:1; 18:15, 18; Ezek 2:5).

7:18-23
Encouraging John

7:18-20. Ancient writers sometimes repeated a message twice (when the messengers heard it and when they delivered it). Some plausibly suggest that John is troubled that Jesus exposes himself to potential ritual uncleanness (e.g., with *Gentiles and corpses) for the sake of healings. More likely, Jesus' words simply do not fit John's picture of the coming one he had proclaimed in 3:15-17, although John has no doubt that Jesus is at least a prophet who will tell him the truth.

7:21-23. Jesus' answer makes use of language from Isaiah 35:5; these healings are signs of the messianic era. Some teachers compared the blind, lame and lepers to the dead because they had no hope of recovery.

7:24-35
Vindicating John

John's and Jesus' styles of ministry differ; but both are valid, and the religious community rejects both equally.

7:24. Reeds were fragile (Is 42:3), so a "reed shaken by the wind" would be notoriously weak (1 Kings 14:15) and undependable (2 Kings 18:21; Ezek 29:6).

7:25-26. Prophets were rarely well-to-do, and in times of national wickedness they were forced to operate outside societal boundaries, including royal courts. Now imprisoned by Herod Antipas, John is no court prophet who simply tells powerful people what they want to hear. Antipas employed a reed (7:24) as an emblem on his coins a few years earlier (up until A.D. 26).

7:27. By fulfilling Mal 3:1, John is more than just any herald of God; he is the direct announcer of the Lord, who will act in a decisively new way by leading his people in a new exodus. (The new exodus, a return from captivity, is a theme in Isaiah.)

7:28. In *rhetoric and elsewhere, comparisons could demean the lesser figure, but often did not do so; sometimes speakers chose the lesser figure for comparison precisely because it was great, thereby amplifying all the more the greater figure. This comparison elevates Jesus' *disciples rather than demeans John. One may compare the early rabbinic saying that Johanan ben Zakkai, one of the most respected scholars of the first century, was the "least" of *Hillel's eighty disciples; this saying was not meant to diminish Johanan's status but to increase that of his contemporaries and thus that of his teacher.

7:29-30. Because the once-for-all kind of *baptism was essentially reserved for pagans converting to Judaism, the religious people are unwilling to accept it for themselves. They questioned the religious commitment of less observant Jews, especially the *tax gatherers.

7:31-32. The marketplace was the most public part of town. Spoiled children having make-believe weddings and funerals (one later game was called "bury the grasshopper") represent Jesus' and John's dissatisfied opponents; unhappy with other children who would not play either game, they are upset no matter what.

7:33-34. John the Baptist fits the role of a more *ascetic prophet, like Elijah (cf. 1:14-15 for John's abstention from wine); Jesus follows a model more like David, but both are proper in their place. *Demon possession (v. 33) was associated with madness (and sometimes with sorcery, hence a capital charge). "Glutton and drunkard" (v. 34) was a capital charge (Deut 21:20), hence a serious accusation.

7:35. Jewish tradition often personified Wisdom, usually as a holy woman exhorting the righteous to follow her; here she is the mother of the righteous.

7:36-50
The Pharisee and the Sinful Woman

Jesus violated social taboos to reach out to those marginalized not only culturally (7:1-10), economically (7:11-17) and religiously (7:24-35) but also morally (7:36-50). Since the classical Greek period, banquets had become an occasional setting for moral instruction.

7:36. It was considered virtuous to invite a teacher over for dinner, especially if the teacher were from out of town or had just taught at the synagogue. That they are "reclining" rather than sitting indicates that they are using couches rather than chairs and that this is a banquet, perhaps in honor of the famous guest teacher.

7:37. Because this woman is a known "sinner" some think that she is a prostitute (surely a Jewish one—cf. **Psalms of Solomon* 2:11—though many prostitutes in Palestine were non-Jews); given ancient stereotypes of women's sins (she is presumably not a tax collector), at least she might be a woman with a reputation for being morally loose. Whatever the case, given associations of these ideas, when assigned to women, with particular behaviors, the Pharisee might suppose her to be seeking something disreputable. If the *Pharisee is well-to-do, he might have a servant as a porter to check visitors at the door; but the pious also sometimes opened their homes for the poor. In any case, the woman manages to get in. In banquets where uninvited people could enter, they were to remain quiet and away from the couches, observing the discussions of host and guests. Alabaster was considered the most appropriate container for perfume.

7:38. Jewish people did not consider perfume sinful, but because this woman is a "sinner" (7:37), they might assign special connotations to it, rendering Jesus' acceptance of the gift offensive. That she stands "behind him" and anoints his feet instead of his head has to do with the posture of guests reclining on the couches; he would have reclined on his left arm, facing the host. His feet would have pointed away from the table toward the wall.

7:39. Adult women who were religious were expected to be married and thus would have their heads covered; a woman with her hair exposed to public view often would be considered promiscuous, at least by those with more conservative cultural values. That this woman wipes Jesus' feet with her hair would thus indicate not only her humility but also her marginal religious and social status, even had Jesus not been a prophet and had she not been known in the community's gossip. That the host allowed that Jesus might be a prophet at all suggests great respect, because many Jewish teachers believed that prophets ceased after the *Old Testament period.

7:40. "I have something to say" sometimes introduces blunt or harsh words in Middle Eastern idiom.

7:41-42. Gratitude was an emphatic obligation in Mediterranean antiquity. Some scholars have argued that *Aramaic lacks a term for gratitude, hence "Which will love him more?" rather than, as we might expect, "Which will be more grateful?" Although debts were to be forgiven in the seventh year, experts in the *law had found a way to get around that requirement. Those who could not pay could be imprisoned, temporarily enslaved or have certain goods confiscated; but this creditor goes beyond the letter of the law and extends mercy.

7:43-46. Common hospitality included providing water for the feet (though well-to-

do householders left the washing to servants); the oft-invoked example of Abraham's hospitality (Gen 18:4) would render the host without excuse. Oil for the dry skin on one's head would also be a thoughtful act. A kiss was an affectionate or respectful form of greeting, commonly shown to respected teachers and others. Jesus faces the woman finally in verse 44; cf. comment on 7:38. Failing to provide such basic courtesies could appear to other guests as an affront, but guests rarely publicly confronted hosts no matter how inadequate the hospitality, for such public humiliation could invite enmity. Yet Jesus humiliates his host who had privately despised the grateful woman.

7:47-50. Although the priests could pronounce God's forgiveness after a sin offering, Jesus pronounces forgiveness without the clear restitution of a sacrifice to God in the temple. This pronouncement contradicted Pharisaic ethics, and most of early Judaism would have seen it at best as marginal behavior. (One story in the *Dead Sea Scrolls is a rare exception to pronouncing forgiveness and accompanies an exorcism, but it does not seem to reflect general Jewish practice.)

8:1-3
The Women Disciples

For the form of support mentioned here, cf. 2 Kings 4:42. Women sometimes served as *patrons, or supporters, of religious teachers or associations in the ancient Mediterranean. (Some estimate that men outnumbered them more than ten to one, because men had more of the economic resources; yet a tenth remained a large number.) But for these women to travel with the group would have been viewed as scandalous, at least by Jesus' detractors. Apart from some small Greek philosophic schools, adult coeducation was unheard of, and that these women are learning Jesus' teaching as closely as his male *disciples would surely bother some outsiders as well. Upper-class families had more mobility, but commoners might still talk. While a small number of philosophers had women disciples, many criticized this practice; we know of no other women disciples among Jewish teachers in this period. "Herod" here (8:3) is Herod Antipas.

8:4-15
The Sower, the Seed and the Soils

See comment on Mark 4:3-20 for more details.

8:5-7. Seed was often sown before the ground was plowed; it thus commonly befell any of the fates reported here. The "road" (NASB) is probably a "path" (NRSV), i.e., a foot path through the field.

8:8. Thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold are tremendously good harvests from Galilean soil.

8:9. Jewish teachers normally used *parables to illustrate and explain points, not to conceal them. But if one told stories without stating the point they were meant to illustrate, as Jesus does here, only those who listen most astutely and start with insiders' knowledge could figure out one's point.

8:10. Greek teachers like *Plato would leave some points obscure to keep them from outsiders; Jewish teachers would sometimes do the same (such as later *rabbis' mystical teachings about creation or God's throne). Thus only those who were serious enough to persevere would understand.

8:11-15. Many of Jesus' hearers would be farmers who could relate well to these agricultural images; although Galilee (which was full of towns) was more urban than much of the empire, the majority of people worked the land. The tenant farmers who made up a large portion of the Roman Empire were also common in rural Galilee. Both Jewish and Greek sources, familiar with agrarian society, often use seeds in illustrations; Jewish sources could apply it to God's word.

8:16-18
Accountability for the Word

8:16. Jesus is a master of the graphic illustrations in which Jewish teachers sought to excel: invisible light is pointless, and God wants people to receive the light of his Word. The lamps Jesus mentions were small clay lamps that had to be set on a stand to shed much light in a room; anything placed over the lamp would have extinguished it.

8:17-18. If the crowds do not obey what light they receive, they will never receive more. Others also observed that those who had something would obtain more.

8:19-21
Jesus' True Family

Thinking of one's coreligionists as brothers and sisters was common; respecting older persons as mothers or fathers was also widespread. But allowing ties with nonkin to take precedence even over family ties could prove offensive culturally (except for *Gentile converts). (One could treat a teacher as a father, and some even allowed according him greater respect, but not in the sort of radical ways taught by Jesus, as in 9:59-60.)

8:22-25
Master of Winds and Sea

Some ancient stories told of powerful individuals able to subdue even the forces of nature, but these were nearly always gods or, less commonly, heroes of the distant past. In Jewish tradition, the one who ruled the winds and sea was God himself (Ps 107:29), though a few pious men were reputed to be able to persuade him to send rain. The surprise of the *disciples at Jesus' power is thus easy to understand.

Storms often rose suddenly on the lake called the Sea of Galilee; these fishermen had usually stayed closer to Capernaum and are unprepared for a squall this far from shore. The only place one could sleep in a small fishing boat with water pouring in from a storm would be on the elevated stern, where one could use the wooden or leather-covered helmsman's seat, or a pillow sometimes kept under that seat, as a cushion to rest one's head.

8:26-39
Subduing the Demonic Legion

See further comment on Mark 5:1-20.

8:26. Matthew's "Gadara" (Mt 8:28), eight miles from the lake, and Gerasa, about thirty miles from the lake, were in the same general region, the area of the Decapolis, a predominantly non-Jewish area. Luke's audience would recognize the area more easily by the better-known Gerasa.

8:27. Jewish people considered tombs unclean and a popular haunt for unclean spirits. Many ancient cultures brought offerings for the dead, which might also be thought to appeal to these *demons.

8:28. In ancient *magic, one could try to gain control over a spirit by naming it. Any such attempt at magical self-protection is powerless against Jesus.

8:29. The strength that this demoniac displays is reported in some cases of spirit possession in various cultures today as well.

8:30-31. A legion had a nominal six thousand (in practice, often five thousand) troops. Although the number might be hyperbolic, this man is clearly hosting a large number of demons. According to Jewish traditions, many demons were imprisoned in the atmosphere, but they could also be imprisoned, as here, under the earth (in the "abyss"). Some sources from this period treat the abyss as a genuine geographic location (**1 Enoch* 18:11-12; 83:4); the *Septuagint applies it to the "depths," perhaps of the waters (Prov 3:20; 8:24).

8:32. Only *Gentiles or nonobservant Jews considered "apostates" raised pigs, which Jewish readers would consider among the most unclean animals and thus better hosts for evil spirits. Ancient exorcists found that demons sometimes asked for concessions if the pressure for them to evacuate their host became too great.

8:33. Some Jewish traditions taught that demons could die, so some ancient hearers might assume that the demons had been destroyed with their hosts. Perhaps more relevantly, in other Jewish traditions demons could be imprisoned in bodies of water; many hearers would thus have thought of them as at least disabled.

8:34-37. The opposition to Jesus arises from both economic causes—the loss of a large herd of swine—and certain Greek conceptions of dangerous wonderworking magicians, whom most people feared.

8:38-39. Perhaps because his *messiahship would be misunderstood, Jesus kept it a secret in predominantly Jewish areas (see the introduction to Mark). In the predominantly non-Jewish Decapolis, however, where people would wrongly perceive him as a magician, Jesus urges his new *disciple to spread the word about what *God* had done, thereby correcting the people's misunderstanding.

8:40-56
Death and the Flow of Blood

See further comment on Mark 5:21-43.

8:40-41. "Rulers of the *synagogue" were usually the chief officials in synagogues (though especially in the *Diaspora this was also often an honorary title for large donors) and were prominent members of their communities.

8:42. The official's daughter had been a minor until that year and on account of both her age and her gender had far less status than her prominent father (vv. 40-41).

8:43. This woman's sickness was reckoned as if she had a menstrual period all month long; it made her continually unclean under the *law (Lev 15:19-33)—a social problem on top of the physical one. In a culture in which adult women who were not wealthy virtually needed to marry, she was almost certainly unmarried at this point (if she had ever been married), since it violated the law for a man to sleep with her in this condition. Just as Jewish interpreters linked texts by a common phrase, Luke's source may use "twelve years" to emphasize the relatedness of these stories (vv. 42-43).

8:44-45. If she touched anyone or anyone's clothes, she rendered that person ceremonially unclean for the rest of the day (cf. Lev 15:26-27). She therefore should not have even been in this heavy crowd. Conservative teachers avoided touching women altogether (other than their wives), lest they become accidentally contaminated. Thus this woman could not touch or be touched, was probably now divorced or had never married, and was marginal to the rest of Jewish society.

8:46-48. Jewish people generally believed that only the sages closest to God had supernatural knowledge. Jesus uses his supernatural knowledge to identify with the woman who had touched him—even though in the eyes of the public this would mean that he had contracted ritual uncleanness. Lest anyone be permitted to think that the healing had been accomplished by typical pagan *magic, operating without Jesus' knowledge, he declares that it happened in response to "faith" (v. 48).

8:49. Many Jewish teachers held that once an event had occurred, it was too late to pray for its reversal. For example, later rabbis claimed that it was too late for one hearing a funeral procession to pray that it was not for a relative.

8:50-56. At least two or three professional mourners (two flute-players and a mourning woman) were required at the funeral of even the poorest person; the funeral for a member of a prominent family like this one would have many mourners. Because bodies decomposed rapidly in Palestine, mourners had to be assembled as quickly as possible, and they had gathered before word even reached Jairus that his daughter had died.

9:1-6
Authorizing the Twelve

9:1-2. Delegating authority was intelligible in antiquity. According to Jewish custom, for example, a sender could authorize messengers to act with his full legal authority to the extent of the commission given them.

9:3. Jesus instructs the *disciples to travel light, like some other groups: (1) peasants, who often had only one cloak (but did not often travel); (2) homeless urban Greek philosophers called *Cynics; (3) most relevantly, some prophets, like Elijah and John the Baptist. They are to be totally committed to their mission, not tied down with worldly concerns. Cynics used the "bag" for begging, presumably here prohibited.

9:4. Jewish travelers depended on hospitality, which fellow Jews customarily extended to them.

9:5-6. "Shaking the dust off" may mean treating these Jewish cities as if they are unclean, pagan cities, no defiling dust of which a particularly pious Jew would want to bring into the Holy Land. A place like the temple was so holy that those entering would (at least in pious theory) not want the dust of the rest of Israel on their feet.

9:7-9
John Returned?

Although a few Jews influenced by *Plato and other sources accepted reincarnation, most Palestinian Jews believed in bodily *resurrection. The idea here, however, is probably like the temporary resuscitations Elijah and Elisha performed in the *Old Testament (1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 4:34-35) rather than the permanent resurrection anticipated at the end of the age (Dan 12:2). Herod the tetrarch was a son of Herod the Great; the latter had been king when Jesus was born.

9:10-17
Mass Feeding

9:10-12. Bethsaida was probably associated with fishing, and was located on the northern shore of the Lake of Galilee; some scholars suggest two sites with this name, but the matter is disputed. In any case, the *narrative seems to suggest that Jesus took the crowds beyond Bethsaida itself. The Galilean countryside was full of villages, but Jesus had withdrawn his followers some distance from the nearest villages. Even most larger towns would have under three thousand inhabitants; feeding the crowd in the villages would have been difficult (9:12). The known Bethsaida was ethnically mixed and not far from the region of the Decapolis. If they were further in largely *Gentile territory, hospitality would be even harder to find.

9:13. It would normally have taken far more than two hundred days of an average person's wages (around seven months of hard labor) to feed the great multitude that had assembled, even if we assumed that only five thousand persons were present.

9:14. The people are organized in ranks like armies. The purpose is to facilitate the distribution of food, but some people in the crowd may have thought that Jesus was organizing them as ranks for a messianic army (cf. Jn 6:15).

9:15. People generally reclined at banquets and sat for regular meals.

9:16. It was customary to begin a meal by giving thanks for the bread and then dividing it. A prayer like the common one attested by the second century, "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who have brought bread from the earth" may have already been common. (Later sources indicate that people also gave thanks less formally after a meal, but it is not clear whether this practice was this early.) People often prayed "looking toward heaven" (1 Kings 8:22, 54; Jn 17:1).

9:17. The multiplication of food is reminiscent of the miracle of God supplying manna for Israel in the wilderness, and especially of Elisha multiplying food (2 Kings 4:42-44, where some was also left over).

9:18-27
The Cost of Following the Real Messiah

9:18-19. Because many Palestinian Jews believed that prophets in the *Old Testament sense had ceased, ranking Jesus among the prophets would have been radical—but it was not radical enough to grasp his true identity.

9:20-21. There were many different views of the *Messiah (or messiahs) in Jesus' time, but they all revolved around a deliverance on earth and an earthly kingdom.

9:22. The *New Testament writers took some Old Testament texts as referring to the Messiah's suffering, but most Jewish people in the first century did not recognize these texts as referring to the Messiah, who was to reign as king. Most Jewish people believed in the *resurrection of all the righteous dead at the end of the age and the inauguration of a *kingdom under God's appointed ruler afterward.

9:23-25. The cross was an instrument of violent and painful execution. To "take the cross" was to carry the horizontal beam (the *patibulum*) of the cross out to the site of execution, usually past a jeering mob. In *rhetorically strong terms, Jesus describes what all true *disciples must be ready for: if they follow him, they must be ready to face literal scorn on the road to eventual martyrdom, for they must follow to the cross. "Come after" was often the language of discipleship, since disciples followed their teachers; here disciples follow to the cross, reminding themselves each day that their lives are forfeit.

9:26. "*Son of Man" here may refer to Daniel 7:13-14. The kingdom for which the disciples are hoping will ultimately come; but it will be preceded by a period of great suffering and wickedness. Many others in Jesus' day taught that great suffering and sin would precede the kingdom; but Peter and his colleagues expected the kingdom to come without suffering (perhaps, as some believed, by a supernatural, costless triumph)—at least for Messiah's followers.

9:27. Most Jewish people prayed daily for the establishment of God's kingdom. The future glory of the preceding verses is anticipated by way of a revelation of the glory they would experience in 9:32-35.

9:28-36
A Taste of Future Glory

God had revealed his glory to Moses on Mount Sinai, and Moses had come down

from the mountain reflecting God's glory (Ex 32–34).

9:28. God revealed his glory to Moses on a mountain (see comment above).

9:29. Jewish literature often described angels and other heavenly beings as being clothed in white. Some suggest that Luke omits Mark's "transfigured" because of the pagan connotations this term could have for his audience (Greek gods and magicians transformed themselves into other forms, though Mark, like Luke, was alluding to Moses, not to magicians).

9:30. Elijah apparently never died (2 Kings 2:11; Mal 4:5; Jewish tradition); Moses was buried by God himself (Deut 34:6), and some (unbiblical) Jewish traditions even claimed that Moses was still alive (cf. comment on Rev 11:6). Both these figures were expected to return in some sense before the time of the end.

9:31. Jesus' departure here is literally his "exodus." Although this term was a natural way to describe death (Wisdom of Solomon 7:6), some suggest that it might also represent a wordplay allusion here to Israel's future salvation, which the prophets and later Jews often viewed as a new exodus.

9:32-33. Peter's suggestion of erecting shelters on the mountain may allude to Israel's tabernacles in the wilderness, by which the Israelites recognized God's presence among them in Moses' day. Israelites annually built tabernacles, or booths, so Peter knew how to build one.

9:34-36. Cf. the cloud of God's presence, especially on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:15-16). In this context, "hear him" might refer to Deuteronomy 18:15, where the Israelites were warned to heed the "prophet like Moses," the new Moses who would come.

9:37-43a
Delivering a Demoniac

9:37-38. An only son was extremely important to a father in this culture, for social, economic (support in old age) and hereditary reasons (including the passing on of one's ancestral line).

9:39. The possessed person's lack of control over his own motor responses parallels examples of spirit possession in many cultures through history and is attested in anthropological studies of spirit possession today. Greek medical texts mention "foam" in connection with epileptic seizures, the symptoms of which are in this case (but not always—Mt 4:24) caused by demonic possession.

9:40-41. *Disciples were expected to learn from their teacher's example. Jesus' response presupposes that he expected his disciples to have enough faith to work miracles as he did. Some ancient Jewish teachers were seen as miracle workers, but not often did they expect their disciples to be able to do miracles also.

9:42-43a. Exorcists normally tried to subdue *demons by incantations, often invoking higher spirits, or by using smelly roots. Jesus here uses only his command, thereby showing his great authority.

9:43b-50
Qualifying Misconceptions of Glory

9:43b-45. The glory on the mountain and Jesus' power over *demons would confirm the disciples' messianic suspicions (9:20), so Jesus needs to reemphasize his definition of the messianic mission in contrast to theirs (see 9:22). Most Jews did not expect the *Messiah's death.

9:46-48. Status was a preeminent concern in ancient society; children had none. But in Jewish custom messengers bore the full authorization of the one they represented (see comment on 9:1-2), so Jesus' agents did not need worldly status. Representatives of someone who had great authority exercised more authority than others who acted on their own.

9:49-50. Ancient exorcists often invoked more powerful spirits to drive out lesser ones. If this exorcist is genuinely effective (contrast Acts 19:15-16), he is probably on their side.

9:51-56
Jerusalem via Samaria

9:51. This is a turning point in the plot movement, as in Acts 19:21. Like modern writers, skilled ancient writers often gave signals of plot movement. "Setting one's face" normally implied resolute determination, such as a prophet would display (cf. Ezek 21:2; in Ezekiel the language normally implies a hostile position, but the idiom need not always imply that).

9:52. Galilean pilgrims to the Passover

feast in Jerusalem often took the short route through Samaria, although some took a longer route around it. But this verse suggests that Jesus sought accommodations there, which would have offended many pious *Pharisees and most Jewish nationalists.

9:53. Even before John Hyrcanus, a Jewish king, had destroyed the *Samaritan temple in the second century B.C., Samaritans and Jews had detested one another's holy sites. The extant version of the Samaritan Pentateuch specifies the proper site of worship as Mount Gerizim. Samaritans later tried to defile the Jerusalem temple (avenging a Jewish king having destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim in the second century B.C.). They were also known to heckle pilgrims to Jerusalem, a practice that occasionally led to violence.

9:54. James and John want to call down fire from heaven as Elijah had done on the altar on Mount Carmel and when two companies of troops came against him (1 Kings 18:38; 2 Kings 1:10, 12). Elijah did this under much severer circumstances than Jesus faces here; all three cases were life-threatening, and his opponents at Carmel had been responsible for the martyrdom of most of his disciples. Jesus uses the model of Elijah elsewhere even in this context (e.g., Lk 9:61-62), but not in this respect.

9:55-56. Ancient audiences (even those that hated Samaritans) did appreciate those who exercised their power with mercy. Ancient Jewish hearers could view Jesus' merciful restraint as pious (1 Sam 11:13; 2 Sam 19:22), even if they hated the Samaritans.

9:57-62
True Discipleship

9:57-58. *Disciples usually sought out their own teachers. Some radical philosophers who eschewed possessions sought to repulse prospective disciples with enormous demands, for the purpose of testing them and acquiring the most worthy. Many Palestinian Jews were poor, but few were homeless; Jesus had mostly given up even home to travel and is completely dependent on the hospitality and support of others.

9:59-60. Family members would not be outside talking with *rabbis during the mourning period, the week immediately following the death. The initial burial took place shortly after a person's decease, and would have already occurred by the time this man would be speaking with Jesus. But a year after the first burial, after the flesh had rotted off the bones, the son would return to rebury the bones in a special box in a slot in the tomb wall. Thus the son here could be asking for as much as a year's delay. Others note that in some Semitic languages, "wait until I bury my father" is a way of asking for delay until one may complete one's filial obligations, even if the father is not yet dead.

Even on these interpretations, however, Jesus' demand is significant; while not highlighting urgency the way that 9:61-62 would, it would still underline the *priority* of following Jesus. One of an eldest son's most important responsibilities was his father's burial. Jesus' demand that the son place Jesus above this responsibility could thus sound subversive: in Jewish tradition, honoring father and mother was one of the greatest commandments, and to follow Jesus in such a radical way would seem to break this commandment. Some sages might demand greater honor than parents in principle, but neglecting a father's burial in practice would make this son a reproach in his village, perhaps for the rest of his life.

9:61-62. One needed to keep one's eyes on the path of the plow to keep its furrow from becoming crooked. The hand-held plow was light and wooden and often had an iron point.

When Elijah found Elisha plowing, he called him to follow but allowed him first to bid farewell to his family (1 Kings 19:19-21). Jesus' call here is more radical than that of a radical prophet.

10:1-16
Authorizing the Seventy(-two)

10:1. If Jesus chose twelve *disciples to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, he may have chosen the number of this larger group to represent the seventy (sometimes seventy-two) nations of Jewish tradition, prefiguring the mission to the *Gentiles. (Some Greek manuscripts here read seventy, others read seventy-two.) Cf. also the seventy prophetically endowed elders of Numbers 11:24-25, plus Eldad and Medad (Num 11:26).

Heralds were generally sent "two by two." The term for "send" might suggest that Luke views them as *apostles similar to the Twelve (see comment on 9:1-2; cf. 1 Cor 15:5-7), though even in Acts Luke usually restricts the noun to the Twelve.

10:2. A *rabbi of the late first to early second century made a statement similar to Jesus' here, referring to training people in the *law; the urgency of harvesting while the fields are ripe was a natural image to first-century farmers.

10:3. Jewish people sometimes viewed themselves (Israel) as sheep among wolves (the Gentiles). The image of a lamb among wolves was proverbial for defenselessness.

10:4. These apostles are to travel light, like some other groups; cf. comment on 9:3. *Essenes reportedly received such hospitality from fellow Essenes in various cities that they did not need to take provisions when they traveled. Greeting no one on the way indicates the urgency of their prophetic mission representing God and not themselves (cf. 1 Kings 13:9-10; 2 Kings 4:29; 9:3); it was offensive to withhold greetings, and pious people tried to be the first to greet an approaching person of higher rank. (Jewish teachers agreed, however, that one should not interrupt religious duties like prayer in order to greet someone.)

10:5-9. Hospitality to travelers was a crucial virtue of Mediterranean antiquity, especially in Judaism. To whom and under what circumstances greetings should be given were important issues of social protocol, because the greeting, "Peace," was a blessing (an implicit prayer to God on the addressee's behalf) meant to communicate peace and well-being, though it was here conditional (cf. Prov 26:2). Jesus cuts through such protocol with new directives.

10:10-11. Pious Jewish people returning to holy ground would not want so much as the dust of pagan territory clinging to their sandals (cf. 10:12).

10:12. Both the biblical prophets and subsequent Jewish tradition set forth Sodom as the epitome of sinfulness (e.g., Is 13:19; Jer 50:40; Zeph 2:9), sometimes applying the image to Israel (e.g., Deut 32:32; Is 1:9; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46; Amos 4:11). The particular sin that Jesus mentions here is probably rejection of God's messengers, albeit lesser ones than Jesus (cf. Gen 19).

10:13. Jewish people thought of Tyre and Sidon as purely pagan cities (cf. 1 Kings 16:31), but those who were exposed to the truth had been known to repent (1 Kings 17:9-24). "Sackcloth and ashes" were characteristic of mourning, which sometimes expressed *repentance.

10:14. According to some Jewish stories about the time of the end ("the day of judgment," as it was often called), the righteous among the nations would testify against the rest of their people, making it clear that no one had any excuse to reject the truth about God.

10:15. Jewish literature often described judgment in terms similar to those Jesus uses here (Is 5:14; **Jubilees* 24:31), especially against a ruler who exalted himself as a deity (e.g., the reference to the Babylonian king's death in Is 14:14-15).

10:16. See comment on 9:48.

10:17-24
The Real Cause for Joy

10:17. Exorcists usually had to employ various incantations to persuade *demons to leave; thus the *disciples are amazed at the immediate efficacy of Jesus' name.

10:18. Although the texts often cited today as describing *Satan's fall (Is 14; Ezek 28) refer contextually only to kings who thought they were gods, much of Jewish tradition believed that angels had fallen (based especially on Gen 6:1-3).

But the context and the imperfect tense of the Greek verb ("I was watching") might suggest that something different is in view here (although it could draw on the same image): the self-proclaimed ruler of this age (Lk 4:6) retreating from his position before Jesus' representatives. (One might compare, e.g., the Jewish tradition that the guardian angel of Egypt fell into the sea when God smote the Egyptians for Israel; the image of falling from heaven is usually not literal, e.g., Lam 2:1; in this context, cf. Lk 10:15.)

10:19. The protection Jesus promises is similar to that which God had sometimes promised in the *Old Testament (cf. Deut 8:15; Ps 91:13; for scorpions as a metaphor for human obstacles to one's call, see Ezek 2:6). Occasionally some associated serpents with Satan, demons or *magic; they provide a

natural metaphor for danger (cf. a real snake in Acts 28:3-4).

10:20. The book containing the name of the righteous in heaven was a common image in Jewish literature (e.g., *Jubilees*; **1 Enoch*), with ample Old Testament precedent (Ex 32:32; Is 4:3; Dan 12:1; Mal 3:16; perhaps Ps 56:8; 139:16; Jer 17:3).

10:21. Jesus' words here could have sounded offensive to people like the *scribes, who had worked hard to study the *law. The theme of God exalting the lowly is, however, common in the Old Testament prophets.

10:22. Jewish texts did speak of unique mediators of revelation (e.g., Moses), but in this period the role here ascribed to the Son as the sole revealer of the Father and as the content of the Father's revelation is held in Jewish texts only by Wisdom, personified as a divine power second only to God.

10:23-24. Some Jewish texts describe how the righteous in the Old Testament longed to see the era of messianic redemption and a fuller revelation of God. Making a statement about someone (here, Jesus) by blessing someone else (here, those who saw him) was an accepted *rhetorical technique of the day.

10:25-37
Loving One's Neighbor

10:25. As this *law-expert would know, students normally sat to listen to teachers, but might stand to ask a question or (normally only for non-students) to issue a challenge. The lawyer's question about inheriting *eternal life was a common Jewish theological question, and legal and other challenges to *rabbis were common in ancient rabbinic debate.

10:26. Teachers often responded to questions with counterquestions. "How do you read?" was a fairly standard rabbinic question.

10:27. The legal expert offers the sort of answers sometimes given by Jewish teachers (and by Jesus; see Mk 12:29-31). Rabbis often linked texts using a common word (here "you shall love" in Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18).

10:28. Some texts in the law promised life for those who kept the law. This "life" meant long life on the land the Lord had given them (Lev 18:5; Deut 4:1, 40; 8:1; 16:20; 30:6, 16-20), but many later Jewish interpreters read it as a promise of eternal life. Jesus applies the principle to eternal life as well (cf. v. 25). "You have answered rightly" serves aptly to drive home a *parable's application in the respondent's own case (**4 Ezra* 4:20; cf. 2 Sam 12:7; 1 Kings 20:40-42).

10:29. Jewish teachers usually used "neighbor" to mean "fellow Israelite." Leviticus 19:18 clearly means "fellow Israelite" in the immediate context, but the less immediate context applies the principle also to any non-Israelite in the land (19:34).

10:30. Jesus' story forces his hearers to identify with a solitary merchant or a *Samaritan, though some might want to side with the priest or Levite. Like most parables, this story has one main point that answers the interlocutor's question; the details are part of the story and are not meant to be allegorized. Jericho was lower in elevation than Jerusalem; hence one would "go down" there. Robbers were common along the steep, seventeen-mile road and would especially attack a person traveling alone. Many people did not have extra clothes, which were thus a valuable item to steal. But though clothes were a valuable commodity, completely stripping him treated him like a corpse on a battlefield. Ancient sources commonly use the expression "half-dead"; one in this condition could appear to be dead (e.g., Callimachus, *Hymn* 6.59; *Livy, *Books from the Foundation of the City* 23.15.8; 40.4.15; *Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 6; Quintus Curtius Rufus, *History of Alexander* 4.8.8).

10:31. Many wealthy priestly families lived in Jericho. Priests were supposed to avoid especially impurity from a corpse; *Pharisees thought one would contract it if even one's shadow touched the corpse. Like the man who had been robbed, the priest was "going down" (v. 31), hence he was heading from Jerusalem and did not have to worry about being unable to perform duties in the temple. But although the rule of mercy would take precedence if the man were clearly alive, the man looked as if he might be dead (v. 30), and the priest did not wish to take the chance on contracting impurity. The task might be better left to a Levite or ordinary Israelite. Jesus' criticism of the priesthood here is milder than that of the *Essenes and often that of the prophets (e.g., Hos 6:9).

10:32. Rules for Levites were not as strict as

for priests, but the Levite also wished to avoid defilement.

10:33. In some later rabbinic parables, an Israelite might perform a pious duty that a priest and Levite had failed to perform, but the third character here would instead shock Jesus' hearers. Jews and Samaritans traditionally had no love for each other; although violence was the exception rather than the rule, the literature of each betrays an attitude of hostility toward the other. Jesus' illustration would strike at the heart of Jewish patriotism, which his contemporaries justified religiously.

10:34. Oil was used medicinally and for washing wounds; wine was also apparently used to disinfect wounds. Jewish people commonly avoided Gentile, and probably Samaritan, oil. A donkey might have seated both men, unless (as is very possible for a donkey-owner) the Samaritan was a merchant with many wares. The Samaritan instead leads the donkey, taking the inferior (even servile) position to help the Israelite. The possible allusion to 2 Chron 28:15 and its context would remind Jesus' most biblically literate hearers of a common bond uniting two different kingdoms in the land.

10:35. "I will repay" was a standard formula guaranteeing a debt. Because inns were known for immorality and innkeepers often mistrusted, his promise to pay more offered the innkeeper further incentive to tend to the wounded man.

10:36-37. Although the legal expert is reluctant to simply confess, "the Samaritan," Jesus has forced him to answer his own question offered in 10:29.

10:38-42
The Woman Disciple

This passage challenges the role designations for women in the first century; the role of *disciple and future agent of Jesus' message is more critical than that of homemaker and hostess, valuable as the latter may remain.

10:38. Being one of Jesus' hostesses would be a lot of work for Martha; he had brought many disciples to feed. Martha's act may fall short of Mary's in this *narrative, but her labor represents the best display of devotion she knows how to offer. Homemaking and hosting skills assigned to women in her culture gave her a way to serve Jesus.

10:39. People normally sat on chairs or, at banquets, reclined on couches; but disciples sat at the feet of their teachers (see Luke's other use of the expression in Acts 22:3). Women could listen to Torah teaching in *synagogues and occasionally one might listen to a rabbi's lectures, but they were not disciples sitting in the dust at sages' feet. Mary's posture and eagerness to absorb Jesus' teaching at the expense of a more traditional womanly role (10:40) would have shocked most Jewish men. The most advanced level of disciples included training to become rabbis; we know of no women who filled this role in antiquity. (The case closest to a known exception was a learned rabbi's daughter who had married another learned rabbi in the second century; but most rabbis rejected her opinions outside of domestic law.)

10:40-42. Despite the cultural importance of hospitality (the food preparation for guests was normally incumbent on the matron of the house), Mary's role as a disciple of Jesus is more important than anything else she could do.

11:1-13
Jesus on Prayer

11:1. *Disciples commonly asked their teachers for instruction, and in later times, when prayers became more standardized, some were known to have asked the proper blessings or prayers for different occasions. Yet it was considered rude and impious to interrupt someone's praying (one dare not even interrupt one's own; cf., e.g., Mishnah *Avot* 3:7; Tosefta *Berakhot* 3:20); thus here the disciples wait till Jesus finishes his own prayers before they ask. Different teachers might teach special forms of prayers to their own groups of disciples, although most of Palestinian Jews had some prayers in common, except for radical sectarians like the *Essenes.

11:2. Jewish people commonly addressed God as "Our heavenly Father" when they prayed, although such intimate titles as "Abba" (Papa) were rare (see comment on Mk 14:36). One standard Jewish prayer of the day proclaimed, "Exalted and hallowed be your . . . name . . . and may your kingdom come speedily and soon."

God's name would be "hallowed," or "sanctified," "shown holy," in the time of the end,

when his *kingdom would come. This idea was biblical (Is 5:16; 29:23; Ezek 36:23; 38:23; 39:7, 27; cf. Zech 14:9). In the present God's people could hallow his name by living rightly; if they lived wrongly, Jewish teachers observed, they would "profane" his name, or bring it into disrepute among the nations (cf. Jer 34:16; Ezek 13:19; 20:14; Amos 2:7).

11:3. This petition alludes to God's provision of "daily bread" (manna) for his people after he first redeemed them (Ex 16:4). Prayers for God to supply basic needs—of which bread and water were seen as the ultimate examples—were common (cf. Prov 30:8).

11:4. Jewish people regarded sins as "debts" before God; the same *Aramaic word could be used for both. Jewish *law at least in theory required the periodic forgiveness of monetary debtors (in the seventh and fiftieth years), so the illustration of forgiving debts makes good sense. Parallels with ancient Jewish prayers suggest that "Lead us not into testing" means "Let us not sin when we are tested"—rather than "Let us not be tested" (cf. 22:46 in context).

11:5-6. Hospitality was a crucial obligation; the host must feed the traveler who has graced his or her home by coming to spend the night. Although many homes would have used up their day's bread by nightfall, in a small village people would know who still had bread left over. In modern villages of that region, bread might last for several days, but one must serve a guest a fresh, unbroken loaf as an act of hospitality.

11:7. The children would often sleep on mats on the floor of the usual one-room dwelling. People who could afford them had beds (one of the most basic pieces of furniture), and those with more resources might even have canopies to protect from insects such as mosquitoes; but even most of those who had beds may have filled them with multiple persons. The door being closed might allude to it being bolted; unbolting the heavy bar that was often laid through rings attached to the door was a bother and would make noise that would awaken them. In real life, however, it should have been unthinkable for the man inside to refuse the request that affected the village's reputation.

11:8. The continual pounding would awaken the children anyway; unbolting the door would thus no longer pose much problem. The word translated "importunity" (KJV) or "persistence" (NASB, NRSV) means "shamelessness" (sometimes like the insistence of some "holy men" in prayer in Jewish tradition;). This term refers either to the boldness of the knocker, lest he be shamed by having nothing to give his guest, or perhaps the shame of the father inside, because the whole village would be humiliated by a bad report about their hospitality.

11:9-10. In the context of the *parable, these verses mean that the knocker receives either (see 11:8) because of boldness or because the honor of God is inseparably connected with the honor of his servant, the knocker.

11:11-12. Fish was a basic staple around the Lake of Galilee.

11:13. This is a standard Jewish "how much more" (*qal vahomer*) argument. Most people believed that the *Holy Spirit (1) had departed, (2) was available only to several of the holiest people, or (3) belonged to a special end-time community (*Dead Sea Scrolls). Thus the promise of verse 13 would have surprised the hearers; given common beliefs about the Spirit in ancient Judaism (based on the *Old Testament) often emphasized in Luke-Acts, this was essentially a promise that God would make them like prophets, anointed spokespersons for God.

11:14-26
Who Is Satan's Real Vassal?

11:14-16. Ancient exorcists typically sought to remove *demons by fumigation or magical incantations. Rabbis in the second century still accused Jesus and Jewish Christians of using sorcery to achieve the miracles they were performing. "Beelzebul" is related to the name of the pagan god called "Baal-zebub" in 2 Kings 1:2; used as an equivalent to "Belial" (2 Cor 6:15), it was a common Jewish name for the devil in the **Testament of Solomon*. (The pre-Christian work **Jubilees* called him Beliar or Mastema; the *Dead Sea Scrolls, Belial; later *rabbis often called him Sammael; by whatever name, ancient Jews understood who the prince of demons was.)

11:17-18. Jesus does not deny the existence of other exorcists here, but he need not be validating most of them either: a demon's retreat to draw attention to another of *Satan's

servants would be only a strategic retreat. Their exorcisms contrast with the wholesale exorcising of the masses that Jesus undertakes, which clearly signifies a defeat of Satan (11:20).

11:19. "Your sons" means "members of your own group" (just as, e.g., "sons of the prophets" meant "prophets"); because some of their associates also cast out demons (by methods that would look more magical than Jesus'), they should consider their charge carefully. They achieved limited success for a few individuals, not the massive results Jesus was achieving.

11:20. God's "finger" represented his power. Although the phrase occurs elsewhere, Jesus alludes especially to Exodus 8:19, where Pharaoh's magicians, attempting to imitate Moses' miracles, are forced to admit that the true God is working through Moses but not through them.

11:21-23. Many early Jewish sources report that Satan or demons were "bound," or imprisoned, somewhere after God subdued them. Less relevant to this context, ancient magical texts also speak of "binding" demons by magical procedures. The parable here about tying up a protective and armed householder means that Jesus had defeated Satan and could therefore plunder his possessions—free the demon-possessed.

11:24-26. Here Jesus returns the charge: they, not he, are servants of Satan; he casts demons out, but they invite them back in even greater numbers. Skillful lawyers and *rhetoricians delighted in subverting an opponent's charge by showing that the opponent himself was guilty and thus unqualified to bring the accusation.

11:27-36
The Genuinely Blessed

11:27-28. It was customary to praise the child by blessing the mother; this figure of speech occurs in Greco-Roman literature (e.g., the first-century Roman satirist *Petronius), rabbinic texts (e.g., sayings attributed to Johanan ben Zakkai) and elsewhere (e.g., *2 *Baruch* 54:10).

11:29-30. Jonah's preaching was a simple message of judgment, but that was all that Nineveh required in his generation.

11:31-32. Jewish discussions of the end times included converts from among the poor who would testify against those who said they were too poor to follow God; and similarly converts among the rich, converts among the *Gentiles and so on. Thus no one could say, "My group had no opportunity to repent." Here Jesus appeals to pagans who converted. Ancient Sheba was probably in south Arabia and/or the horn of Africa. Jewish people in this period probably thought of the "Queen of the South," the queen of Sheba, as the queen of "Ethiopia" (the Greek title for Africa south of Egypt), which was considered the southernmost part of the world (cf. Acts 8:27). *Josephus thought that she ruled Egypt and Ethiopia (*Jewish Antiquities* 8.159, 165, 175).

11:33. Most Palestinian homes did not have "cellars," but Luke is relating the image to his audience; many Greek homes did have them (cf. 6:48). Sizeable Greek houses often placed the lamp in the vestibule, and many Palestinian homes had only one room; whichever architectural style is in view, "those who enter in" would immediately see the lamp.

11:34-36. Jesus speaks literally of a "single" eye versus a "bad" or "evil" one. A "single" eye normally meant a generous one. A "bad" eye in that culture could mean either a diseased one or a stingy one. Many people believed that light was emitted from the eye, enabling one to see, rather than that light was admitted through the eye; here it seems to be admitted through the eye.

11:37-54
Denouncing Religious Colleagues

As in 7:36-50, a dinner becomes the occasion for moral instruction (this practice was so common in antiquity that it became a frequent setting in a type of philosophical literature called a *symposium*). Even more than in 7:36-50, it also becomes the occasion for confrontation.

11:37. The *Pharisee's behavior would have appeared honorable; see comment on 7:36. Prominent teachers would be invited to lecture at such meals, discoursing on wise topics with others who also liked to show off their education.

11:38. Pharisees were particularly scrupulous about washing their hands, a tradition common in the *Diaspora but not practiced in the *Old Testament.

11:39-40. Ritual purity was important to the Pharisees, so they washed their vessels as well as themselves in ritual baths. The school of *Shammai—the Pharisaic majority in this period—said that the outside of a cup could be clean even if the inside were not; the minority view, held by *Hillel's followers, was that the inside of the cup must be cleansed first. Jesus sides with the school of Hillel on this point, but does so to make a figurative statement about the inside of the person, the heart.

11:41. The *Aramaic word for "cleanse" (Mt 23:26) is similar to that for "give in charity"; it is possible that Luke adopts one nuance of an Aramaic wordplay by Jesus, while Matthew adopts another.

11:42. Tithes were used especially to support the priests and Levites. "Rue" and Matthew's "dill" (23:23) are similar words in Aramaic, possibly reflecting an original Aramaic source here. The written *law did not explicitly require tithing these dry, green, garden herbs; the question among the Pharisees was whether they counted as foodstuffs and hence were subject to tithing. Jesus may thus address a hyperbolic, superscrupulous Pharisee.

11:43. Pharisees were considered quite meticulous in their observance of the law, people were seated by social rank in public places, including *synagogues, and those regarded as superior in their knowledge of the law were hailed especially respectfully in the marketplaces. Custom dictated the character of greetings, so that people of higher status were greeted first.

11:44. Nothing spread ritual impurity as severely as a corpse; Pharisees believed that one contracted impurity if even one's shadow touched a corpse or grave. Inconspicuous tombs (or limestone ossuaries) would be whitewashed each spring to warn passersby to avoid them and so to avoid impurity, but the Pharisees lack this telltale warning sign. They look religious on the outside but spread impurity.

11:45. Luke is more concerned to distinguish Pharisees from professional legal experts than Matthew is (cf. Mt 23:13-29). Although some Pharisees worked as legal experts and some legal experts were Pharisees, these groups were not identical.

11:46-47. Ancient Judaism emphasized more often than the Old Testament had that Israel had martyred its prophets; the Jewish community in this period built tombs as monuments for the prophets and the righteous (including some Old Testament servants of God who were not martyred, like David or Huldah).

11:48. The point of Jesus' saying here is "like father, like son"; speakers sometimes linked those they accused with the misdeeds of their ancestors, pointing out that this was what one expected. Corporate sin and guilt continued among the descendants of the wicked unless they repented (Ex 20:5; Deut 23:2-6; 1 Sam 15:2-3; 2 Sam 21:1; Is 1:4; etc.).

11:49-51. Jewish sources often personify God's wisdom. Many Jewish people believed that fully anointed prophets had ceased at the end of the Old Testament period and would be restored only in the end time. Bloodguilt was a serious matter, affecting the whole community and not just the individuals directly responsible (Deut 21:1-9). God would avenge it (Deut 32:43; Ps 79:10). The *rabbis considered the place between the porch and altar the holiest place on earth after the holy of holies and the priestly sanctuary.

The Hebrew Bible filled multiple scrolls, but ancients generally thought of their arrangement differently than in our English Bibles today. Thus Zechariah could be the last martyr (2 Chron 24:20-22), while (as in our Bibles) Abel was the first (Gen 4:8). Jewish tradition expanded the accounts of both martyrdoms, declaring that after Zechariah's death a fountain of blood appeared in the temple that even the slaughter of thousands of priests could not appease. Zechariah prayed for vengeance (2 Chron 24:22), and Abel's blood cried out from the ground (Gen 4:10); to say that their vengeance would be requited on Jesus' generation was thus to promise unimaginable horrors. This judgment is because his generation would climax the terrible sins of their spiritual ancestors.

11:52-54. Experts in the law supposedly increased knowledge of the law; for Jesus to charge that their detailed expositions of it instead rendered its plain meaning inaccessible was a serious accusation.

12:1-12
Sound Speech and the Day of Judgment

Some Jewish sages focused on the end time. Jesus warns his hearers to evaluate all their values and priorities in view of the day of judgment: their words, their lives and (in 12:13-34) their possessions. Although the world's hostility appears somewhat less pronounced in Luke (who, like the Jewish authors *Philo and *Josephus, wants his faith to make sense to the broader culture) than in Mark (who, like many *apocalyptic writers, experienced only opposition from the world), Luke reports Jesus' warnings no less plainly than other writers: following Jesus is costly. The costs of not following, however, are eternal.

12:1. From natural acoustic settings (e.g., coves or hills) a powerful speaker could address a vast crowd. A crowd of "many thousands" was rare; had the Romans known of such large crowds in the wilderness, they might have detained Jesus. They did not trust large gatherings of people who met without their sanction and whose potentially revolutionary *rhetoric they could not monitor. (The theater in the Galilean city Sepphoris seated four to five thousand people, but because it was not in the countryside, any anti-Roman rhetoric would have been more quickly an issue.) The odds of Roman interference at this point are small, however; they did not patrol the Galilean countryside, and their highest officers are as yet unaware of Jesus (23:2).

12:2-3. The flat housetops would have provided the most conspicuous forum for shouting news to neighbors; they were in the open, as opposed to the inner rooms. The darkness of night was considered the easiest time to pass along secrets (or do antisocial activities that would not be known). In this context, 12:2-3 may either warn that one's confession or denial of *Christ will be reported by deceptive betrayers (12:1, 4-5) or that it will be reported at the judgment (12:4-10). The day of judgment would bring all deeds to light (cf., e.g., Is 29:15); the wicked would be ashamed and the righteous vindicated (e.g., Is 45:16-17).

12:4-5. All Jewish hearers would understand "the one who has authority to cast into hell" as God, the judge, whose power the wise are respectfully to "fear" (e.g., Prov 1:7).

12:6-7. Sparrows were one of the cheapest items sold for poor people's food in the marketplace and were the cheapest of all birds. According to Matthew 10:29, one could purchase two sparrows for an *assarion,* a small copper coin of little value; here it appears that they are even cheaper if purchased in larger quantities. This is a standard Jewish "how much more" argument: If God cares for something as cheap as sparrows, how much more does he care for humans? The hairs of one's head being numbered was an *Old Testament way of saying that nothing could happen to a person without God allowing it (cf. 1 Sam 14:45; 2 Sam 14:11; 1 Kings 1:52).

12:8-9. Jesus is presented as both intercessor (defense attorney) and prosecutor before the heavenly court, a familiar Jewish image. In many Jewish accounts, the heavenly court consisted of angels; the angels would certainly be gathered for the day of judgment. God would pass final judgment, but the text implies that Jesus never loses a case before him.

12:10. When Jesus says people "will be forgiven," he means that God will forgive them (Jewish people sometimes used passive constructions to avoid use of God's name). See comment on Mark 3:23-30. In this context, blasphemy against the Spirit might apply to a denial of Jesus (in the face of danger) of which the denier (unlike Peter) never repents.

12:11. Synagogues functioned as meeting places for Jewish local courts; transgressors were sometimes beaten there. Punishments meted out by Roman authorities were normally even harsher than Jewish punishments.

12:12. The Jewish people viewed the *Holy Spirit especially as the Spirit of prophetic inspiration and empowerment; thus when brought before the authorities (12:11) believers would be empowered to speak God's message as plainly as did the Old Testament prophets. (Inspiration does not, of course, imply lack of general preparation or discipline in the subject about which one speaks; *disciples memorized the sayings of their teachers in both Jewish and Greek culture, and Jesus' disciples would know his teaching as well as being inspired by the Spirit.)

12:13-21
Materialism and Hell

12:13. People often called upon *rabbis to settle legal disputes. Inheritance disputes were extremely prominent in *Gentile courts, where wills would determine inheritance. Jewish *law should have been less complicated: the eldest son was supposed to receive double what any of the other sons would receive (Deut 21:17). The proportion of inheritance in a Jewish setting was thus fixed (though particular items may be in dispute), and the plaintiff in this case has every legal right to receive his share of the inheritance.

12:14-15. Jesus' answer would strike first-century hearers forcefully: the issue is not whether the plaintiff is legally in the right (probably clear; cf. 12:13); the issue is that life, not possessions, is what matters. Even most peasants owned some property (a dwelling), so Jesus' words strike at the very heart of human desire. Only a few Greek philosophers (e.g., *Epictetus) uttered words about possessions that sounded as countercultural as Jesus' here.

12:16-18. Archaeologists have found large grain silos on farms owned by wealthy absentee landowners, such as at Sepphoris, one of the largest and most *Hellenized Jewish cities in Galilee. The image in the *parable here is that of a wealthy landowner, part of the extremely small leisured class (generally estimated at less than one percent), who need not labor in his own fields. Although many peasants may have taken pride in their labor and few could ever change their social status, the lifestyles of the rich and famous provided natural models for popular envy.

12:19. The *Epicurean-like complacency of the man who would "eat, drink and be merry" probably refers to the analogous folly of well-to-do Jews in Isaiah 22:13-14. It was the best that mortal life itself could offer a person (Eccles 2:24; 3:12; 5:18-19), but one needed also to consider God's demands (11:7-12:14). Many other Jewish texts also criticize the self-sufficient person who thinks that he or she has it all and does not reckon with death (e.g., Sirach 11:18-19; Syriac Menander's *Sentences* 368-76; *Pseudo-Phocylides 109-10; **1 Enoch* 97:8-10).

12:20. The idea of leaving the fruit of one's labors to others more worthy appears in the *Old Testament wisdom tradition (e.g., Prov 13:22; Eccles 2:18); the fear of leaving it to someone who would squander it is also common in ancient literature; the image of life being loaned to a person and required back at death would have likewise been familiar (Wisdom of Solomon 15:8).

12:21. Jesus does not state that the sin is how the man gained his income but simply that he hoarded it rather than giving generously; the same emphasis appears in Proverbs.

12:22-34
The Unimportance of Possessions

12:22-23. Jesus reasons back to basics: one's basic needs relate to survival. Some philosophers taught that people should seek only these basic needs, although most philosophers felt that people could acquire possessions as long as they did not go out of their way to seek them. The *Cynics, however, owned nothing; and among Palestinian Jews, the *Essenes shared all their possessions communally. Jesus nowhere prohibits possessions, but he teaches priorities that challenge his followers' lifestyles; whereas people and their needs matter, possessions beyond one's needs are worthless.

12:24-28. Jewish (and Greek) wisdom teachers often illustrated their points from nature. Solomon's splendor, during what was undoubtedly the wealthiest period materially in Israel's history, was impressive by all human standards (1 Kings 10:5). A cubit is a measure of length; if Jesus applies it to longevity, as some think, such clever wording was sometimes used to hold people's attention.

12:29-30. A Jewish hearer would not wish to be worse than the "nations," the godless *Gentiles. The Jewish people believed that God was their (not the Gentiles') father.

12:31-32. Here Jesus may use a Jewish "how much more" argument (if God gives you the *kingdom, how much more will he also supply all other needs).

12:33-34. One should invest in *eternal life rather than in possessions; see comment on Matthew 6:19-21.

12:35-40
Ready for His Coming

In context (12:22-34), this passage suggests that only those who travel lightly will be prepared.

Although most of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries longed and prayed for the time of future redemption, on average they also seem to have been more preoccupied with daily needs than with extraordinary preparation for the future judgment (exceptions were the *Essenes, *apocalyptic visionaries and followers of messianic figures and revolutionaries).

12:35. Like military watchmen or others who stay prepared when others sleep, Jesus' followers must be dressed and ready for action (Ex 12:11). Keeping lamps lit would literally mean having a ready supply of oil and staying awake so they could draw on this supply; this is a figure for preparedness (cf. Mt 25:3-10). Keeping loins girded (so the Greek here) means keeping ready for action (cf. Ex 12:11; 2 Kings 4:29; 9:1), since one could not easily run with the folds of one's long robe impeding.

12:36. Well-to-do householders often had a special slave or slaves in charge of keeping the door; these slave-porters would keep unwanted persons out but admit members of the household. If Jewish banquets resembled Greek and Roman banquets, the feasting itself could last well into the night. Although he might not remain for the full seven days of the feast, it would be unusual for a well-to-do householder to return from a distant banquet (as opposed to one in the same city) in the night. Robbers made night travel more dangerous, though the danger was reduced by a large entourage. (In large urban areas, travel alone at night was dangerous even within one's city, although that might not be relevant to Jesus' primary audience here.)

12:37. Although a few philosophers argued that slaves were the moral equals of their masters, and one well-to-do Roman is known to have eaten on the same level as his freed slaves, masters' serving slaves was unheard of. (The exception among Romans for the festival of Saturnalia was a deliberate inversion of normal reality.) Such an image would offend the well-to-do but would be a powerful symbol of how Jesus would treat those who remained faithful to the end.

12:38. Here the passage follows a Jewish division of night into three watches; contrast the division for Roman guard duty in Mark 13:35.

12:39. The term translated "broken into" can mean literally "dug through"; walls were often built of dried mud and thus one could dig through them, although it would be quicker to simply break in the door. More well-to-do homes could use stone instead. Israelite *law considered thieves breaking in at night the most dangerous.

12:40. Many Jewish thinkers viewed the time of the *Messiah's coming as in God's hands alone (though some believed that Israel's *repentance could hasten it).

12:41-48
For Ministers Too

Leaders in the *church must recognize that they are appointed only to serve their fellow servants, the rest of the church.

12:41. *Disciples often sought clarification from their teachers by asking questions.

12:42. Many well-to-do householders had a hired person or slave called a "steward," a sort of business manager who managed the estate. Such a high-level slave (as is in view here; 12:43) could be in charge of rations to the other servants.

12:43-44. Upward mobility existed among household servants; indeed, many such servants outranked free peasants in terms of real power or status, and even earned more money (which they could later use to buy their freedom). (In the most powerful households in the empire, the highest-level slaves and *freedpersons sometimes wielded more power than most aristocrats, though such power is not in direct view here.)

12:45. High-status slaves often wielded more power than did most free persons; nevertheless, slaveholders would be enraged by abuses. Absentee landowners and householders were not infrequent, especially if they owned other estates at a great distance. In other stories of the period, absentee kings, landowners or husbands posed temptations to those remaining behind. Drunkenness was despised, even more when slaves became drunk at the master's expense. A slave who abused the other slaves was viewed as mistreating his master's property (see comment on 12:47-48); in some cases, slaves were also objects of a master's personal concern.

12:46. The *Gentile punishment of "cutting in pieces" is attested elsewhere, especially in an earlier period; Luke's hearers, who would view

themselves as more civilized, would no doubt find this detail horrifying. Taken literally, the subsequent banishment with unbelievers could mean that he was deprived of decent burial (reserved for the worst crimes; see comment on Rev 11:8; sometimes the pieces of dismembered corpses were also scattered for further punishment). In the *parable, however, it especially points to the Jewish doctrine of hell (Gehinnom; see "*Gehenna" in the glossary) for idolaters and other transgressors.

12:47-48. Some ancient laws treated slaves as persons; other laws treated them as property. Although masters were allowed to beat slaves (as they also generally beat their children), it was in their economic interests not to do so often or severely. A major flogging (12:47), execution and disfigurement of the corpse (12:46) reflect the severity of the crime; a master legally had the power of life and death over his slaves. Floggings often preceded executions in general. The parable indicates that greater knowledge brings greater responsibility (see Lev 26:18; Amos 3:1-2).

12:49-53
Bringer of Division

Jesus' ethics and mission differ so radically from those of the world that division is inevitable.

12:49. The fire probably refers to the impending end-time judgment. Fire in the Old Testament could symbolize the end-time judgment and purging; cf. comment on 3:16.

12:50. Jesus' impending "*baptism" may refer to undergoing the baptism of fire (12:49; judgment—3:16; cf. also comment on Mk 10:38).

12:51-53. Given the great emphasis on family harmony in Judaism, Jesus' words here would strike the hearers strongly (cf. Mic 7:6). Extended family lived in the same household more frequently than today, although not everyone would have had in-laws present.

12:54-59
Signs of the Times

12:54. In Palestine, a cloud from the west would be coming from the Mediterranean Sea and thus would be full of rain.

12:55. In much of the Mediterranean world, a wind from the south would bring hot air from the Sahara Desert. In Palestine, it came especially from the Arabian desert to the southeast, but the immediate south of Judea was also hot desert.

12:56-57. Such weather predictors (12:54-55) were obvious; Jesus says that the truth of his message is equally obvious. Speakers sometimes *rhetorically challenged their hearers to decide the matter (12:57).

12:58-59. Here Jesus refers to the ancient practice of debt imprisonment (cf. debt slavery in the *Old Testament, e.g., Lev 25:39-41; Amos 2:6). In debt imprisonment, one without access to means would have to depend on friends to come up with the needed funds; one would not be released unless they did so. The term for "officer" here can apply to a constable overseeing a debtors' prison. (This may be a contextualization for Greek readers of a more general term as in Mt 5:25.)

13:1-9
Repent or Perish

13:1-5. As in many cultures today, so in much ancient Jewish thought, when something bad happened to someone, people wondered what the person had done wrong. Stories of atrocities traveled quickly, and often grew as they spread. *Pilate's cruelty here fits the sort of conflicts he had with the Jewish community; his known brutality (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.60-62); the presence of Galilean pilgrims at the holy days celebrated in Jerusalem; and the governor's practice of coming to feasts to maintain order. The "tower in Siloam" may have been on Jerusalem's city wall above the pool of Siloam; some suggest that it may have been associated with Pilate's construction of an improved water-supply system for the city. The feast may have been Passover, when nonpriests offered their animals.

13:6. *Parables often includes stories about plants and animals (though only relatively rarely in Jewish parables did they speak, as in many Greek fables). Palestinian vineyards often contained fruit trees in addition to vines.

13:7. That some fig trees did not bear fruit in a given year did not mean that they would never do so (cf. comment on Mk 11:12-14), and fig trees do not always bear fruit even within their first four or five years. In this parable the vineyard worker asks the master to wait till the fourth year to make sure it was a worthless tree

(cf. Is 65:8). According to rabbinic interpretation of Leviticus 19:23, fruit from newly planted trees was forbidden for three years (though the Jewish tradition may have applied more strictly to olives than to figs). In later Jewish teaching, God examined Israel's sins once a year to decide their future for the coming year; but it is not clear if Jesus alludes to such an idea here. The space it takes up could be used for vines.

13:8. The vineyard worker answers to the owner, perhaps as his servant, yet intercedes on behalf of the fig tree. Digging around a tree and putting manure around it to fertilize it were common procedures, but fig trees usually did not need manure; the worker does all he can to try to save the tree. Jewish teachers debated whether Israel's *repentance could change the set time of the end, but they agreed that God could suspend his judgment if he saw repentance.

13:10-17
Healing on the Sabbath

13:10. Visiting teachers were commonly asked to speak in *synagogues on the sabbath.

13:11-12. Ancient medical writers used words like "loose" to describe the removal of curvature of the spine and related ailments. The term was also used of freeing people from a *demon's grip.

13:13-14. The synagogue leader's argument sounds logical: work is forbidden on the sabbath, but that still leaves six days a week for healings. The problem with the argument is that biblical sabbath *laws did not restrict *God's* activity, and the only physical work Jesus performs on this sick woman is to lay his hands on her (though some *Pharisees considered this work). Even Pharisaic rules officially forbade only healing by a physician; they debated the propriety of prayer for the sick on the sabbath. But we do not know if Pharisees were present on this occasion anyway; most of the estimated six thousand seem to have lived in Judea.

13:15-16. Here again Jesus uses the common Jewish "how much more" (*qal vahomer*) argument: if one could release an animal from a bond for its own good on the sabbath (one of the few kinds of tying and loosing permitted then), how much more could one release a "daughter of Abraham" (i.e., an Israelite) from her satanic bonds?

13:17. Arguments by analogy were accepted in Jewish legal debate; Jesus has skillfully outmaneuvered his opponents. Both Greek and later rabbinic controversy *narratives typically culminated in the wise protagonist's response that silenced his opponents, so Jesus' triumph would be obvious to Luke's readers.

13:18-30
The Nature of the Kingdom

13:18. "To what shall we compare?" was a common rabbinic way to introduce a *parable to illustrate a point.

13:19. Everyone regarded the mustard seed as very small; indeed, something smaller would be hard to see easily. It nevertheless yielded a shrub the size of a small tree (around the Sea of Galilee, it can reach a height of eight to ten feet, though rarely more than five, if interpreters have the correct plant in view), with room for small birds to perch in it (borrowing the language of Daniel 4:12, the splendor of a mortal ruler's kingdom). According to second-century Palestinian teachers the mustard seed was not sown in gardens (cf. Mt 13:31); but outside Palestine (where Luke's hearers lived) it could be.

13:20-21. Leaven, or yeast, would be mixed with flour throughout the dough. The point of both parables (13:18-21) is that the mighty *kingdom everyone expects could issue from apparently obscure beginnings—like Jesus and the *disciples.

13:22-24. The image of "the two ways" was common in Jewish (and other ancient) literature; some texts also stressed that the majority of people would follow the way to destruction (see, from the late first or early second century, **4 Ezra* 7:3-16, 60-61; 8:1-3). Other Jewish groups besides Christians, like the *Essenes, also believed that they were the only saved group. But many mainstream Jews apparently believed that nearly all Israel would be saved in the time to come (cf. Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 10:1).

13:25. It was an essential social rule to greet by name or title those persons one knew. To deny knowledge of where they were from would be to deny knowing them and was a form of repudiation.

13:26-27. Table fellowship created a social bond; hospitality bound its recipient to friendship (cf. comment on 14:1). In this parable the fugitives from destruction try to remind the owner of the house who they are, but he reiterates that he does not know them, and therefore they will not enter his house. The final line is Psalm 6:8 (cf. 119:115; 139:19), where the workers of iniquity are the psalmist's own persecutors, against whom the Lord takes vengeance to vindicate the psalmist.

13:28. Most Jewish people assumed that God had prepared the kingdom for Israel; they expected to participate in it with the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and the prophets (see on 13:22-24).

13:29-30. Here Jesus could refer to the gathering of the Jews dispersed outside Palestine, but in the context of Luke-Acts (and the parallel in Mt 8:11-12) the point is much more shocking: *Gentiles will participate in the kingdom, reclining (the posture used for feasts) at the messianic banquet, from which many of the people who expected to be there would be excluded. The four directions were used together to mean "everywhere."

13:31-35
Lament of the Rejected Lover

13:31. Herod Antipas had considerably more authority in Galilee than the priestly aristocracy did in Jerusalem; he had executed John and could do the same with Jesus. If, however, Jesus leaves Antipas's jurisdiction (as the well-meaning *Pharisees here warn him to do), he will be safe.

13:32. Calling someone a "fox" in antiquity would not necessarily imply that the person is sly (although that was one possibility); instead, it could portray the person as worthless, slanderous, treacherous or (quite often) cunning, but often in an unprincipled manner. Thus Jesus here does not offer Herod a backhanded compliment (cf. Ezek 13:4). Moreover, foxes were predators and scavengers (Neh 4:3; Song 2:15; Lam 5:18), hence could prey on hens (Lk 13:34) when they had the opportunity. Ancient stories feature their cunning and their activity as predators more than any strength; though ancient stories regularly portray them as predators, they sometimes emphasize that they (and even wolves) are inferior in power to lions, the most powerful predators.

13:33. In the *Old Testament some prophets were martyred, and Jewish tradition applied this fate to many other prophets as well. Jesus plays on this tradition; in several days he will enter the city that had murdered the most prophets (i.e., he is leaving Antipas's jurisdiction but will die soon, with or without Herod's help). That Jerusalem was prophets' only place of martyrdom was hyperbolic, but it was naturally the center of persecution in ancient Judah. Putting it so starkly, however, would shock many Jewish listeners, because most Jews except the Essenes considered Jerusalem the center of Jewish piety.

13:34. Jewish tradition claimed that Jewish people were under God's wings, and when a Jewish person converted a Gentile, he or she "brought the Gentile under the wings of God's presence." The Old Testament also portrays God as an eagle hovering over its offspring (Deut 32:11; cf. Ex 19:4) and protecting Israel under his wings (Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4), and similarly terrifying Israel's foes (Jer 49:22). This is but one image of God's love for his people. Jesus here applies this divine role and image to himself.

13:35. The desolation of the "house" probably refers to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 (cf. Lk 21). The quotation is from Psalm 118:26, which was sung during this season at the Passover and which the crowds will sing to Jesus at his entry into Jerusalem (19:38).

14:1-6
Healing on the Sabbath

14:1. Eating bread together was supposed to be an occasion for intimate fellowship; treachery or less than friendly motives among those sharing a meal would repulse ancient readers. This feeling would be magnified at a sabbath meal, to which many Jewish people considered it particularly virtuous to invite a prominent teacher.

14:2. Dropsy (edema) causes the body to swell from excess fluids, as ancient medical texts commonly mention. Because the man with dropsy here is in front of Jesus and not on the room's periphery, he might be an invited guest.

14:3-6. Jewish legal experts debated proper sabbath *laws among themselves; if one side

was silenced and unable to reply, they would be presumed wrong or at best too ignorant of the law to defend their position. *Essenes did not permit rescuing an animal on the sabbath, but *Pharisees did. Jesus argues by analogy with a principle on which his opponents agreed, and extrapolates by a "how much more" argument; cf. 13:15-16.

14:7-14
Instructions to Guests and Hosts

14:7. Well-known teachers customarily lectured or participated in dialogues at banquets. Ancient writers sometimes arranged literary discussions as monologues or dialogues in the setting of such banquets; these writings were called *symposia*.

Social status was important in antiquity and was made obvious by the seating of dinner guests at banquets. This status was especially a problem in well-to-do Greco-Roman circles (see comment on 1 Cor 11:21), but seating by rank is well attested in Palestinian Jewish society, including in the *Dead Sea Scrolls.

14:8-10. Jesus states a principle directly from Proverbs 25:6-7—to which the guests were not paying much attention—that is repeated in other ancient Jewish texts. Yet as in Roman circles, no one of socially inferior status would be arbitrarily invited forward; one would be advanced only if one had sat in too low a position.

14:11. Here Jesus repeats a standard *Old Testament promise, applied especially to the day of judgment (cf. Is 2:12; Ezek 17:24; 21:26; cf. also comment on Lk 1:52-53).

14:12. Not to invite people of one's own social status would offend them; but Jesus says that the other's need, not one's own social standing, must determine the giving of gifts. The Old Testament forbade charging interest on a loan and so profiting by one's neighbor; but Jesus' principle here excludes looking for any repayment at all; cf. 6:34-35.

14:13. Well-to-do persons in the Greco-Roman world usually invited people of somewhat lower social status in return for receiving honor, but these invitees would still be relatively respectable, not absolute dependents or beggars, as those who were unable to walk or were blind would be in that society, or peasants (although many Jewish teachers might regard inviting beggars and peasants as an act of piety). Those unable to walk or who were blind were not permitted on the premises of the probably *Essene community at *Qumran, but this was for ritual reasons.

14:14. Judaism taught that the righteous would ultimately be rewarded at the *resurrection of the dead; here Jesus applies this truth to distribution of resources. That God repaid those who helped the poor was already taught in the Old Testament (Prov 19:17).

14:15-24
The Ultimate Banquet

Those one would have expected to attend God's banquet had turned him down; thus he has every right to invite the outcasts of society whose presence would offend the powerful.

14:15. Texts reflecting Jewish expectation (as early as Is 25:6-9) often portrayed the *kingdom of God as a banquet.

14:16. The man in the *parable would have invited well-to-do persons; though not of higher status and wealth than himself, he would invite peers and those less well-to-do but still respectable.

14:17. Invitations were often R.S.V.P.; thus these invited guests had already confirmed that they were coming.

14:18. One would think that this man would have examined the land beforehand, even if he had bought it through an agent. (Indeed, legal contracts often specified that the buyer had examined the property and found it satisfactory; e.g., P.Oxy. 1707.13-15.) The buyer may have been legally obligated to go to complete the purchase; deals were also sometimes made contingent on a later inspection. But like the excuses that follow, this late notice would be heard as a weak excuse that would serve as a grievous insult to the dignity of the host, who had prepared the feast at much expense.

14:19. A buyer could test oxen before buying them. Indeed, only a fool would buy an animal without examining it (cf. *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 47.16). Having even a total of five yoke of oxen would mean that this man had much land to plow; he must be a wealthy landowner in his own right. It would therefore be inconceivable that he had no one working for him.

14:20. The rudeness escalates: the first man

objected, "I need to go," but asked to be excused; the second, "I go," but also asked to be excused; this man does not even ask to be excused! This man's excuse is a valid one for not going to war during the first year of marriage (Deut 20:7; 24:5; cf. 1 Maccabees 3:56), but it is not valid for skipping a feast one had promised to attend, even though women (including his new wife) were sometimes not invited to such dinners (and would have often been in a separate banquet hall if they were). Banquets generally lasted into the night. Wedding feasts (which this feast probably is; cf. Mt 22:2) were planned far in advance, and the man should have known not to schedule two events at the same time.

14:21-22. Banquets were meant to bring the host honor, but the corporate insult of 14:18-20 instead dishonored him. He can recoup at least some honor (and keep the meat from spoiling) only by getting at least some guests. Poor people rarely entered the walled, well-to-do part of a city; bringing in beggars from off the street was unheard of (see comment on 14:13). (The Dead Sea Scrolls exclude the maimed and blind from the future messianic banquet.) The host's behavior will not be socially respectable to his own class, but it will give him honor at least with someone. "Lanes" here may represent the narrow walkways between the residences of the poor.

14:23-24. Because the poor would feel unworthy to come, the slave must compel them. A higher-ranking slave in a wealthy household might be of higher status than poor free persons.

14:25-35
The Cost of Following Jesus

The demand that all Jesus' *disciples value the needy above respectability (14:7-24) deprives them of the right to remain socially respectable; to count the cost of following Jesus, one dare not value family approval (14:26) or any possessions (14:33) above God's call heard through the world's need.

14:25-26. "Hate" could function as a hyperbolic, Semitic way of saying "love less" (Mt 10:37), but this point hardly diminishes the offensiveness of this saying in a society where honor of parents was considered virtually the highest obligation and one's family was usually one's greatest joy. Teachers regularly demanded great respect and affection, but in Jewish tradition only God openly demanded such wholesale devotion as Jesus claims here (Deut 6:4-5).

14:27. A condemned criminal would "carry the cross" (i.e., the horizontal beam of the cross) out to the site of the upright stake where he would be crucified, usually amid a jeering mob. No one would choose this fate for oneself, but Jesus calls true disciples to choose it and thus to hate their own lives by comparison with their devotion to him (14:26).

14:28-30. Wealthy people displayed their power by magnificent private buildings or by supporting public buildings. Failing to finish, however, would convince others that the donors' supposed wealth was merely pretense. Several years earlier (A.D. 27) a poorly built amphitheater had collapsed, with an estimated fifty thousand casualties. The failings of inadequate or half-finished structures were well known. The crucial point here, however, is the builder's shame in a society obsessed with honor.

14:31-32. Occasionally those with smaller forces defeated those with larger ones, but it was normally wiser to sue for peace (cf. Prov 20:18; 24:6). Galilee's tetrarch Herod Antipas had recently (A.D. 29) lost a war with a neighboring Roman vassal, so the image of foolhardy war should be meaningful to Jesus' hearers. Jesus' point (as in 14:28-30) is that one must recognize the cost when one enlists as a disciple of Jesus (cf. Prov 20:18; 24:6).

14:33. The *Essenes devoted all their property to the community; some radical Greek philosophers espoused the same kind of teaching. But the rest of early Judaism and, even more, Greco-Roman society in general rejected such fanaticism; Judaism stressed giving to charity but not divestiture of possessions. Jesus' disciples did not become propertyless but shared all that they had (Acts 2:44-45; cf. comment on 12:12). Nevertheless, Jesus would sound like one of the radical teachers, because he claims that anyone who values possessions more than people—and so holds onto them rather than meeting known needs—is not being his disciple.

14:34-35. Salt was particularly used as a seasoning agent for taste. Some suggest that it was sometimes (probably not in Palestine) mixed in with manure to keep it fresh for use

as fertilizer (slowing fermentation, although the salt itself would be counterproductive in fertilizing soil, unless one's purpose was to make ruined land incapable of producing; it might also be used for killing weeds). The point is that disciples who do not live like disciples are worth as much as unsalty salt: nothing. (Such graphic demands *rhetorically commanded attention, but Jesus' desire for all to be transformed is clear in the context; see 15:1.)

15:1-2
Sinful Friends

15:1. *Tax gatherers and sinners were excluded from the religious community; cf. comment on 5:29-32. Proverbs (1:15; 13:20; 14:7) warns of the danger of spending time with sinners (cf. also Ps 1:1). But it is clear in this text that the moral influence is from Jesus to the sinners, not the reverse. Many religious Jews emphasized talking about the *law whenever possible; no one could legitimately complain about Jesus, who here communicates God's message to his listeners during table fellowship (on lectures at meals, cf. comment on 14:7).

15:2. *Pharisees and legal teachers did not consider it proper to eat with those excluded from the religious community; besides such dangers as eating untithed food, intimate table fellowship connoted acceptance. "Grumbling" could remind biblically knowledgeable ancient readers of Israel's unbelief and murmuring in the wilderness.

15:3-7
The Lost Sheep

Jesus addresses three *parables to his religious accusers (15:1-2), in effect turning the tables on them and demonstrating that they were not truly God's friends. Pharisees considered shepherds members of an unclean profession and thus would not readily identify with the protagonist of the story (but cf. 2:8-20).

15:3-4. One hundred was not an unusual size for a flock. Because shepherds often worked together (cf. e.g., 2:8) or with cowherds in the same area, this shepherd could probably leave his flock with his companions without endangering the flock. That they remain in the open pasture at night makes it likely that this is the warm season, not winter. Other Jewish teachers stressed God's forgiveness for the repentant, but did not stress God's seeking sinners out.

15:5. The easiest way to carry a lamb may have been across one's shoulders, with the legs crossed over one's chest (cf. God carrying his sheep in Ps 28:9; Is 40:11, but in the latter text God carries lambs at his breast).

15:6-7. "Heaven" was sometimes a surrogate title for God (15:18), but might allude more broadly to heaven's watching inhabitants (cf. 15:10). The moral of the story is: As the shepherd's friends rejoice when he finds that which was lost, so do God's friends rejoice when he recovers what was lost to him. Thus Jesus' accusers, who resent his fellowship with sinners he seeks to restore, may not really be God's friends (15:1-2).

15:8-10
The Lost Coin

The relative value of the lost item increases in each parable: one out of one hundred, one out of ten and finally (15:11) one out of two. Pharisees were generally unimpressed with the moral character of women and, though valuing care for the poor, mostly came from an educated class different from people with just ten coins. They would not readily identify with the protagonist of this story (contrast Luke's approach in 24:1-11).

15:8. The ten silver coins are most likely the woman's dowry—the only money she brings into the marriage that is technically hers even if the marriage is dissolved. That she has only ten coins (worth about ten days of a worker's wages) suggests that her father's family is not well-to-do; she would presumably have married into a household roughly equally poor (marriage within one's economic bracket was preferred). Given Luke's emphasis on widows elsewhere and his lack of specification here, she is probably not envisioned specifically as a widow, but a widow with only ten coins would be in an even more desperate condition.

The lamp here is a small, handheld oil lamp, which emits little light but is more helpful than the small (if any) window that may be in her wall. The rough stone floors of poor homes had many crevices between the stones, into which coins and fragments of pottery fell so often that archaeologists can now use coins in those

crevices to date when people lived in these homes. By sweeping with a broom she might hope to hear the coin rattle against the floor.

15:9-10. See comment on 15:6-7 for the moral. In Jewish tradition the angels in heaven generally took great interest in God's workings on earth; seven chief angels surrounded the throne, and among other angels each person was specifically assigned at least one guardian angel.

15:11-32
The Lost Son

15:11-12. To ask one's father for one's share of the inheritance early was unheard of in antiquity; in effect, one would thereby say, "Father, I wish you were already dead." Such a statement would not go over well even in the West today, and in a society stressing obedience to one's father it would be a serious act of rebellion for which the father could have beaten him or worse (cf. Ex 21:17; Deut 21:18-21). A not unusual response would have been for the father to disinherit the son! That the father grants the request means that most of the hearers will not identify with the father in this parable; from the start, they would think of him as stupidly lax to pamper such an immoral son. Presumably most hearers do not realize at the beginning that Jesus is depicting God's mercy toward them!

The Roman custom was to divide an estate equally unless a will gave more specific instructions. In the traditional Jewish practice, apart from gifts designated before the father's death, the eldest son was to receive a double portion (Deut 21:17); in this case, he would have received two-thirds of the inheritance (15:31) and the younger brother one-third.

15:13. Jewish *law did permit a father to determine which assets (especially land) would go to which sons before he died, but they could take possession only on the father's death: the father remained the manager and received the land's profits until then (cf. 15:22-23, 29). Thus this son could know what would be his but could not ethically (and perhaps legally) sell his assets; he does it anyway.

Many Palestinian Jews migrated, seeking fortune in less economically pressed areas. The younger son is presumably little older than eighteen (he was unmarried) and had an older brother. Moralists, both Jewish and *Gentile, considered squandering a father's hard-earned assets a terrible crime.

15:14. Famine was a common devastating feature of the ancient economy. (People often viewed famines as divine judgments, but because Jesus' story does not address the famine area as a whole, it does not apply this perspective to the story line.)

15:15. At this point, many of Jesus' hearers may be ready for the story to end (like a similar second-century Jewish story and a kind of moral lesson they might tell their children): the son gets what he deserves—he is reduced to the horrendous level of feeding the most unclean of animals. The son might well thus be cut off at this point from any nearby Jewish community and any financial charity it would otherwise offer him.

15:16. The "pods" here are the kind of carob pods fed raw to animals; people roasted and ate them, but subsisted on them only in time of famine. (Thus some Jewish teachers said Israel repented whenever they were driven to eating carob pods.) Given pigs' proverbially unclean eating habits, the thought of eating pigs' food would disgust Jesus' hearers. That the young man is jealous of pigs' fare also suggests that he is not receiving fair wages (cf. 15:17).

15:17. "Hired men" could be slaves rented for hire but are likelier free servants working for pay; either option suggests that his father is well-to-do.

15:18-19. Jewish people often used "heaven" as a respectful way of saying "God." The son here returns simply out of hunger and the belief that his father may feed him as a servant, not because he is genuinely sorry that he disgraced his father. Given the magnitude of his sin and the squandering of one-third of his father's life's earnings, stricter hearers might regard his return as an act of incredible presumption rather than humility.

15:20. It was a breach of an elderly Jewish man's dignity to run, though familial love could take priority over dignity after a long absence (cf. Tobit 11:9—mother and son). Given the normal garb, the father would have to pull up his skirt to run. Kissing was a conventional greeting for family members or intimate friends; normally it consisted of a light

kiss on the lips (easily distinguishable from lovers' passionate kisses).

15:21-22. The best robe in the house would belong to the father himself. The ring would probably be a family signet ring—hence would symbolize reinstatement to sonship in a well-to-do house. Slaves or impoverished workers often did not wear sandals, though (as here) they carried and tied a master's sandals. The father is saying, "No, I won't receive you back as a servant. I'll receive you only as a son."

15:23. The calf would be enough to feed the whole village; this would be a big party! Aristocratic families often invited the whole town to a banquet when a son attained adulthood (about thirteen years old) or a child married. If Jesus' audience envisioned any particular occasion here for which the calf had been fattened, it might be the elder son's impending wedding, or perhaps even the father's expectation of the younger son's return (though the text does not specify the particular occasion for which it was fattened).

15:24. Ancient writers sometimes bracketed off a section of their work by repeating a particular line; this bracketing off is called an *inclusio*. So far this parable has followed the course of the two that preceded it (15:3-10), but 15:24-32 are bracketed off to address the climactic issue: the elder brother represents Jesus' religious accusers (15:2).

15:25-28. Dancing was used in both religious and nonreligious celebrations. That the elder brother is apparently the only person in the village (cf. 15:23) uninformed about the party bursts the bounds of plausibility in the real world (where the elder brother should himself have taken the lead at reconciling father and younger son). This touch of unrealism is necessary to graphically underline the older brother's isolation from the community (cf. 15:1-2). Publicly refusing to enter in the midst of a party makes an intrafamily dispute public news, dampening the celebration and, worse yet, shaming his father just as the younger brother had, in a culture where honor and shame were essential values. This is also a grievous insult to the father's dignity and could have warranted discipline or being disinherited (cf. 15:12). Instead of punishing him, however, the father comes out and humbles himself, giving up his honor to seek reconciliation with his son (cf. 15:20).

15:29. Failing to greet one's father with a title (e.g., "Father", "Sir"; contrast even 15:12) was a grievous insult to the father's dignity. This son emphasizes his "service"—even though the father wanted a son rather than a servant (15:19-22). In this context (15:1-2), the elder brother is a transparent analogy for the Pharisees, and the younger brother for the sinners with whom Jesus was eating. A kid (baby goat) offered much less meat than a fattened calf (15:30).

15:30-32. Religious Judaism in this period considered prostitution sinful; both Jewish and non-Jewish sources considered squandering property, especially someone else's (16:1), sinful.

Although hearers might not consider all the details of the *narrative's logic, within the narrative logic the elder brother's response is even worse than modern readers might assume. Because the inheritance had been divided, the elder brother was already assured of his share, effective on the father's death (15:12); he had nothing to lose economically by his brother's return, at least not in terms of obligation. The final response of the elder brother is never stated, providing the Pharisees with the opportunity to repent if they are willing.

16:1-13
The Unfaithful Steward

16:1. Many well-to-do landowners had managers to oversee their estates; these managers, or stewards, could be slaves or, as here (16:3-4), free persons. Squandering another's possessions was considered a particularly despicable crime (cf. 15:13).

16:2-4. Although the master has dismissed this manager, the master gives him some time to get the accounts together before he leaves. The manager uses this time to procure favor for himself with others to whose houses he may join himself afterward. Ancients were very conscious of favors they owed; reciprocity was a matter of obligation. The manager uses the master's authority even though he can no longer legally exercise it.

Both digging and begging were considered undignified professions. Digging was usually performed by captive slaves or those who

knew no other skills, and was viewed as the most difficult form of labor.

16:5. These tenants may owe the landowner fixed amounts of their crops. They were not required to pay the sum until harvest. Each of these debtors is wealthier than average in his own right, hence could use a manager in the future.

16:6-7. The measure of olive oil (100 baths, about 850 gallons) represented the yield of nearly 150 olive trees and was worth about 1,000 denarii, no small sum. The measure of wheat (100 cors, about 1,000 bushels) represented the yield of about 100 acres and was worth about 2,500 denarii. The percentages of debt forgiven differ, but roughly the same amount of money is forgiven in each of the sample transactions (about 500 denarii). These renters are all relatively well-to-do in their own right, and thus might make use of a manager themselves in the future.

In hard times, masters would sometimes forgive part of the debt, writing it off as a loss, in return for being considered benevolent.

16:8. All these changes of notes required only small marks on the papers, made by the clients themselves (not incriminating the manager's own, no longer authorized, hand); and if the projected income thereby appears less, it will be harder to recognize that the master's profits affected by the manager's embezzlements are really diminished.

More important, the manager has gained public favor for himself and for the master as a generous benefactor; if the master punishes the manager now, it would appear to the public that he were doing so because of the manager's benevolent act. The criminal manager could be jailed, but he wisely stakes everything on his master's honor as a generous man. Ancient stories often portray powerful persons as appreciating and rewarding cunning, even if it had been used against them ("wisely"—KJV—can mean "shrewdly"—NIV, NASB, etc.; cf. Ex 1:10). Some stories (undoubtedly popular among slaves) portray slaves outwitting their masters; although this steward appears to be free (thus "begging" in 16:3), the story line may resemble one with which Jesus' hearers would be familiar. "Children of light" appears in the *Dead Sea Scrolls for God's special remnant, as opposed to the rest of the wicked world; here the "children of this age" echoes Jewish language for those who live for this age and lack hope for the world to come. There appears to be an implied "how much more" argument (a common ancient Jewish argument): if worldly people can think ahead regarding money, how much more should God's people do so?

16:9-13. The moral of the story appears to be: Use possessions to serve people, rather than accommodating it for yourself, because you are only God's managers of anything you have. "Mammon" (KJV) is an *Aramaic word for possessions or money.

16:14-18
The Radical Demands of the Law

16:14. Many *Pharisees may have belonged to the leisured class, but that description applied far more to the *Sadducees. Most Pharisees worked and praised the piety of giving. In this context, however, "lovers of money" refers to all who value money too much to give whatever of it they must to satisfy the human needs around them.

16:15. Jesus here cites a standard *Old Testament principle (1 Sam 16:7; Job 10:4), applicable especially to the practice of religion (Is 1:10-17; 58:1-14; Jer 6:13-14, 20; Hos 4:4-9, 19; 6:6; Amos 5:21-27).

16:16. Jewish people sometimes summarized the Bible as "the Law and the Prophets"; many of them believed that after the era of the prophets the prophetic voice had been muted until the messianic time. Thus John introduces the messianic era.

16:17. Later *rabbis told the story that when God changed Sarai's name to Sarah, the *yod* (the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet) that was removed complained to God for generations till he reinserted it in Joshua's name. Jewish teachers used such illustrations to make the point that the *law was sacred and one could not regard any part as too small to be worth keeping.

16:18. Jewish law permitted men the right of divorce for almost any reason, although many rabbis disapproved of divorcing on slight grounds. Jesus' statement, however, declares that divorce is invalid in God's sight, so that a subsequent marriage is adulterous. Here Jesus articulates a stronger view of the mar-

riage bond than anyone else we know of in antiquity, and his statement thus intensifies the law of Moses. Like most other statements of general principle in the ancient world (e.g., Prov 18:22 with Prov 11:22; 12:4; 21:9; or Prov 10:15; 13:8; 14:20 with 10:2, 11:4; or 14:24; 16:6 with 15:16; 16:8; 30:7-9; or 11:8; 12:13, 21 with principles such as 2 Tim 3:12), this one does not exclude exceptions (for the innocent party who had no say in the matter, cf. Mt 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor 7:15). Jesus' language is probably *hyperbole (see comment on Mt 5:32; 19:9; Mk 10:9); Jesus' purpose is to protect an innocent party from being divorced, not to punish the party who has been so betrayed. His statement addresses especially the wife because in the traditional custom in Jewish Palestine (in contrast to Roman custom) only the husband had full rights to divorce.

16:19-31
The Rich Man and the Poor Man

This story resembles a rabbinic story of uncertain date, except that there the rich man did a good deed and made it into the world to come; here he allows starvation while he lives in luxury, and thus inherits hell. Some details about the afterlife here are standard features of Jewish tradition; a few are simply necessary to make the story line work (acceptable practice in the telling of *parables).

16:19. Purple was an especially expensive form of apparel (cf. comment on Acts 16:14); the lifestyle Jesus describes here is one of ostentatious luxury. Although this man may have become rich by immoral means such as oppressing the poor (as people often did), one cannot simply assume this; the only crime Jesus attributes to him is that he let Lazarus starve to death when he could have prevented it.

16:20. On occasion, Jewish parables (including the rabbinic one mentioned at the beginning of this section) named a character or two. In normal stories, one would expect the rich man rather than the poor man to be named. "Lazarus" is a variant form of Eleazar.

16:21. Some wealthy people displayed extravagant consumption, careless about what was spilled from their tables. The crumbs here may be regular crumbs or pieces of bread used to sop up the table. Had Lazarus gotten to eat them, these leftovers would still have been insufficient to sustain him. The dogs here appear to be the usual kind Palestinian Jews knew: scavengers, viewed as if they were rats or other unhealthy creatures (also in the *Old Testament, e.g., 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4; 21:24; 22:38). They were considered unclean, and their tongues would have stung his sores.

16:22-23. Jewish lore often speaks of the righteous being carried away by angels; Jesus spares his hearers the traditional corresponding image of the wicked being carried away by *demons. Every person, no matter how poor, was to receive a burial, and not to be buried was seen as terrible (e.g., 1 Kings 14:13). But Lazarus, having neither relatives nor charitable *patron, may not have received one (if we might infer from the contrasting statement about the rich man), whereas the rich man would have received great eulogies. True Israelites and especially martyrs were expected to share with Abraham in the world to come. The most honored seat in a banquet would be nearest the host, reclining in such a way that one's head was near his bosom.

The term "Hades" simply specifies the realm of the dead (like the Hebrew *sheol*), but the description of torment makes clear that the rich man is in hell. Greeks envisioned a neutral place of shadowy existence inhabited by most deceased people; a few particularly righteous went to a more blessed place, and a few particularly wicked were tormented in Tartarus. Jewish views were more likely to have a clearer divide, as here. Their views of the place of the wicked, *Gehenna, varied; the image of continuing torment here is among the harshest of views.

16:24-26. Jewish literature often portrayed hell as involving burning. The formerly rich man hopes for mercy because he is a descendant of Abraham (see comment on 3:8), but the judgment here is based on a future inversion of status. Jewish people expected an inversion of status, where the oppressed righteous (especially Israel) would be exalted above the oppressing wicked (especially the *Gentiles), and also believed that charitable persons would be greatly rewarded in the world to come. But this parable specifies only economic inversion, and its starkness would have been as offensive to most first-century hearers of means as it could be to many

middle-class Western Christians today if they heard it in its original force.

16:27-31. If those who claimed to believe the Bible failed to live accordingly, even a *resurrection (Jesus points ahead to his own) would not persuade them. Jewish literature also emphasized the moral responsibility of all people to obey whatever measure of light they already had. Ancient writers sometimes included foreshadowing, prefiguring later events; in verse 31 Jesus foreshadows future hostility despite his own resurrection.

17:1-4
Proper Relationships

17:1-2. Those who caused others to stumble ("to sin"—ESV, NLT) are as doomed as the rich man of the preceding parable; in contrast, *disciples should look out for one another's good. "Stumble" was often used metaphorically to refer to sinning or falling away from the true faith. Millstones, used to grind wheat and olives, were extremely heavy, and the term here refers to the heavier kind of millstone turned by a donkey for the community mill, rather than the lighter kind a woman would use for household grinding. Jewish people considered barbaric the Roman punishment of drowning someone in a bag or with a heavy weight; the image is thus all the more dreadful.

17:3-4. Private reproof, *repentance with restitution, and forgiveness were standard doctrines of Jewish piety. Jewish teachers did question the genuineness of repentance if one planned to sin again, but like Jewish legal experts exploring legal principles, Jesus offers here a theoretical case: if a person does genuinely repent repeatedly, you must forgive that person.

17:5-10
The Faith of Servants

17:5-6. Ancient Jewish writers sometimes observed that the roots of the black mulberry (this tree's usual identification) are spread out, which makes it a difficult tree to uproot. It is a strong tree that grows slowly but lives a long time. Mustard seeds were proverbially small.

17:7-10. Except during harvest, field work might end, and the afternoon meal begin, some time after 3 p.m. Most slaveholders had few slaves; thus the slaves did both fieldwork and food preparation. Masters regarded this work as their slaves' duty, not an option. Nor was it considered honorable for masters to eat with their slaves, and it was virtually never done; even a master eating at the same table with his *freedpersons (former slaves) was rare and noteworthy. The point of the illustration seems to be: Faith grows as one uses it as a servant; its end is service, and it is never an end in itself.

17:11-19
A Samaritan's Gratitude

17:11-12. Leprosy was an unattractive skin disease (not limited to what is called leprosy today) for which the Bible had prescribed quarantine from the rest of society (Lev 13:45-46), although the Bible did not go so far as many Jewish teachers in blaming the disease on the leper's sin. Lepers were thus outcasts from the rest of society.

17:13. The lepers approach Jesus with humility, which was the proper *Old Testament way to approach God or one of his representatives for prayer.

17:14. The Bible had prescribed particular sacrifices if someone's leprosy were cured (Lev 14:1-32). By complying with these regulations, Jesus does nothing to violate the *law or to offend the priests.

17:15-19. On their own terms *Samaritans were quite pious, but Jewish people considered them irreligious, and religious Jews avoided intimate dealings with them (lepers, alienated from both societies, might ignore this barrier). This tension supplies most of the punch of the story. That a Samaritan would travel with Jewish lepers in the area between Samaria and Galilee (v. 11) also illustrates the extremity of lepers' outcast status: it erases other social distinctions. Ironically, Elisha had healed an outsider leper (Naaman the Aramean, 2 Kings 5) but not the lepers of the city of Samaria (2 Kings 7:3; Lk 4:27).

17:20-37
The Nature of the Impending Kingdom

17:20-21. Jewish teachers debated whether the *kingdom would come at a predetermined time known only to God, or when Israel repented. Although Jewish people acknowledged that

God ruled in the present, most also longed for God's unchallenged rule, or kingdom, in the future. Jewish teachers disputed when the kingdom would come: either at a set time unknown to mortals, or whenever all Israel repented. By teaching that the kingdom as God's reign is somehow present, Jesus implies that something of the kingdom—such as the messianic king—is already among them.

17:22. Second-century *rabbis, probably using a wider idiom, sometimes spoke of a future messianic era called "the days of the Messiah." Some texts spoke of a period (sometimes forty years) when the *Messiah would lead Israel in war against its enemies before the final end; others (more often), that the Messiah would come to reign for a period after those enemies were subdued.

17:23-24. The ultimate coming of the kingdom would not be ushered in by just an earthly war (as some thought) or by earthly messianic figures claiming followings (as many expected), but by a cosmic revelation to all the earth. (Various Jewish texts adopted either scenario.) "In his [Jesus'] day," if original, may allude to the *Old Testament "day of the Lord," the final time when God would judge the earth and bring about eternal justice (cf., e.g., Is 13:6, 9; Ezek 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31).

17:25. Cf. the context of Daniel 7:13-14 (the future *Son of Man) for suffering preceding glory (in Dan 7:21-22, referring to the *saints).

17:26-27. Jewish literature often used Noah's generation as a typical image of evil. None of the activities Jesus mentions here is evil (though Jewish teachers regarded some as necessary responses to the evil impulse); but those otherwise preoccupied are taken by surprise, living life oblivious to impending judgment.

17:28-30. Many Jewish texts used Sodom (Gen 19) as a typical image of evil (cf. comment on Lk 10:12) and often linked it with Noah's generation (cf. comment on 17:26-27).

17:31. The flat rooftop was used for a variety of purposes. Because the stairs from the rooftop led down the outside wall of the house, not inside, one need not go inside when descending. This is an image of haste: of forgetting possessions, property and worldly concerns to get to the street and greet the returning king, or to flee impending doom.

17:32-33. When Lot's wife looked back to her destroyed home in Sodom, it cost her her life, which she should have valued more than her possessions (Gen 19:15-16, 26).

17:34. The Greek language used masculine pronouns if any members of the group were male; thus the "two" likely refers to husband and wife (NIV, against NASB "two men"). Here Jesus undoubtedly refers to one being taken to judgment (as in an analogous second-century story about Israelites and Egyptians in bed during the last plague).

17:35. Part of the Palestinian Jewish woman's work was grinding at a mill; she would often do this with another woman. These women could normally work together regardless of religious convictions. Provided that the unreligious woman was not violating Pharisaic rules, even the wife of a *Pharisee and the wife of a nontither (whom Pharisees despised) could grind together.

17:37. The *Son of Man's coming would bring judgment as on Noah's and Lot's generations (17:26-30), leaving his enemies as food for vultures (Ezek 32:4-6; 39:17-20), which Jewish people considered a horrible fate (Deut 28:26; 1 Sam 17:44; Ps 79:2). Some commentators have suggested (though the reference seems less likely here) that the "eagles" here refer instead to the Roman standards, which could be represented thus. In A.D. 70 the Romans offered sacrifice to these standards on the site of the temple after they had destroyed it. The image of devouring vultures was, however, widespread.

18:1-8
God the Faithful Judge

18:1-5. Under *Old Testament *law, judges were to fear God (i.e., consider that he will judge those who break his law and mistreat others) and therefore defend the oppressed. Many ancient societies had severe legal penalties for unjust judges, though the judges often got away with their corruption (taking bribes and the like).

In the law, the widow was the ultimate example of the oppressed person, because she had no means of support (e.g., Ex 22:22-24; Ps 146:9; Is 1:17, 23; Jer 7:6-7). She certainly could not afford a bribe; in Jesus' *parable here the widow's opponent may threaten something like taking her land in payment for a debt (cf.,

e.g., 2 Kings 4:1). Although normally only men spoke in lawcourts and women needed advocates to plead cases for them, when women were so audacious as to speak there they generally commanded attention and sympathy.

18:6-7. This parable is a standard Jewish "how much more" (*qal vahomer*) argument: if an unjust judge who cared not for widows can dispense justice, how much more will the righteous judge of all the earth, who was known as the defender of widows and orphans, do so? In the context, God would administer his justice especially when Jesus came to judge the earth (17:22-37). The principle is familiar from the Old Testament: God is faithful to act on behalf of and to vindicate his people, by his acts in the present and especially his final day of judgment.

18:8. Many Jewish writers predicted great sufferings in the end time, on account of which many people would fall away from the truth; Jesus warns his own to persevere (17:22-37; 21:8-19, 34-36; 22:31-32, 40, 46).

18:9-14
The Pharisee and the Tax Gatherer

18:9-10. *Pharisees were considered the most pious people in regular Palestinian Jewish society (*Essenes were less involved in society; many lived in the wilderness); *tax gatherers were considered the most despicable, often regarded as traitors to their people. Pharisees did not want tax gatherers admitted as witnesses or given honorary offices. To catch the impact of this *parable today a traditional Christian might think of these characters as the most active deacon or Sunday-school teacher versus a drug dealer, gay activist or crooked politician.

18:11. Jewish people considered it pious to thank God for one's righteousness, rather than taking credit for it oneself. The first hearers of this parable would not think of the Pharisee as boastful, but rather as grateful to God for his piety.

18:12. Many of the most pious fasted—without water, despite the health hazard—two full days a week (Mondays and Thursdays); some believe this was only during the dry season. (Considering this pattern of fasting hypocritical, some early Christians insisted on fasting on Wednesday and Friday instead!—*Didache* 8.1). Pharisees were meticulous about tithing to the full extent one could infer from the *law (several different tithes, together constituting more than twenty percent of one's income). When they were not certain that the food they purchased had been tithed on, they would tithe it just in case. (Tithes involved a portion of agrarian produce.)

18:13. Standing with eyes and hands lifted to heaven was a common posture of prayer in antiquity (as well as in some other cultures). Beating one's breast was a sign of great mourning or grief, in this case in *repentance for sin (which in Jewish custom was expressed by mourning). The tax gatherer's prayer for mercy involves no deliberate act of restitution, and hence many of Jesus' contemporaries would judge it invalid.

18:14. Jesus' conclusion to the parable would shock the original hearers (cf. comment on 18:11); it fails to shock many Christians today only because they are so accustomed to the parable. On the future inversion of present roles, cf. 14:11 and 16:25.

18:15-17
The Kingdom Is for Children

Children were people of no social status, and the *disciples would not want the important time of their rabbi taken up with blessing them. But Jesus says that the *kingdom belongs to those considered insignificant, those who do not approach it on the merits of their own status.

18:18-30
Sacrificing Wealth for the Kingdom

18:18. Some disciples asked their teachers questions like the one this ruler asks Jesus about *eternal life. To "inherit eternal life" meant to share in the life of the coming world, the life of the *kingdom of God.

18:19-20. Without denying that he himself is good, Jesus reminds the man of the standard Jewish conception of God's goodness (others could be good, but no one compared with God); he then lists select commandments from the *Old Testament.

18:21. If only God is good, the man will have to admit he has broken some commandment; but the commandments Jesus lists were kept by most well-raised Jewish people.

18:22-23. Judaism stressed charity heavily, but other Jewish teachers did not normally require a prospective disciple to divest himself entirely of funds. A few teachers, especially some radical Greek teachers (Antisthenes, Zeno and Diogenes), made such demands on rich students to see if they would value true teaching above their wealth. A rich person would occasionally give up his goods, but rich prospective disciples usually disappointed such radical teachers, failing the test of discipleship and returning to their wealth.

18:24. Jesus turns the social order upside down. Often the well-to-do were hailed for their generosity (they had more to give), and the poor, being less educated in the *law, were thought less pious (although poverty itself was not necessarily seen as a sign of impiety, especially by the poor themselves). Many also believed the poor and oppressed to be pious, but many further believed that the rich were wealthy by virtue of God's blessing.

18:25-27. Jesus' saying here reflects a Jewish figure of speech for doing something impossible (a large animal going through a needle's eye). The saying, a *hyperbole, uses the image of a literal needle (not a gate, as some have incorrectly thought).

18:28-30. Though not elite, most of Jesus' disciples whose professions we know (such as fishermen and, especially, tax gatherers) had not been poor (though the Gospels may be more interested in narrating the exceptional ones) but had abandoned their economic security to follow him. Their reward would be found in believers' sharing of possessions in this world (cf. Acts 2:44-45) and the life of the kingdom in the world to come.

18:31-34
Jesus' Impending Suffering

Standard Jewish messianic concepts did not accommodate a suffering *Messiah (most Jewish references to that idea are from the second century or later). Although Jesus saw this idea in the Scriptures (24:44-46), Jewish tradition's different way of reading the Bible (normally passages about suffering were not applied to the expected triumphant Messiah) makes it difficult for the disciples to fit their belief in Jesus as the Messiah with the plain words he speaks.

18:35-43
Healing a Blind Suppliant

18:35. Most blind and other disabled persons who could not engage in the traditional occupations of the day could secure their living only by begging, normally on a busy roadside. Jewish people considered helping them a righteous deed. Jericho was a prosperous town with a good climate and many wealthy priests living there. This blind man no doubt received ample support there, especially when pilgrims were passing by en route to the festival in Jerusalem.

18:36-38. That the blind man shouts "Son of David" means that he recognizes Jesus as the *Messiah. Jesus characterizes his insistent, obstinate (v. 39) plea for mercy as "faith" (v. 42).

18:39-42. Blind people were socially powerless, and Jesus' followers see his loud pleas as an intrusion, the way they had seen the children (18:15).

18:43. Other miracle stories in this period frequently ended with the response of the crowds, a response generally characterized—as one would expect after a miracle—by awe.

19:1-10
A Tax Gatherer's Repentance

19:1-2. Being a border city, Jericho had a customs station. Because it was also one of the wealthiest cities of Palestine, in the most fertile part of Judea and boasting a Herodian palace, the residence of many wealthy priestly families, other tax income would also be extensive. The "chief" *tax gatherer would be the one who contracted for sales and customs taxes and hired collectors under him. Given this role, Zacchaeus could have become rich without cheating; but it seems that he had cheated anyway (19:8).

19:3-4. For Zacchaeus to be "short" by ancient Mediterranean standards could mean that he was shorter than five feet tall. People often paid more attention to tall people (though Zaccheus by virtue of his office commanded attention). With its pleasant climate year-round, Jericho was especially noted for its palm trees but supported many other trees as well, including the well-known sycamore tree. The kind of "sycamore" tree described here is related to the fig tree and was easy to climb, with large limbs spreading from fairly low on

the tree; it is not the North American sycamore or European-Asian sycamore maple. *Old Testament Jericho had many tightly packed houses, but the prosperous city of the *New Testament period had spacious villas and parks, where one could more easily climb a tree than get on a rooftop.

19:5. No matter how high their status, people did not normally invite themselves to someone else's home. Pious Jews would also be loath to enter the home of a tax gatherer or to eat of his food (which Jesus' language also implies); because someone unreligious enough to collect taxes would not be careful about tithing his foodstuffs, *Pharisees would not trust what he offered. Jewish people normally considered the ability to call the name of someone one had never met—as Jesus does here with Zacchaeus—to be the sort of thing that only a prophet could do. Because the journey to Jerusalem from Jericho was about seventeen miles uphill (nearly a day's journey), Jesus may have preferred to let his *disciples rest in a place with sufficient accommodations before continuing their journey.

19:6-8. Zaccheus could not imprison someone on his own authority, but he could make false reports to produce that outcome; his office would thus have given him power to intimidate and secure his demands, if he wished to do so. Zacchaeus's promise to make restitution recognizes that his white-collar crime is just as serious as other kinds of theft (Ex 22:1-4). His restitution goes beyond the lenient Pharisaic interpretation of the *law, which required fourfold or fivefold restitution only for stolen oxen and sheep, only if he slaughtered or sold it, and only if a sufficient number of people witnessed the act. Moreover, Judaism traditionally thought of restitution to receive forgiveness, but here it responds to *grace instead of invites it. In ancient accounts of discipleship, a radical response with possessions was a certain sign of newly acquired devotion to the teacher.

19:9-10. Many Jewish people believed that salvation belonged to almost all Israelites by virtue of their descent from Abraham, except for those who excluded themselves by heinous crimes. In Ezekiel 34:6 and 11, God took over the mission of seeking out the lost sheep because the leaders of his people had failed (less directly relevant, cf. also Wisdom of Solomon 6:16).

19:11-27
Making Use of the Delay

19:11. New Testament Jericho is about seventeen miles from Jerusalem and about a mile south of the site of Old Testament Jericho.

If Jesus was the *Messiah, proclaiming the *kingdom and saying things like salvation was "today" (19:9), Jewish hearers would naturally expect the kingdom right away (17:20; Acts 1:6). The most common expectation of the kingdom would include the subjugation of Rome and other *Gentiles.

19:12. The image Jesus uses here would be familiar: both Herod the Great (40 B.C.) and his son Archelaus (4 B.C.) had to go to Rome to receive their "kingdom," i.e., the right to rule Judea.

19:13. Each of the slaves was given a mina, the equivalent of about one hundred days' wages, which they would probably entrust to the moneychangers. Because of exorbitant interest rates in the Greco-Roman world (on one unusual occasion a lender charged a desperate city roughly fifty percent interest) and because only a few people had significant capital, those doing business could quickly multiply their investments.

19:14. What this verse describes happened to Herod's son Archelaus, who was not at all popular with the people. An embassy of fifty representatives of the people went to Rome to oppose him. Similarly, his father Herod the Great had to fight till 37 B.C. before his kingdom (already officially granted him by the Romans) was securely under his control. Even under more direct Roman rule, complaints to Rome about actions of Roman officials could still cause them trouble, but only if Rome was persuaded.

19:15-19. It was not unusual for investors to make returns such as those these servants report; nor was it unusual for rulers to reward profitable servants who proved their administrative skills. Rome allowed its client kings to appoint their own local officials.

19:20. Not only was this servant's failure to invest the money contrary to the king's orders and common sense (19:13); he even failed to protect the money, as giving it to money-

changers, storing it in a temple treasury or even keeping it in a strongbox might have done. Wrapping money in a perishable handkerchief was considered one of the most irresponsible ways to take care of money and suggests that the servant was stupid or treasonous (cf. v. 14), or (most likely) both.

19:21. Objecting that the master "takes out what he does not supply" means that he took money that he had not deposited, perhaps misappropriating funds.

19:22-26. Knowing that the master liked to make money that he had not deposited, the slave should have understood that the master would certainly want good interest from a deposit. Judging one by one's own words (19:22) was considered appropriate (e.g., 1 Kings 20:40).

19:27. Eastern kings coming to power often disposed of enemies in this manner; Herod the Great had taken some ruthless measures to quell opposition and bring peace, and his son Archelaus likewise brutally retaliated against those who had opposed him.

19:28-40
The Royal Entrance

19:28-29. Messengers were normally sent two by two. When Jesus' group reaches the Mount of Olives, they are just outside Jerusalem.

19:30-34. Readers might interpret Jesus' (as king) borrowing the animal in terms of Romans or royal emissaries temporarily impressing (demanding the service of) an animal. The donkey's owners probably see it as part of the hospitality to visitors to the feast, or perhaps as the honor of helping a famous *rabbi on his way.

In antiquity the vast majority of people, including Christians, were poor; knowing that their Lord Jesus had to borrow his royal mount probably would have encouraged them.

19:35. Officials used donkeys for civil, not military, processions (1 Kings 1:38). Thus this text is not a triumphal entry in the sense of Roman triumphal processions; it is Jerusalem's reception of a meek and peaceful king. Jesus chooses to define his kingship in terms of Zechariah 9:9, not the commonly expected role of warrior *Messiah.

19:36-37. Festal pilgrims were often welcomed with shouts of joy, but 19:37-40 suggests that a greater recognition was taking place here.

19:38. With the addition of "the king," the first part of the people's cry is taken from Psalm 118:26. The Hallel, composed of Psalms 113–118, was sung regularly during Passover season and would be fresh on everyone's mind; later generations applied these psalms to the future redemption for which they hoped. Jesus will cite the psalm messianically in Luke 20:17.

19:39-40. "Stones" could mean any stones (3:8), but they may refer to the stones of the temple (see 19:44; 20:17).

19:41-44
Jerusalem's Doom

19:41-42. Like Jeremiah or another prophet weeping for his people (e.g., Jer 6:26; 8:18–9:3; Lam 1:1-4), Jesus cries out a lament over his people.

19:43. "The days will come" was a common phrase used by *Old Testament prophets (e.g., 1 Sam 2:31; 2 Kings 20:17; Jer 31:31). The Romans besieged and destroyed Jerusalem in the war of A.D. 66–70, roughly forty years after Jesus spoke these words.

19:44. Here Jesus uses standard prophetic *hyperbole; the city was destroyed in A.D. 70 but not completely leveled. Further leveling (including the filling of an entire valley) took place after the Bar Kochba revolt, which was finally suppressed in A.D. 135. The Old Testament spoke of God "visiting" (KJV, NASB, NRSV; cf. "coming to"—NIV) his people in acts of deliverance or judgment (e.g., Is 23:17); here the term refers to Jesus' mission.

19:45-48
Transforming the Temple

See the more extensive comment on Mark 11:15-19.

19:45. Sellers were needed in the temple so foreign Jews could buy sacrifices to offer there. Psalms, prophets and Jewish teachers in Jesus' day agreed that prayer and a pure heart counted for more than sacrifices but did not oppose sacrifices per se. Jesus presumably would oppose not sacrifices (cf. Acts 21:26) but an emphasis on ritual without the true relationship with God that he had demanded in his own teaching (cf. Lk 19:47). Even if he clears out the whole temple, however, the sellers will not stay out.

19:46. One text Jesus cites in part, Isaiah 56:7,

refers to the future restored temple when even pious *Gentiles would come to worship in the temple; but instead the temple has become like the "robbers' den" of Jeremiah 7:11. Jeremiah called it that because Israel thought the temple was a refuge from divine judgment despite the people's sins; injustice was taking place in the land, but the people did not expect judgment because of their ritual piety (Jer 7:1-15).

19:47. Other teachers also taught in the temple courts. The Jewish aristocracy who controlled the temple had vested interests in keeping down would-be *Messiahs (usually revolutionaries) and anyone who challenged the temple. Defiling the sacred inner courts of the temple was the one offense for which the Romans permitted the Jewish authorities to execute an automatic death penalty. Although Jesus' action in the outer court would not actually qualify as defiling the sacred precincts, it must have enraged the authorities and served as a direct challenge to their power there.

19:48. These leaders had official authority, but they lacked the measure of popularity with the common people in Jewish Palestine that the Pharisees and Jesus possessed.

20:1-8
On Whose Authority?

20:1-2. People lectured in temples, which were public places. Verbal challenges in public staked the honor of both challenger and challenged on the outcome. The powerful priestly aristocracy who ran the temple exercised their own authority over it; they would know that Jesus has not received the authority from themselves or from the Romans. They would not accept any other human authorization as legitimate, nor regard other humans as divinely authorized; they presumably believed that God had authorized them rather than someone else to be in charge of the religious aspects of the temple. They would regard Jesus as a serious troublemaker from Galilee, dangerous (yet to be handled gently) because he was a populist demagogue. Elites in antiquity complained about demagogues who swayed the masses instead of appealing to aristocratic sentiments like "honorable" people should.

20:3-4. Jesus' question about John the Baptist concerns the principle of agency: in Jewish *law, an authorized agent acted on behalf of the sender, backed by the sender's full authority. "Heaven" was a Jewish circumlocution for God.

20:5-8. The temple authorities, who had to please the Romans on the one hand and the populace on the other, were already accustomed to considering the political consequences of their statements.

20:9-18
Judgment on Evil Leaders

Jesus still addresses those who fancy themselves rulers of Israel, reminding them that they are merely custodians appointed by God over his vineyard (like the shepherds over God's flock of Jer 23 and Ezek 34).

Wealthy landowners controlled much of the rural Roman Empire, including many rural parts of Galilee; tenant farmers worked their land. Landowners had great status, whereas tenant farmers had little; tenants were therefore normally quite respectful to the owners.

20:9. Absentee landlords were common.

20:10. Payments were rendered at harvest time. Some contracts specified that the tenants would pay the landowner a percentage of the harvest; other contracts called for a fixed amount.

20:11-12. Landowners always had power, socially and legally, to enforce their will on the tenants; a few even reportedly had hit squads to deal with troublesome tenants. Here the tenants act as if they are the ones with power, and they exploit it mercilessly (as opposed to the ancient ideal of a *benevolent* *patron or landowner). This description fits the Jewish tradition that Israel martyred many of the prophets God sent to it.

20:13. The expression "beloved son" emphasizes the father's great affection for the son, increasing pathos if he were lost (cf. Gen 22:2). In the light of 3:22, the "beloved son" clearly represents Jesus. Ancient hearers of the *parable would regard the landowner as abnormal; naively benevolent, he counted on a kindness in his tenants that their behavior had already disproved. Rich or poor, all hearers at this point would agree that the landowner was in the right, and that he was benevolent—indeed, strikingly, foolishly benevolent.

20:14-15. The tenants presume too much about the inheritance; although they could have seized it under certain legal conditions, the owner could also stipulate—and after their misdeeds certainly would—that someone else inherit the vineyard; or representatives of the emperor could have seized it. If a dead body were left in a vineyard, it would render the harvested food impure if the food got wet (traditional Jewish interpretation of Lev 11:38).

20:16. Ancient hearers would wonder why the landowner had not come earlier and killed the tenants. The people's negative response is only because they know how Jesus is applying it—against their own leaders (v. 19).

20:17. Here Jesus cites Psalm 118:22-23, another text from the Hallel (the crowd referred to 118:25-26 in Lk 19:38). The building here is the temple (Ps 118:18-21, 25-27); as the cornerstone of a new temple, Jesus is a threat to the builders of the old one. (Herod used priests to construct the temple, but we need not press the analogy of "builders" so far.)

20:18. "Falling on" the cornerstone reflects Isaiah 8:14-15 (cf. 28:16); the stone falling on the offender reflects Daniel 2:34, 44, where God's *kingdom, portrayed as a rock, crushes its earthly challengers. Jesus here uses a standard Jewish practice of expounding one text (cf. Lk 20:17) by citing others sharing the same key word or concept, in this case, the divine stone.

20:19-26
Both Sides of the Coin

20:19-21. Here Jesus' opponents seek to force him to choose between revolution—which would get him in trouble with Rome—and accommodation to the Romans—which they suppose he opposes (because he opposed their leadership in the temple).

20:22. They pit the obligations of peace with Rome against the nationalistic, messianic fervor that they assume Jesus has generated; a disastrous tax revolt two decades earlier had shown where such fervor could lead. If he publicly takes the view characterized by those later called *Zealots (no king but God), he can be arrested; if he rejects that view (which he does), he may compromise his following (cf. 23:18-19).

20:23-26. Jewish Palestine circulated its own copper coins, which bore the name but not the image of the deified emperor. Nonetheless, foreign coins, which bore the emperor's image and mention of his divine status, were in common circulation in Palestine, where neither gold nor silver coins were permitted to be struck. Revolutionaries in A.D. 6 had violently protested the use of such coins and incurred terrible Roman retaliation.

20:27-40
God of the Living

20:27. In ancient Palestinian Judaism the *Sadducees were especially notorious for not believing in *resurrection, and *rabbis who considered themselves successors of the *Pharisees classified Sadducees as heretics for this view.

20:28. The Sadducees' question to Jesus concerns the law of levirate marriage, practiced in many cultures both in antiquity and today. It provides economic and social protection to widows in societies where women cannot earn wages. Students of Jewish *law were still expounding this *Old Testament principle (Deut 25:5) in Jesus' day and afterward.

20:29-32. The Sadducees borrow the story line from the Jewish book of Tobit, where the jealous *demon Asmodeus killed righteous Sarah's first seven husbands (though they were not brothers).

20:33. Later *rabbinic literature is full of examples of the "mocking question" posed by pagans, apostates or heretics like the Sadducees.

20:34-36. Jewish people widely agreed that angels did not procreate (they did not need to replenish their numbers, because they did not die, and also because, in some other traditions, God regularly created new angels), nor did they normally eat or drink.

20:37-38. Against their Sadducean opponents the Pharisees commonly tried to prove the resurrection from the law of Moses; Jesus here does the same. He argues (using Ex 3:6; cf. 3:15-16; 4:5) that God would not claim to be the God of those who no longer exist; indeed, his faithfulness to his covenant demands that if he is their God after death, death is not the final word for them. One of the most common Jewish prayers of the period recites God's faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as

a living reality for their own time (cf. also *4 Maccabees 7:19; 16:25).

20:39-40. Contemporary literature commonly reports hearers being overawed by a wise speaker's (usually the protagonist's) wisdom.

20:41-44
David's Lord

By definition, the Christ, or anointed one, was the royal descendant of David (Is 9:7; 11:1; Ps 2; 89; 132). But this view of *messiahship often lent itself to a revolutionary view of the *kingdom (see comment on 17:20-24) and was inadequate. The one who would reign in God's kingdom was David's "Lord" (Ps 110:1) not merely his descendant (cf. Ezek 34:24; 37:24); he would thus be greater than the resurrected David (cf. Is 9:6-7).

When Jewish teachers challenged their hearers to resolve apparent discrepancies in Scripture, they assumed that both texts were true (in this case, Jesus knows that he is both David's son and David's Lord) and were asking how to harmonize them. Jesus' opponents apparently have no answer, because other Jewish interpreters did not apply Psalm 110:1 to the Messiah (reacting against the Christian interpretation, some later Jewish interpreters even applied this text to Abraham).

20:45–21:4
The Powerful and the Weak

Some Jewish teachers were so concerned to prevent the exploitation of the poor that they criticized collectors of charity who asked for contributions from the poor. But then, as now, some individuals used their religion to exploit others.

20:45-46. Like their Greek counterparts, some Jewish teachers wore a special identifying garb, in this case a long, white linen robe, similar to those of priests and temple officials. People normally greeted teachers with titles of honor; marketplaces, which were full of people, would provide many opportunities for teachers to receive such recognition. Seating at banquets marked one's rank in society.

20:47. Widows had little means of support, were socially powerless and were to be protected under Jewish *law (see comment on 18:1-5). Jesus could mean that these teachers exploit widows' resources by seeking extensive tithes (which they could set at twenty to thirty percent, on top of the heavy land taxes levied by the government); or he could mean that they follow the letter of the law toward creditors in legal decisions, rather than showing mercy to the poor as the law also required.

These teachers may have lingered long in their individual prayers in the *synagogues; here Jesus criticizes not the length of prayers but the motive for this length. Like the *Old Testament prophets (e.g., Is 1:11-17; Amos 5:21-24), Jesus sees social injustice and religious hypocrisy as inextricably linked. Both examples here reveal selfish hearts.

21:1-4. A later tradition claims that thirteen receptacles for gifts to the temple treasury were in the Court of Women, accessible to Israelite women as well as to men. Because of the annual temple tax on all Jewish adult males, the temple now sported ostentatious wealth (such as a golden vine; *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.394-95), and its officials would probably waste this widow's money; but this powerless woman, presumably ignorant of that likelihood, acts in good faith and is the greatest giver in God's sight.

21:5-7
Introduction to the Discourse on the Future

Jesus draws much of the language of this discourse from the *Old Testament.

21:5. The Jerusalem temple was one of the most splendid structures of all antiquity and seemed strong and invincible (cf., e.g., **Letter of Aristeas* 100-101); cf. comment on Mark 13:1.

21:6. Other groups also expected the temple to be judged, but most Jews, regardless of their other differences, found in the temple a symbol of their Jewish unity and would have been appalled to think that God would allow it to be destroyed (as in Jer 7:4-15). Some stones in the retaining structure were left on others (e.g., one wall still stands; not in the temple proper), but this fact does not weaken the force of the prophetic *hyperbole: the temple was almost entirely demolished in A.D. 70—roughly forty years after Jesus predicted it (Lk 21:32).

21:7. Old Testament prophets often grouped events together by their topic rather

than their chronological proximity, and Jesus in this discourse does the same. He addresses two separate questions: the time of the temple's destruction and the time of the end.

21:8-19
Imminent Sufferings

21:8. Various false messiahs and messianic-type leaders modeling themselves after Moses or Joshua arose in the first century; such figures drew significant Jewish followings in Palestine as late as Bar Kochba, whom Rabbi *Akiba hailed as the *Messiah after A.D. 130.

21:9-11. Ancient *prophecy teachers usually listed these sorts of events among the signs of the end; the end was often portrayed as preceded by great sufferings or a final war. (Jesus' list omits some other omens cited by his contemporaries, such as babies born with animal heads.) Jesus says that instead these events characterize normal life until the end.

21:12-15. Synagogues were the local places of public assembly and thus provided the natural place for hearings and public discipline. Sometimes discipline was administered in the form of flogging; under second-century rules, this meant thirteen harsh strokes on the breast and twenty-six on the back. Prisons were usually holding places until a trial rather than places of punishment; punishments included execution, enslavement, banishment, confiscation of property and so forth. "Kings" could refer just to Rome's vassal princes, but could also suggest that Parthian and other rulers from the East are also in view. People in the Roman Empire knew of other parts of the world as far apart as Iceland (probably), Tanzania, India and China; in the second century, some merchants from the Roman Empire traveled to what is now Vietnam. The proclamation and consequent persecution therefore may be widespread.

21:16. See Micah 7:5-7. In a culture with a heavy emphasis on family fidelity, betrayal by a family member would sound especially harsh (though such problems as court disputes over inheritances show that the ideal was not always achieved).

21:17-19. Here Jesus offers a promise of protection (cf. 1 Sam 14:45; 2 Sam 14:11). Because hundreds, probably thousands, of Christians had been publicly murdered under Nero in Rome in A.D. 64, probably less than two decades before Luke wrote, it is clear that this is hyperbolic, not an unqualified promise (9:23-24; 21:16). (With the majority of scholars I assume that Luke did not write before A.D. 64, although the case for this date is not conclusive.) This promise suggests either spiritual survival (12:4-5) or that God will often deliver physically, as in many cases in the *Old Testament (e.g., Dan 3:27).

21:20-24
The Fall of Jerusalem

21:20. Luke's language is less ambiguous than Mark's "abomination of desolation": the war with Rome began in A.D. 66, and soon Roman armies had marched through the rest of Palestine and surrounded Jerusalem, then laid siege to it until it fell in A.D. 70. Those who tried to flee shortly after Jerusalem was surrounded found that it was too late; some who escaped the Jewish revolutionaries inside Jerusalem were cut open by Syrian recruits outside, who were looking for jewels they might have swallowed.

21:21. The mountains of Judea were the safest place to evade invading armies, as the people in Judea had often learned (e.g., David and the second-century B.C. Maccabean guerrillas). When people in the countryside saw approaching armies, they often fled to the safety of city walls; but Rome would not break its siege, and those trapped within Jerusalem's walls would be doomed (v. 24).

21:22. The prophets often spoke of judgment against Jerusalem. God would come in a day of vengeance (e.g., Is 34:8; 61:2; 63:4; Jer 46:10; 51:6) or days of vengeance (Hos 9:7), and in some cases the prophets spoke of God's vengeance against his own unfaithful people (e.g., Jer 5:9, 29; 9:9). Although the prophets usually pointed especially to the Babylonian captivity (about six centuries before Jesus), their principle of judgment and their demand for *repentance before ultimate restoration was still applicable.

21:23. The difficulties of bearing or nursing a child under these circumstances are obvious in any culture. The text may also indicate grief over the loss of the children (cf. **2 Baruch* 10:13-15). The language of "great distress" echoes prophecies about tribulation that

would precede Israel's final repentance (Dan 12:1). The *Old Testament repeatedly describes God's judgments in history as "wrath" (e.g., on Jerusalem—Lam 1:12), as well as his future wrath in the day of the Lord (e.g., Zeph 1:14-15).

21:24. All the inhabitants of Jerusalem died in the war (by famine, disease, burning, Jewish factional fighting or fighting with the Romans) or were enslaved in the year 70. Jerusalem was left in ruins; after the second destruction in A.D. 135, Jerusalem was rebuilt as a pagan city, with a pagan temple on the site where God's temple had been. "Times of the *Gentiles" presumably refers to the period of Jerusalem's or the Jewish people's subjugation under other nations; many Jewish people envisioned a succession of four evil empires (cf. Daniel 7), Rome being the final one, before the *kingdom of God would come and deliver them from evil.

21:25-38
Be Prepared

The destruction of Jerusalem constitutes the final, universally visible earthly sign before Jesus' return; after this sign, Christ's followers should be ready for his imminent return.

21:25-26. *Josephus and writers dependent on him spoke of portents in the heavens preceding the fall of Jerusalem. These portents were meant to give the wicked cause to fear (Is 19:16; Jer 4:9). This is the language of the end (how most Jewish people in this period understood Is 13:10; 34:4; cf. 24:23; Ezek 32:7-8). Some ancient Jewish literature used this cataclysmic language for historical events (the **Sibylline Oracles* use it for an earthquake; cf. Ps 18:6-19; Jer 4:20-28), but most reserved it for the end or transformation of the present world order and the establishing of God's eternal *kingdom.

21:27. Jesus sometimes describes the *Son of Man's coming in terms Jewish literature usually reserved for God (cf. Is 19:1). Here Jesus clearly alludes to Daniel 7:13-14, where "one like a son of man" (i.e., like a human being) receives the kingdom from God.

21:28. Unlike others, believers need not fear these heavenly signs (Jer 10:2); they merely signal that "redemption" is near. Jewish teachers sometimes debated whether the Jewish people could hasten the kingdom or whether it would come only in a time dictated by God. During the revolts against Rome, Jewish patriots declared the arrival of their "redemption," or liberation from Rome; but Jesus teaches that this redemption will come solely from heaven's intervention.

21:29-31. The signs Jesus lists show that the end is imminent, just as a fig tree's leaves show what season it is. (In winter the fig tree appeared more bare than other trees.)

21:32. The length of a generation varied but was often represented in the *Old Testament by forty years (in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, forty years represents the suffering of the final generation). Jesus speaks these words near A.D. 30; the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70.

21:33. Sometimes God made promises that he noted would endure even if heaven and earth passed away (Jer 31:35-37); God's words would not pass away (*Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* 11:5). Jesus thus speaks as God here.

21:34-36. "Strength to escape" (v. 36) could refer back to the escape of verse 21 or to enduring the persecutions of verses 12-19; "standing before the Son of Man" may mean persevering or being presented triumphant before him. For this use of "snare" or "trap" as judgment imagery, cf. perhaps Is 8:14; 24:17-18; Jer 48:43-44; 50:24; Ezek 12:13; 17:20.

21:37. As sundown approached, about 6 p.m. in April, fewer and fewer people would be in the temple courts. Because thousands of pilgrims came to the Passover feast, many had to stay in surrounding villages at night. Although eating the Passover in Jerusalem, as was expected, Jesus lodged in Bethany (Mk 11:11-12), about three kilometers east of Jerusalem on the southeastern slopes of the Mount of Olives.

21:38. "Early in the morning" could mean as early as sunrise, which would be by 6 a.m. in Jerusalem in April.

22:1-13
Preparing the Passover

22:1. The Jewish Feast of Passover was technically followed immediately by the Feast of Unleavened Bread; but because pilgrims made one trip to Jerusalem to celebrate both of them, in popular parlance they had come to be described as a single entity (e.g., in *Josephus).

22:2-6. Jewish literature reports that the *high priests bullied those who opposed them;

against some popular misconceptions, the Gospels are no more anti-Jewish for their reports of high-level corruption and abuses than are the ancient *rabbis, *Dead Sea Scrolls and Josephus who report the same sort of behavior by the priestly aristocracy. (Indeed, many scholars today believe that Josephus even mentions the Jewish aristocrats alongside the Romans as involved in Jesus' execution; despite later Christian editing, much of *Jewish Antiquities* 18.63-64 is original.) The aristocratic priests who dominated Jerusalem's municipal elite would certainly not tolerate someone who claims that God has directed him to attack their temple cult. But they have to be cautious due to Jesus' popularity (22:2; cf. comment on 20:5-7).

22:7. See comment on 22:1.

22:8-9. Representatives from each family would have the priests slaughter a lamb for them in the temple, then return with it to feed the whole family that night after sundown.

22:10. Commentators note that water jars (as opposed to leather wineskins) were almost always carried by women; thus a man carrying one could be a noticeable sign. In well-to-do households (as apparently here), however, slaves would carry the water. Running water was a great luxury, and in many cities people would collect water at public fountains.

22:11-13. Anyone with a two-story home, the second of which contained a "large" upper room (not merely a small dwelling), would be considered well-to-do. This family presumably resided in the Upper City of Jerusalem, near the temple, rather than the poorer Lower City, downwind of Jerusalem's sewage. Because the Passover had to be eaten within Jerusalem's walls, most homes would be crowded with guests; but the accommodations for Jesus' last meal with his *disciples would be quite adequate.

22:14-23
Eating the Passover

Both the preparation for Passover and its eating are mixed with promises and foreshadowings of the betrayal, because the Passover here itself prefigures Jesus' death. Following the *Old Testament prophets, Judaism looked for a new exodus when God would again deliver his people from bondage, although contemporary Judaism was looking for a new Moses—not a new lamb.

22:14. The Passover was to be eaten at night. April's sundown in Jerusalem came by 6 p.m., so the meal should have started then. Table fellowship was intimate at the feast; one or two families normally shared the meal, but here Jesus and his closest disciples make up the family unit. Palestinian Jews in this period "sat" for most meals but "reclined" for feasts, like Passover.

22:15-16. Vows of abstinence (also 22:18) were common in Palestinian Judaism: "I will not eat any such and such until this happens," or "I vow that I will not use this until that happens." Jewish tradition often portrayed the time of the *kingdom as a banquet. It was customary to give thanks over the cup of wine at regular meals and also at Passover.

22:17-19. The head of the household customarily gave thanks for the bread and wine before any meal but said special blessings over bread and wine in the Passover meal. We should not understand "This is my body" literally, just as we do not take literally the standard Jewish interpretation spoken over the Passover bread: "This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate when they came from Egypt." The thought instead is of a sort of memorial (as in Ex 12:14), but, as with the Passover, one in which one symbolically reenacted, hence participated in, the past act of redemption. Those who did not understand it in these terms would have imagined it as cannibalism, a custom that horrified most people in the Mediterranean world (cf. Jn 6:52); that misinterpretation later became a pagan accusation against Christians.

22:20. Covenants were ratified by the blood of sacrifice; "covenant in . . . blood" probably evokes Exodus 24:8, "the blood of the covenant." Here, however, a "new covenant" is in view (see also 1 Cor 11:25), echoing Jeremiah 31:31. God had also redeemed his people from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb. Passover ritual interpreted most elements of the meal and included blessings over the cup. But the ritual certainly did not interpret the cup as blood, because Jewish *law and custom were revolted by the idea of drinking any creature's blood, especially human blood.

22:21. Ancient Jewish readers would view

betrayal by one sharing a meal as particularly scandalous, because they saw hospitality and the sharing of table fellowship as an intimate bond, initiating a covenant of friendship, often lifelong.

22:22-23. Most people in ancient Judaism stressed both God's sovereignty and human free will, which they saw as complementary. (Modern views that see them as contradictory are based more on Greek logic than on Jewish thought or the Bible.)

22:24-30
Exaltation of the Servants

22:24-25. Jewish people were well familiar with the *Gentile model of authority: ancient Near Eastern kings had long claimed to be gods and had ruled tyrannically; Greek rulers had adopted the same posture through much of the eastern Mediterranean. Jewish people would view the Roman emperor and his provincial agents (who often showed little concern for Jewish sensitivities) in much the same light. Rulers and others who doled out favors from the vantage point of power were called "benefactors"; the practice of benefaction was widely praised in Greek circles, appearing pervasively in public inscriptions. Jesus' reminding the disciples that seeking power is a Gentile (i.e., pagan) practice is tantamount to telling them they should not be doing it.

22:26. In antiquity age often determined rank; the youngest had the least respect. Even a socially powerful slave remained subordinate to the master (applicable even to slaves who wielded more power than peasants and others who were socially inferior to their masters).

22:27. Slaves waited on masters at table. (Although servants are probably in view here, in households without servants the female members of the family prepared and served the food.) "Reclining" was the standard Greek posture for eating, which Palestinian Jews adopted at feasts.

22:28-30. Jewish literature often portrayed the *kingdom as a future time when Israel would partake of a banquet prepared for them (cf. already Is 25:6, for all peoples); a standard Jewish expectation for that time was that the lost tribes of Israel would be restored. Those who "judged" Israel in the *Old Testament ruled it.

22:31-38
Preparing for the Betrayal

22:31-32. Wheat would be sifted to separate the genuine wheat from other items that had gotten mixed in with it; for the image, see Amos 9:9. For winnowing away the chaff, see comment on Matthew 3:12. The background for *Satan's demand is presumably Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-6, where Satan tries to prosecute Job before the heavenly court (the Hebrew text has "the satan," literally "the adversary," i.e., the accuser).

22:33-34. Ancient sources typically regarded the rooster as a reliable reporter of the advent of dawn (attested by *Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.26; *3 Maccabees 5:23; Babylonian Talmud *Berakhot* 60b). But commentators report that in Palestine nocturnal crowings are familiar to night watchmen beginning at 12:30 a.m.; the second was about 1:30 a.m.; roosters often crow during the night. In either case the point is that the denial is imminent.

22:35. See comment on 9:3.

22:36-38. By mentioning the "sword" here Jesus is not inviting revolution like the *Zealots and other revolutionaries did (cf. *Pseudo-Phocylides 32-34). Instead, Jesus calls for a temporary and symbolic act—two are sufficient (v. 38)—so he may be charged as a revolutionary and hence "reckoned among transgressors" in accordance with Isaiah 53:12. (On the messianic import of Is 53, see comment on Mt 12:15-18.) To be without one's outer cloak at night would leave one cold; yet Jesus suggests that it is better than being unprepared for the conflict these disciples are about to face.

22:39-46
The Prepared and the Unprepared

22:39. The walk from the upper room to the Mount of Olives took at least fifteen minutes.

22:40. They may have arrived at Gethsemane by 10 or 11 p.m. (which was normally considered late in the evening, because agriculture and business operated by daylight). Jewish people customarily stayed awake late on Passover night to speak of God's redemption. The *disciples should have been able to stay awake to keep watch; they had probably stayed up late on nearly every other Passover of their lives.

"Temptation" here means "testing"; given the common Jewish religious uses of the word, Jesus is saying: "lest you fall prey to the testing you are about to face."

22:41-42. On the "cup of judgment," see comment on Mark 10:39.

22:43-46. The disciples are to "stand watch" like porters (slaves in charge of the door) or sentries. Some ancient texts report the rare phenomenon of sweating blood; Luke's variant may intend this phenomenon (sometimes mentioned today in connection with extreme stress) or simply that Jesus' sweat is profuse and dripping the way blood would.

22:47-53
The Betrayal

22:47. Because they had been sent by prominent men of Jerusalem, the band that comes to arrest Jesus is probably the temple guard. This guard is known to have possessed the weapons mentioned here (swords and clubs); clubs were said (by later rabbis) to have characterized the corrupt priestly aristocracy, as well as being useful in controlling rioters.

22:48. A kiss was a sign of special affection among family members and close friends, or of a disciple's honor and affection for his teacher. Thus Judas's betrayal kiss is a special act of hypocrisy (cf. Prov 27:6).

22:49-50. Being well-to-do, *high priests had many servants. Although the servant mentioned here is probably not a Levite and is thus unable to minister in the temple anyway, some note that those who were missing appendages such as ears were barred from serving in the sanctuary. This attack on this servant would confirm the armed (22:47) expedition's suspicions that Jesus' followers are violent revolutionaries (22:36-38).

22:51. Many people associated leaders who were thought to be messiahs with popular revolt and the overthrow of the Gentile kingdoms that oppressed Israel; a *Messiah who would heal his attackers was not part of anyone's messianic picture at the time.

22:52-53. Subversives (e.g., the later assassins who slew Jewish aristocrats under cover of the crowds in the temple) did their acts secretly or in a way that would avoid capture; Jesus' alleged subversion was public and unconcealed. Here it is Jesus' enemies, not Jesus, who acts under the cloak of darkness. Night was commonly associated with evil and crime; in popular superstition (later found in rabbinic teaching as well), night was the time when the *demons ruled and witchcraft operated.

22:54-62
Peter's Denials

22:54. This trial breaks a number of Jewish legal rules, if later documents correctly indicate the state of Jewish *law in this period. Taking Jesus to the *high priest's home at night breached ancient legal protocol (Jewish and Roman).

22:55. Peter's trespassing on the high priest's property (even an outer court) required serious commitment from a Galilean fisherman. Household watchman and temple guards wait to learn the results of the trial inside. They may have planned to stay up late for Passover anyway, as was the custom.

22:56-58. Slaves in aristocratic households exercised more power and status than the average free person. Although the high priest had many servants, the slave girl would recognize that Peter and the guards are not from the household; further, Peter was not dressed like one of the guards. As a servant in an aristocratic priestly household near the temple, she may have been at the temple, where she could have gotten a good look at Jesus' disciples in the temple courts.

22:59. Galilean accents differed from Judean accents, certainly in *Aramaic and presumably (as undoubtedly here) in Greek; Galileans were especially noted for mispronouncing guttural sounds. The high priest's servants and temple guard lived in Jerusalem and would see themselves as Judeans. Regional accents were difficult to hide (cf. Judg 12:6).

22:60-62. For most people in the ancient Mediterranean, a rooster's crowing marked daybreak. Some scholars have suggested that this crowing refers to an earlier Palestinian rooster crowing between 12:30 and 2:30 a.m.

22:63-71
The Decree of the Sanhedrin

22:63-65. Jewish *law (as preserved in the more Pharisaic tradition of the later rabbis) permitted public flogging of a condemned person; it did not permit the treatment de-

scribed here—mocking and beating—certainly not before a person had been proved guilty in a trial. Jewish law meticulously guarded the rights of the accused and erred on the side of mercy in official decisions; thus the behavior described here would have revolted the *Pharisees and other pietists. Jesus' words could not even be construed as blasphemy by the strict definitions of later rabbis (possibly held by Pharisees in this period). Like most ancient elites, however, the priestly aristocracy would not feel bound to such rules.

22:66. By at least waiting till morning for an official hearing (as opposed to any informal interrogations that may have taken place earlier), those representatives of the Sanhedrin present maintained some semblance of legality in the proceedings; night trials were illegal and would not be respected even by honorable Roman governors.

"Leading priests," "elders" and "*scribes" were three groups represented on the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious court of Israel. In later tradition the full Sanhedrin had seventy-one members, normally assembled in a meeting hall in the temple called the Chamber of Hewn Stone, where they sat in a semicircle with the high priest in the center. The number may have been simply an average, and Josephus, writing in the first century, suggests that they met quite close to the temple, but not in it. In any case, although the body acted as a whole, not all its members concurred (23:51); writers would often make a general statement about a group without listing explicit exceptions (cf. Jer 26:16, 24).

22:67-68. If extant reports of ancient Jewish law are accurate, the high priest could not legally force Jesus to convict himself out of his own mouth. Nevertheless, he asks whether Jesus thinks of himself as a *messiah—hence, to the high priest's mind, as a revolutionary. A prophet could speak the truth while doubting that his hearers would accept it (Jer 38:15).

22:69. Jesus' response is a claim to be not a merely mortal messiah but the cosmic ruler of Daniel 7:13-14. "Power" was sometimes used as a Jewish title for God; Luke simplifies the phrase for his Greek readers as "power of God."

22:70-71. The religious authorities serve as their own witnesses that Jesus claims to be a subversive, a revolutionary (23:2). Although codified only later, the spirit of Jewish law resisted condemning a prisoner by his own admission, but Jesus' critics here treat Jesus' words not as admission of an offense, but as an offense itself. Although they might construe Jesus' words as "blasphemy" for purposes of the court, they also seemed to confirm suspicions about Jesus politically—the issue in which Pilate would be interested (23:2).

23:1-12
Accusations Before Pilate and Herod

23:1. The visit to *Pilate would be early in the morning, because Roman officials met the public only from sunrise to before noon.

23:2. "King Messiah" became a standard title of the *Messiah in later *rabbis; "Messiah" meant simply "anointed one," but in popular parlance it was most often used for the king from David's line who would be associated with the restoration of the *kingdom to Israel.

Despite 20:22-25, the leaders interpret Jesus' messianic claim the only way they know how: according to the category of prophetic revolutionaries. Such revolutionaries had become common in their day; some leaders among them appeared to be potential messianic figures, a pattern that would climax in Bar Kochba, the purported messianic warrior who would lead his people to a bloody defeat in A.D. 132–135. Such political messiahs threatened the religious authorities' power and security and were especially troublesome to Rome. In addition to genuine revolutionaries, a number of prophets gathered followings, expecting God to intervene for Israel; but Rome regarded even predictions of an emperor's demise as treason. All such popular movements threatened the aristocratic priests' base of power and the nation's stability.

23:3-4. Pilate apparently understands Jesus' claim in a religious or philosophic rather than a political sense and therefore does not feel that it comes under Roman civil jurisdiction. Further, Pilate's relationship with the priestly aristocracy is known to have been strained. On Luke's theme of Roman authorities exonerating Christians, see the discussion of Luke's legal purpose in the introduction to Acts.

23:5. A Galilean had led the tax revolt of A.D. 6; Judeans also tended to view Galileans

as inferior to themselves, although some of Galilee was urban and much of it was in touch with the larger Mediterranean culture, as Jerusalem was.

23:6-7. Herod Antipas would be in Jerusalem for the feast and was probably staying at the old Hasmonean (Maccabean) palace. Pilate had the authority to try Jesus if he had committed a crime in Pilate's area of jurisdiction; but sometimes the right of extradition was allowed, and Antipas might thus be free to try Jesus for a crime committed in Galilee. By refusing jurisdiction, Pilate could take the matter off his own hands.

23:8-10. This Herod was the one who had murdered John; cf. comment on Mark 6:14-29. Many people wanted to see signs; in some popular stories (notably a later one in *Apuleius), their curiosity got them in trouble with sorcerers. Of the four Gospels, only Luke reports two hearings before the governor separated by one before a Herod; Acts reports two trials of Paul before procurators with a trial before another Herod, Agrippa II. Ancient Greco-Roman historians liked to point out parallels between related figures in history.

23:11. The "bright" or "elegant" (NIV, NRSV) robe may be a white one, characteristic of Jewish kings. This apparel would be an appropriate mockery from Antipas's bodyguard.

23:12. Herod and Pilate had had plenty of opportunities to become alienated; for instance, Antipas had intervened in a matter concerning votive shields (reported in *Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 299-300); on another occasion Pilate had pilfered the temple treasury for funds for an aqueduct; even the event of Luke 13:1 could have been the provocation. Giving the ambitious Herod Antipas a sign of influence in Jerusalem would certainly create a "friendship," which in upper classes often meant a political alliance.

23:13-25
Pilate and the Crowds

23:13-17. On the Lukan motif of Roman authorities exonerating Christians, see the introduction to Acts.

23:18-25. As a clearly violent revolutionary, Barabbas appeared to Pilate to be a greater danger than Jesus. Romans were known for their emphasis on justice, but Romans were also politicians concerned with crowd control: the emperor himself pacified the masses with shows in the arena and free grain, and public outcry had previously forced Pilate to withdraw the Roman standards from Jerusalem. For many Roman governors, efficiency in ruling provinces and keeping peace took precedence over individual justice; for instance, a Roman soldier who had burned a *law scroll was executed to pacify Jewish antagonism, not because the Romans cared about burning their religious book.

23:26-32
Road to the Cross

23:26. Condemned criminals normally bore their own crosses (i.e., the horizontal beam of the cross), but in this case someone else is drafted, perhaps due to the severe precrucifixion beating often administered, which the other Gospels report Jesus had received (cf. also Lk 18:33).

Cyrene was in what is now Libya in North Africa and included a large Jewish community; "Simon" is a Greek name often used by Jewish people (because it sounded like the patriarch Simeon). Devout Jewish pilgrims from throughout the Mediterranean world came to Jerusalem during Passover. Roman soldiers could impress anyone into service to carry things for them. Because it is a feast and work is forbidden, Simon is not coming from "the field" (literally) as a worker; perhaps he is late for the festival, only now arriving from Cyrene, or perhaps he has rejoined the day's festivities from where he is residing temporarily in the countryside.

23:27. Authorities used executions as public warnings, and crowds generally went to view an execution. Later rabbinic tradition claims that the pious women of Jerusalem often went to mourn the executed, providing a narcotic drink to dull the victim's pain. (Rulers sometimes forbade funerals and public mourning for condemned persons; but nationalistic Jews would sympathize with fellow Jews executed by the Romans for being revolutionaries.) In antiquity women usually expressed mourning more dramatically than men.

23:28. "Daughters of Jerusalem" designates Jerusalemite women (e.g., Song 1:5; 2:7; 3:5) but could also recall some judgment or-

acles (Is 3:16-17; 4:4). The admonition to "mourn for yourselves" was also a prophetic cry of judgment (Is 32:9-14; Joel 1:5).

23:29. Jesus' statement is the sort of lament mothers would offer when their children died (*2 *Baruch* 10:13-15). *Josephus reports that some mothers were reduced to eating their children during the famine in Rome's siege against Jerusalem, A.D. 66–70 (cf. Lev 26:29; Deut 28:53; 2 Kings 6:29).

23:30. The prophets had used the same image Jesus uses here as an image of awful judgment (cf. Hos 10:8; Is 2:10, 19-21). Jesus especially uses Hos 10:8, changing the wording only slightly.

23:31. Unlike a green one, a dry tree would easily catch fire. The point may be that Jesus is "green" wood, not really a revolutionary; how much greater would be the Roman judgment against the dry wood, the real revolutionaries? Or that if they murdered the innocent, how much more would they destroy themselves (Jewish leaders fought one another as well as the Romans in 66–70)? Or the saying may simply mean that Jerusalem is becoming more ripe for judgment. Jesus may also allude back to the trees and Jerusalem's fall in 21:24, 29-30, though this option seems less likely.

23:32. Authorities preferred to execute people on festivals, when the executions would warn the greatest number of people against rebellion. It was also less work for the soldiers if they could execute several convicts at once.

23:33-43
On the Cross

23:33. The site of the crucifixion might have been named "Place of the Skull" because so many deaths occurred there. The traditional "Calvary" (KJV) is from Latin *calvarius*, "skull."

23:34. Despite the precedent of *Old Testament prayers for vengeance (e.g., 2 Chron 24:22; Ps 137:7-9; Jer 15:15; 17:18; 18:23; 20:12), Jesus prays that God will forgive his persecutors. Those who were executed were supposed to say, "May my death *atone for all my sins"; but Jesus confesses instead the sin of those who falsely convicted him, who under Old Testament *law were liable for his penalty before God. Ancient biographers often paralleled different figures, and Luke parallels with Jesus the first martyr of his second volume, Stephen (Acts 7:60). Roman custom awarded the soldiers the victim's clothes. People in antiquity made many decisions by means of casting lots (see comment on Acts 1:26).

23:35. Ridicule was one of the sufferings inflicted on the naked man hanging on a cross. Ancient writers often liked irony; the double irony here is that Jesus does save others, and that the leaders utter lines like *Satan's (4:3, 6-7, 9).

23:36. One might view the soldiers' offer of "sour wine" or "wine vinegar" (NIV) as an act of mercy, because sour wine could act as a painkiller and was also often used as a remedy for thirst; but Luke declares that it is done only as part of their ridicule. That some is on hand is not surprising; soldiers and others used it because it quenched thirst better than water and was cheaper than normal wine.

23:37. The soldiers' taunt may include a touch of *Gentile cynicism toward Judaism, which was widespread despite (or partly because of) Roman conversions to Judaism.

23:38. The condemned person or a member of the execution squad sometimes carried the charge (Latin *titulus*) to the site of execution.

23:39-41. Jesus' interaction with his fellow victim is Luke's ultimate example of Jesus receiving sinners and outcasts, although Luke (unlike Mark) has called them "evildoers" or "criminals" (NIV) without specifying that they were revolutionaries.

23:42. A request to "remember" the supplicant could mean to look out for them once one was able (cf. Gen 40:14). To "enter his kingdom" was to begin to reign; at the cross, only clear-sighted faith could recognize that this dying rabbi Jesus would genuinely reign as *Messiah, true king of the Jews.

23:43. Jewish literature typically contrasted "paradise" (the "garden of Eden") with "*Gehenna," or hell. Although Jewish texts disputed the location of paradise (e.g., in the third heaven; or on the perimeters of the circle of the earth—like a Greek view of the Elysian Fields), they often mentioned it as the abode of the righteous after death or after the *resurrection. Thus both Jesus and this condemned man would proceed directly to the abode of the righteous after death.

23:44-49
Jesus' Death

23:44. "All the earth" (KJV) means simply "the whole land" (NIV, NRSV; "the whole country" GNT cf. Mt 9:26). The "sixth hour" would come shortly before noon, the "ninth hour" shortly before 3 p.m.; crucifixions rarely ended so quickly. The latter time, when Jesus dies, is close to the time of the evening offering in the temple. Darkness was one of the plagues in Egypt (Ex 10:22) and occurs in the prophets as a judgment for the end time (often due to clouds of rain, locusts, smoke, etc.; Is 13:10; Ezek 30:3, 18; 32:7-8; Joel 2:2, 10, 31; 3:15; Amos 5:18; Zech 14:6). An eclipse (cf. 23:45) was considered particularly ominous, especially when it occurred at length and in the middle of the day (the sun was said to be at its peak at midday); cf. Amos 8:9.

23:45. The "veil" (KJV, NASB) or "curtain" (NIV, GNT, NRSV) is probably the one between the holy of holies—inhabited only by God, and where no mortal could enter except the *high priest once each year—and the sanctuary where the priests ministered (Ex 26:33). Some believe that the point of the veil's rending is that God provides access for all people into his presence; others argue that it is more likely that it indicates instead the departure of God from the temple, as in Ezekiel 10–11.

23:46. This line from Psalm 31:5 is said to have often been recited at the period of the evening offering—about the time of Jesus' death.

23:47. Whereas Mark has "*Son of God," Luke emphasizes an implication of that claim: "innocent." Roman pronouncements of innocence were important to Luke's audience; see the introduction to Acts. Soldiers of the Roman army stationed in Palestine were auxiliaries mostly recruited from the eastern Mediterranean, especially from Syria. Although the centurion may be ethnically Syrian, however, for Luke's hearers he would represent Rome.

23:48. Beating breasts was a characteristic sign of mourning (cf. 18:13; Jer 31:19; Nah 2:7), like other mourning activities such as tearing one's hair and throwing dust on one's head). Jewish women bystanders would offer this as the only public mourning these criminals could get, because none was normally permitted after the disposal of their bodies.

23:49. Family and friends would usually be present at an execution; probably only the male *disciples would be in danger as potential revolutionaries. No one stood too close to the cross, because that could obstruct the view; most crosses were lower to the ground than many modern pictures depict. To Palestinian Jews, the fact that these women accompanied Jesus' group of disciples could have been scandalous.

23:50-56
Jesus' Burial

23:50-51. Luke, whose readers are not clashing with Palestinian Jewish leaders (as are Matthew's), is more apt to distinguish different elements within that leadership than is Matthew. In Jesus' day, Judaism was quite diverse, because no one group could lay claim to all the power; but after A.D. 70, when much of the competition had been eliminated by the destruction of the temple (the *Sadducees' power base) and the scattering of other groups, some other members of the Palestinian Jewish elite sought to consolidate their religious power.

23:52-53. Condemned criminals did not normally receive such honorable burials; but exceptions seem to have been made on the intercession of well-to-do family or friends, as the skeleton of a crucified man buried in another aristocratic Jewish tomb of this period testifies.

23:54-56. Because bodies decomposed rapidly, mourners were allowed to anoint, wash and wrap the body in its shrouds even on the sabbath. More elaborate arrangements that these loyal women *disciples wish to bestow on Jesus, however, might wait until the sabbath (sundown Friday evening to sundown Saturday evening) has passed.

24:1-12
The First Announcement

24:1. The sabbath ended at sundown Saturday evening; as soon as daylight breaks (by 6 a.m. at this time of year) these women head for the tomb. (In popular superstition, night was dangerous due to the predominance of *demons at that time, but the women probably do not travel at night because it would be too hard to find the tomb, which was outside the city walls on unfamiliar terrain.) Spices may not have

been used for everyone but were often used for the bodies of special persons (e.g., Herod). They reduced the immediate stench of rapid decomposition in the normally hot Mediterranean days. After one day and two nights, the women could expect that the body would already stink. But Jerusalem is over two thousand feet above sea level and is cool enough in April that in a sealed tomb the body would have still been approachable.

24:2-3. The stone was probably a large, disk-shaped stone rolled along a groove in front of the tomb. That it had been rolled back could have suggested tampering or a tomb robbery, although nothing valuable had been buried with the body. More likely, just outside Jerusalem, it could suggest seizure by the authorities.

24:4-5. Angels often appeared as human beings in the *Old Testament (Josh 5:13) and also often appeared in radiant garments or bodies (cf. 2 Kings 6:17; Dan 10:5-6). The latter was especially the case in contemporary Jewish texts (i.e., in the expectations of the people to whom this revelation is being given).

24:6-12. Part of the reason for the *apostles' unbelief is that a *resurrection of this nature contradicted their messianic expectations; another reason may have been that many men considered the witness of women nearly worthless, because they regarded women as unstable and undependable. (These opinions appear, e.g, in *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.219 and Justinian, *Institutes* 2.10.6, as well as Mishnah *Yevamot* 15:1, 8-10; 16:7; *Ketubbot* 1:6-9; Tosefta *Yevamot* 14:10; *Sifra Vayyiqura Dibura Dehobah* pq. 7.45.1.1.)

24:13-35
The Emmaus Appearance

24:13. Sixty stadia was about seven miles. Apparently more than one place in Palestine was called Emmaus (1 Maccabees 3:57; 4:3; Josephus reports a different one). The exact site of Luke's Emmaus is no longer known.

24:14-17. Jewish travelers would not consider it unusual for a stranger, who is also a fellow Jew, to join their small company walking for some distance, especially if they assume him to be a Passover pilgrim on his way home. People normally conversed as they walked; later *rabbis favored discussion about the Torah. Jesus' feigning ignorance to ask a question does not mean that he does not know the answer (cf. Gen 3:9, 11; 4:9-10). On their lack of recognition, see comment on 24:31-35.

24:18. News spread quickly by word of mouth, and public executions at a feast would be widely discussed. No matter where a Greek-speaking pilgrim visiting Jerusalem for the feast was from, he or she would probably have heard something about these matters. (The description of Cleopas's surprise resembles, for example, astonished characters in ancient stories confronting people awakening from many years of sleep and unaware of recent events.) Unless he speaks with emotional *hyperbole, however (which is possible), Cleopas appears to suppose too much to presume that everyone would regard these events as the most obvious of the past several days.

24:19-21. Cleopas's words reflect the confusion all Jesus' followers must have felt: Jesus was a prophet, as in the *Old Testament, or maybe the *Messiah; but the religious leaders of the nation, who of all people should have embraced and followed him, had rejected him (like some prophets of old). In Galilee and outside Palestine, where the priestly aristocracy was not as directly known as in Judea, respect for the temple leadership no doubt ran higher.

24:22-24. See comment on 24:6-12.

24:25-27. If we may infer his subjects from the texts used elsewhere in Luke-Acts and in early Christianity, plus obviously messianic texts, Jesus surely includes references to Deuteronomy 18:15-18, Isaiah 9, 11 and 53; for suffering preceding exaltation, Isaiah 53:12 might be key. The implication, however, is that Jesus adduced principles applying to his messiahship from throughout the Old Testament. (Luke may supply samples of the intended references in some speeches in Acts; these could also include analogies with Old Testament savior figures, as in Acts 7, where some suffered before being exalted.) Later *rabbinic literature regularly praised interpreters with deep insight into Scripture, such as that Jesus demonstrates here.

24:28. It is polite for Jesus to make as if he would go on, unless they invite him to stay with them; such behavior could also test a person's hospitality (Gen 19:2).

24:29. Hospitality demanded no less than the lodging these *disciples offer Jesus, espe-

cially because it is approaching sundown; night travel, particularly as one got farther from Jerusalem, would be dangerous due to robbers, and it would be difficult to see. Jewish people throughout the ancient world welcomed fellow Jews who were traveling to spend the night, and insistence was part of hospitality (e.g., Judg 19:5-9; 1 Sam 28:23).

24:30. It was also part of hospitality to offer bread to a guest, no matter how late in the evening (see comment on 11:5-6). After the long walk, these disciples would be hungry anyway, and all three are travelers. But by breaking and giving bread to them, Jesus takes the role usually held by the head of the household, which he had exercised among his disciples.

24:31-35. Greeks told stories of supernatural beings who could change shape or disguise themselves or others. More relevantly, in Jewish sources angels were sometimes said to come in disguises and reveal themselves only at the end of their mission (e.g., Raphael to Tobit and Tobias in the book of Tobit). But this was not the case with humans, including dead persons restored to earthly life in the Old Testament. Although one reason these disciples do not recognize Jesus may be that their eyes have been blinded (24:31; cf. 2 Kings 6:17), Jesus' subsequent disappearance also seems to indicate that he has a new kind of body, the sort of body promised the righteous in the future resurrection.

24:36-43
The Nature of Jesus' Resurrection

24:36-38. Because the *resurrection of all the dead had not yet occurred, the disciples think Jesus might be a "ghost" or some other spirit. On the popular level, some people held a belief in ghosts (cf. Mk 6:49) without considering that it contradicted the idea of afterlife in paradise or hell (*Gehenna) and the doctrine of the bodily resurrection. But Jesus assures them that he is not an example of a ghost but of the bodily resurrection.

24:39-40. Some victims were tied onto crosses; others were nailed on. The nails would have been driven through the wrists (which could be called part of the hand). A nail through the ankles may not have been common (there does appear to be evidence from an excavated example), but there was nothing to have kept soldiers from doing it. Roman execution squads were left to their own ingenuity to devise various creative ways to torture their dying victims.

24:41-43. In most Jewish traditions, angels did not eat earthly food. Spirits had no need for food.

24:44-53
The Final Commission

24:44-46. See comment on 24:25-27. Although Scripture could be summarized by other divisions (e.g., the Law and the Prophets; 16:16), other Jewish writings mention the threefold division of the *Old Testament, as here. Jewish interpreters sometimes spoke of God "opening their eyes" to his truths, language with Old Testament precedent (Ps 119:18). Although the Gospels report Jesus' disagreement with his contemporaries on many issues, every stratum of Gospel tradition reports his appeal to the Old Testament to define his mission. Although he may have disagreed with many of his contemporaries on Old Testament interpretation, he agrees with them concerning its authority. Luke does not elaborate Jesus' teaching here, but probably alludes to what he believes was its content in some speeches in Acts (e.g., Acts 7:2-53; 13:16-47).

24:47-48. Isaiah spoke of Israel being witnesses to (or against) all the nations in the end time (43:10; 44:8), by means of the endowment of the *Spirit (42:1; 44:3). The Spirit (mentioned in the parallel passage in Acts 1:8) was especially associated with the ability to prophesy, to speak as God inspired a person to speak.

24:49. Jewish people sometimes spoke of being "clothed" with spiritual qualities (e.g., 1 Chron 12:18 [literally; Heb. and Gk. 12:19]; Sirach 17:3). Given the parallel with these verses in Acts 1:4-8, "power from on high" may echo Isaiah 32:15, where the Spirit is poured out "from on high."

24:50. Priests lifted their hands to give the priestly benediction over the people ("May the Lord bless you, and keep you . . ."—Num 6:24-27).

24:51. See comment on the ascension in Acts 1:9-11.

24:52-53. Many of the temple courts were used for prayer. Ancient writers often framed literary units by starting and ending on the same point; Luke frames his whole Gospel by starting and ending it in the temple.

John

Introduction

Authorship. For the purposes of interpretation, the specific author's name is less important than that the Gospel appeals to eyewitness testimony; there is wider agreement on the latter point than on the former. Early tradition is almost unanimous that "John" wrote the Fourth Gospel, although scholars debate which John. The Gospel itself claims to come from an eyewitness (19:35), whom the internal evidence suggests is the "beloved disciple," whose role most closely fits that of John, son of Zebedee, in the other Gospels. This perspective fits the respect that classicists often accord to external attestation, although it is a minority view among *New Testament scholars today. (One mediating solution has been the proposal that a Johannine "school" composed the Gospel using traditions that the beloved disciple had passed on to them; most famous teachers had *disciples to pass on their teachings in such settings.)

The two strongest objections to Johannine authorship of this Gospel today are its date and its differences from the other extant Gospels. The argument based on date objects that an original disciple of Jesus would have been in his eighties or nineties when the Gospel was written. This challenge is of limited weight, however; although most people did not live that long, mortality was highest in early childhood; typical disciples were in their teens; and we know of other ancient thinkers in their eighties with sharp memories and wit. That one of the Twelve (or another close disciple) should have survived into his nineties and would then be pressed to record his experience of Jesus is not implausible. The other objection, based on differences from Matthew, Mark and Luke, is more persuasive but would lose most of its force if John represents an independent tradition or witness to Jesus, writing in his own style and with his own interests (see the discussion of *genre). Flexibility in the ways ancient biographies were written allow John to pursue a distinctly different approach from Mark and those that followed him.

Although pseudonymous works existed in antiquity, they stated their purported author rather than implied him; unless we want to argue for the author's *implicit* pseudonymity (implying that he was one of Jesus' disciples), the internal evidence

supporting an eyewitness author should be allowed to stand. For this reason, the Fourth Gospel's claim to authorship by an eyewitness is significant. We would accept this claim in most other ancient biographies or histories.

Date. Tradition holds that the Gospel was written in the 90s of the first century; that it could not have been written much later than this date (against some nineteenth-century scholars' views) has been confirmed by a manuscript fragment of the Gospel dating to the early second century. A date in the 60s has also been proposed, but most scholars hold to the mid-90s, which best fits the setting described below and the probable setting of the book of Revelation, which stems from the same Christian circles as the Fourth Gospel.

Where John Was Written. Because John focuses (even more than Matthew) on the *Pharisees as opponents, it is plausible that his Gospel is written in Galilee or Syria, where conflicts with the Judean Pharisees would be most easily felt in the 90s of the first century.

Tradition strongly holds, however, that John lived in Ephesus in Asia Minor, although he had originally come from Palestine and probably maintained awareness of issues in Palestine through contacts there. In this case the material may have taken shape in retellings in Palestine before massive numbers of Palestinian Jews settled elsewhere (including Asia Minor) in the wake of the war of 66–73. Two of the seven *churches in the book of Revelation grapple with precisely the issues that his Gospel addresses: Smyrna (Rev 2:9-10) and Philadelphia (3:7-9). Smyrna became a center of Johannine tradition in the next generation and faced the sort of situation most scholars find in this Gospel.

Setting. Archaeological discoveries have demonstrated the appropriateness of the Fourth Gospel's traditions to a Palestinian Jewish milieu—that is, the place where both Jesus and the beloved disciple had lived. The Gospel applies these traditions to a new situation. The temple's destruction in A.D. 70 and the scattering of many Judeans afterward fit the emphasis on the new temple in John.

John also expresses concern for conflict with *synagogues (16:2; cf. 9:22; 12:42). After A.D. 70, the strength of many Jewish religious groups in Palestine was broken; the Pharisees began to take more leadership in religious matters. Jewish Christians may have provided their main competition, and many scholars argue that Judean leaders even added a line to a standard prayer that cursed sectarians, among whom they included the Jewish Christians. (Scholars are not, however, unanimous regarding the precise date and object of the curse.) John's specialized concern with the Pharisees in his Gospel (other groups are mostly limited to his passion narrative) may suggest that their opposition is somehow related to the opponents his readers face in their own communities.

After the war of A.D. 70, many Jews in the Roman Empire wanted to distance themselves from sects emphasizing messiahs, the *kingdom and *prophecy. Some

believers were made unwelcome by local synagogue authorities, treated as if their very Jewishness was held in question because they believed in Jesus as *Messiah and kingdom-bringer (cf. perhaps another response in Rev 2:9; 3:9, also addressing western Asia Minor). The Roman authorities were also suspicious of people who did not worship the emperor but were not Jewish (see the discussion of setting in the introduction to Revelation). John writes his Gospel to encourage these Jewish Christians that their faith in Jesus is genuinely Jewish and that it is their opponents who have misrepresented biblical Judaism.

Genre. For the *genre of Gospels in general, see the introduction to the Gospels. Although all four Gospels fall into the general ancient category of biography, that genre was broad enough to allow considerable differences of style. For instance, Luke writes like an ancient Greek historian; Matthew's heavy use of the *Old Testament shows his interest in interpreting such history. But John seems to be the most interpretive of all, as has been recognized since the early church fathers.

Jesus' discourses in this Gospel also require special comment. The style of Jesus' speaking in John differs from his words in the first three Gospels; it may be helpful to observe that ancient writers were trained to practice paraphrasing speeches in their own words. Some scholars have also argued that John applies Jesus' words to his readers' situation under the *Spirit's guidance; Jewish teachers and (more thoroughly) storytellers often developed different kinds of Old Testament *narratives by describing them in terms most relevant to their audience. Most of Jesus' discourses in John 3–12 are conflicts with the Jewish authorities and could bear some resemblances to the briefer rabbinic accounts of arguments with opponents. Others compare John's lengthy speeches to the interpretive speeches often found in ancient historiography. In any case, John remains a Gospel—an ancient biography of Jesus.

Message. One emphasis in the Fourth Gospel concerns God's *law and word. The Pharisees claimed that God's law supported their positions; but John emphasizes that Jesus himself is the Word (1:1-18) and the appointed messenger of the Father, and that to reject him is thus to reject the Father.

Another area of emphasis is the Spirit. The Pharisees did not believe that the Spirit, which they associated especially with the ability to prophesy, was active in biblical ways in their own day; thus they did not claim to have the Spirit. In contrast, John encourages the believers to argue not only from the law but also from their possession of the Spirit. The Pharisees claimed to know the law through their interpretations and traditions; the Christians claimed to know God personally and therefore claimed to understand the law's point better than their opponents did.

One recurrent set of characters in the Gospel, identified with these opponents of Jesus, is "the Jews." Although Jesus and the disciples are clearly Jewish, John usually uses the term "Jews" in a negative sense for the Judean authorities in Jerusalem, whom he sometimes identifies (perhaps to update for the language of his

own day) with "the Pharisees." Anti-Semites have sometimes abused the Gospel of John to deny Jesus' Jewishness, ignoring the situation in which John writes. But John often uses irony (a common ancient literary technique), and by calling the Judean authorities "Jews" he may ironically answer these authorities who say that the Jewish Christians were no longer faithful to Israel. He concedes the title to them, but everything else in his Gospel is meant to argue just the opposite: that the genuine heirs of Israel's ancestral faith are the Jewish Christians, even though they have been expelled from their Jewish communities.

John uses many images common in his culture, especially contrasts between light and darkness (common in the *Dead Sea Scrolls), above and below (common in Jewish *apocalyptic literature), and so on.

Commentaries. For background, some of the most useful commentaries are the multivolume commentaries by Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John,* 2 vols., AB 29 and 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966–1970); Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); and Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John,* 3 vols. (New York: Herder & Herder/Seabury/Crossroad, 1968–1982); and the single-volume commentary on the Greek text by C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John,* 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978). On a less technical level, useful works for background include, among others, Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Jo-Ann A. Brant, *John*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Jey J. Kanagaraj, *John,* NCC (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013); on a mediating but still one-volume level, see George R. Beasley-Murray, *John,* 2nd ed., WBC (Nashville: Nelson, 1999); Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John,* BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004). Helpful specialized studies abound, e.g., Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered,* LNTS 321 (New York: T & T Clark, 2006); Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community,* JSNTSup 61 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, Sheffield Academic Press, 1991).

1:1-18
The Word Becomes Flesh

The Greek term translated "word" was also used by many philosophers to mean "reason," the force that structured the universe; *Philo combined this image with Jewish conceptions of the "word." Although Greek conceptions undoubtedly did have some influence on how John's hearers understood his phrase, they were not philosophically trained. (Statistically it is likely that most could not even read.) The most relevant background is background that all of them shared, at the very least from what they heard read in *synagogues or *churches each week: God's "Word" was Scripture. The personification of this "Word" makes sense. The *Old Testament had personified Wisdom (Prov 8), and ancient Judaism eventually identified personified Wisdom, the Word and the Law (the Torah), sometimes identifying them with each other (e.g., Sirach 24:1, 23; Baruch 3:28–4:1).

By calling Jesus "the Word," John calls him the embodiment of all God's revelation in the Scriptures and thus encourages his Jewish Christian hearers, marginalized from some of their synagogues, that only those who accept Jesus truly honor the law fully (1:17). Jewish people considered Wisdom/Word divine yet distinct from God the Father, so it was the closest available term John had to describe Jesus; to communicate, we normally take the best available language and then adjust it as needed (e.g., the Greek and English words for "God" were applied to other deities before being applied to the true God).

1:1-2. Beginning like Genesis 1:1, John alludes to the Old Testament and Jewish picture of God creating through his preexistent wisdom or word. According to standard Jewish doctrine in his day, this wisdom existed before the rest of creation but was itself created. By declaring that the Word "was" in the beginning and especially by calling the Word "God" (v. 1; also the most likely reading of 1:18), John goes beyond the common Jewish conception to imply that Jesus is not created (cf. Is 43:10-11).

1:3. Developing Old Testament ideas (e.g., Ps 33:6; Prov 8:30), Jewish teachers emphasized that God had created all things through his Wisdom/Word/Law and sustained them because the righteous practiced the law. (Some even pointed out that Gen 1 declared "And God said" ten times when he was creating, and this meant that God created all things with his Ten Commandments.) Ancient Jewish teachers would have agreed with verse 3. Influenced by Platonic thought, *Philo also believed that God created the world through his *logos* ("word"), which he viewed as a sort of pattern in God's mind; but the background for creation through God's word is already present in the Old Testament.

1:4. Developing Old Testament promises of long life in the land if Israel obeyed God (e.g., Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16; 8:1; 11:9), Jewish teachers emphasized that the reward for obeying God's word was *eternal life. John declares that this life had always been available through God's word, which is the same word that he identifies (in 1:14) with Jesus. Jewish teachers called many things "light" (e.g., the righteous, the patriarchs, Israel, God), but this title was most commonly applied to God's law (a figure also in the Old Testament, e.g., Ps 119:105).

1:5. That darkness did not "apprehend" the light may be a play on words (it could mean "understand" or "overcome" [NRSV]). Similarly, in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, the forces of light and darkness were engaged in mortal combat, but light was predestined to triumph.

1:6-8. "Witness" was traditionally a legal concept in the Greco-Roman world and in Jewish circles. Isaiah used it in relation to the end time, when the people God delivered would testify to the nations about him before his tribunal (43:10; 44:8). This image recurs throughout this Gospel; although people in this period used the term widely enough that it did not always retain legal connotations, many scholars envision a legal metaphor in this Gospel (in view of expulsions from the synagogue in 9:22; 12:42; 16:2; cf. comment on 14:16; 16:8). On John the Baptist himself, see 1:15.

1:9-10. Jewish people expected that the *Gentiles were unenlightened. A later Jewish tradition even declared that God had offered the law to all seventy nations at Mount Sinai but lamented that they had all chosen to reject his word; only Israel had accepted it. In the same way, the world of John's day has failed to recognize God's Word among them.

1:11. Here John breaks with the image in Jewish tradition, according to which Israel alone of all nations had received the law. Jewish people expected that the faithful of Israel would likewise accept the revelation when God gave forth the law again in the end time (Is 2:3; Jer 31:31-34). (In most Jewish tradition, the law would, if changed at all, be more stringent in the world to come.) They realized, of course, that in many generations even Israel disobeyed God.

1:12-13. The emphasis is thus not on ethnic descent (v. 11) but on spiritual rebirth; see comment on 3:3, 5 for details on how ancient Judaism might hear the language of rebirth. Jewish tradition applied the title "children of God" to Israel (cf. Ex 4:22; Deut 32:19-20).

1:14. Neither Greek philosophers nor Jewish teachers could conceive of the Word becoming flesh. Since the time of *Plato, Greek philosophers had emphasized that the ideal was what was invisible and eternal; most Jews so heavily emphasized that a human being could not become a god that they never considered that God might become human.

That John had in mind one particular passage, which addresses God giving the law to Israel, is confirmed by the accumulation of multiple allusions. When God revealed his glory to Moses in Exodus 33–34, he revealed not just dramatic splendor but his *character* (Ex 33:19). Particularly relevant here, his glory was "abounding in covenant love and covenant faithfulness" (Ex 34:6), which could also be translated "full of *grace and truth." Like Moses of old (see 2 Cor 3:6-18), the *disciples saw God's glory, now revealed in Jesus. As the Gospel unfolds, Jesus' glory is revealed in his signs (e.g., Jn 2:11) but especially in the cross, his ultimate act of love and the ultimate expression of God's heart for people (12:23-33). The Jewish people were expecting God to reveal his glory in something like a cosmic spectacle of fireworks; but for the first coming, Jesus reveals the same side of God's character that was emphasized to Moses: his covenant love.

"Dwelt" (KJV, NASB) here is literally "tabernacled," which means that as God tabernacled with his people in the wilderness, so had the Word tabernacled among his people in Jesus. In Jewish literature Wisdom also appeared on earth and "lived among" people (Baruch 3:37-38), although there was no thought of Wisdom becoming human.

1:15. Scholars have suggested that some people may have thought too highly of John the Baptist, a mere prophet, at the expense of Jesus the *Messiah (cf. Acts 19:3-5); such a situation would invite the writer to put John in his place. Others see John as merely the prototypical witness here, modeling the Gospel's larger theme. In any case, in the Fourth Gospel, John always defers to Jesus, as a proper prophet should.

1:16-17. Grace and truth were clearly present in the law (Ex 34:6), but Moses could not witness their fulness because he could see only part of God's glory (Ex 33:20-23). Their ultimate expression would come in the Word/law enfleshed.

1:18. Even Moses could see only part of God's glory (Ex 33:20), but in the person of

Table 3. Parallels Between Exodus 33–34 and John 1:14-18

Exodus 33–34	John 1:14-18
The revelation of God's word, the Torah	The revelation of God's Word, Jesus
God dwelt among his people in the tabernacle (33:10); Moses pleaded that God would continue to dwell with them (33:14-16)	The Word "tabernacled" (literally, in 1:14) among people
Moses beheld God's glory	The disciples beheld Jesus' glory (1:14)
The glory was full of grace and truth (34:6)	The glory was full of grace and truth (1:14)
The law was given through Moses	The law was given through Moses (1:17)
No one could see all of God's glory (33:20)	No one could see all of God's glory (1:18a), but it is fully revealed in Jesus (1:18b)

Jesus God's whole heart is fleshed out for the world to see. "In the Father's bosom" (KJV, NASB; cf. "side"—ESV) means that Jesus was in the position of greatest possible intimacy (cf. Jn 13:23; cf. "in closest relationship with the Father," NIV; "near to the Father's heart," NLT). Jewish people often viewed personified Wisdom as the image of God (Wisdom of Solomon 7:26), so that seeing Wisdom was seeing God (see Jn 14:9). Ancient writers often framed a *narrative by beginning and ending it with the same phrase or statement; this framing device is called *inclusio*. In John 1:1 and (according to the most likely reading of the text) 1:18, John calls Jesus "God."

1:19-28
John's Witness to the Jewish Leaders

1:19. Although a few priests were *Pharisees in Jesus' day, there was generally little cooperation between them, and the Pharisees (1:24) certainly had never had power to send priests on missions from Jerusalem. A minority belonged to the ruling aristocracy, but a larger number of the members of the ruling elite were *Sadducees. By the time John writes, however, the Pharisees probably represent Palestinian Christians' main opposition. It was within the tradition of Jewish writing John follows to update the language, the way preachers often do today to bring home the point of the text. John thus focuses on the Pharisaic element of Jesus' opposition.

1:20-21. Elijah had been caught up to heaven alive, and Jewish people anticipated his return, which was predicted in Malachi 4:5. (The later *rabbis thought of him as a master of Jewish *law who would sometimes show up to settle rabbinic disputes or be sent on angelic errands to deliver rabbis in trouble. They expected him to settle legal issues when he returned; others expected him to perform great miracles or to introduce the Messiah.) "The Prophet" undoubtedly means the promised prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15-18).

1:22-23. Applying Isaiah 40:3 to himself means that he is the herald of a new exodus, announcing that God is about to redeem his people from captivity, as he had in the days of Moses. This theme appears in many of the *Old Testament prophets and was part of Jewish expectation in Jesus' day. Indeed, would-be prophetic leaders usually gained followings in the "wilderness." *Qumran sectarians, who (according to the most common view) lived in the wilderness, applied the verse to their own mission.

1:24-25. Of the many kinds of ceremonial washings in Jesus' day, the most significant once-for-all kind of washing was *proselyte *baptism. *Gentiles were usually baptized when they converted to Judaism; this was widely known and is even mentioned by the Greek philosopher *Epictetus. By reporting that John asks Jews to be baptized in an act of conversion, the Gospel writers suggest that John treats Jews as if they are pagans, which was unheard-of (see comment on 3:3-5). The Fourth Gospel often contrasts water rituals and the *Spirit (3:5; see comment on 4:7-26).

1:26. John probably employs the common ancient technique of irony: that they do not "know" the coming one speaks ill of them spiritually (1:10, 33-34).

1:27. Slaves carried their master's sandals (the one servile activity that was too demeaning for rabbis' *disciples to duplicate); John claims that he is not worthy to be even Christ's slave. Prophets were often called God's servants in the Old Testament (e.g., 2 Kings 18:12; 19:34; 20:6; 24:2; Jer 35:15; 44:4).

1:28. "Beyond the Jordan" means Perea, one of the territories controlled by Herod Antipas. Because *Josephus tells us that John was later imprisoned in the fortress Machaerus in the same region (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.116-119), it makes sense that this is where he ministers and is later arrested.

1:29-34
John's Witness to His Disciples

1:29. John's saying probably alludes to the Passover lamb (19:36), likely with the *Old Testament image of sacrificial lambs blended in. (By this period, Passover lambs seem to be viewed as sacrificial; cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.248, 294; 11.110; *Jewish War* 6.423.) John may also allude to Isaiah 53:7, 11. "Taking up" sin might allude to the scapegoat (Lev 16:21-22), but it also suits a sacrificial lamb.

1:30-31. The whole purpose of John's *baptism is to "prepare the way" (cf. v. 23). To "come after" a person sometimes meant to be

his *disciple, so some scholars propose that Jesus actually followed John for a time, as well as being baptized by him; others interpret "come after" in this passage only chronologically.

1:32. The dove might evoke, if anything in particular, God's promise of a new era (Gen 8:10-12).

1:33-34. In Old Testament *prophecy, God pours out his own *Spirit (Is 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28-29), a role here assumed by Jesus. Most Jewish groups believed that the Spirit was not as active in prophetic inspiration as in the Old Testament period. The emerging rabbinic movement and many of their allies, who linked the Spirit almost exclusively with prophecy, emphasized that the direct prophetic endowments of the Spirit had ceased when the last Old Testament prophets (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) died. Many others believed that prophecy continued, yet without major prophets; some, like the Qumran sectarians, believed that the Spirit worked among them as the end-time remnant of Israel. For many of John's hearers, a claim that the Spirit is being restored would be a claim that the messianic era is at hand. In the Old Testament, the Spirit often was said to come "on" people temporarily rather than explicitly remaining (e.g., Judg 11:29; 2 Chron 20:14).

1:35-39
John's Disciples Follow Jesus

1:35-37. See comment on 1:29. Teachers normally trained *disciples, who then went out to teach others. To recommend disciples to a greater teacher was rare, required great humility and denoted confidence in the other teacher's superiority. Conflict sometimes arose between disciples of rival teachers, though we do have reports of exceptional cases where a teacher, very impressed with another sage, referred his students to him.

1:38-39. Asking such indirect questions (they want to come home with him) was characteristic of ancient politeness and hospitality. The "tenth hour" by usual reckonings would be about 4 p.m., possibly too late in the afternoon to walk a long way home before dark and thus implying that a hospitable person would invite them to spend the night. (By another system of time reckoning, unlikely here, the "tenth hour" could mean 10 a.m.; this system fits 19:14 better but not 4:6.) Rabbis also could lecture disciples while traveling.

1:40-51
The Disciples Witness Too

Like John the Baptist, the disciples learn that the best witness is simply to introduce people to Jesus and let him do the rest.

1:40-41. Given close kinship ties, the testimony of a brother would count significantly. Of the four Gospels, only John uses the Hebrew or *Aramaic title, *Messiah, although he also translates it into Greek because that is the language of his Jewish readers. (Outside Palestine, most Jews in the Roman Empire spoke Greek.)

1:42. "Cephas" is Aramaic and "Peter" Greek for "rock." Nicknames were common, and *rabbis sometimes gave characterizing nicknames to their disciples. In the *Old Testament, God often changed names to describe some new characteristic of a person (Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joshua; as a negative declaration, see Jer 20:3).

Greeks and Romans would attribute supernatural knowledge (like knowing the name of a person one had never met, as Jesus does here) to miracle workers (usually magicians); Jewish people would attribute it to prophets or prophetically endowed teachers; but see especially comment on 2:24-25 for John's emphasis.

1:43. Some radical Greek teachers were said to have called disciples to follow them (e.g., Socrates reportedly called Xenophon), but normally ancient students or their parents chose their own teachers. As often in Matthew and John, "following" could mean "becoming a disciple," because disciples could show respect to masters of Torah (*law) by walking behind them. In the Fourth Gospel, however, this term also has greater significance (see 10:4).

1:44. Bethsaida's name suggests its association with the fishing industry; the town was not well known outside Galilee. Its name was apparently changed to Julia in A.D. 30 (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.28), but the Gospels retain its name from the time of Jesus' ministry. Mark says that Simon and Andrew were from Capernaum (1:21, 29; 2:1), and excavations confirm that many early Christians thought that Peter's home was there. It is not unlikely that as fishermen in a fishing cooperative with

James and John (Mk 1:19) they took their boats back and forth between Capernaum and Bethsaida; perhaps the latter had a regional market or the family had moved from the latter to the former.

1:45. By the one predicted in "the Law and the Prophets" (a common Jewish designation for the Old Testament), Philip no doubt means the Messiah (e.g., Deut 18:15-18; Is 9; 11; 53).

1:46. Some suggest local village rivalry as a factor in Nathanael's question. Nazareth seems to have been a very traditional, orthodox town; priests later considered it ritually clean enough to move there. But Nazareth was relatively small and obscure; some early estimates of the population are about sixteen hundred to two thousand inhabitants, with some more recent estimates even below five hundred within the village itself. (Then again, many Galilean villages probably had fewer than three hundred residents.) Yet people often expected important figures to hail from important places, and Nazareth was no Jerusalem (or Bethlehem). It lay about four miles from the large city of Sepphoris, which rivaled Tiberias (6:23) for its urban Greek character in Jewish Galilee.

1:47. Jesus here makes a wordplay on the Old Testament Jacob, or "Israel," who *was* a man of guile (Gen 27:35; 31:26); see Jn 1:51.

1:48-49. Teachers often taught disciples under trees, which were popular for this and a wide variety of other purposes because of their shade (too many purposes for us to be certain what Nathanael was doing under the tree). But Jesus' knowing *which* tree Nathanael had sat under is a demonstration of genuine supernatural knowledge (cf. Susanna 54, 58). On this knowledge, see comments on 1:42 and 2:24-25.

1:50-51. The opening of the heavens indicated a major revelation (e.g., Ezek 1:1). Jesus' words allude to Genesis 28:12: Jesus is the new way between heaven and earth (Jacob's ladder) on whom angels ascend and descend; like Jacob of old, this "genuine Israelite" Nathanael (Jn 1:47) would receive this new revelation.

2:1-11
Jesus' First Sign

Jesus values the groom's honor above the demands of ritual purity.

2:1. "Third day" here does not refer to the third day of the week, because virgins were married on the fourth day (Wednesday) and widows on the fifth; nor does it seem to fit the count of days in 1:29, 35, 43. Presumably it simply means (as it normally did) "the third day after the event just narrated" (counting the days inclusively, so that it was the day after the next day). But ancient writers often bracketed off segments of their work by starting and ending on the same note (a practice called *inclusio*); thus John may use this designation to point toward 2:19 and link this story (2:1-11) with the prediction of Jesus' death and *resurrection (see on 2:4).

"Cana" may be Kefar Kanna (over three miles from Nazareth), but most scholars prefer Khirbet Kana (over eight miles from Nazareth). Either site would be a long walk, close enough to Nazareth to explain how the host knows Jesus' family.

2:2. Weddings ideally lasted seven days, and hosts invited as many people as possible, especially distinguished guests like prominent teachers. Many guests would come for only part of the time, however, making the requisite resources harder to predict.

2:3. To run out of wine at a wedding was a social faux pas that could become the subject of this village's jests for years; the host was responsible to provide his guests with adequate wine even if the feast lasted seven days.

Women were often closer to where the wine and food were prepared; thus Mary learns of the shortage of wine before word reaches Jesus and the other men. Her words may be a polite Middle Eastern way of implying that he should do something; guests were to help defray the expense of the wedding with their gifts, and it seems that their friend needs some extra gifts now.

2:4. "Woman" was a respectful address (like "Ma'am") but hardly a customary address for one's mother. Jesus' statement here establishes further polite distance (though "What have I to do with you" is usually a harsh, not a polite, expression in biblical language). One's "hour" could refer to the time of one's death. Because Jesus' "hour" in John refers especially to the cross, here Jesus is saying, "Once I begin doing miracles, I begin the road to the cross."

2:5. Like many *Old Testament seekers of

God who would not take no for an answer (Gen 32:26-30; Ex 33:12–34:9; 1 Kings 18:36-37; 2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6, 9; 4:14-28), Mary acts in confidence that Jesus will hear her entreaty. Ancient Jewish readers, who told stories of miracle workers who insisted that God would send rain, would read Mary's action as demonstrating strong faith. Her words may evoke Pharaoh's similar words concerning Joseph, a God-empowered provider (Gen 41:55).

2:6. The description of the stone jars indicates that they contained enough water to fill a Jewish immersion pool used for ceremonial purification. Although *Pharisees forbade storing such water in jars (and *Essenes and *Sadducees also avoided this), some Jews were probably less strict. Jewish people also poured water over their hands to purify them, but such large jars would not have been suitable for direct pouring, though water could be drawn from them. In any case, these large jars were being reserved for ritual purposes. To employ waterpots set aside for purification for non-ritual purposes violated custom; Jesus here values the host's honor above ritual purity customs. Stone jars were common because they were less likely to contract ritual uncleanness than those made of other substances.

2:7. The jars were consecrated for sacred use; Jesus shows more concern for his friend's wedding than for contemporary ritual.

2:8. "Master of the banquet" was a position of honor (Sirach 32:1-2); one of his primary duties was to regulate the distribution of wine to prevent excess that would (especially in a Jewish context) ruin the party. At least in Greek banquets, guests sometimes elected this person; at other times the host would select him or he would be chosen by lot. His role included presiding over the entertainment and controlling the level of dilution for the wine; thus some observers might have held him partly responsible for the host's running out of wine prematurely.

2:9-10. Soon after the grape vintage, all wine would contain some alcohol (neither refrigeration nor hermetic sealing existed). But the alcohol level of the wine was not increased artificially (distillation was not in use); rather, the wine was watered down, with (on average) two to three parts water to one part wine. Sometimes at Greek parties drunkenness was induced through less dilution or the addition of herbal toxins, but Jewish teachers disapproved of such practices; that drunkenness is part of the celebration at Cana is unlikely. Yet it normally made sense to serve the better wine first because, drunk or not, guests' senses would become more dulled as the seven days of banqueting proceeded.

2:11. God had often manifested his glory by doing signs (Ex 16:7; Num 14:22; for glory, cf. comment on Jn 1:14). Moses' first public sign was turning water into blood (Ex 7:20; cf. Rev 8:8); Jesus' first sign is turning water into wine.

2:12-25
The Raising of a New Temple

Especially in the devastating wake of the temple's recent destruction (A.D. 70), Jesus' earlier warnings about the old temple and announcement of a new one would prove very relevant for John's hearers.

2:12-13. Pious Jews who could attend the Passover in Jerusalem customarily did so; unlike Jewish people in distant lands, Galileans could make the pilgrimage regularly. Galileans went "up" to Jerusalem (because of Jerusalem's higher elevation).

2:14. The sheep and doves (and, to a lesser extent, the cattle; cf. Lev 1:3-9; 4:2-21; 8:2; 22:21) were necessary for the people's sacrifices; moneychangers were needed to standardize foreign and Galilean currencies into coinage useful to the sellers of the sacrificial animals.

2:15-16. Jesus insists on a different priority for activity in the temple; cf. perhaps Malachi 3:1-6.

2:17. The *disciples recall Psalm 69:9, a psalm of a righteous sufferer. Psalm 69:21 speaks of vinegar being given him to drink (cf. Jn 19:29). In the context of John, Jesus' zeal "consumes" him by bringing about his death for the world (cf. 6:51).

2:18. Some Jews expected prophetic leaders to validate their authority with signs. (Some for example claimed to be able to part the Jordan or make the walls of Jerusalem collapse, like a new Moses or Joshua.)

2:19-20. Many groups in Judaism expected a new or transformed temple. But the old temple was one of the most magnificent buildings in antiquity, the symbol to which the rest of Judaism looked. To most Jews, and es-

pecially to the aristocracy who controlled Jerusalem's temple, speaking of the temple's demise sounded like opposing God. Herod the Great began work on the temple in 20–19 B.C., and work continued until A.D. 64; its forty-sixth year mentioned here places Jesus' words in A.D. 27.

2:21-22. A prophetic word was often understood only in retrospect (e.g., 2 Kings 9:36-37; the Delphic oracle's words to Croesus). Many Jewish interpreters (attested especially in the *Dead Sea Scrolls) interpreted Scripture in this way.

2:23-25. Miracle workers were often thought to know some hearts, but only God, who was called "searcher of hearts," was thought to know the hearts of all people.

3:1-8
Conversion as Birth from Above

Jesus explains to Nicodemus that religious knowledge and ethnicity are not a sufficient basis for a relationship with God; one must be born into his family by the *Spirit. John often contrasts water rituals and the Spirit (3:5; see comment on 4:7-26).

3:1. A wealthy and prominent Nicodemus (Nakdimon ben Gorion) is known in Jerusalem in this period, though we do not know whether John means the same one. As a highly educated "ruler" or leader in the Jewish community, John's Nicodemus was surely well-to-do.

3:2. One might come by night to avoid being seen, or because Jewish teachers who worked during the day could study only at night (cf. Ps 119:148; the latter was undoubtedly not the case with Nicodemus, who would not need to work—v. 1). But John includes the detail because it serves the theme of light and darkness (1:4-5; 11:10; 13:30) that brackets this *narrative (3:19-21).

3:3-4. Jesus speaks literally of being born "from above," which means "from God" ("above," like "heaven," was a Jewish circumlocution, or roundabout expression, for God). One could also construe the phrase as meaning "reborn," which Nicodemus takes literally. (Ancient writers, including those of the *Old Testament—as in the Hebrew text of Jer 1:11-12; Mic 1:10-15—often used plays on words, and John includes quite a few other puns; they also sometimes used other characters as less intelligent foils for a narrative's main spokesperson.) Most evidence for Greek traditions about individual rebirth come from a later period, possibly formulated in light of Christianity, but some Jewish analogies probably lack direct Christian influence. Because Jewish teachers spoke of *Gentile converts to Judaism as starting life anew like "newborn children" (just as adopted sons under Roman law relinquished all legal status in their former family when they became part of a new one), Nicodemus should have understood that Jesus meant conversion; but it never occurs to him that someone Jewish would need to convert to the true faith of Israel. The idea of a transforming conversion reflects texts such as Ezekiel 36:26 (evoked in this passage of John), although such ideas may appear elsewhere (e.g., 1 Sam 10:6; Wisdom of Solomon 7:27; 8:17).

3:5. Converts to Judaism were said to become "as newborn children"; their conversion included immersion in water to remove Gentile impurity. "Born of water" thus could clarify for Nicodemus that "born from above" means conversion, not a second physical birth.

The Greek wording of 3:5 can mean either "water and the Spirit" or "water, that is, the Spirit." Ezekiel 36:24-27 used water symbolically for the cleansing of the Spirit (cf. especially the *Dead Sea Scrolls), so here Jesus could mean "converted by the Spirit" (cf. 7:37-39)—a *spiritual* *proselyte *baptism. Whereas Jewish teachers generally spoke of converts to Judaism as "newborn" only in the sense that they were legally severed from old relationships, an actual rebirth by the Spirit would produce a new heart (Ezek 36:26).

3:6-7. The "spirit" that is born from God's Spirit may reflect the "new spirit" of Ezekiel 36:26. Everyone understood that like begets like.

3:8. The term for "Spirit" also meant "wind" in both Greek and Hebrew. (Although Jesus probably spoke especially *Aramaic in Galilee, a high-status teacher in Jerusalem might be equally comfortable with Greek.) One could translate "sound of the wind" as "voice of the Spirit" (for plays on words, see comment on 3:3-4). The wind is unpredictable and uncontrollable (see Eccles 8:8; cf. Eccles 1:6, 8, 14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9). The Spirit, associated with water in Ezekiel 36, was sym-

bolized as wind in the next chapter, Ezekiel 37; some Jewish interpreters linked this image with Genesis 2:7 (cf. Jn 20:22).

3:9-21
The Revealer from Above

Jesus as incarnate Wisdom (see comment on 1:1-18) is the only one fully qualified to reveal God and reconcile the world to him.

3:9-10. Nicodemus's denseness makes him a foil for Jesus the revealer. For this theme in some ancient literature, see the discussion of Mark's message in the introduction to Mark.

3:11-12. "Earthly things" might be the analogies of water and wind used earlier in the passage. Only an eyewitness of heaven, such as the Father and the Son, could fully testify about heaven. Wisdom of Solomon 9:16 notes that people can scarcely guess about earthly matters, and thus asks how people could guess about heavenly ones.

3:13. In the context of John's allusion to Wisdom of Solomon 9:16 (in Jn 3:11-12), the next verse may be relevant: no one could learn God's ways without wisdom and the *Spirit sent from above (Wisdom of Solomon 9:17). Jewish literature provides other parallels to John 3:11-13, but the closest are Jewish texts that speak of divine Wisdom coming down from God, seeking to reveal the ways of heaven (God) to people (cf., e.g., Baruch 3:29; Wisdom of Solomon 9:10; God's powerful "word" descending to slay Egypt's firstborn in Wisdom of Solomon 18:15). Jesus might also imply a contrast with Jewish mystics who sought to ascend to heaven, and with the Jewish tradition that Moses ascended not only Mount Sinai but up into heaven to receive God's *law. Now Wisdom/Word/Law itself—one greater than Moses—has come down from heaven in the flesh (see comment on 1:14-18).

3:14-15. "Lifting up" is another play on words (3:3-4): Jesus returns to heaven by way of the cross, "lifted up" like the serpent Moses lifted up to bring healing (Num 21:4-9; for "lifting up," see comment on Jn 12:32-33). "Lifting up" had long been a play on both exaltation and execution (Gen 40:20-22); here the language evokes Isaiah 52:13, where God's servant would be lifted up (and the *Septuagint adds, "glorified"), a passage immediately preceding Isaiah 53. The serpent passage in Numbers (Num 21:8-9) directly precedes a passage about God's gift of a well in the wilderness (Num 21:16-18), relevant for John's following chapter (Jn 4:6, 14). Ancient Egyptians used images of snakes as magical protection against snakebites; this cursed the snakes. In Wisdom of Solomon 16:6, this bronze serpent symbolized salvation. Moses set the serpent on a standard, which the Septuagint renders with the same word that translates "sign" (*semeion*), making Jesus' death a sign (cf. Jn 2:18-19). *Midrashically, some Jewish interpreters could have linked this bronze serpent with Moses' rod that became a serpent (Ex 4:3; 7:9-10, 15), hence a "sign" (Ex 7:9). Those who saw the serpent in Numbers 21 would "live" (21:8-9); later Jewish interpreters sometimes applied biblical promises of life to *eternal life, and in John, those who see Jesus live forever (cf. Jn 6:40; 14:19).

3:16-18. God "gave" his Son by him being lifted up like the serpent (see comment on 3:14-15). The term often translated "so" means not "how much" but "in this way"; the tenses of the Greek verbs reinforce the sense: "This is how God loved the world: he gave his son." Some translations' "only begotten" is literally "special, beloved"; Jewish literature sometimes applied it to Isaac, to emphasize the greatness of Abraham's sacrifice in offering him up. Eternal life is literally the "life of the world to come" (from Dan 12:2); John's present tense ("have") indicates that those who trust Jesus begin to experience that life already in the present time.

Despite ancient Jewish literature's mention of God's love for humanity and its emphasis on God's special love for Israel, nothing compares with this sacrifice, especially not for "the world," which in John normally means those not yet following God's will. The *Old Testament also emphasizes God's immeasurable love (e.g., Ex 34:6-7; Deut 7:7-8; Judg 10:16; Is 63:9; Hos 11:1-4, 8-11; cf. Is 16:11; Jer 48:36). Jewish people expected full salvation and judgment in the day of judgment; like eternal life, however (just noted), John recognizes these events taking place also in the present (3:17-18), because the promised *Messiah has already come.

3:19-21. Ancient texts (especially the *Dead Sea Scrolls) often contrast light and darkness

as good and evil in the same way John does here. Everyone would have understood John's point. Bracketing off a narrative by starting and ending on the same point (3:2) was an ancient literary device.

3:22-36
The Witness and the Son

3:22-23. On John's *baptism, see comment on Mark 1:4-5. Jews who practiced initiatory baptisms of other Jews could be viewed as sectarian. Away from the Jordan River, water was not plentiful, so in their itinerant ministry Jesus' *disciples (4:2) probably do not baptize everywhere, although ceremonial immersion pools were widespread in Palestine. Many scholars think that Aenon was near modern Ainun; although it lacks water today, many springs remain in the area. Although this reconstruction is not certain, if it is correct it is interesting that Aenon lay near Shechem, the center of *Samaritan habitation in Jesus' day, so that John the Baptist is already ministering in an area near where Jesus will be ministering in chapter 4.

3:24. There is a possible echo of Jer 37:4. John was imprisoned and executed in Herod Antipas's strong and well-known fortress Machaerus. This was located in Perea, across the Jordan (i.e., not in Judea or Galilee proper), where much of John's ministry occurred (1:28; 3:26; 10:40).

3:25-26. On Jewish ceremonial purification, cf. 2:6 and 11:55. This theme runs through the Gospel: ceremonial washing (2:6), *proselyte baptism (3:5), perhaps Jacob's well (chap. 4) and the healing waters of Bethesda (chap. 5), Siloam's water for the Feast of Tabernacles (7:37-38; 9:7) and perhaps 13:5-11 and 19:34. Disciples of rival teachers often competed, but John is not competing with Jesus.

3:27-28. "Heaven" was a fairly common Jewish circumlocution for God. In Jewish custom, one person who represents another acts on his sender's authority but must adhere to the constraints of his mission; the real authority always stems from the sender; for being sent ahead, cf. perhaps Malachi 3:1. Such customs might help make the point more intelligible for John's hearers.

3:29-30. Weddings epitomized joy (e.g., *3 Maccabees 4:6). The "friend of the bridegroom" refers to the Jewish custom of the *shoshbin*, who was much like the best man in weddings today. Like other friends, this leading friend of the bridegroom might offer speeches of encouragement at the wedding; he might also be a witness for the wedding, contribute to it financially, possess the evidence of the bride's virginity, and so forth. (To illustrate the way that Jewish traditions valued both this role and weddings in general: later *rabbis claimed that God was the *shoshbin* for Adam's wedding.) The most significant emphasis of Jewish weddings was joy.

3:31. One who originates from heaven, as opposed to others who were from earth, most naturally applies in Jewish texts to divine Wisdom (see comment on 1:1-18).

3:32-33. Prominent individuals had distinctive marks on their signet rings, which they would press into hot wax seals on the outside of documents to attest that they were witnesses to the execution of the document. Merchants could use seals to attest a container's contents. Rulers could also share their seals with the highest officials who would act in their name (cf. Gen 41:42).

3:34. Because many thought that the *Spirit had been quenched in Israel till the future restoration of Israel, and many thought that only a few had merited the Spirit, to say that someone had unlimited access to the Spirit (whether Jesus has unlimited access as giver or receiver here is debated) indicates that he is greater than any person who had ever lived.

3:35-36. Again, the language of the Father authorizing the Son and judging the world by their response to him portrays the Son more highly than any mere human was viewed in Jewish literature; cf. 3:31. Again, language that John's Jewish contemporaries often applied to the future judgment is applied also to the present here (see comment on 3:16-18).

4:1-6
Jesus Travels Through Samaria

Jesus' positive reception by *Samaritans contrasts with his reception in Jerusalem (2:13–3:9). In John 4:1-42, Jesus crosses strict cultural boundaries separating culturally distinct peoples, genders and moral status, pointing to the new and ultimate unity in the *Spirit. Some features of Jesus' encounter with the Sa-

maritan woman evoke earlier well scenes (Gen 24; 29; Ex 2), but to a different effect.

Samaritans worshiped Israel's God devoutly, practicing circumcision and the Sabbath. Nevertheless, insofar as our later sources can indicate, they accepted only the Pentateuch, regarding Israel's subsequent history as apostate. They claimed that the true site for worship was Mount Gerizim (edited even into their version of the Ten Commandments), rejecting the Jerusalem temple. Like Jews, they looked for an end-time restorer; thus one prophetic figure promised to restore sacred vessels left by Moses at Mount Gerizim (before *Pilate butchered them). Greek culture and language heavily affected Samaria, although Greek need not have been the first language of Samaritan villagers. (The *Gentile Greek city Sebaste, in the midst of Samaria, probably exerted an influence; cf. Acts 8:5.)

4:1-2. On Jesus' *baptism, see comment on 3:22-23. Although ceremonial washings were common in Judaism, those who practiced initiatory baptisms (those that initiated people into a particular Jewish group) were viewed by other Jews as sectarian.

4:3-4. The "necessity" of the Samaritan route may have been spiritual rather than geographic. One could travel around Samaria (east through Perea), but many pilgrims to and from the feasts in Jerusalem took the shorter route straight through Samaria (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.118; *Jewish War* 2.232); the quickest route, it yielded a three-day journey (*Josephus, *Life* 269). But if Jesus was near John (3:22-23) and the latter was in the Jordan valley (3:23), Samaria might even be a geographic detour, since Jesus could have traveled north near Bethshan. Since Jesus ends up staying awhile (Jn 4:40), the Father's plan rather than haste probably motivates his need to pass through Samaria. Samaritans and Jews worshiped the same God and both used the *law of Moses (although the Samaritans made a few changes in it). But they despised one another's places of worship and had remained hostile toward one another for centuries.

4:5. Some identify "Sychar" here with Shechem (closest to Jacob's well), or perhaps more often with modern 'Askar (about 1.5 km northeast of the well).

4:6. The site of Jacob's well is still known; it is within view of Mount Gerizim, which was holy to the Samaritans (based on Deut 11:29; 27:12). This site begins a *narrative that emphasizes holy geography (especially 4:20). Although this concept is foreign to most modern Western readers, ancient people were widely attracted to special "holy sites"—which Jesus here supersedes.

The "sixth hour" normally means noon; thus Jesus and the *disciples had been journeying for perhaps six hours. (According to a much less likely system of time reckoning here, "sixth hour" would mean 6 p.m.—cf. 19:14—in which case Jesus and his disciples would be ready to settle down for the night and lodge there—4:40.) Weary travelers sometimes would sit, including at wells; most relevant here is Ex 2:15 (which in Jewish tradition Josephus claims occurred at noon). Because noon was particularly hot, most people sought shade and often rested during that time. The local women, who often would come in groups to draw water, would not come in the midday heat of this hour; people throughout the ancient Mediterranean world avoided being out in the midday heat except when no alternative was available. This woman, however, had to do so, because she had to come alone (for her reasons, see comment on 4:7).

4:7-26
A Gift for a Samaritan Sinner

In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' gift of the *Spirit supersedes the ritual waters of John the Baptist (1:26, 33), ceremonial purification (2:6), *proselyte *baptism (3:5) and the Feast of Tabernacles (7:37-39; 9:7); note discussion of background on each of these passages. It also apparently supersedes water having other religious symbolism associated with holy sites, such as healing sanctuaries (5:2-8) and Jacob's well (4:7-26). For John's readers, who have the Spirit but lack many of the rituals of their opponents, these contrasts would constitute an encouragement.

4:7. That this *Samaritan woman comes to the well alone rather than in the company of other women (and at the hottest hour of the day, when she would not run into them) probably indicates that the rest of the women of Sychar did not like her, in this case because of her marital history (cf. comment on 4:18). Although many Jewish teachers warned

against talking much with women in general, they would have especially avoided Samaritan women, who, they declared, were unclean from birth. Other ancient accounts show that sometimes even asking water of a woman could be interpreted as flirting with her; this might be especially the case if she had come alone at an unusual time. Jesus breaks various conventions of his culture here. In addition, Isaac (through his agent, Gen 24:17), Jacob (Gen 29:10) and Moses (Ex 2:16-21) met their wives at wells; such precedent created the sort of potential ambiguity at this well that religious people wished to avoid.

4:8. Rabbis sometimes sent *disciples to procure supplies. Many *Pharisees considered many of the foods of the Samaritans unclean.

4:9. John provides cultural background in this verse. Although his summary statement might contain an element of *hyperbole, the animosity between Jews and Samaritans was well known; on rare occasions it even led to bloodshed requiring Roman intervention. Judeans usually regarded Samaritans more favorably than Gentiles, but views varied and tended to be negative. The woman first confronts this encounter in ethnic/cultural terms: under Jewish *law, even her water vessel (the same term as in 2:6) was considered unclean for Jewish drinking. Ironically, in John's Gospel only non-Jews recognize Jesus' Jewishness (here and 18:33-35).

4:10. "Living water" simply meant "fresh" or "flowing" as opposed to stagnant or well water (cf. the *Septuagint and Hebrew text of Lev 14:6, 51; Num 19:17; Zech 14:8), but given John's propensity for double meanings (see 3:5), here the term may also mean "water of life." Cf. Jer 17:13.

Some scholars have pointed out that the *rabbis spoke of Torah, the law, as God's gift and as living water. But John uses the symbolism differently to refer to the Spirit (7:37-39). The background here is God as provider of the source of genuine life (Is 12:3; Jer 2:13).

4:11. Jesus has no jar to lower into the well; moreover, even with a jar he could not get "living" (i.e., fresh or flowing) water from a well (see comment on 4:10). Although we cannot know the well's depth in the first century, in modern times it is about a hundred feet (around thirty meters) deep.

4:12. Her saying "our father Jacob" is an affront to the Jewish teaching that the Jewish people were children of Jacob, whereas the Samaritans had much Gentile blood. The one who is greater than Jacob (for this theme cf. also 8:53) does not argue the point with her; it is peripheral to the issue he wishes to drive home.

4:13-14. Cf. Sirach 24:21 (where Wisdom promises that whoever drinks from her will thirst for more of her). If Jesus alludes at all to Moses' well in Numbers 21:16-18, it may or may not be coincidental that that passage immediately follows the account of the serpent (Num 21:4-9) mentioned in John 3:14.

4:15. The images of water and wells were often used symbolically in antiquity; like many other characters in John, however, she takes Jesus literally when he is speaking figuratively. Nonwealthy rural women usually went to nearby water sources to draw water; they could let down their pitcher or other vessel into a spring, and sometimes would carry it back on their head.

4:16-17. In view of the ambiguity of the situation (see comment on 4:7), her statement, "I have no husband," could mean "I am available." While wells were common places of conversation, they also could serve as places for finding spouses, most notably in some well-known biblical accounts (Gen 24; 29; Ex 2). Although she obviously came to the well alone, this Jewish man converses with her (against custom; Jn 4:27) and might be thought to ask a leading question. Jesus removes the ambiguity, which stems from his refusal to observe customs that reflected ethnic and gender prejudice, not from flirtation.

4:18. Jesus clarifies her ambiguous statement: she had been married five times and is not married to the man with whom she now lives. If she were repeatedly widowed, people might well think something was wrong with her (cf. Gen 38:11; Tobit 6:14-15). A more common situation would be that she had been divorced most or all of these times; in this case, most ancient readers would (rightly or wrongly) believe there was something wrong with her. (Carrying a vessel, she was not wealthy enough to have initiated the divorces.) Samaritans were no less pious and strict than Jews, and she was apparently ostracized from the Samaritan religious community—which

would have been nearly coextensive with the whole Samaritan community (see comment on 4:6-7).

4:19. That she came to the well alone might lead a visitor to suspect that she had a negative reputation; only a prophet, however, could supply details. Prophets were considered capable of sometimes knowing others' thoughts (see comment on 1:42). Although this frequent designation for Jesus is inadequate (4:44; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17), it at least moves the conversation beyond 4:17. Yet Samaritans apparently rejected the biblical prophets between Moses and the end-time restorer. The Samaritans awaited not just any prophet, but the greatest prophet, one like Moses (Deut 18:15-18); see John 4:25. If Jesus is a prophet, then Jews are right and Samaritans are wrong, leading to the question of 4:20.

4:20. Mount Gerizim, the Samaritans' holy site equivalent to Judaism's Jerusalem, was in full view of Jacob's well. For Jews, the Jerusalem temple was the holiest site on earth. The Samaritan Pentateuch, by contrast, specified Gerizim as the proper site for worship. The woman undoubtedly uses the past tense for "worship" because of her continuing consciousness of Jews' and Samaritans' ethnic separation: roughly two centuries earlier, in 128 B.C., a Jewish king had obliterated the Samaritan temple on that mountain, and it had remained in ruins ever since. Samaritans mocked the Jewish holy site and once, under cover of night, even sought to defile the Jerusalem temple. Jews similarly ridiculed Mount Gerizim and even built many of their *synagogues so worshipers could face Jerusalem. Samaritans were unwelcome in Jerusalem's temple, so if the Jews are right (4:19), there is no hope for her.

4:21. "A time is coming" was common prophetic language (1 Sam 2:31; 2 Kings 20:17; Jer 31:31). Ancient peoples valued "holy sites."

4:22. Jesus is not neutral; he accepts the correctness of the Jewish position, although he does not allow that to remain as an ultimate barrier to ethnic reconciliation (4:23). In a Gospel probably at least partly addressing Jewish Christians rejected by their synagogues (see the introduction), this point is significant.

4:23-24. When he speaks of "worship in Spirit and truth," Jesus may have in view the common identification of the *Spirit with prophetic inspiration and empowerment in ancient Judaism, as well as *Old Testament passages about charismatic, prophetic worship (especially 1 Sam 10:5; 1 Chron 25:1-6). Given the common belief that the prophetic Spirit was no longer fully active, Jesus' words would strike ancient ears forcefully. The future hour (4:21) is present as well as future; Jesus makes the character of the future world available to his *disciples in their present lives (see comment on 3:16). For oppressed Jews and Samaritans longing for the future promise, this was also a striking statement.

4:25-26. Later Samaritan documents explain the Samaritan concept of a *messiah: the *Taheb,* or restorer, was a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15-18). Some evidence suggests that the Taheb's role included teaching.

4:27-42
Reaping Among the Samaritans

4:27. Traditional Jewish piety warned men not to talk much with women (some later *rabbis added, even with one's own wife!), both because of temptation and (especially in later sources) even because uninformed observers might suspect misconduct. Traditional Greek and Roman culture also considered it inappropriate for a wife to talk with men in unguarded settings; although Roman culture had been shifting, much of the rural Mediterranean world (probably including most of Galilee and Samaria) maintained more conservative traditions. That the disciples are amazed yet trust their teacher enough not to ask about this situation is a sign of their respect for him, an attitude considered appropriate for faithful disciples. (A few later Jewish traditions report rabbis who disintegrated disrespectful disciples into heaps of ashes with their eyes, but such stories are meant only to illustrate the general principle that one ought not to challenge one's teacher!)

4:28-30. Like other ancient cultures (e.g., Roman law), most Jewish people did not have much regard for the witness of a woman (see later rabbis but especially Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.219). The witness of a sinner, meanwhile, would be worthless; the situation was probably the same among the Samaritans. Nevertheless, she witnesses the way Philip had

(1:46). That she is distracted from her original purpose for coming to the well (4:28) likely suggests that Jesus' water has replaced the water of Jacob's well for her. Someone who knew Rebekah came to meet the man who met her at the well and to invite him to stay (Gen 24:28-32; cf. 29:13; Ex 2:20).

4:31-33. Ancient teachers sometimes used food as a metaphor for spiritual food (see comment on 6:32). In the *Old Testament, this metaphor sometimes related to one's calling (Jer 15:16; cf. Ezek 3:1-3).

4:34. The figurative use of food imagery was intelligible in Jesus' milieu (e.g., Sirach 24:19-21), including for one's calling (cf. Jer 15:16; Ezek 3:1-3). Jewish teachers regarded God's work in one sense as finished (his creative work—Gen 2:2) but in another sense continuing (his work of sustaining his creation; see comment on 5:17). Jesus refers here to a work that climaxes all God's work: Jesus completes the Father's work on the cross (19:30; cf. 17:4).

4:35. "Lifting up one's eyes" (KJV, NASB) was a common Old Testament expression for "looking" (e.g., Gen 13:10; 18:2; 24:63-64), although it became rarer in later Hebrew. The main wheat harvest ran from mid-April through the end of May; the barley harvest, which made fields "white" (literally, as in KJV, NASB; cf. "ripe"—NIV, NRSV) was in March. In Palestine, the gap between sowing and reaping was normally four to five months. Some scholars think that Jesus here cites a Jewish proverb that refers to four months between planting and harvesting.

4:36-38. In this context, Jesus and the Samaritan woman sow, and the *disciples see the harvest (v. 39). Verse 37 seems to adapt a popular proverb based on ideas such as Ecclesiastes 2:18—changing an image of sorrow to one of joy.

4:39-42. The effectiveness of her testimony in this culture is surprising; see comment on 4:28-30. The Samaritans now believe because they meet Jesus (as in 1:46-49), but the woman's relationship to her community also changes through her having become his first witness there.

Mediterranean culture, especially in largely rural areas like Palestine, emphasized the virtue of hospitality. Nevertheless, Jews and Samaritans did not typically extend this act to each other. For Jesus to lodge there, eating Samaritan food and teaching Samaritans (v. 40) would disturb traditional Jewish sensitivities, perhaps like defying segregation in the United States during the 1950s, apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s, or ethnic or cultural segregation found in many other societies. The Jesus of the Gospels is more concerned with people than with custom (cf. 2:6-9).

4:43-54
Faith and Healing in Galilee

4:43-45. See comment on Mark 6:4; but here the "home country" is apparently Judea (cf. Jn 1:11).

4:46. For Cana see 2:1. Capernaum was close to a full day's walk from there. "Royal official" (NASB, NIV) probably means that this man is one of Herod Antipas's court officials, although Herod's official title was tetrarch rather than king; some of the Herodian rulers' officers were even *Gentiles (though John would probably mention it if that were the case here). Many of these lived in Tiberias, some ten miles (about fifteen kilometers) from Capernaum (see comment on 6:23), but this one may reside in Capernaum. Jesus, who is never mentioned as entering Tiberias (or Sephoris, the other major city in Galilee), was extremely unfavorable toward Antipas (Lk 13:32; 23:9; for reasons, cf. Mk 6:17-29); this man who comes to Jesus may have been a wealthy aristocrat, probably much influenced by Greco-Roman culture and probably not respected by stricter Jewish standards.

4:47-49. "Come down" (v. 49 NRSV) is relevant because Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, was lower in elevation than Cana. The *Old Testament condemned unbelief in the face of signs (Ex 4:9; Num 14:11); John's Gospel articulates an even higher ideal. On Jesus' rebuff and a suppliant's insistence, see comment on 2:4-5.

4:50-54. The journey from Capernaum to the likeliest site of Cana is less than twenty miles, an average day's walk in antiquity, but if evening intervened the official would have stopped en route to spend the night before proceeding. Long-distance miracles were rare by Old Testament, other Jewish and Greco-Roman standards; people generally

believed prophets and Greek magicians more easily if they were present in person. The rare stories of long-distance miracles suggested to ancient readers that these miracle workers had extraordinary power. For Jesus, the only prerequisite for such miracles is seekers' faith in his power.

5:1-9a
Healing at Bethesda

Healing shrines were common throughout the ancient world, especially for the worship of Asclepius and other popular deities renowned for healing powers. Most of these shrines required the supplicants to purify themselves at the adjoining fountain or other source of water. This passage portrays Jesus as greater than such healing sanctuaries of his day. More critically, this chapter reveals Jesus as the Father's agent (see "*apostle" in the glossary), hence able to perform divine acts even on the Sabbath. Contrasting characters was a common *rhetorical and literary device in antiquity, probably applied by John here.

site under St. Anne's Monastery in Jerusalem, just north-northeast of the temple. The pools were quite large (like a football field) and roughly twenty feet deep. This site had two twin pools, surrounded by four porches, or porticoes, and one porch (a fifth one) down the middle separating the pools (perhaps separating genders). Although John writes after Jerusalem was destroyed in 70, his recollection of the site is accurate.

5:3. This site was later used as a pagan healing shrine; given the ancient tendency to reuse older shrines, the Jewish community in Jesus' day may well have viewed this pool as a place of healing. The temple authorities undoubtedly did not approve—after all, sacred pools at healing shrines characterized Greek cults like that of Asclepius—but popular religion often ignores religious contradictions that seem clearer to official religious leaders.

5:4. This verse may not be original (see notes in most translations) but was probably added early by a *scribe familiar with the tradition of healing at Bethesda; it explains the otherwise enigmatic verse 7.

Table 4. Parallels Between John 5:1-17 and 9:1-34

John 5:1-17	John 9:1-34
Unable to walk for 38 years (5:5)	Blind from birth (9:1)
Jesus, rather than a Jerusalem pool, brings healing (5:3-4, 7)	Jesus uses a Jerusalem pool to bring healing (9:7)
Do not keep sinning, lest you face something worse (5:14)	Neither this man nor his parents sinned to cause his condition (9:2)
The man reports Jesus to the authorities (5:15)	The man refuses to deny Jesus to the authorities (9:24-34)
Jesus does the Father's works (5:17)	Jesus came to fulfill the Father's works (9:3-4)

5:1. John does not specify which Jewish feast is the occasion for Jesus' trip to Jerusalem, although some manuscripts have "the feast," which would probably imply the Feast of Tabernacles, as normally in Jewish tradition (not Passover). But the real issue for this narrative is that the day on which Jesus heals is a sabbath (5:9b).

5:2. Public baths were standard in Greco-Roman cities, and people congregated there. A *Qumran scroll attests the name of this pool, and archaeologists have discovered a pool in this location fitting precisely this description. Although scholars do not agree on the site of Bethesda (or its exact spelling), many favor a

5:5. The man had been sick there longer than many people in antiquity lived—for about as many years as Israel had wandered in the wilderness. Ancient reports of healings often specified how long the person had been sick to emphasize the greatness of the healer's cure. Obviously nothing else, including this pool, had succeeded in restoring him.

5:6-9a. In 2:6 and 3:5, Jesus replaces the water of ceremonial purification; in 4:13-14, he replaces the "holy water" of a *Samaritan holy site. Here he, not the supposedly healing waters, restores the man.

5:9b-18
Betrayal on the Sabbath

Narratives often made points by contrasting characters; John contrasts the man healed in 5:1-9 with the man healed in 9:1-7. Local authorities may have been pressuring some of John's hearers to follow the example of the former; John urges them to emulate the latter instead (a few decades later, a Roman governor was pressuring Christians to renounce their exclusive devotion to Christ, sparing their lives only if they revered the statue of the emperor and other deities).

5:9b-10. Biblical rules forbade work on the sabbath, even so much as gathering wood for a fire (Num 15:32-36). By Jesus' day, Jewish *law explicitly forbade carrying things on the sabbath, viewing this as a form of work.

5:11-13. Many teachers also forbade minor cures—physicians' cures not necessary to save a life—on the sabbath. That Jesus acts in God's name with a miracle rather than a physician's cure should make that discussion irrelevant; but law is often argued by analogy, and the particular authorities in this passage apparently reason that Jesus' cure is just like a physician's cure.

5:14. The man may have been in the temple for worship, possibly to give thanks for his healing (cf. Lev 14:10; Ps 56:12); but the temple dominated public space in Jerusalem. In the Bible sufferings were sometimes (not always—cf. 9:2-3; e.g., 2 Sam 4:4; 1 Kings 14:4; 2 Kings 13:14) judgment for sin (e.g., 1 Kings 13:4; 2 Kings 1:4; 2 Chron 16:12). Jesus warns of greater judgment here—probably the *resurrection for judgment (cf. 5:29).

5:15-16. This man apparently does just the opposite of the faithful healed man in 9:30-34, with whom John contrasts him. His behavior may resemble those who left the *churches of John's readers and sided with their opponents, betraying them to persecution (see introduction to 1 John in this commentary).

5:17. Everyone recognized that God had continued to work since creation, sustaining the world even on the sabbath. Jesus reasons by analogy that what is right for God in sustaining his creation is also right for himself.

5:18. Jewish prayers often called God "Father," as the Father of Israel; the issue here is that Jesus seems to treat his relationship to the Father in a special way (see e.g., Ex 4:22-23; Is 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:19). Because Jesus appears to usurp prerogatives solely attributed to God (5:17—the right to work on the sabbath), his hearers think that he thereby claims a position equal to that of God, a claim that naturally sounds blasphemous to them (cf. Is 14:14; Ezek 28:2). Second-century *rabbis accused many Jewish Christians of believing in two gods; some later rabbis even spoke of those who sought to make themselves independent of God as acting as if they were "equal" to God. Even Greeks, for whom the line between divine and mortal was often rather thin, regarded attempts to make oneself a deity as presumptuous. One could "annul" a biblical law by disregarding it, so they feel that Jesus is (literally) "destroying" the sabbath.

5:19-29
Jesus' Relation to the Father

Jesus seeks to qualify their understanding of his relationship to the Father; far from usurping God's honor (5:18), Jesus acts only on the Father's authority and in conjunction with his will.

5:19. Jesus qualifies their understanding by applying another analogy: it was common wisdom that sons imitated their fathers. Far from claiming that his rank rivals the Father's (as they have charged), Jesus here highlights his obedience to the Father (filial obedience was an important virtue in antiquity). But the offense remains in that Jesus claims to be God's Son (and to watch the Father continually) in a unique way that does not include them.

Wordplays were common. God continued his creative work on the sabbath (see comment on 5:17); what Jesus "does" or "makes" (*poieo*) here is that he "makes a person" well on the sabbath (7:23), a possible allusion to the *Septuagint of Genesis 1:26-27, where God first "made a person." In that passage, God made humanity "in *our* image"; Jesus might imply the joint work of the Father and the Son.

5:20. Some Jewish mystics claimed visions of God, but Jesus' language goes beyond this, implying continual experience of God. Fathers typically loved sons; God was said to love Israel (in context, of course, Jesus' claim is more special).

5:21-22. If Jesus shares the Father's initial and continuing work of creation (see comment on 1:3; 7:23), he could also share his future prerogative of raising the dead. Although some *Old Testament texts spoke of a king who would reign under God's authority (Dan 7:13-14; cf. Jn 5:27), raising and judging the dead was a divine prerogative reserved for God alone, as rehearsed daily in Jewish prayers ("God who raises the dead"). Some Jewish texts, perhaps following Greek models, delegate some judgment in the afterlife to an individual like Enoch or Abel or perhaps even the *Son of Man, but absolute judgment is a divine prerogative.

To his opponents, this would sound like ditheism (an offense with which some later rabbis charged early Christians). By claiming that the Father "gave" him this authority, Jesus claims to exercise delegated authority as the Father's agent (Judaism accepted the legal principle of agency; cf. "*apostle" in the glossary). The idea of the Son as the Father's agent runs throughout this section and disarms their objection in verse 18. (In trinitarian terms, Jesus is equally deity with the Father but distinct in person and submits to the Father.)

5:23. In the kin-centered ancient Mediterranean world, how one treated one member of a family reflected one's attitude toward the family as a whole. God sometimes gave others honor as his representatives (Ps 2:11-12; Is 60:1-2), but no one was ever to be honored to the same degree as God (Is 42:8; 48:11; cf. Ex 20:5). Jesus' hearers could easily construe Jesus' statement here as a claim to deity.

5:24-25. *Eternal life, the life of the world to come, was supposed to be available only when the dead would be raised; but Jesus provides new life already for those who trust in him.

5:26. Non-Palestinian Jewish texts held God to be the only one with life "of himself" ("uncreated," "self-begotten," etc.); as in some Greek writings, they described the supreme God as existing without any source outside himself. Although John can also use the phrase more generally in other contexts (6:53), this passage compares Jesus' prerogatives with those of the Father, suggesting that, as in *Diaspora Jewish sources, the term here refers to Jesus' uncreated eternality.

5:27. The Son of Man in Daniel 7:13-14 was to rule for God in the future *kingdom; ruling included executing judgment.

5:28-29. The Old Testament (Dan 12:2) and much of ancient Judaism taught a *resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous, which would take place at the last day. (Some circles in ancient Judaism taught only a resurrection of the righteous; others taught that the wicked would be resurrected only temporarily for judgment and then destroyed; still others held that the wicked would be resurrected to eternal judgment. Others, such as *Sadducees and probably many Hellenized Diaspora Jews, denied a future resurrection.) The Old Testament and Judaism spoke of God judging people by their deeds. "Tombs" may evoke Is 26:19 in the Septuagint.

5:30-47
Jesus' Witnesses

5:30. Jesus is thus a faithful *shaliakh,* or agent; Jewish *law taught that the man's agent was as a man himself (backed by his full authority), to the extent that the agent faithfully represented him. Moses and the *Old Testament prophets were sometimes viewed as God's agents.

5:31. Here Jesus cites the Old Testament principle, central to later Jewish law (both that of the rabbis and that of the *Dead Sea Scrolls), that two witnesses are necessary to prove a (capital) case (Deut 17:6; 19:15). Testimony was essential in ancient Jewish court cases.

5:32. Jewish teachers sometimes spoke of God in roundabout terms (here, "another").

5:33-34. On John the Baptist as a witness, see comment on 1:6-8. Speakers in courts sometimes supplied evidence even while denying that it should be strictly necessary.

5:35. The hand-held oil lamps of the Herodian period were too small to give forth much light (they normally produced as much as a candle), and thus one would symbolize only a small reflection of "the light." Some Jewish teachers referred to a great person, such as a patriarch or a great rabbi, as a "lamp" or light in the world.

5:36-37. The witness of the Father should be all that is necessary. Israel at Sinai supposedly saw his form and heard his voice (cf. Ex 19:9, 11; 24:10-11; Sirach 17:13; but cf. the qualification in Deut 4:12), and accepted his

word through his agent Moses; Jesus says that his own generation rejects the fuller revelation of God sent to them (cf. Jn 1:11, 14-18). Greek-speaking Jews thought of Wisdom as God's image (Wisdom of Solomon 7:26; so also *Philo of Alexandria regarding the *logos*); see comment on John 1:1-18.

5:38. They claimed to have God's word in the law given at Sinai (cf. 5:37, 39), but missed the point.

5:39-40. Even *Gentiles recognized the Jewish people's zeal for their Scriptures, and various groups (including the people reflected in the *Dead Sea Scrolls) emphasized diligent searching of the Scriptures. Scripture said, "Do this and you will live," which Jewish teachers read as: "Do this and you will have life in the world to come." Thus they believed that one had eternal life through the Scriptures; but Jesus says that the Scriptures witness to him, hence to reject him is to disobey the Scriptures.

5:41-44. The Father's agent comes in the Father's name, not in his own; to reject a person's agent was to reject the authority of that person himself.

5:45-47. Moses witnesses to Jesus in his writings (the first five books of the Old Testament were attributed to him). Ancient Judaism viewed Moses as an intercessor for Israel (a view found in, e.g., *Josephus, rabbis, the **Testament of Moses*); but Jesus says that Moses will instead be their prosecutor. Jewish teachers regarded Moses as the central prophetic figure of their history, and even many pagans knew of Moses as Israel's lawgiver. Moses wrote of a prophet like himself (Deut 18:18), but in the larger context of John's Gospel, Jesus could refer here to Moses' experience of divine glory (see comment on 1:14-18).

6:1-15
A New Passover Meal

After speaking of Moses (5:45-47), Jesus goes on to perform a sign that might be expected of a new prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15): providing manna.

6:1. Although outsiders rightly called it a "lake," Galileans called it the "Sea" of Galilee.

6:2. Any means of possible healing in antiquity (such as hot springs and healing shrines) drew large followings. Wonder-workers seem to have been rarer in this period, but even fraudulent ones (such as the Alexander mentioned by *Lucian) or those who promised but later failed to deliver prophetic signs (such as some failed prophets mentioned in *Josephus) often drew large crowds.

6:3-4. If the events of chapter 5 took place at the Feast of Tabernacles (see comment on 5:1) and those of this text occur at Passover, and if this section of John is in chronological order, half a year has elapsed between these chapters. The chronological recollection fits the depiction of grass in 6:10.

6:5-6. People (e.g., generals) sometimes tested others' understanding or resolve; some teachers also asked questions of their *disciples solely to test them.

6:7. The bread needed to feed the crowd would cost two hundred days' wages for a peasant or unskilled laborer; during food shortages (which such a multitude might create for surrounding villages) a day's wages might feed just one family. Although fishermen may have earned the same amount faster, it still represents a substantial sacrifice to the disciples' communal treasury (12:6; 13:29).

6:8-9. The "barley" loaves are reminiscent of 2 Kings 4:42-44, where Elisha multiplies such loaves. Philip's and Andrew's skepticism also mirrors that of one of Elisha's prophet disciples (2 Kings 4:43; cf. Num 11:21-22). (Some scholars also point to the presence of Elisha's assistant in 2 Kings 4:38, 41; the *LXX there uses the same word for "lad" as Andrew does here.) There too bread was left over, though Elisha fed just two hundred with twenty loaves. Bread was the most fundamental staple of the ancient Mediterranean diet; barley was cheaper than wheat, allowing for more loaves at the same price. Fish was a staple in Galilee, and sometimes was dried; most people could not regularly afford meat.

6:10. People often sat on chairs but "reclined" (so the Greek here) at banquets (like Passover). Grass would flourish especially in the spring, around Passover season (cf. 6:4); it would also make the ground more comfortable for sitting (the wilderness often lacked it). John numbers five thousand "men" (the Greek term here is gender-specific, and only men were usually numbered in antiquity); the whole crowd, including women and children, may have been as many as four times that

number. In this case Jesus could be addressing a crowd nearly as large as the seating capacity of the theater for the citizen assembly of a major city like Ephesus, and at least four times the seating capacity of the theater in Sepphoris, a major Galilean city; to address such a crowd was no small feat.

6:11. The head of the Jewish household customarily gave thanks before (and, at least according to later attested custom, after) the meal. A later standard blessing is, "Blessed are You, Lord our God, who brings forth bread from the earth." Miracles of multiplying food appear in the *Old Testament (cf., e.g., 1 Kings 17:16; 19:8) and occasionally in extrabiblical Jewish tradition (cf. the oil in late traditions about the *Maccabees) and Greco-Roman texts; the primary background here is 2 Kings 4:42-44 (see comment on 6:8-9) and especially the manna of Exodus 16 (see comment on 6:31-33).

6:12. Possibly relevant is an ancient Roman custom that required hosts to provide sufficient food for some to be left over at the end of the meal; Jesus is the ultimate host. Certainly relevant is the analogous miracle in 2 Kings 4:44. Greco-Roman moralists and Jewish teachers abhorred waste; although the extra bread has been provided miraculously, its provision is not to be taken for granted and squandered.

6:13. The leftovers are considerably more than they started with; that they filled the maximum number of baskets they could carry underlines the enormity of the miracle.

6:14. "The Prophet" implies the prophet like Moses of Deuteronomy 18:15-18. In Moses' day, God had miraculously provided bread from heaven, manna. At Passover season (Jn 6:4) hopes for deliverance ran even higher than usual, because the Jewish people rehearsed how God had delivered them from their oppressors by the hand of Moses.

6:15. Some other first-century leaders gathered large followings in the wilderness who believed that they could perform signs like Moses or Joshua and overthrow the Romans; see comment on 6:14. The crowds wanted a worker of earthly miracles and an earthly leader like Moses (some Jewish traditions—*Philo, the *rabbis, etc.—viewed Moses as a king; cf. Deut 33:4-5); but this was not Jesus' mission (6:63). Perhaps threatened by the earthly emperor's claims to authority (see the introduction to Revelation), John's hearers may have taken warning from this passage. Privacy was difficult to find within Galilean villages, but would be easier on the mountain (6:3).

6:16-21
Lord of the Sea

In the context of John's discussion of Jesus as the New Passover, new manna and one greater than Moses, Jesus' miracle on the sea may have reminded his first hearers of Israel's crossing the sea in the days of Moses.

6:16-19. Squalls were frequent on the lake and can keep even modern boats on shore. Given where they are traveling (from the northeast to northwest shores), they were probably most of the way across the lake; turning back is no longer an option. That they had not arrived yet indicates the difficulty of the wind (6:18). Fishing boats were equipped with oars; the sail would be counterproductive in this storm. In the *Old Testament, only God is said to walk on the waves (see comment on 6:20).

6:20. "It is I" (v. 20) is literally "I am." "It is I" is a legitimate way to translate the phrase, and no doubt how Jesus intends the disciples to understand it; but given the context of Jesus walking on water, the nuance of deity in "I am" (Ex 3:14; Is 41:4; 43:10, 13) is probably present. *Gentiles had some stories of miracleworkers walking on water, but these were not known to Palestinian Jewish tradition, echoed here. In the Old Testament, Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha all parted bodies of water, but only God trod upon the water (Job 9:8; cf. Ps 77:19, shortly before Ps 78:24, possibly used in Jn 6:31).

6:21. The boat being instantly at its destination has no exact Old Testament parallels, but the *Spirit had sometimes carried prophets from one place to another almost instantly (e.g., Ezek 8:3; 11:24—probably in a vision; cf. 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16).

6:22-29
Proper Motives

6:22-23. A large, culturally Greek-oriented city on the lake of Galilee, Tiberias was named for the emperor Tiberius and built by Herod Antipas on the site of a graveyard. This site ef-

fectively kept the most religious Jews out of the city and allowed Herod to dole out favors to allies without interference from other powerful Jews. It does not appear in the *New Testament record apart from this mention and, like Sepphoris, the other large city of Galilee (also very Hellenized), does not seem to have been frequented by Jesus. People often had to cross the lake in small boats.

6:24. People could lease boats, and perhaps paid a fare for conveyance (though this is not clear). Capernaum was a shorter distance across the sea from their location than Tiberias was, and less than ten miles from Tiberias (relevant if the boat-owners of 6:23 wished to return there).

6:25-26. The appeal of free food is not hard to understand; thus, for example, emperors and others used it to pacify Rome or gain political support. The crowd wants to follow a prophet who will provide free food and political deliverance—another Moses. But they miss the central thrust of Jesus' mission (cf. 6:15).

6:27-29. The dialogue between Jesus and the crowd plays on the term *work;* Judaism stressed righteous works, but Jesus singles out a particular work: faith in him (Jewish teachers praised Abraham's "work" of faith in God, but Jesus' demand is more specific). They then demand from Jesus a "work," which now means a sign (v. 30), as it sometimes does in Jewish literature. The "seal" (v. 27) means that God has attested Jesus; cf. comment on 3:33.

6:30-59
Jesus as the New Manna

This passage fits ancient Jewish expectations for a *midrash or homily on Exodus 16:15 and Psalm 78:24, which Jesus quotes in John 6:31. Jesus paraphrases, explains and expounds in a manner characteristic of ancient Jewish teachers, yet his hearers fail to understand him. Ancient teachers sometimes made their lectures hard to understand to sort out genuine followers from the masses.

6:30-31. The crowd still wants him to act as the new Moses they expect—on an earthly, political level. Many Jewish people expected manna to be restored in the world to come. Moreover, God provided Israel bread in the wilderness not just once but daily; the crowd might reason that if Jesus is a prophet like Moses (6:14-15), he should provide bread more than once. Like other ancient writers, John was free to paraphrase his material in his own words; here the crowd cites Scripture as if they are rabbis in a debate, using Exodus 16:4, 15 and/or Psalm 78:24. John seems to know and use both Hebrew and Greek versions of these texts. The following discourse repeatedly paraphrases the text (as was common in ancient Jewish Scripture exposition).

6:32-33. Both Exodus 16:4, 15 and Psalm 78:24 attribute the bread to God (also Ps 78:19-20; Neh 9:15); correcting a misapplication was common in Jewish Scripture interpretation (e.g., "Do not understand the text as meaning X; instead it means Y"). (Some later rabbis attributed the manna to Moses' merit, but they would have agreed that God gave it.) Jesus says, "Not Moses, but God really gave this bread." His hearers would have to agree; that was technically how Moses had put it (Ex 16:4, 15; cf. Deut 8:3). Like many other interpreters of his day (see, e.g., the *Dead Sea Scrolls), Jesus is concerned to apply the biblical text to their present situation.

6:34. They hear him on a different level from the meaning he intends (cf. 3:4; 4:15), so he explains further. The ignorance of opponents or minor characters was often used as a foil to further a main argument throughout ancient literature (*Plato, rabbis, novels, etc.).

6:35-38. Jewish expositors had already often used manna as a symbol for spiritual food, God's *law, or Torah/Wisdom/Word. Ancient writers also often used water or drinking figuratively (including Jewish teachers using it for Torah or Wisdom). Sirach 24:19 portrays Wisdom as saying, "Come to me . . . and eat from my fruits"; in 24:21, Wisdom cries, "Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more." Jesus here compares himself with divine Wisdom, but (in contrast to Sirach) emphasizes the satisfaction of those who eat and drink from him.

6:39-40. The dead would be raised to *eternal life "on the last day," the day of the Lord, when God would transform the world and inaugurate his eternal *kingdom. In ancient *rhetoric, the repetition of a point would make it sound more emphatic; repeating both the beginning and ending of a claim would underline

it all the more. For divine vision (6:40) and transformation, see comment on 1 Jn 3:2.

6:41-43. In Exodus 16:2, Israelites grumbled before receiving manna, but here Jesus' hearers complain even after having eaten bread. The crowd continues to hear Jesus on the wrong level, even though he clearly refers to eternal life and not literal bread. For background on Jesus coming down from heaven in addition to manna, see comment on 3:13 (especially on Wisdom's descent; e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 9:10).

6:44. Most Jewish people believed in both human choice and God's sovereignty. For example, the fifth benediction of the Amida, a regularly prayed Jewish prayer, recognized that God granted *repentance. "Drawing" may echo *Septuagint language for God drawing his people to himself (Jer 31:3; cf. Hos 11:4).

6:45. Jewish expositors often explained a Torah text in view of a passage from the prophets. Jesus cites Isaiah 54:13, which is not far from another context offering drink to God's people (55:1) or from Isaiah 53, which John uses elsewhere (12:38).

6:46. On God's invisibility, even in part to Moses, see comment on 1:18.

6:47-51. Jesus contrasts the new and old manna in good midrashic style, like a good Jewish expositor. Most fundamentally, the manna in the wilderness conferred only temporary life, whereas Jesus confers eternal life. Virtually the entire wilderness generation perished in the wilderness (6:49) through disobedience, despite manna and the Torah.

6:52. Again Jesus' hearers interpret him too literally. Jewish people had many forbidden foods, but they and all the Greco-Roman world as well abhorred cannibalism (which some abominable cults and some barbarians reportedly practiced occasionally). Many non-Christian Romans later misinterpreted Christian language about the Lord's Supper: "eating the body and blood of their Lord" sounded like cannibalism to outsiders and thus aroused more persecution against the *church. In a Passover context (6:4), however, Jesus is being identified figuratively as the Passover lamb (Ex 12:8); cf. also divine Wisdom in comment on John 6:35.

6:53. Eating the flesh of the Passover lamb was required (Ex 12:8); but drinking the blood of the lamb (or of any creature) was always forbidden (Lev 17:10-11), avoided even in meat (Gen 9:4). Perhaps some might have also recalled the expression "the blood of grapes," meaning wine (Gen 49:11), which was essential to the Passover meal. Moreover, both Sirach and *Philo speak of drinking divine Wisdom.

6:54-58. On the literal level (cannibalism and drinking blood) obeying Jesus' statement should have merited judgment, not salvation; thus they are confused. Some sages spoke in riddles, a practice for which Jesus is known (his *parables, etc.). Only those wise enough to continue with him would penetrate the meaning of his teaching.

6:59. Synagogues could function as community centers and were not limited to use on the Sabbath. Although most of the remains of the Capernaum *synagogue are from a later period, evidence remains that points to the first-century synagogue on which the later synagogue was built.

6:60-71
Perseverance and Apostasy

6:60-61. The *disciples' grumbling recalls how the Israelites treated Moses in the wilderness. "Stumbling" (NASB) was a common figure of speech for sinning or falling away.

6:62. Here Jesus may use a standard Jewish "how much more" argument: If you cannot receive the message of the cross, how much more difficult will it be for you to accept my *resurrection and return to the Father? For the impossibility of earthly things understanding heavenly things, see comment on 3:11-12.

6:63. Jesus provides here the interpretive key to what preceded: he is not speaking literally, as if they are to eat his literal flesh; he speaks of life through the *Spirit. Some Jewish interpreters were masters at figurative interpretation; but his followers still fail to understand him (6:66).

6:64-65. On Jesus' knowledge, see comment on 2:23-25.

6:66. John portrays the departure of these disciples as apostasy, which Judaism regarded as one of the worst sins. The loyalty of disciples brought honor to teachers in antiquity; their abandonment led to dishonor.

6:67-71. Even among his closest followers, one is a betrayer. That even Jesus faced such

betrayal would encourage John's readers, who had experienced some apostates in their own churches (see the discussion of setting in the introduction to 1 John). On the "Twelve," see comment on Mark 3:14-15. For "Iscariot," see comment on Mark 3:16-19.

7:1-9
The Unbelief of Jesus' Brothers

7:1. In Jesus' day, Galilee and Judea were under separate jurisdictions (that of Antipas and the Roman governor, respectively), so that someone in trouble in one part of the country would be safer to remain in the other part. The Judean ruling class controlled many affairs in Judea and could refer capital cases to Pilate.

7:2. The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the three most important festivals of the Jewish year and was celebrated for eight days in Jerusalem. Jewish pilgrims from throughout the Roman and Parthian world would gather. The men would live in booths (made of branches and the like) constructed on rooftops or elsewhere, commemorating God's faithfulness to his people when they lived in booths in the wilderness (women and children were not required to live in the booths). This feast was known for its joyous celebration.

7:3-4. From the standpoint of general ancient political theory, the advice of Jesus' brothers is correct; they may not know the specific matter of the Jerusalem authorities' opposition. Most teachers taught in public places. Moralists praised as virtuous frank or open speech (v. 4), whereas secret acts were deemed deceitful. But cf. John 6:30.

7:5. Brothers were normally among one's closest allies; kin ties were very important, and intrafamily conflicts were considered particularly tragic.

7:6-9. Pious Jewish men who lived as near as Galilee were supposed to go to the feast. It would be normal for Jesus to travel with his extended family (*Josephus spoke of whole towns going). The issue is not that he will not go, but that he will only go "secretly" at first, so as not to hasten the appropriate time of his execution (cf. 7:6 with 2:4). Although Jesus' "not yet" prevents his statement from qualifying as deception per se, Scripture's general demand for truth was qualified in particular cases, most often for saving life (e.g., Ex 1:19; 1 Sam 16:2-3; 2 Kings 8:10).

7:10-36
Divided Opinions

7:10. Festal pilgrims typically traveled in groups (Josephus even speaks of entire towns going). Because of Jerusalem's elevation, pilgrims would "go up" to it. Greco-Roman biographers often liked to describe their subjects' appearances, flattering or not. That none of the Gospels does so suggests that Jesus' appearance may have been average enough to allow him to pass unnoticed in a crowd: probably curly black hair, light brown skin, perhaps a little over five feet in height—unlike the Aryan pictures of him that circulate in some Western churches. (He could be taller; some suggest an average height closer to five foot seven. The *Shroud of Turin, which is purported to be Jesus' burial cloth, makes him taller, in the epic Hebrew tradition—1 Sam 9:2. But scholars debate its authenticity.) Although *Diaspora Jewish men, like Greek and Roman men, were normally clean-shaven, coins portray Palestinian Jewish captives in this period with full beards and hair down to their shoulders. Nevertheless, most Judeans had not seen Jesus at close range, so while Jesus' appearance was probably not strikingly distinctive, we cannot be certain about the details.

7:11-13. In contrast to some later stereotypes, ancient Jewish views were very diverse on a number of issues. "One who leads astray the multitude" (NASB) or "one who deceives the people" (NIV, NRSV) was a serious charge, applied to those who led other Jews to idolatry or apostasy. Deuteronomy prescribes death as the penalty (13:5, 12-18), and some *rabbis even felt that such persons should be given no chance to repent, lest they be able to secure forgiveness though their followers had perished. Some Jewish sources as early as the second century charged Jesus with this crime.

7:14. Teaching was often done in public places, including in the temple courts. Some popular teachers drew large crowds there.

7:15. Most children in the Greco-Roman world could not afford even a primary education. But many Palestinian Jewish children, except perhaps from the poorest homes (which a carpenter's family usually was not),

would learn how to recite and probably often how to read the Bible, though most probably could not write. The issue here is not whether Jesus is literate or can recite Torah, but that he has never formally studied Scripture with an advanced teacher, yet he expounds as well as any of the scholars without depending on earlier scholars' opinions.

7:16-17. Some Jewish sages agreed that willingness to obey preceded genuine understanding. Learning by doing was a standard part of Jewish education, which included imitating one's teacher. (Sometimes this may have been taken too far. In a probably fictitious story, one *disciple was said to have hidden under his rabbi's bed to learn the proper way to perform the marriage act.)

7:18-19. Prophets were to be God's agents (see "*apostle" in the glossary). False prophets were technically to be executed; but the prophet like Moses was to be followed (Deut 18:9-22). To seek to kill a true prophet obviously contravened the *law.

7:20. Demoniacs were often thought to act insanely; in this case the crowd thinks Jesus is paranoid. But even this charge could imply the suspicion that he is a false prophet (7:12): false prophets were sometimes thought to channel spirits (indeed, many pagan magicians claimed such spirit-guides). The penalty for false prophets was death (Ex 22:18; Deut 18:10), so it is ironic that they would accuse him of having a *demon while denying any intention to kill him. Josephus tells of one true prophetic figure in this period (he does not quite label him a "prophet") who was regarded as insane and demon possessed; the Gospels suggest that some viewed another this way (John the Baptist—Mt 11:18).

7:21-23. Jesus asks the crowd to reason consistently (sound and fair judgment was paramount in Jewish teaching): why is it wrong for him to heal supernaturally on the sabbath, when circumcision (which wounds) is permitted on the sabbath? A later first-century rabbi argued similarly: circumcising on the eighth day (involving a single member) takes precedence over the sabbath, so saving a whole life (which involves all one's members) also does so. Some practices at the festivals (such as killing the Passover lamb and waving the lulab, i.e., palm branch, at the Feast of Tabernacles) were likewise held to take precedence over the sabbath. Jesus employs a "how much more" argument, frequent in the Gospels and in Jewish teaching more generally.

7:24. Many thinkers, including many *Pharisees, would have agreed with Jesus' admonition here.

7:25-26. When a speaker was troublesome but popular, the less brutal ancient authorities sometimes discreetly waited for the best opportunity to deal with him rather than acting immediately.

7:27. Some scholars have pointed to a tradition (attested mostly but not exclusively in later sources) that the *Messiah would be hidden for a time before he appeared, and thus no one would know where he was from (cf. the irony in 9:29). Later sources compare him with Moses.

7:28-29. Jesus declares that where he is "from" is obvious: he is "sent from" the Father. This expression means that he is a commissioned agent, an authorized representative, of the Father (see "apostle" in the glossary).

7:30. The idea of an appointed (or fated) hour of death was fairly common in ancient Mediterranean sources, so the present claim would be intelligible to a wide audience.

7:31. In most Jewish traditions, the Messiah was not a miracle worker, except to the extent that the works of a new Moses figure would validate his prophetic claim to lead the people.

7:32. The aristocratic priests were dominant in Jerusalem's leadership; some aristocratic Pharisees (though probably a much smaller number in Jesus' day) also belonged to the coalition, though they did not dominate it. In Jesus' day the Pharisees as a *movement* had no authority to arrest anyone, although the chief priests did; John might update the language for readers of his own day. Most scholars believe that the main Palestinian opposition that Jewish Christians faced in the decades after A.D. 70 came from Pharisees. The officers are the Levitical temple guards.

7:33-36. Sages sometimes spoke in riddles, inviting those who were wise to understand their teaching. John again employs the motif of misinterpretation: if the Jewish authorities misinterpret Jesus so badly, how can they claim to understand the Scriptures rightly? "Greeks" refers to Hellenized *Gentiles, perhaps

descended from Greek and Macedonian settlers; "dispersion" (NASB) refers to Jewish people scattered among them. Jesus' hearers apparently suspect that he will use the foreign Jews as a base of operation for reaching the Gentiles to whom they seek to be witnesses (a situation that ironically occurred, according to the book of Acts).

7:37-39
Rivers of Water

7:37. The "last day" of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2) probably refers to the eighth day. For at least the first seven days of the feast, priests marched in procession from the Pool of Siloam to the temple and poured out water at the base of the altar. Pilgrims to the feast watched this ritual, which Jews throughout the Roman world thus knew about; it was even commemorated on souvenir jars they could take home with them. "Come to me" may echo the summons of Wisdom to come eat and drink of her (Sirach 24:19, 21).

7:38. Scripture reading at this feast is at least as old as Nehemiah 8:1-18; early Jewish tradition suggests that the readings on this last day of the festival (7:37) included the one passage in the Prophets that emphasized this feast, Zechariah 14, which was interpreted in conjunction with Ezekiel 47. Together these texts taught that rivers of living water would flow forth from Jerusalem or the temple, bringing life to all the earth. Jewish teachers often depicted the temple as the navel, or belly, of the world—that is, the center of the world (the way that Greeks viewed Delphi), so one might view the waters as proceeding from this belly or center. The water-drawing ceremony (7:37) (originally meant to secure rain) pointed toward this hope.

Because the water of verse 38 flows to and not from the believer (v. 39), 7:37-38 may be punctuated to read: "If anyone thirsts, let this one come to me; and let whoever believes in me drink. As the Scripture says . . . " (The original manuscripts had no punctuation.) Verse 38 may thus declare that Jesus fulfills the Scriptures read at the feast, as the foundation stone of a new temple, the source of the water of life (cf. 19:34; Rev 22:1).

7:39. Most of Judaism did not believe that the *Spirit was prophetically active in their own time but Scripture promised the full outpouring of the Spirit in the messianic age or the world to come. Water often symbolized Torah (*law) or wisdom in Jewish texts, but John follows *Old Testament precedent in using it for the Spirit (Is 44:3; Joel 2:28; esp. Ezek 36:25-27).

7:40-52
The Division Deepens

7:40. "The Prophet" is the "prophet like Moses" (Deut 18:15, 18; see on 6:14-15). Although the connection is not explicit here, the hearers might have thought of the living water God provided in the wilderness in Moses' day (Ex 17:1-7).

7:41-42. Like civic pride, regional prejudice was common in antiquity. Contradicting what others had said in 7:27, some people cite the place where the Messiah was to originate, based on Micah 5:2; that the Messiah was of Davidic descent was unanimously held. Although John included no birth *narratives, the conjunction of Matthew, Luke and widespread Christian traditions known by the early second century (to pagans interrogated by Hadrian) suggests that John's hearers know that *Christ was born in Bethlehem. They would thus regard Jesus' opponents here as ignorant.

7:43-44. Public divisions were common in ancient Mediterranean society.

7:45-46. On the *Pharisees in Jesus and John's day, see comment on 7:32. Powerful and wise speech was highly regarded in antiquity; in that era, listening to public speakers was a form of entertainment as well as of learning (the former function has been largely replaced in affluent societies by television). The Levite temple guards would have heard many teachers in the temple, yet they are particularly impressed by this one. Rarely, but on occasion, elsewhere in antiquity armed men failed to arrest someone after hearing his discourses (an earlier case is mentioned by ancient Roman historians).

7:47. On the "misleader," see comment on 7:12.

7:48. The Pharisees are clearly mistaken here (cf. 3:1-2). John uses irony, a common ancient literary technique, to underscore his point: Jesus' opponents are closed-minded

and dense. Aristocrats despised demagogues who appealed to the uneducated masses, and often tried to protect the masses from being deceived by them.

7:49. Trained *rabbis often looked down on the *'amme ha'arets,* "the people of the land," common people who did not even try to follow rabbinic interpretations of the *law. Many texts indicate the animosity between Pharisaic rabbis and *'amme ha'arets* (e.g., *Akiba contended that before becoming a rabbi he was one of the *'amme ha'arets* and wanted to beat up rabbis). On a lesser scale, analogous attitudes may sometimes be observed among educated elites today; but the rabbis reasonably believed that one could not live the law without knowing it, and they did not think that *'amme ha'arets*, who did not know rabbinic interpretations, knew it.

7:50-51. Although municipal elites may not have always acted fairly, Pharisees and some others could insist on following proper Jewish legal procedure: a defendant must be allowed to speak for oneself. Given the elite's attitude to those who do not know the law (7:49), John's irony (see comment on 7:48) is eloquent here: Nicodemus challenges them on a basic matter of legal procedure accepted by Moses (e.g., Deut 1:16; 19:16-17) and all Jewish interpreters.

7:52. "Search and see" was a familiar phrase inviting a person to check the Scriptures. This response reflects regional prejudice rather than knowledge of the Scriptures (despite their attitude in 7:49): 2 Kings 14:25 demonstrates that they were mistaken. Later rabbis admitted that prophets arose from every tribe. Especially outside Sepphoris and Tiberias, Galileans (who were mostly rural) may have been more conservative than much of the Jerusalem elite, but Jerusalemites often perceived them as backward.

7:53–8:11
The Woman Taken in Adultery

Omitted by all the earliest manuscripts, this passage is generally agreed to be a later addition to the Fourth Gospel. Although it may be a true story, as many scholars think, it should not be read as part of the context in John.

7:53–8:1. For Jesus spending nights on the Mount of Olives, cf. 18:1-2; Luke 22:39; cf. also Mark 11:1, 11.

8:2. Most people rose about sunrise. Teachers often taught in the temple courts; cf. 7:14.

8:3. John, who deals only with "*Pharisees" and chief priests, nowhere mentions "*scribes," who are more frequent in the other Gospels; scribes functioned as teachers of the *law. On adultery, see comment on 1 Thessalonians 4:4-6.

8:4-5. Scripture commanded the execution not only of the adulteress but also of the adulterer; if the woman was genuinely caught in the act, the adulterer had surely been identified as well. The law of Moses demanded the execution of this woman, but Rome had removed capital jurisdiction from Jewish courts, except for temple violations. Thus the Jewish leaders test whether Jesus will reject the law, compromising his patriotic Jewish following, or reject Roman rule, which will allow them to accuse him to the Romans. Pharisees and later *rabbis were quite scrupulous about the biblical requirement of witnesses (Deut 17:6; 19:15), so it was necessary to claim that they had caught her in the act. Since she was caught in the act, however, it seems suspicious that the man is not brought.

8:6-8. Roman judges wrote their sentences before reading them aloud. Some think that Jesus may have written an acquittal. God wrote the Ten Commandments with his finger (Ex 31:18; Deut 9:10); perhaps Jesus writes the first line of the tenth commandment in the *Septuagint of Exodus 20: "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." This text might declare them all guilty of adultery (Mt 5:28). Jesus' hearers, however, seem unaware of what he is writing; this proposal is thus at best speculation. (Some people also drew circles for ultimatums, but while the term here allows also for drawing figures, Jesus nowhere explains the writing.)

The witnesses were normally the first to throw the stones, but false witnesses were to pay the same penalty they had hoped to inflict on their victim (Deut 17:7; 19:19).

8:9-11. It was a commonplace of Jewish teaching that even the most pious had committed sins. God had the power to judge or forgive sins.

8:12-29
Accepting the Witness of the Light

In the likelihood that 8:1-11 is not part of the context, 8:12–10:21 still takes place on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2, 37).

8:12. Jewish literature was generous with the title "light of the world," applying it to Israel, Jerusalem, the patriarchs, the *Messiah, God, famous rabbis and the *law (cf. 1:4-5); but always it refers to something of ultimate significance. One of the most spectacular celebrations of the Feast of Tabernacles was a torchlight ceremony with dancing in the temple's court of women (commemorating the pillar of fire in the wilderness); this feast, along with Hanukkah (10:22), was thus known for splendid lighting (though John also uses the image in 12:46). That Jesus offers his light to the whole world, to all the nations, may suggest an allusion to Isaiah 42:6; 49:6. Walking in darkness (cf. Jn 9:4; 11:9) is a natural metaphor for stumbling (Is 59:10; Jer 13:16), falling from the right way (Jer 18:15; Mal 2:8) or being destroyed (Ps 27:2; Jer 20:11).

8:13-18. Ancients normally condemned public self-praise. The law of Moses required two witnesses to confirm any case (Deut 19:15; cf. 17:6), and subsequent Jewish interpretation made this requirement stricter; Jesus might employ the standard Jewish argument "how much more": if the witness of two men is valid, how much more that of Father and Son? Perhaps relevant to 8:17: if later traditions are applicable to this period (which is not clear in this case), this was the season in which Jewish people especially contemplated judgment (during the closely associated New Year's and Day of Atonement holy days).

Jews spoke of the law as "God's law" or "our law"; rabbis presented only their pagan and heretical challengers as calling it "your law" (8:17). In John (who argues that Jesus fulfills the law), however, this expression is surely ironic: see the introduction on "the Jews."

8:19-20. Their response is (v. 19): If he is a witness, he must appear in the court; and they complain that they have no access to the voice of God. Jesus' reply is apparently: that is the problem. Treasuries were standard in ancient temples; the Jerusalem temple's wealthy treasury (containing money, expensive garments, and other goods) was said to adjoin the Court of Women, where the lighting ceremony (8:12) and dancing took place throughout the nights of the festival. The treasury itself may have been used only for storage, but 8:20 can be read, "near the treasury."

8:21-22. Many *Gentiles approved of suicide, but most Jews rejected it except under the most drastic circumstances (see comment on Acts 16:27). Although it is far from clear, it is possible that they think in terms of a deceased father; those who trafficked in ghosts would be viewed with hostility (Lev 20:27). In any case, they do not see Jesus as a particularly pious person here. Yet John's irony is again at work: Jesus does return to the Father through his death on the cross.

8:23. The contrast between the realm above (God's realm) and the realm below (where mortals lived) was common in Jewish *apocalyptic literature, but heavenly revealers in apocalypses were angels or very special heroes of the past (helping to prompt the question of 8:25). Jesus' hearers cannot accept his implications, which depict Jesus more like divine Wisdom descended from heaven than like a boy who grew up in Nazareth (6:42; 7:41).

8:24-25. Dying in sin was a serious matter, for at death one's final opportunity for *repentance had passed (cf. Ezek 18:21-32). (For this reason, Jewish teachers exhorted those being executed to confess their sins and expect their death to *atone for their sins.) Jesus agrees that one must repent but insists that genuine repentance must include faith in him. Although *ego eimi* can mean "I am he," it can also refer to the divine name (Is 43:10, in Greek inviting them to believe that *ego eimi*; John builds toward the more explicit claim of 8:58).

8:26-27. That God was "true" was central to Jewish understanding of his character. According to Jewish law, an agent must accurately represent his sender, and to the extent that he did so was backed by his sender's full authorization.

8:28-29. "Lifting up" (cf. 3:14; 12:32) is from the *Septuagint of Isaiah 52:13—the context of which early Christians applied to the crucifixion (Is 52:14–53:12).

8:30-47
Debating Parentage

8:30-31. Although Jesus' listeners initially believe, they are ready to kill him by the end of the passage (8:59; cf. Ex 4:31; 5:21). Just as *Gentile converts or converts to Jewish movements had to persevere as well as join, and teachers wanted their *disciples to continue in their teaching, so true followers of Jesus must persevere (on perseverance, see also Ezek 18:24-26). This report could also encourage John's circle of *churches (see introduction to 1 John).

8:32. The Greek concept of truth emphasized reality; the *Old Testament word translated "truth" had more to do with integrity or faithfulness to one's word or character. Jewish thought sometimes characterized God as the Truth, so Jesus' hearers should realize that he refers specifically to God's truth in the Jewish sense.

8:33. Jesus' hearers typically misunderstand him in a natural sense. Since freeborn ancients used slave status as an insult, they might object that they have never personally been slaves. Nevertheless, their reference to Abraham shows that they understand Jesus as referring to the Jewish people as a whole. Their response is surprising, since Jewish teachers generally acknowledged that their people had been subjected under the yoke of at least four kingdoms: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. But many expected God to ultimately break the yokes of the other nations (an extreme form of this belief led to the revolt of A.D. 66–70). They taught that the other nations were ruled by guardian angels and the stars, but that Israel was ruled by God alone.

8:34. Philosophers often used "free" to mean free from false ideas, passion or constraint; Judaism spoke of being free from sin.

8:35. Although slaves were considered part of a household and could be "inherited," they were not permanent members; they could be sold, and often they were freed. Indeed, Old Testament *law mandated that Jewish slaves be freed in certain years. By contrast, barring disinheritance, a son was always part of a household (cf. Gen 21:10). Jesus may also make another allusion here: "house" (which here, as often, means "household," "family" or "home") might possibly include a wordplay with God's house, the temple (2:16); only the "sons" will have a permanent share there (Ezek 46:16-17; cf. also Is 56:4-5).

8:36-37. In popular Jewish belief in some circles, descent from Abraham virtually guaranteed salvation except for the most wicked; Israel was chosen and destined for salvation in him. Judaism celebrated Abraham's righteousness, a righteousness Jesus' critics here did not imitate (8:40).

8:38-39. "Father" could mean "ancestor," and on that level Abraham was their father (v. 37—although many would have had some Gentile converts in their ancestry). But metaphorically a father was someone whose ways one imitated, often a teacher, or whose nature one revealed, such as a spiritual progenitor.

8:40. Abraham was used as the ultimate model for Jewish piety (hospitality, faith, and his role as model *proselyte and maker of proselytes), and Jewish tradition celebrated his reception of God's disguised messengers in Genesis 18. (Jewish teachers later even appealed to his merits as a basis for God's favor.)

8:41. Insinuation was common in ancient *rhetorical conflicts. To suggest that someone had one father by law but another father by nature was to suggest that one's mother was guilty of adultery. Recognizing this implication, the interlocutors insist on the purity of their descent: "children of Abraham" was equivalent in Jewish literature to "children of God" (cf., e.g., Ex 4:22), because God had adopted Abraham's descendants. (Some scholars have also seen here an allusion to the later rabbinic charge against Jesus that his mother bore him to a Roman soldier rather than as a virgin, though this charge is not clear in this debate.)

8:42-45. Jesus' interlocutors would not deny that the devil was the original murderer (cf. 8:37, 40) and denier of truth (cf. 8:32); Jewish tradition stressed that his lie had led to Adam's death (cf. Gen 3). People could be called "children" figuratively of those they resembled or whose ways they imitated; for becoming children of God instead, see comment on 3:3, 5. Because Jesus' interlocutors want to kill him and reject his truth, their behavior demonstrates who is their real father; the issue is not ethnic but spiritual. Commentators usually associate the devil's initial murder with his deception of Eve into spiritual death or

(perhaps less likely, since no deceiver is explicit) Cain's murder of Abel. (In a much later Jewish tradition, the devil was Cain's actual father.) In ancient forensic rhetoric a defendant often returned the accuser's charges (cf. 7:20). The devil (see *Satan) as liar likely evokes the serpent's deception of Eve; Jewish literature continued to emphasize his role as deceiver (as well as tempter).

8:46-47. In court, the accused typically demanded proof from their accusers. Ancient defense rhetoric showed that the accusation was morally not characteristic of the upright defendant; it also often shifted charges onto accusers, thereby also impugning their motives for bringing a case. But whereas defendants would sometimes "confess" to faults that were not indictable crimes, Jesus claims to be above reproach. Jewish teachers normally acknowledged that everyone sinned (a few excepted the patriarchs).

8:48-59
Greater Than Abraham

8:48. Although many Judeans looked down on Galileans, both would have been insulted to be compared with *Samaritans. Jesus' hearers within the *narrative are probably unaware of his fraternizing with Samaritans (4:40), which would not play well to a Jerusalem audience. The basis for this charge might be similar theology: Samaritans insulted the temple and challenged the Jewish people's exclusive heritage in Abraham (see comment on 4:12). It was customary in ancient rhetoric to return one's accuser's charges (Jesus associated them with the devil, and they associate him with a *demon). Jews denied that Samaritans were pure descendants of Abraham (cf. 8:41). The charge of demon possession (also 10:20) challenges his prophetic credibility (see comment on 7:20). The discussion also reflects John's irony: only the Samaritans (4:9) and *Pilate (18:35) recognize that Jesus is *Jewish*.

8:49-50. According to Jewish *law, one who rejects a person's appointed agent also insults and rejects the one who sent that agent.

8:51-53. They could have understood him spiritually or in terms of the *resurrection, since some Jewish sources do speak in such terms (e.g., *4 Maccabees 7:18-19); most Jewish people except the *Sadducees would have agreed that Abraham and the prophets were spiritually alive with God. They continue to understand him too literally, however. (Even in one Jewish story where Abraham did not want to die, God made special arrangements to persuade him to give in.)

8:54-55. Ancients condemned public self-praise, but one could cite another's endorsement. God would not share his glory with another deity (Is 42:8; 48:11). "He is our God" was the basic confession of the covenant in the *Old Testament (e.g., Ex 6:7; Lev 26:12; 1 Chron 17:22; Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:28). Yet those loyal to the covenant—those who truly keep God's law—were said in the Old Testament to "know" God (e.g., Jer 9:24; 31:31-34; Hos 2:20).

8:56. Jewish tradition emphasized that during his vision in Genesis 15:12-21 Abraham had been shown the future kingdoms that would oppress Israel and the messianic era beyond them. This experience links Abraham with Moses (see comment on 1:14-18) and Isaiah (cf. Jn 12:39-41) as among those who had seen God's glory.

8:57-58. Although the main point is that Jesus is too young to have known Abraham, his interlocutors might also imply that he is too young for much authority; fifty was the minimum age for involvement in some kinds of public service (and maximum for some others, Num 8:25).

If Jesus merely wished to imply that he existed before Abraham, he should have said, "Before Abraham was, I *was*." But "I am" was a title for God (Ex 3:14), which suggests that Jesus is claiming more than that he merely existed before Abraham. This title of God may have been fresh on the minds of Jesus' hearers at the feast: later tradition says that during the Feast of Tabernacles, the priests uttered God's words in Isaiah: "I am the Lord, I am he" (Is 43:10, 13; the *Septuagint of Is 43:10 has *ego eimi* "I am"). (Although we cannot be certain of this tradition's date, it certainly does not derive from this Gospel.)

8:59. Jesus' hearers do not miss his point in 8:58; they take his words as blasphemy (a mere claim to *messiahship was not considered blasphemous, although it could be offensive; they understood him to claim deity). Stoning was an expected punishment for blasphemy (Lev 24:16, 23), but God's people had some-

times attempted it against God's own agents (Ex 17:4; Num 14:10; cf. 1 Sam 30:6). The temple was constructed from massive stone blocks, not the sort of stones that people could throw; but in Jesus' day construction was still going on, and mobs usually found objects to throw, as *Josephus says *Zealots later did in the temple and a crowd did in a *synagogue.

In the Greek tradition, deities sometimes made themselves or favorite mortals invisible. More relevant here, God had earlier hidden some of his servants for their safety (Jer 36:26); here Jesus hides himself. Jesus' departure from the temple might symbolize that: the glory had departed (Ezek 10–11); the departure of God's presence on account of Israel's sin was a common theme in later Jewish texts.

9:1-12
Healing the Blind

9:1. The pool of Siloam (9:7), presumably not far from where this incident occurs, was also near the temple (which Jesus had just left, 8:59). Blind people could make a living only by public charity, and they could make it best near the temple, where many people passed and people would tend to think charitably (cf. Acts 3:2). The *disciples see this blind man as they are leaving the temple area (8:59).

9:2. Most people in antiquity, including Jewish teachers, believed that suffering, including blindness, was at least often associated with sin, though Jewish *law provided protection for a blind person. Jewish people acknowledged punishment for ancestral sin; many believed in prenatal activity; and some allowed even for prenatal sin.

9:3-5. Jesus uses commonplace images: no one (except night watchmen and shepherds) works in the dark (v. 4); because modern lighting was unavailable, that normal forms of work (and usually even battles) ceased at nightfall was common knowledge. On the light of the world, see comment on 8:12.

9:6. Spittle was sometimes associated with healing in pagan circles, so it would naturally represent an agent of healing in popular thought. But spittle was still more widely considered vulgar and disgusting, and its application would make the man uncomfortable if he knows what it is. Some find here an allusion to the creative act in Genesis 2:7 (cf. Jn 20:22).

9:7. Healing through washing appears in the account of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:10-14. It is not clear whether "Siloam" meant "sent," but Greek teachers as well as Jewish teachers from *Philo to the *rabbis commonly made arguments based on wordplays, which were often based on fanciful etymologies.

This pool was inside Jerusalem's walls in Jesus' day, with large masonry and four porches. Although Siloam was used as a water supply and for baptizing converts to Judaism, it has more direct significance here. This was probably still the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2, 37; see comment on 7:53–8:11), and the water of Siloam was the sacred water used for this feast (see comment on 7:37-38). Here Jesus employs the ritual water (cf. 2:6; 3:5), but it works only because the man is "sent."

9:8. Beggars in antiquity were often turned down and despised; Judaism emphasized charity, but the shame attached to begging normally deterred those who did not need to resort to it.

9:9-12. Those blind from birth (9:1) were not known to recover (9:32)—at least not without direct supernatural intervention.

9:13-23
Interrogating the Witnesses

The key word in 9:12-31 is "know": everyone claims repeatedly what they know and do not know. The *Pharisees, who supposedly know the *law, turn out to know nothing; whereas the healed man, who knows only Jesus, has had an experience with God that his more scholarly interrogators cannot refute.

9:13. Local elders (or in some places, like *Essene communities, priests filled this role) served as judges in local communities before A.D. 70; but Pharisaic teachers gradually began to achieve much dominance in religious teaching in Palestine after 70. Writing in the 90s, John uses the language of his day to communicate the point to his readers, many of whom have faced opposition or expulsion from their own *synagogues (see comment on 9:24-34).

9:14-16. This is a natural Pharisaic response on the sabbath (5:9-12; see comment on Mk 2:23-3:6). The Pharisaic school of *Hillel allowed praying for the sick on the Sabbath; but the Pharisaic school of *Shammai was

dominant in Jesus' day. Most, however, would have viewed as a Sabbath violation making a clay poultice on the Sabbath (so long as the person was not in danger of dying). Kneading (dough, and by analogy clay) was one of thirty-nine classes of work forbidden on the sabbath. Pharisees were divided among themselves on many issues in Jesus' day, and they had still not settled those issues by the end of the first century, when John was writing.

9:17. "Prophet" is an inadequate but positive title (cf. 4:19, 44; 6:14; 7:40). Some of the more academic circles in early Judaism were apparently more skeptical that prophets continued in their day, although popular circles were often open to them. "Prophets" could also be associated with unrest or criticism, and so were often problematic for Jerusalem's institutional leaders.

9:18-21. The blind man could have remained under his parents' roof at night and earned his keep by begging in the day, although this is not clear. But the reason the Jewish leaders ask his parents about his blindness is that they would know if he was born blind. Both Greek and Jewish courts of law could compel persons to witness against their will. "Of age" means any time past puberty. After about age thirteen a Jewish boy became responsible for his own keeping of the commandments (this point becomes explicit only in later rabbinic texts but was probably already implied in coming-of-age rituals in this period).

9:22-23. Pharisaic rules were scrupulous about cross-examining witnesses fairly and without prejudice; these interrogators thus violate Pharisaic ethical teaching. Excommunication was one of the severest forms of discipline administered by a synagogue community and was apparently rare and thus very harsh in the time of Jesus. (The practice is also attested among other disciplines in the *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 6.24–7.25; cf. Ezra 10:8.)

9:24-34
Excommunicating a Disciple

Throughout this section, the interrogators ignore the basic rules of evidence and fairness that later *rabbis diligently emphasized. Most scholars today believe that John's hearers, or many of them, had faced the danger or reality of expulsion from their synagogues (16:2; cf. 12:42-43). The faithfulness of this man (in contrast to the betrayal of the man in 5:14-16) would encourage them to remain faithful too.

9:24. "Give glory to God" can invite praise, but in an interrogation setting it can invite confession of sin (cf. Josh 7:19; 1 Esdras 9:8), in this case perhaps for following a "misleader" (see comment on 7:12). Interrogations sometimes proceeded in a heavy-handed way to procure a desired outcome (e.g., *Gentiles sometimes tortured slaves until they confessed what was suspected). Greek literature often mocked the overconfident person wise in their own eyes.

9:25. In contrast to arrogant persons (cf. 9:24), philosophers (like Socrates) normally admitted their ignorance and pursued knowledge. Although the man's affirmation of ignorance may be sincere, it is possible to interpret the passage otherwise; sometimes people feigned ignorance *rhetorically.

9:26-27. Diligent cross-examination was important in Jewish *law (cf., e.g., Susanna 48-62; Mishnah *Avot* 1:9). Although most people accepted arguments from the experience of miracles, some rabbis whose opinions appear in later sources insisted that standard rabbinic interpretations of Scripture outweighed even visible miracles.

9:28. Both Philo and later rabbis spoke of being *disciples of Moses, suggesting that the idea was common. John's point, however, is that these interrogators are wrong (5:45).

9:29-30. Leaving someone anonymous was sometimes a way to denigrate their value. The interrogators confess that they do not know where Jesus is from. Some scholars note that the circumstances of birth of a person accused of leading people astray would sometimes be investigated to determine if the misleader was an illegitimate child; if this point is in view here at all, the interrogators have failed to investigate the matter. More importantly, denying knowledge of where someone was from could repudiate or belittle them, demonstrating their lack of significance. Ironically, they undercut their own claims of knowledge (9:24); where Jesus is significantly from is "above" (8:23). Irony was a common literary technique in antiquity.

9:31. This view reflects good Jewish piety:

everyone taught that God heard the pious but rejected the prayers of the ungodly (cf. Ps 34:15; Prov 15:8, 29; 21:27; 28:9). This is the major premise in the healed man's argument.

9:32-33. The minor premise of the argument (9:31) is that an extraordinary miracle was done; the conclusion is that Jesus is a righteous man. Syllogism—the practice of demonstrating a conclusion from two accepted premises—was a common way of arguing a case in antiquity.

Blindness from birth was thought an especially difficult ailment to cure; in the rare instances when such extraordinary healings were claimed at a pagan healing shrine (e.g., a later-written report of empty eye sockets filled), they became a cause for much praise to the pagan god held responsible for them. But while extant Jewish tradition reports healings of blindness (Tobit 11:12-13), it does not report the healing of one born blind. (The man's "never since the world's beginning" is emphatic, and probably *rhetorical overstatement; there were a few claimed exceptions in the Gentile world of which he was probably unaware. But even if John's audience knew and believed other claims of healing they would have excused the man's *hyperbole.)

9:34. Later rabbis emphasized being humble and teachable; but despite the proper Jewish argument the man gave in 9:31-33, the authorities expel him on the premise that he was born in sin—which the reader knows to be false (9:2-3). How formal excommunications were in this period is unclear, but he is certainly expelled from participating in the local center of religious life (see comment on 9:22-23).

9:35-41
The Seeing and the Blind

9:35-38. The healed man responds like John's probable Jewish Christian hearers: in faith, unlike their opponents. The title "*Son of Man" is potentially ambiguous, but as an object of faith presumably alludes to Daniel 7:13-14. The man responds based on his experience of Jesus (see comment on 9:25-27).

9:39-41. Greek and especially Jewish tradition used "blindness" figuratively in a moral, intellectual or spiritual sense (e.g., Is 6:9-10; Jer 5:21); sometimes this was conjoined with physical blindness (e.g., the Greek seer Tiresias; the Israelite prophet Ahijah, 1 Kings 14:4). The reversal of physical and spiritual blindness is a motif in the prophets (e.g., Is 42:16-19); the religious authorities, who are sure they are not spiritually blind, are the blindest of all.

10:1-21
Shepherd, Sheep and Robbers

The original text of the Bible had no chapter breaks; this passage continues Jesus' words to the *Pharisees in 9:41. It is based on *Old Testament images of God as the shepherd of Israel (Gen 48:15; 49:24; Ps 23:1; 28:9; 77:20; 78:72; Is 40:11; Ezek 34:11-31), of Israel as his flock (Ps 74:1; 78:52; 79:13; 100:3) and of abusive or unfaithful religious leaders as destroyers of his flock (Jer 23:1-2; Ezek 34). Faithful human shepherds (Jer 3:15) included Moses, David (2 Sam 5:2; Ps 78:71-72) and the Davidic *Messiah (Mic 5:4), but God appears most often as Israel's chief shepherd. Although Moses and David were shepherds, urban people throughout the Roman Empire often looked down on shepherds as low-class and coarse. From the ancient Near East to Greek epic, however, shepherds were a common ancient figure for rulers.

In this context, the healed man who follows Jesus but is excluded from the *synagogue is one of Jesus' sheep; Jesus is the divine shepherd of Israel; and those who excluded the man recall Israel's unfaithful leaders condemned in the prophets. Thus, although these leaders seek to exclude the man from God's people, God himself affirms that the man (and those like him) do belong to his people.

10:1-2. During the cool winter months, sheep were kept inside a pen at night; the pen often had a stone wall, which might have briers on top of it. (Winter was approaching at the time of this feast.) Ancient sources portray the pen as a protection from wolves (10:12) and other predators. Although in warmer parts of the Mediterranean sheep could ideally find pasture at any time of year, where this was not possible they might remain in the fold during winter (soon approaching, in view of 7:2 and 10:22).

One could build such pens at caves (1 Sam 24:3), a square on a hillside surrounded by

stone walls, an enclosed yard in front of a house, and anything from a roofed enclosure to a temporary shelter using thornbushes instead of rocks, depending on the circumstances. The door here may suggest formal walls, perhaps of stones. One observer of Middle Eastern shepherding, Kenneth Bailey, suggests that because the thief must "go up" to surmount the wall in 10:1, it may be like some modern village family courtyards, with walls more than two meters high. ("Go up" does not always require such an interpretation, however; cf., e.g., Gen 38:12; 41:2.) Various families may share a courtyard for this purpose; this might be distinct from the setting in 10:7-9 (see comment there).

When speaking technically, ancient law distinguished thieves from robbers: the former broke in, whereas the latter often lived in the wilderness and assaulted passersby. When linked figuratively, though, they can belong to the same semantic domain. Shepherds continually had to guard against losing sheep to either kind of enemy (or other predators, 10:12). People dreaded thieves and robbers, which were common (esp. at night) and could be harshly punished.

10:3-4. Sheep were considered among the most obedient of animals. In the Old Testament, Israel "heard God's voice" when they obeyed the *law and his message through his prophets. Those who were truly his sheep—in covenant relationship with God—knew him (see comment on 10:14-15). (John's readers hear him through the *Spirit, a practice that most of their contemporaries did not believe was possible in their own day; cf. 16:13-15.) Sheep could have names based on color, like "snowy" (white), or other characteristics. It is said that shepherds customarily knew each of their sheep by name. In the Old Testament, God called his special ones, his closest servants, "by name" (Ex 33:12, 17; cf. Is 43:1). (God knowing the names of all stars reveals his omniscience [Ps 147:4; Is 40:26]; likewise, he is able to know each person individually.) Flocks of various shepherds often mingled together, but shepherds could easily separate out their own sheep, for example to put them in or lead them from their pen, or lead sheep elsewhere. They could do this because the sheep knew their shepherd's voice; it is said that some even trained sheep to respond to the signals of particular flute melodies.

10:5. Ancient sources do report (and modern experience confirms) sheep fleeing from strangers. In this context the strangers are the thieves and robbers (v. 1)—the Pharisees—who have sought to mislead the sheep (9:40-41). The synagogue leaders who expelled John's Jewish Christian readers claim to be true shepherds, but when John's audience hears this passage they will think of them quite differently.

10:6. Jesus' preceding figure fits Jewish definitions for a *parable; indeed, in the *Septuagint, the present term translates the same Hebrew term that is translated "parable" in the *Synoptic Gospels.

10:7-8. Although wolves (10:12) and other intruders were sometimes known to penetrate sheepfolds, often they feared to enter them, and even when ravenously hungry they sometimes assaulted the walls in vain. As opposed to the apparently walled enclosure in 10:1, some suggest that the sheep pen here might be a temporary enclosure topped with thorns, closer to pasture for seasonal grazing; lacking a separate door, it could depend on the shepherd to sleep across the gateway, a practice sometimes reported in modern times. Although shepherds in warmer regions could keep sheep in pasture areas all year (grazing in higher altitudes in summer and lower in winter), in cooler areas such as the Judean hills they spent part of the year in more formal pens and part of the year in the pastures, where temporary pens might be constructed. This explanation makes sense here (10:7, 9), but mixed metaphors were common and Jesus might simply alternate between shepherd and door images because he fulfills more than one role; like God in the Old Testament, he is Israel's shepherd, but he is also the way to the Father. On sheep not hearing strangers, see comment on 10:5.

10:9. For the door, see comment on 10:6-8. Sheep were led "in" and "out" (cf. shepherd leaders in Num 27:17; 2 Sam 5:2) of the sheepfold to and from pasture. Coming and going offered a Semitic expression for freedom of movement and together sometimes meant "all the time" (cf. Deut 28:6, 19; 2 Kgs 19:27; Ps 121:8). In at least some regions of the ancient

Mediterranean world, shepherds led sheep to begin grazing around sunrise, led them to drinking around 10 a.m., led them to shade, where possible, during midday heat, and then drinking and then grazing again until evening. In the evening they returned to the fold, whether the temporary or permanent variety.

10:10-11. The thief (in the context, unfaithful leaders; cf. v. 5) acts for his own good, not that of the flock (hungry thieves might steal sheep to eat them); a shepherd risks his life to protect his flock from animals and thieves. Shepherds were known for intimate concern for their sheep, an image applicable to God (Ps 23:1; Ezek 34:2-6, 11-16). Pharisees considered shepherds members of an unclean profession, and aristocrats despised them as vulgar lower-class workers; thus Jesus' opponents would not readily identify with the protagonist of the story, but in Scripture God was Israel's chief shepherd (see the introduction to 10:1-18). Sheep were completely dependent on shepherds, who provided shelter and guidance and helped them when they gave birth or were sick or injured. "Life" was short for "*eternal life," the life of the world to come, in Jewish parlance; Jesus provides this relationship with himself in the present. See comment on 3:16.

10:12-13. A hired helper was not responsible for attacks from wild animals (cf. Ex 22:13) and worked for pay, not because the sheep were his own. Ancient sources sometimes complain about hirelings who did not protect the animals the way they should. Biblical prophets condemned religious leaders who let God's sheep be scattered, not concerned with what concerns God (Jer 23:1; Ezek 34:6). Commonly ancient sources (including fables) contrasted sheep with wolves, regularly portraying wolves as predators of sheep. The image was used both literally and figuratively.

10:14-15. The Old Testament often described Israel's covenant relationship with God as "knowing" him, which meant having an intimate and obedient relationship with him (e.g., Jer 31:34; Hos 6:6). The intimacy anticipated here appears to exceed even the intimacy that earlier biblical prophets had with God. See John 10:3-4 and 16:13-15. As a perfect reflection of God, Wisdom was expected to provide people intimacy with God like prophets (Wisdom of Solomon 7:26-27); probably more important, all of God's people would "know" him in the time of the new covenant (Jer 31:33-34).

10:16-18. The image of gathering the folds together into one flock in Old Testament language meant gathering the dispersed sheep of Israel, scattered among the nations (cf. Ezek 37:21-24; Mic 2:12); the "one shepherd" in Ezek 37:24 is the Davidic king (cf. Ezek 34:23). The regathering of Israel in the end was one of the basic hopes of ancient Judaism, reflected in writings and prayers. But Jesus may include *Gentiles; *proselytes, or converts to Judaism, became part of God's people.

10:19-21. The Jewish community again experiences schism over Jesus' identity (cf. also 7:43; 9:16), as it was also experiencing in John's day. On charges of demonization, see comment on 7:20.

10:22-42
In the Temple at Hanukkah

Jesus attends an extrabiblical festival in Jerusalem, commemorating Israel's deliverance in the time of the *Maccabees. Ironically, Israel's truest deliverer faces rejection from some of his people at this festival of national deliverance.

10:22. Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication, was not a required pilgrimage festival, but the eight-day celebration of lights in the temple was beautiful, and many pious Jews from nearby Galilee would come to Jerusalem. It was the next festival after those immediately connected to the Feast of Tabernacles (7:1-10:21).

10:23. The vast outer part of the temple had porches on all four sides; the Royal Porch, on the south, had four rows of pillars. Solomon's Porch was on the east side of the temple, with two rows of pillars (as on the west and north sides). The south portico was called Solomon's because people thought that its pre-Herodian masonry had survived from Solomon's temple (*Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.184-85; *Jewish Antiquities* 15.397-400; 20.221). Greek public buildings often included such porches, and they had long been a popular place for public lectures and discussions. Even as early as Hanukkah (10:22), it could be cool in Jerusalem in winter, so people would be especially inclined to walk under the colonnades, as here.

(On avoiding travel in winter, see comment on Acts 27:9.)

10:24. See 8:25; cf. also the discussion of the theme of the messianic secret in the introduction to Mark. These Jews would have either misunderstood his claim or used it to charge him with sedition (cf. 18:29-35).

10:25-27. On hearing Jesus' voice, cf. comment on 10:3-4.

10:28-29. A shepherd who would protect his sheep against any thief or predator would have to be ready to pay a great price (10:12, 15), but this is the price of faithfulness (Jer 23:4). On no one snatching from his hand, compare also Psalm 95:7, where Israel is "the sheep of his hand"; this allusion would fit the mention of hearing Jesus' voice (10:27), since the same verse in the psalm exhorts his people to hear God's voice.

10:30. His hearers might think of the relation between Israel and God, but Jesus' wording about his unity with the Father is too explicit for that: instead he echoes the basic confession of Judaism that God is one (Deut 6:4). For Jesus to be one with the Father (albeit distinct from him) is tantamount to a claim to deity. (He has probably already applied earlier texts about God to himself in this context; see comment on 10:28-29.)

10:31-33. Cf. 5:18, 8:59; as in the other instances, Jesus' opponents understand his claim to deity, even if they do not catch all the ramifications. Hanukkah (10:22) celebrated deliverance from the wicked ruler Antiochus Epiphanes, who made himself to be God; John's hearers, however, know that the Father sent Jesus, rather than he exalting himself (1:14; 5:23, 36; 6:38). Jesus implicitly compares his good work with his opponents' attempt to stone him; ancient defense *rhetoric often contrasted the honorable behavior of the accused with the shameful behavior of the accusers and sought to expose the accusers' own crimes. Ingratitude toward a benefactor was reprehensible, and direct enmity toward a benefactor even more so. The festival honored the Maccabees' good works; Jesus' opponents want to stone him for his (cf. Ex 17:4; Num 14:10; the term used here appears in 2 Sam 16:6, 13).

10:34. On "your law," cf. 8:17. Some employed the term "*law" broadly to include all of Scripture, as here, where Jesus cites a psalm. Psalm 82:6 in context refers to powerful people, probably the kings of the earth viewed as God's divine council; those kings considered themselves divine, but they would perish like mortals. In a Jewish tradition attested in second-century *rabbis, however, this verse was sometimes applied out of context to Israel as recipients of the divine law (God's word at Sinai gave them immortality, but they lost it through disobedience), as Jesus may know. Or Jesus may simply be evading the issue by a further riddle, noting that he has not explicitly defined his words.

10:35-36. Jesus might respond with a standard Jewish "how much more" (*qal vahomer*) argument: if (as you read it) Israel was loosely called "gods," how do you object to me saying that I am God's Son, without even understanding my point? (Even more generally, a Jewish tradition protested that the wicked complain about righteous people calling God their Father; Wisdom of Solomon 2:16.)

Many commentators have argued that Jesus' being "sanctified" or set apart to his mission (cf. also 17:17) may relate to the context of the Feast of Hanukkah, or "Dedication" (10:22). Hanukkah commemorated the consecration, rededication or setting apart (as again holy) of the Jerusalem temple in the time of the Maccabees in the second century B.C. For Jesus as the foundation of a new temple in John, see 2:21 and comment on 7:37-38; such an image would be particularly compelling after the traumatic destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

10:37-38. Jewish tradition emphasized right motives but allowed that obeying a commandment from inadequate motives was better than not obeying at all.

10:39-42. "Beyond the Jordan" presumably means Perea, in Jesus' day ruled, like Galilee, by Herod Antipas—and well outside the jurisdiction of the Jerusalem leaders.

11:1-16
Announcement of Lazarus's Sickness

Jesus' first sign in this Gospel is at a wedding; his climactic one, at (or more technically, after) a funeral. (In ancient sources, weddings and funerals typified the most joyful and most sorrowful occasions, respectively.) Less cer-

tainly, if Jesus' first sign (water turned to wine) evoked in reverse Moses' first plague (water turned to blood), his climactic sign (raising Lazarus) might evoke Moses' final plague (death, in that case of the firstborn).

11:1. Bethany was close to Jerusalem (v. 18); emphasizing Jesus' Galilean ministry, Mark omits this miracle and is followed by Matthew and Luke. "Mary" was the most common Jewish woman's name in the period; "Martha" is rarer, though attested; "Eleazar" is fairly common, sometimes in the Greek form, "Lazarus." (The three names even occur together, along with others, in a burial cave in Bethany, but we do not know if the names reflect the persons in John 11.)

11:2-5. Visiting and praying for the sick was a pious obligation in Judaism, but Jesus' reputation as a healer is undoubtedly the main reason for informing him of Lazarus's sickness. Informing him would serve as a polite request (cf. 2:3).

11:6. Given the urgent request for a miracle-worker, Jesus' delay may have seemed culturally offensive. Perhaps by the time Jesus receives news, however, and certainly before he could have reached Bethany, Lazarus was already dead (11:14, 17). Lazarus was in the tomb four days by the time Jesus arrived (11:17, 39), people buried corpses on the day of death, and it was only a day's journey each way, just over twenty miles. The journey to Bethany may have taken slightly longer than the journey from there, since it would be uphill (in the Judean hills, Bethany may have been nearly 2700 feet above sea level, whereas the Jordan plain, where Jesus was in 10:40, was roughly 1100 feet below it). For temporary rebuffs to test faith, cf. 2:4.

11:7-8. Although the Jerusalem priesthood was respected in Galilee, it wielded more power and influence in Judea; Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, did not tolerate direct interference in his territory. (In John's day, the Pharisaic establishment was also settled in Judea, where it presumably wielded more influence than in Galilee.)

11:9-10. On walking in darkness and stumbling, see comment on 8:12. Anyone who has walked on unlit paths on a dark night understands the metaphor, but even the language was familiar in first-century Palestine (in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, children of righteousness walk in the light but those ruled by the evil one walk in darkness; 1QS 3.20-21).

11:11-16. Again the *disciples interpret Jesus too literally (v. 12)—although "sleep" was a common metaphor for death in Jewish texts and throughout the ancient world (Greek myth even portrayed Sleep and Death as twin brothers). But even though they may not understand that Jesus' death is the cost of giving Lazarus (and others) life, they are prepared to die with him (v. 16). Even though disciples loved their teachers, this is a rare expression of commitment in practice; in general, Jewish people emphasized only being prepared to die for God and his *law.

11:17-37
Comforting the Mourners

11:17-19. The note of proximity (11:18) may heighten the element of danger (11:8), but also explains the presence of additional "Judeans" in 11:19. Visiting and consoling the bereaved in the days immediately following a close relative's loss was an essential duty of Jewish piety. The neighbors would provide the first meal after the funeral. Lazarus would have been buried on the day of his death.

11:20. The first week of deep grief after a close relative's burial would be spent mourning in one's house, sitting on the floor, while others brought food and sympathy (considered an important element of piety). This custom, called *shivah* (for "seven" days), is continued in Jewish tradition and is very helpful for releasing grief. Mourners abstained from adornment for the next three weeks and from common pleasures for the next year. Because mourners would be present to console the family, Mary remains in the home while Martha slips out.

11:21-22. Prayers for comfort were standard, and this might be the import of verse 22. Conversely, Martha may be asking in verse 22 for her brother's resuscitation, and verse 24 may test Jesus, pressing him further for the favor (2 Kings 4:16; cf. 4:28). Ancient Near Eastern peoples often sought favors from benefactors in such self-effacing ways, as opposed to the more direct modern Western approach ("Give me . . . ").

11:23-27. The common belief of Palestinian

Judaism in this period was that the dead would be raised bodily at the end; indeed, *Pharisees considered those who denied this doctrine (specifically *Sadducees) to be damned for doing so. Apparently most Jews who affirmed future *resurrection also accepted an afterlife before the resurrection.

11:28. Martha informs Mary about Jesus' coming "secretly" perhaps for his safety, but perhaps also because someone needed to remain home to entertain the guests. According to custom, members of the family were supposed to remain home mourning for the first seven days (unless perhaps going to weep at the tomb, 11:31).

11:29-32. The time and consolation of an important religious teacher who had come a long distance would be especially meaningful, though local students and teachers of the *law joined in funeral processions when it was possible for them to do so. Supplicants fell at one's feet (11:32) to beg favors, but one could also fall before God in worship or prayer.

11:33-37. Unlike most individuals, Greek and Roman philosophers emphasized sobriety and remaining calm and untroubled by bereavement; Jewish tradition, by contrast, expressed grief emotionally. Most people regarded as praiseworthy a protagonist who shared others' grief; also, in the ancient Mediterranean world, women's tears were sometimes known to move men to special action. Jesus' "anger" (the normal sense of the term for him being "moved" in 11:33, 38) might be grief over people's unbelief (cf. Num 14:11; Mk 4:40).

11:38-44
Raising Lazarus

11:38. People were often buried in caves. Although some tombs were vertical shafts, as a cave this one probably had the body laying horizontally. The body would be left to decompose for one year, then its bones would be placed in an ossuary (bone box), which in turn would typically be slid into a slot on the wall. Stones (often disk-shaped) covered many tomb openings and would keep out animals, the elements and occasionally robbers.

11:39. The body would be wrapped and left lying on the floor in the tomb's antechamber; only after a year, when the flesh had fully decomposed, would family members return to collect the bones into a box, which they would then slide into a slot on the wall. After four days (11:17), decomposition was well under way, especially because it was probably no longer winter (11:55). Whatever spices they may have used to delay the stench (see comment on Mk 16:1) would no longer be sufficient. Some scholars note a later rabbinic tradition that the soul left the body only after three days; if the idea is this early, the fourth day could emphasize the miracle's greatness.

11:40. Moses promised Israel that they would "see God's glory" when God acted on their behalf (Ex 16:7, though in a context of their initial unbelief).

11:41-42. Lifting one's face to heaven appears in some other ancient Jewish prayers (e.g., Ps 123:1; **Jubilees* 25:11). For the preliminary prayer, cf. 1 Kings 18:36.

11:43-44. The deceased would be wrapped in long cloth strips, often mentioned in ancient Jewish texts. This wrapping was thorough, binding the limbs to keep them straight and even the cheeks to keep the mouth shut; the facecloth may have been a yard square. John's ancient audience would recognize that this tight wrapping would have made it hard enough for a living person to walk, not to mention a formerly dead person coming forth from the entrance to the tomb; this difficulty probably further underscores the miraculous nature of this event. Men could not wrap women's corpses, but women could wrap both men and women, so Lazarus may have been wrapped by his sisters.

11:45-57
The Religious People Plot to Kill Jesus

11:45-46. On the *Pharisees here, see comment on 7:32. Most ancient miracle stories include acclamation but lack rejection, but *New Testament miracle stories often include the latter as well.

11:47-48. The Pharisees and chief priests call together literally a "Sanhedrin," probably referring here to the supreme court of Israel or those of its representatives who are available. Their concern is a legitimate one validated by history: those perceived as political messiahs threatened their own power and Judea's sta-

bility, inviting Roman intervention; the Romans accepted only one supreme king, Caesar. *Josephus testified to this concern of the priestly aristocracy, and one reason Joseph Caiaphas maintained his office longer than any other *high priest of the first century (A.D. 18–36) was that he kept the peace for the Romans. But this is another touch of John's irony (a common ancient literary device): this was their view, not that of the Romans (18:38; 19:12); and although they handed Jesus over to the governor for execution, the Romans ultimately did take away their temple and nation, in A.D. 70, anyway.

Josephus shows that Jewish aristocrats (not unlike Roman ones) plotted to remove those they considered dangerous. Sometimes sympathizers leaked this information to those being plotted against. Historically, we should expect that at least some of the Sanhedrin was involved in Jesus' execution: Romans normally depended on local accusers to bring cases to their attention, and would expect a hearing before the local elite first. Most scholars accept as authentic part of Josephus's comments about Jesus, sometimes including the remark that it was Jerusalem's aristocrats who influenced *Pilate to execute him (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.63-64).

11:49. Various ancient Jewish sources complain about frequent corruption in the first-century high priesthood. The high priesthood, like some Greek priesthoods (e.g., at Eleusis), had originally been a lifelong office. It had never been reduced to an annual assignment, like most priesthoods in Syria or Asia Minor, but John's "priest that year" may poke fun at how the Roman governor had power to change the *high priests, or at how the high priest's deposed relative could still meddle so much in these affairs (18:13); or he may simply mean (with probably the majority of commentators) "high priest in the particular year of which we speak," because officials' terms were used to date events.

The high priest presided over the Sanhedrin. To have a high priest inform his colleagues, "You do not know anything," is the epitome of John's irony.

11:50. Whether one should be sacrificed to protect the many (if, say, the Romans demanded an innocent person be handed over) was an issue of debate in early Judaism, but never in terms of actual murder (11:53). Josephus claimed that King Agrippa II urged his people to forego vengeance concerning injustice for the sake of peace; but Jewish teachers in the rabbinic tradition said not to betray a single Israelite to rape or death even if the result would be the rape or execution of all. The chief priests here think in terms of expediency (a common Greek ground for moral and *rhetorical debate). Many of the chief priests helped control their people to keep peace with the Romans (to whom they also owed their own local political power).

11:51. Here the high priest means one thing on the level of his own hearers, but his words have another meaning that would be more obvious to John's readers: others (both Greeks and Jews) also believed that those appointed as God's representatives could sometimes speak God's truth without meaning to do so. Some Jewish traditions seem to associate *prophecy with the priesthood.

11:52-53. Jewish people expected the gathering of their dispersed people (God's children) in the end time. (John may reapply this spiritually; 1:12.)

11:54-55. The temple courts had countless pools for ritual purification; on this point, cf. also 2:6 and 3:25. Those coming from a great distance, especially in the *Diaspora, wanted to arrive early to ensure that they were pure for the festival; those with corpse impurity would need to arrive at least a week early.

11:56-57. Those speaking presumably could not believe someone as pious a religious teacher as Jesus is popularly supposed to be would not show up for one of the great pilgrimage festivals required by the *law, especially when he had to come only from Galilee.

12:1-11
Mary's Gratitude, and Dying to Live

For more details, see comment on Mark 14:1-11. Three kilometers east of Jerusalem, Bethany was one of those villages near Jerusalem where Passover pilgrims could spend the night with hosts. Even six days before the festival, Jerusalem would be filling with pilgrims (esp. those needing purification and those from the *Diaspora, who could not calculate the exact

timing of arrival but needed to avoid arriving late). Given 18:28 and 19:14, this meal may be Saturday evening after sundown (hence allowing Martha to serve). Just possibly this could portray Jesus as entering Jerusalem (12:12) when the Passover lambs were set aside (Ex 12:3, 6), but this interpretation is not clear.

12:1-2. One typically "sat" at normal meals; one "reclined" on couches at special meals like feasts or banquets. Unless the Gospel writers simply adopt Greek language for the meals consistently (Greeks normally reclined), Jesus was invited to many banquets—this one probably in his honor. Early traveling teachers were often invited to lecture at meals in return for free meals and lodging. In that culture, women often served at table.

12:3. The Roman "pound" (NASB) or "pint" (NIV) may have been roughly 324 grams, about twelve ounces. A flask would normally contain not more than an ounce, so Mary is tremendously extravagant here. Actual "myrrh" could take the form of either powder or liquid, perfume or ointment; its manufacturers derived it from resin from a sort of short balsam tree in the horn of eastern Africa and southern Arabia. John, however, employs the Greek term here more generically, the specific aromatic substance being spikenard, a very expensive fragrant oil from a plant in the mountains in northern India.

It was common to anoint the heads of important guests, but for their feet a host normally would simply provide water. Expending such expensive perfume on feet was shocking; she treats even Jesus' feet as worthier than a normal head. (Given the following context, Mary may have thought of a royal anointing.) Further, religious Jews resented married women who uncovered their heads and exposed their hair to men's gazes; because Mary's brother and sister but not her husband are mentioned, she may well have been unmarried (thus young, widowed, divorced, or—rare as this was for women—adult yet never married); but acting thus toward a famous (albeit single) *rabbi might still raise some pious eyebrows. In any case, normally only servants (see comment on 1:27) would even touch the master's feet with their hands, much less their hair.

12:4-5. Because such ointment would have been so expensive, scholars often think that it was a family heirloom. In any case, it represented nearly a year's wages for an average worker and would be reserved for only a dramatically special occasion.

12:6. Some rabbis delegated their school's financial concerns to their *disciples; some other groups, like the *Essenes and some Greek philosophers, held property in common. Only those whose virtue was most trusted were permitted to keep group funds (cf. 13:29); thus Judas's treachery is all the more scandalous.

12:7. Kings (cf. 12:13-15) were anointed, but so were corpses; fragrant spices could be added to help cover the initial odor of decomposition. On anointing corpses, see comment on Mark 16:1; they were first anointed to clean them and then washed with water. This was an important act on Mary's part; those executed as criminals may have sometimes been denied anointing before burial (though not Jesus; see 19:39).

12:8. Jesus' reply alludes to Deuteronomy 15:11, which urges generosity to the poor, who will always be in the land; the context promises that God will bless his people if they care for the poor. Jesus thus does not play down giving to the poor but emphasizes his impending death; he must be his followers' first commitment.

12:9-11. The religious leaders decide to have Lazarus killed. John's irony: those who receive life by Jesus' death must die because of it; witnesses get martyred. Irony was a common ancient literary device.

12:12-22
The World Follows

12:12-13. Branches were also waved to celebrate triumphs or in homage to rulers (cf. 1 Maccabees 13:51; 2 Maccabees 10:7). Large palm branches were used at the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall (cf. Lev 23:23, 40), often brought from lower-elevation Jericho; some pilgrims constructed temporary shelters for Passover (*Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.213, 217), for which they could have brought such branches; or local branches could be used. The branches described here are small enough for the colt to walk on. Palm branches, which had been one of the nationalistic symbols of Judea since the days of the *Maccabees, were consistently used to celebrate military victories and

probably stirred some political messianic hopes among the people. (Carrying branches was also part of the worship at the feast depicted in Ps 118:27.)

Pilgrims to the feast were typically welcomed by crowds already there, so it is unlikely that the whole crowd recognized the significance of Jesus' entry. Nevertheless, Jesus was well-known, especially among the Galileans who had come to the festival. In view of the crowd's acclamation in 12:13, the image that may have come most readily to the minds of John's ancient hearers is probably that of a royal entrance procession. Hopes for the restoration of the Davidic *kingdom also ran high at this time of year. "Hosanna" means "Please save!" Although the expression could be appropriate for imploring a king for deliverance (cf. the Hebrew of 2 Sam 14:4; 2 Kings 6:26), it could also address God, which is how it functions in Psalm 118:25. This Hebrew term and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" come from Psalm 118:25-26. Psalms 113–118, called the Hallel, were regularly sung at Passover season, so these words would have been fresh in everyone's minds.

12:14-16. One expected military heroes to ride horses or be drawn in chariots; Jesus came as a meek, nonmilitary official would, following Zechariah 9:9. (Later rabbis also took Zech 9:9 as messianic, due to the mention of the king.)

12:17-19. Again employing irony (a literary technique common in antiquity, as it is today), John lets the *Pharisees denounce themselves: "You do nothing profitable!" Their complaint that the world has begun to follow Jesus leads into 12:20.

12:20. Although some suggest that these "Greeks" are Jews who live in the Greek East, they are probably ethnic or cultural Greeks (the normal sense of the term), God-fearers not yet fully converted to Judaism who nevertheless would come to worship at Jerusalem (cf. Acts 8:27). Many of the attending "Greeks" could be from the region, including the Decapolis and larger Syria. Jews and Greeks were known for their mutual hostility in Palestine, nearby Syria and Egypt.

12:21-22. Philip is one of the only disciples of Jesus with a Greek name. Until A.D. 34 (i.e., after these events), Philip's town of Bethsaida belonged to the tetrarchy of Philip rather than that of Herod Antipas; the town would have had contact with the predominantly *Gentile Decapolis. The cities of the Decapolis were culturally Greek. The announcement of verse 21 prompts Jesus' knowledge that his hour has arrived (v. 23); his mission has begun to touch the whole "world."

12:23-34
Jesus' Death Approaches

12:23-26. On "the hour" see 2:4; on "glory" see 1:14. "Glorified," like "lifted up" (v. 32), refers back to the *Septuagint of Isaiah 52:13, which prefaces the death of the suffering servant (Is 53), whom early Christians recognized as Jesus. For most people in the Roman empire, crucifixion, where one was hanged naked to die slowly in front of crowds, was the most shameful form of death; but for John, it reflects Jesus' glory.

Grain images were naturally common in antiquity. Technically (from a botanical standpoint), an embryo is already growing in a seed of wheat when it falls; it usually breaks through the seed coating after two days in moist soil. The text uses the image in a way more directly intelligible, however, for Jesus' and John's audiences. As in 12:25, some others also recognized that losing one's life in this world preserves it for the greater reward of *eternal life (**1 Enoch* 108:10; **2 Baruch* 51:15-16).

12:27. Ancient philosophers and biographers often praised those who were not troubled in the face of death (in contrast to the Gospels).

12:28. Prayers for the glory of God's name were common (see comment on Mt 6:9). Jewish tradition often discussed voices from heaven, which were frequently regarded as a substitute for *prophecy. (See comment on Mk 1:11 for more detail.)

12:29-30. In ancient Jewish stories, God often answered prayers by sending angels, which may have seemed less dramatic to some of his hearers than a voice from heaven. (On the persistent misunderstanding of the crowds, see comment on 3:9-10.) Thunder sometimes appears in theophanies, and God's voice sometimes sounded like thunder (2 Sam 22:14; Job 37:2, 5; 40:9; Ps 18:13; 29:3-7; also in several Sibylline oracles). (Greeks also associated thunder

with the chief deity, in their case, Zeus.)

12:31. God is the ruler of the world in nearly all Jewish texts, but these texts also speak of fallen angels ruling much of the world under his decree and recognize that the prince of the evil angels (i.e., *Satan, also called Sammael, etc.) ruled most of the peoples in the world except Israel (or, in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, all but the remnant). John would agree that God has always been ultimately sovereign over all; but here he speaks of Satan's dominion in human affairs and of the present defeat of demonic spiritual forces, which Judaism expected only in the time of the *kingdom.

12:32-33. The "lifting up" (also 3:14; 8:28) alludes to Isaiah 52:13 and refers to being lifted up on the cross. This fits the allusion to Isaiah 52:13 in "glorified" (see comment on 12:23-27) as well. Ancients (e.g., *Cicero) spoke of people being "lifted up" on a cross, and sometimes ancients played on the expression: lifting up could refer to hanging or to exaltation (Gen 40:20-22; Gentile writers).

12:34. The *Old Testament predicted that the *Messiah's rule would be eternal (Is 9:6-7; cf. 2 Sam 7:16); so also the *Son of Man's (Dan 7:14). (Especially in the time of John and later, some Jewish teachers moved away from identifying the Son of Man with the Messiah; no less a rabbi than *Akiba was reproved by his colleagues for supposing that the Son of Man, like God, would receive his own throne.)

12:35-50
Belief and Unbelief

12:35-36. The Dead Sea Scrolls also contrast light (symbolizing good) and darkness (symbolizing evil), calling the righteous "children of light" and their opponents "children of darkness." The former "walk in the light" and the latter "walk in darkness." Jesus' hearers would easily understand his language.

12:37-38. Isaiah 53:1 is from the same passage to which "glorified" and "lifted up" refer (Is 52:13; see comment on 12:32). The point is: Israel's very unbelief in the servant-Messiah fulfills Scripture.

12:39-40. On the text (Is 6:10), see comment on Mark 4:12. At points the quotation follows the Hebrew as opposed to the Septuagint translation into Greek. John omits Isaiah's "deaf" image, probably to focus on the blindness image that recalls his own discussion in 9:39-41.

12:41. Isaiah 6:1-5 refers clearly to Isaiah seeing a vision of God, the Lord of hosts, in his glory when he received this message, but John explains that this manifestation of God was the Son, Jesus (v. 41), also seen by Abraham (8:56) and Moses (see comment on 1:14-18). The Septuagint of both Isaiah 6:1 and 52:13 speak of "glory" or being "glorified"; the former text applies to God and the latter to God's "servant." Both texts also speak of being "lifted up" or "exalted," as does Isaiah 57:15 (referring to God). Ancient Jewish *midrash, which interpreted texts based on shared key terms, could have treated the servant as divine (though for theological reasons probably only the Jewish Christians would have done so).

12:42. Because John selects details most applicable to his own day, it appears that not even all the *synagogue leaders of his time are of one mind about believers in Jesus. Those who are not hostile to the Jewish Christians, however, seem to remain publicly silent on the issue. The admission that even some of their opponents recognize the truth would encourage John's audience in their situation (see comment on 9:22).

12:43. The Greek word translated "glory" (NRSV) or "praise" (NIV, KJV) can also be translated "reputation" or "honor" but contrasts here with Jesus' glorification (12:23). Ancient moralists sometimes condemned those who sought much glory; but achieving honor and status and avoiding shame were central obsessions, especially in urban masculine culture.

12:44-45. Many scholars believe that 12:44-50 recapitulates a number of major themes in the Gospel. Ancient writers often summarized or recapitulated their argument at the end of a work or of a section. Jewish literature portrayed personified, preexistent divine Wisdom as the image of God (Wis 7:26); others, like Moses, could reflect his glory, but Jesus is the glory Moses and others saw (12:41, 46; cf. 1:18 and comment on 1:14-18).

12:46. On the "light," see comment on 8:12; on the contrast of light and darkness as a common image for God's *kingdom versus that of his opponents, see comment on 12:35-36.

12:47. Judaism believed that God's *law was the standard by which he would judge his

people at the end time; Jesus thus presents his words as equivalent to those of God.

12:48-49. One was to receive an agent or ambassador with the honor due his sender. An agent or ambassador was also expected to represent his sender accurately.

12:50. For life in God's word, see comment on 1:4. Rabbis sometimes explained that keeping even the smallest of God's commandments warranted eternal life (by which they meant life in the world to come), whereas disobeying even the smallest forfeited that life. Jesus describes his personal commission from the Father similarly.

13:1-11
Footwashing

John intertwines foreshadowings of the betrayal and cross with the footwashing. Jesus follows Mary's example of servanthood (12:3).

13:1-2. Before the banquet, diners would normally wash a hand, eat appetizers, and then recline (13:12) and wash both hands for the main meal. (Because they reclined and had only one hand free, those preparing the food sliced it before the meal.) Meals could be accompanied by music, lectures, other entertainment, or deep discussion; Jesus here provides a teaching session.

13:3-5. The couches would be arranged around tables containing the food, with the upper part of each person's body facing the food and their feet away from the table. Jesus would go to the outside of this circle to wash each person's feet. A wealthy home might recline three or four people on each of three large couches; whether couches were available here (or mats, or cloaks), the arrangement may be similar. The person would lean on the left elbow, leaving the right hand free to reach food on the table.

After travelers had come a long distance, the host was to provide water for their feet as a sign of hospitality, as exemplified by Abraham (Gen 18:4). Yet loosing sandals and personally washing someone else's feet was considered servile, most commonly the work of a servant or of servile or submissive persons (cf. 1 Sam 25:41). Travelers' sandals need not be covered in dung, as some scholars have suggested (although in Rome people were known to occasionally empty chamber pots from their windows, sometimes to the misfortune of passersby below). Side roads were very dusty; the main streets of Jerusalem, however, would have been kept clear of human waste, especially in the Upper City, where Jesus likely ate this Passover meal historically. (Finding an upper room sufficiently large to host all the *disciples would have been more difficult in the poorer Lower City.) In any case, travelers and people walking in the streets normally washed their feet when entering a home. Jesus' removing his outer garments to serve them would also appear as a sign of great humility before them.

By so serving, Jesus prefigures his death as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 on behalf of the many. Jesus' milieu celebrated honor and feared shame. Unlike most elite men in Greco-Roman society, Judaism valued humility; but like other societies, it also upheld societal roles. Jesus overturns even positions of social status. Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi (about A.D. 220) was said to be so humble that he would do anything for others—except relinquish his superior position; seating according to rank was crucial. Jesus goes beyond even this.

Ancient evidence suggests that Jesus may have poured water over the feet into a basin. Sometimes one would pour cold water into the basin first, and then hot water. Possibly Jesus uses a basin used for handwashing before the meal.

13:6-8. Jesus' act violates cultural status boundaries so thoroughly (see comment on 13:3-5) that Peter finds it unthinkable.

13:9-11. The "bath" here may allude to ceremonial washing that Jesus and the disciples had undergone before the feast (11:55), but Jesus applies it in a spiritual sense. This figurative sense of cleansing was common enough that the disciples should have been able to understand his meaning. John's repetition of Jesus' statement of 13:10 in different words in 13:11 is not surprising; ancient writers valued variation and few people expected casual quotations to follow exact wording (cf. also Lk 24:46-49 with Acts 1:4-8; Gen 39:17-19; 1 Sam 15:3, 18).

13:12-20
The Meaning of Footwashing

13:12-14. *Disciples normally served their teachers, after the model of Elisha serving

Elijah and Joshua serving Moses. One expression of service, however, was not required even of disciples: dealing with the teacher's feet; Jesus goes beyond the service expected even for disciples. Although people often sat on chairs, they normally "reclined" (as here) for banquets (like Passover).

13:15. Disciples were expected to learn by imitating their teachers.

13:16. Some slaves were prominent when compared with free peasants, but any authority slaves exercised was derived from their masters, and slaves were always subordinate to their masters. An agent was always subordinate to his sender, his authority limited to the extent of his authorization.

13:17. The literary form of "beatitude" was common in the *Old Testament and early Judaism. Judaism also emphasized that one should not only know but also obey God's *law.

13:18. Here Jesus cites Psalm 41:9, a psalm of a righteous sufferer; lifting up one's heel to another was an act of disdain (cf. Mk 6:11). Betrayal by a friend sometimes happened, but was counted the most heinous form of betrayal. To eat at table with another formed a permanent covenant of peace (sometimes ideally extending even to descendants), so to betray one's host at a meal was especially treacherous. (To give one example of the covenant bond: two warriors about to engage each other in battle relinquished the fight after learning that one's father had hosted the other's at table a generation earlier.)

13:19. Jesus' wording here evokes Is 43:9-10, where God announced the future in advance (cf. Is 41:26; 44:7, 11; 48:3-7) so that his people might know that he alone was God.

13:20. In ancient cultures, one responded to agents, ambassadors or other representatives according to one's feelings toward the person who authorized them.

13:21-30
The Betrayer's Mission

13:21-22. Betrayal by one's own *disciple would be a cause of embarrassment and reproach in the ancient system of honor and shame. Greek philosophers stressed remaining always tranquil and untroubled in spirit, but not everyone in antiquity shared this value. Although the Fourth Gospel stresses Jesus' deity, it also stresses and frequently illustrates his humanity (1:14). In the *Old Testament God's passionate feelings also frequently surface (e.g., Judg 10:16; Is 63:9-10; Jer 2:30-32; 9:1-3; Hos 11:8).

13:23. Men would recline (on couches, where available) at feasts. (According to traditional Greek custom often observed in the eastern Mediterranean, women would not dine in the same room with a gathering of men outside their family; this custom was changing in some areas, however. Passover was a more family-oriented setting.) Each person, facing to the right, would recline behind the person to his right, but with the head further forward on the couch; thus the beloved disciple could lean his head back and be even with Jesus' chest. (They would lean on the left elbow with the right arm free. They could not easily, then, cut up their own food; it would come presliced at the banquet, and they could normally eat with their fingers.) This beloved disciple (presumably John) has one of the most honored positions at the feast, perhaps implicitly contrasting him with Peter in 13:24. (Ancients did not always compare only good and bad, but, as in this case and in 20:4-8, sometimes good and better.) Given verse 26, Judas may have the position to Jesus' left. If so, Jesus offers Judas one final expression of love; the position to the left of the host was often the most honored position in a banquet.

13:24-27. For the host to dip a piece of bread in the common bowl (on Passover, the bowl may have contained *charoset,* a sweet mixture, and bitter herbs) and hand it to someone was normally a sign of honor to the person who received it. Jesus is in complete control here (cf. Mk 14:20).

13:28-30. Some pietists would do a charitable work before Passover to secure God's favor. It would not have been customary to go outside on Passover night (Ex 12:22), and the bazaars would have been closed then, but in John's *narrative (unlike Matthew, Mark and Luke) Passover apparently begins the following day (18:28; see comment there). (Many interpreters believe that John also thinks on a symbolic level here; cf. 3:19-21.) A group's treasurer (see on 12:6) being a thief could generate scandal, though Judas is about to commit an even more heinous betrayal.

13:31-35
Glory and Love Defined

The context of these verses is betrayal and Jesus' death.

13:31-32. On glorification, see comments on 1:14 and 12:23-27.

13:33. Teachers sometimes called their disciples "children" (cf. 1 Jn 2:1), and disciples called teachers "my father" (cf. Mt 23:9). Jewish literature included "testaments" of dying or departing famous heroes of the past giving important teachings to their children, to be read by future generations. Others have simply compared the more general form of farewell discourses; because Jesus is leaving, it is natural for him to provide final instructions to his disciples, whether or not John consciously follows the testamentary form here.

13:34-35. The *Old Testament had commanded love (Lev 19:18); what makes Jesus' commandment new is the new standard and example: "as I have loved you"—in the context, to the point of laying down one's life for others. Jewish ethics emphasized learning by imitation, including imitating God's good character. Disciples were expected to learn by following the examples of their teachers. (In antiquity, love for one's own group did not need to imply that one not love those outside it.)

13:36–14:1
Following to the Cross?

13:36-37. Although Peter is sure that he will follow Jesus to the death, he does not understand that death is precisely where Jesus is going (14:5). For the misunderstanding motif, see, for example, 3:4; for background on it, see the introduction to Mark. Teachers often lectured in response to questions.

13:38. The first night cock crowing in Jerusalem occurred by about 12:30 a.m., according to some reports (others place it later), though only night watchmen were normally awake to hear it (most people went to sleep at sundown, except on special nights like Passover). Other crowings also occurred during the night. That the rooster crowed to mark the advent of dawn is more widely reported in ancient sources because this was the cock crowing most people knew. In either case the point is that Peter's denial will follow almost immediately after his promise not to deny Jesus.

14:1. "Your" is plural, and thus Jesus addresses all the *disciples; in the *Old Testament God often told his servants not to fear. But to pair faith in Jesus with faith in God would sound blasphemous to most ancient Jewish hearers (although they could have found a less offensive way to interpret the phrase; see Ex 14:31; 2 Chron 20:20).

14:2-7
Where Jesus Is Going, Enigmatic Version

As the chapter proceeds, it becomes evident that the coming again specifically in view in verse 3 includes Jesus' coming after the *resurrection to give the *Spirit (v. 18); but this point is not immediately clear at the beginning (v. 5).

14:2. The "Father's house" could evoke the Father's household (8:35) or the temple (2:16), where God would forever dwell with his people (Ezek 43:7, 9; 48:35); in any case, it designates the place of his presence. (A small number of early Jewish texts also speak of future homes for the righteous in God's presence; e.g., versions of **1 Enoch* 91:13.) The "dwelling places" (NASB, NRSV) might allude to "rooms" (NIV, GNT) in the new temple, where only undefiled ministers would have a place (Ezek 44:9-16; cf. 48:11). Whatever the particular background of the image (perhaps simply an ordinary house), John presumably understands this language figuratively for being in Christ, where God's presence dwells (2:21); the only other place in the *New Testament where this term for "dwelling places" or "rooms" occurs is in 14:23, where it refers to the believer as God's dwelling place (cf. also the verb "dwell"—15:4-7; see further the comment on 14:6-7).

14:3-4. In this context, John probably means not the Second Coming but Christ's return after the resurrection to bestow the Spirit (14:16-18). In Jewish teaching, both the resurrection of the dead (which Jesus inaugurated) and bestowal of the Spirit indicate the arrival of the new age of the *kingdom. Jesus explains where he is going and how they will come to be there in 14:6-7.

14:5. *Disciples asked their *rabbis questions to clarify the teaching. Four questions

were also asked in the extant household Passover celebration, but they differed from the questions here and the shared number may be mere coincidence (13:36-37; 14:5, 8, 22).

14:6-7. Jewish sources contrast the way of righteousness (wisdom, truth, etc.) and the way of falsehood (evil, etc.); Scripture and true Wisdom informed people of the righteous way. Some think the "way" might also echo Isaiah's way back to the new Jerusalem through the wilderness (cf. 1:23). In this case the background is less critical than the force of the image, however. Jesus answers Thomas's question thus: The Father is where I am going, and I am how you will get there.

"Truth" characterized God's nature (e.g., Ex 34:6; Is 65:16) and later came to be even a Jewish title for God; it is uncertain if it was in use this early. The primary significance of the statement, however, is that Jesus is the embodiment of the truth, God's covenant faithfulness (1:17), which was embodied in God's "word" in the *Old Testament (17:17; Ps 119:142, 151). Just as Judaism affirmed that there was only one God and thus one right way (his *law, either in the short version supposedly given to the *Gentiles or the full version given to Israel), Jesus here affirms that he is the only way to the only God.

14:8-17
Revealing the Father Clearly

14:8. John may wish his readers, most of whom were more immersed in the Bible than most modern readers, to think of Exodus 33:18, where Moses asked to see God's glory; see comments on 1:18 and 14:21-22. Philip might thus request a theophany.

14:9-10. Various Jewish sources portrayed divine Wisdom (see comment on 1:1-18) as the image of God. In the context of an allusion to Ex 33:18 in Jn 14:8, Jesus is the glory that Moses saw (see comment on 1:14-18). The *Old Testament sometimes spoke of God's Spirit inspiring or anointing the prophets for his work; Jesus' words here go beyond that idea.

14:11. God had earlier granted signs to invite faith (e.g., Ex 4:4-9; 19:9; Num 14:11).

14:12-14. Here scholars debate whether "works" (KJV, NASB, NRSV) refers to righteous deeds, as often in Judaism (e.g., 8:39), or to miraculous works such as Jesus performed (5:17; 10:32), or to both. (The works are probably quantitatively greater because Christ's work is multiplied through *all* his followers.) In this context Jesus' words are an invitation to radical faith: Jewish tradition allowed that some very pious teachers could receive from God almost anything they asked because of their intimate relationship with him, but never applied this possibility to the majority even of the pious. *Magic had no emphasis on relationship with the power addressed and sought only to manipulate forces for the manipulator's ends (contrast 14:15). A broad invitation to confident faith such as appears in this passage was not common in antiquity. (Cf. 2 Kings 2:9.)

Ancient Judaism used "name" in so many overlapping senses that the context tells us more here than the background. In the Old Testament "name" often meant reputation or renown, and when God acted "on account of his name" it was to defend his honor. "In the name of God" could mean as his representative acting on his behalf (Ex 5:23; Deut 18:19-22; Jer 14:14-15), according to his command (Deut 18:5, 7), by his help (Ps 118:10-11; Prov 18:10) or using his name in a miraculous act (2 Kings 2:24). (When rabbis passed on traditions "in the name of" other rabbis it simply means that they were citing their sources, their basis of authority for the tradition.) In prayer, calling on a deity's name simply meant addressing him (1 Kings 18:24-26, 32; 2 Kings 5:11; Ps 9:2; 18:49). In the Old Testament and later Judaism "Name" could also simply be a polite and roundabout way of saying "God" without uttering his name.

In this context "name" might mean something like: those who seek his honor and speak accurately for him, who are genuinely his authorized representatives. Nothing could be further from the pagan magical use of names that sought to manipulate spiritual forces for one's own ends.

14:15. Here Jesus evokes another Old Testament idea, with Jesus filling the role of God: those who love God keep his commands (e.g., Ex 20:6; Deut 5:10, 29; 6:5; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3-4; 19:9; 30:6, 14). In Ezekiel 36:27, the gift of the *Spirit enables one to keep the commandments (Jn 14:16).

14:16. The background for calling the Spirit "advocate" (NIV; NLT) or "Helper" (NASB, ESV)

is debated; some suggest a courtroom image: one sense of the term is "advocate," "defending attorney"; see comment on 16:8-11. Much more generally, it can mean "intercessor" or even simply "helper." In Jewish depictions of God's heavenly court, angels and divine attributes could serve as accusers or advocates, but *Satan is the primary prosecutor, and God (or his favored attribute of mercy, or Michael) defends Israel. Here the Spirit is "another" advocate like Jesus (cf. 9:35-41, where Jesus defends the man put out of the *synagogue and accuses his accusers); Judaism was also familiar with the idea of a "successor" who carries on a predecessor's work. Although Judaism normally viewed the Spirit as an aspect of God rather than as a person, this passage goes beyond that perspective (cf. Rom 8:26).

14:17. The Spirit of truth guides God's people in the way of truth—into fuller revelation of Jesus, who is the truth (14:6; 16:13). The *Dead Sea Scrolls contrast the spirit of truth with the spirit of error (cf. 1 Jn 4:6). The Old Testament sometimes (rarely) spoke of the Spirit of God dwelling in or filling some servants of God (e.g., Ex 31:3; 35:31; Num 27:18; probably Gen 41:38; Dan 4:8-9; cf. also several early Jewish texts); this was promised for all God's people in the future (Ezek 36:27).

14:18-31
Jesus' Coming and Revealing

14:18-20. "Orphan" language (v. 18) sometimes extended figuratively to other forms of bereavement. In the *Old Testament, "orphans" (NASB, NIV) were powerless and needed a legal defender. The context here refers to Jesus' coming to them and leaving his presence in them by the *Spirit (20:19-23). For background on the Spirit dwelling in people, see comment on 14:17.

14:21-22. *Apocalypses and other Jewish sources sometimes spoke of mysteries revealed to special persons. Israel believed (rightly) that God had given them a special revelation in the *law that the nations did not have. The language of "manifesting" (KJV) or "revealing" (NRSV, GNT) himself to them probably recalls God's revealing himself to Moses on Mount Sinai (see comment on 1:14).

14:23-24. Jewish teachers spoke of God's presence residing in a special way among those who studied his law, and especially in the temple; Jesus speaks of God's presence residing in each believer continually as something like an individual temple for his presence. That God dwelt in his temple and among his people was standard Old Testament teaching (cf. Ex 25:8; Lev 26:11-12; Ezek 37:27-28); that his laws were written in the hearts of his faithful and that his Spirit moved among his prophets were also taught in the Old Testament. But Jesus broadens and personalizes this perspective in a manner unparalleled in extant ancient literature. The *Dead Sea Scrolls speak of the Spirit being active among the remnant of God's people, but this activity is not nearly as extensive as the prophetic and charismatic activity found in the New Testament. Instead, the fulfilment is more like Ezekiel 36:27, where God's Spirit dwells in all his people.

14:25-26. Some of the functions Jesus lists here for the Spirit were attributed in Judaism to divine Wisdom (e.g., Wis 7:21; 8:7; 12:2), which was associated with God's Spirit as well as his law in some popular, pre-Christian Jewish writings (cf. also Neh 9:20; Ps 143:10). In a Jewish context, "teaching" could include elaborating and expounding; rote memorization was also an important part of ancient learning.

14:27. Jewish teachers highly extolled peace (especially in terms of relationships with others). Many philosophers and some rabbis, such as *Hillel (according to later tradition), also valued tranquility and/or peace. The Roman empire promised peace in its propaganda but was usually at war.

14:28-31. For verse 29, see comment on 13:19; for verse 30, see comment on 12:31; for "love" and "commandments" in verse 31, see comment on 14:15. Jesus' obedience to the Father includes his mission to the cross in 14:31, where perhaps he also summons his followers to participate in that call ("let *us* go"). Thus the world could know Jesus' true identity (12:32-33; 17:21).

15:1-8
Dwelling in the Vine

The word "abide" (KJV, NASB, NRSV), "remain" (NIV, GNT) or "dwell" (15:4-10) is the verb form of "dwelling place" (see comment on 14:2, 23). In the *Old Testament God had promised to

dwell with his obedient covenant people always (Ex 25:8; 29:45; Lev 26:11-12; Ezek 37:27-28; 43:9). The Old Testament and Jewish literature sometimes portrayed Israel as a vineyard (e.g., Is 5:7; Jer 12:10), or less frequently as a vine (e.g., Ps 80:8; Ezek 19:10; Hos 10:1). Nevertheless, the image of organic union elaborated here goes beyond most available analogies (though see comment about the *Spirit at 14:17).

15:1. As just noted, the Old Testament and Jewish literature sometimes portrayed Israel as a vineyard (e.g., Is 5:7), or less frequently as a vine (e.g., Ps 80:8; Hos 10:1), and God as the vinegrower (Is 5:1-3). A celebrated golden vine in the temple may have symbolized Israel's power, and Jesus may here portray the *disciples as the remnant of Israel (see comment on 15:16). Also relevant in light of John's depiction of Jesus in 1:1-18, Wisdom could be portrayed as a fruit-bearing vine (Sirach 24:17), inviting others to come to her, eat and drink, and obey (24:19-22). But Wisdom is compared with various trees (24:13-17) and invites hearers to eat her fruit, not bear it (24:19-21). Again, therefore, the image of union in this passage is more organic than in the most closely analogous texts. The most basic point of the imagery is the obvious dependence of branches on the vine for their continued life.

Vineyards were pervasive in the Mediterranean world, including in Judea and (where most scholars locate John's audience) in Asia Minor. Small farmers, including most Galileans, had vines along with fig and olive trees.

15:2-3. The three common domestic fruit "trees" were the fig, olive and vine, and of these, the olive and vine (esp. the latter) required most attention. Those tending vines (and some kinds of trees) would cut away useless branches lest they wastefully sap the strength of the plant; in the long run, this diverted more strength into the branches that would genuinely bear fruit. The weaker the vine, the more harshly one pruned it, reducing short-term fruit but ensuring a greater measure of fruit the following year. Farmers pruned in two different ways: they pruned fruitful branches to make them more fruitful, and (as in 15:6) they removed unfruitful branches entirely.

In the spring in Italy, farmers would tie vines to their supports (trees or, more often, wooden posts) and offer an initial trimming; further pruning of tendrils could occur during summer and as late as October. Some advised pruning only when the vine was strong enough to bear it, with the strongest pruning just after the fall vintage. In Palestine, fruitless branches were removed especially during winter.

Here is another of John's plays on words (see comment on 3:3): the term he uses for "prunes" normally means "cleanses," reflecting a motif in John (e.g., 2:6; 13:10). Although the term applied to ritual purity, both Greek and Jewish sources also applied it to inward purification of the heart. The Old Testament prophets often called on Israel to "bear fruit" for God (e.g., Is 27:6; Hos 14:4-8); in an agrarian culture, one might depict God's *law as bearing fruit in the righteous (**4 Ezra* 3:20).

15:4-8. Dead, fruitless branches of vines are obviously of no use for carpentry; their only possible value is for fuel. Jewish teachers believed that God had awful punishments in store for apostates, because those who had known the truth and then rejected it had no excuse (cf. 15:22-24; for burning, see "*Gehenna" in the glossary). Although it may be coincidence based on common customs, the destruction of vine branches appears in an image of judgment in Isaiah 18:5.

15:9-17
Abiding in Love

15:9-11. Keeping the commandments (here epitomized as love) was supposed to bring joy (Ps 19:8 and often in later Jewish teachings).

15:12-13. Dying for others was considered heroic in Greco-Roman stories, and friendship to the death (dying with or, better when feasible, for a friend) was considered a high moral value (see comment on 15:14-15). But Jewish ethics did not usually share this general Greek emphasis, although it emphasized dying for the *law if need be. Rabbi *Akiba (within a few decades of John) pragmatically argued that one's own life took precedence over another's. Although it is unlikely that Jesus is directly influenced by the Greek view of friendship, John's *Diaspora audience probably would have been familiar with it and so would have appreciated his point.

15:14-15. There were different kinds and levels of friendship in antiquity, and Greco-Roman writers often commented on the topic. Friendship could involve political or military alliances and was often pursued in self-interest; kings or lesser *patrons who supported dependents called *clients were (especially in Roman circles) said to be engaging in "friendship"; *Pharisees also met in circles of "friends." The traditional Greek concept of friendship emphasized equality among companions, and some philosophical schools like the *Epicureans especially emphasized such friendship. Patron-client friendships were unequal, a socially greater supporting a lesser; thus friendship need not involve equality of rank.

The main ideals of friendship in ancient literature included loyalty (sometimes to the death), equality and mutual sharing of all possessions (cf. 16:14-15), and an intimacy in which a friend could share everything in confidence. Jesus especially emphasizes the last point in 15:15, where he distinguishes a friend from a servant, who might also be loyal but would not share intimate secrets. Jewish writers like *Philo emphasized friendship with God, sometimes even contrasting it with servanthood, as here.

The *Old Testament called two people friends of God: Abraham (2 Chron 20:7; Is 41:8) and Moses (Ex 33:11). Jewish tradition amplified on the friendship and intimacy of both of them with God. If an Old Testament allusion is in view here, it may be to Moses (see comment on 14:8). In another familiar source, Wisdom made people friends of God and prophets (Wisdom of Solomon 7:27). If this text emphasizes Jesus' sharing his heart with his followers, the context communicates the character of his heart: love.

15:16-17. Jewish teachers emphasized repeatedly that Israel was chosen and commissioned by God (initially in Abraham [Neh 9:7], the secondary possible allusion in v. 15, though the emphasis on Israel's chosenness is more pervasive than this); see comment on 15:1. Although Jesus, like most Jewish teachers, welcomed most listeners, he chose his own core *disciples. This language evokes OT texts about God choosing his people (Ps 135:4), normally not because of their own merit (Deut 7:6-7; cf. 9:5); this was a special privilege (Deut 14:2). (Sometimes God is also said to choose individuals or groups within Israel for tasks, e.g., Ex 35:30; Deut 18:5; 21:5; 1 Sam 10:24; 1 Chron 15:2; 28:10; 29:1; 2 Chron 29:11.) It can give the disciples confidence in their fruitfulness (Judas left the group in 13:30). On asking "in the name," see comment on 14:12-14.

15:18–16:4
The World's Hatred

Ancient writers often liked to lay comparisons and contrasts side by side. After emphasizing unity, love and friendship in 15:1-17, Jesus turns here to the world's hatred.

15:18-20. Given the sort of political alliances characteristic of Mediterranean urban life, friendship with someone (15:13-15) entailed also sharing common enemies. Jewish people often believed that the *Gentile nations hated them because they were chosen and sent by God and suffered on his account. They would resent Jesus' grouping most of them with "the world," but other persecuted minority sects in Judaism (like the *Essenes at *Qumran) also included the majority of Israel, whom they regarded as apostate, as among the world, their enemies.

15:21. Jewish people spoke of suffering (even martyrdom) for the sake of God's name (e.g., Ps 44:22); Jesus here speaks thus of his own name (cf. Mt 5:11; Mk 13:13). When Israel kept covenant with God, they were said to "know" him; in their disobedience, they did not "know" him (e.g., Is 1:3; Jer 2:8; 4:22; 5:4; Hos 5:4).

15:22-24. Judaism taught that greater knowledge brought greater responsibility; thus in one line of tradition, the nations were accountable to keep only seven commandments, whereas Israel, who had received the *law, had 613 commandments. Jesus also teaches that revelation increases moral responsibility (elsewhere, e.g., Lk 12:41-46).

15:25. Here Jesus quotes from a lament of a righteous sufferer (Ps 69:4; cf. 35:19; 109:3), which Jesus elsewhere applied to his sufferings (cf. Jn 2:17). On "their law" see 8:17 and 10:34.

15:26. On the forensic work of the *Spirit as advocate, see 14:16; here he is not only advocate but witness.

15:27. The believers are also witnesses for Jesus before the court of the world (cf. 16:2)

and God's tribunal. The Jewish people viewed the *Holy Spirit especially as the Spirit of *prophecy (usually in the *Old Testament and even more often in later Jewish literature); God would thus empower the *disciples to speak as prophets. (This promise also fits the idea that God's people would be anointed by the Spirit to witness God's truth against the nations before God's final tribunal; cf. Is 42:1; 43:10-12; 44:3, 8-9.)

16:1. Advance warning was helpful; cf. comment on 13:19.

16:2-4. Even in the *Diaspora, *synagogues could enforce discipline on members violating Jewish laws. Capital jurisdiction, however, belonged to Rome; any other killing was a lynching not approved by the Roman state. In the context of discussing witness, Jesus warned that his followers would face trouble in synagogues as elsewhere (see Mk 13:9-11), but this point may have special relevance for John's audience. Most scholars believe that Christians in John's day were being expelled from some local synagogues, perhaps under the influence of Palestinian Pharisaic propaganda (see the introduction to John and comments on 9:34 and 12:42). Hostile Jewish non-Christians in Asia Minor do not appear to have killed Christians directly (in violation of Roman law); but some nevertheless may have participated in getting followers of Jesus killed (in later Smyrna, cf. *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17.2; 18.1, although scholars do not accept the entire story as accurate). By betraying Jewish Christians to the Roman authorities and claiming that Christians were non-Jewish, they left Christians with no legal exemption from worshiping the emperor and difficulty explaining how they remained loyal to the empire. Worried that Christians were a messianic and *apocalyptic movement that could get them in trouble with Rome, many synagogue leaders may have thought their betrayal of Christians would protect the rest of their community (cf. 11:50). Persecutors could believe that they acted for God (cf. Is 66:5), perhaps by following Phinehas' model of zeal (Ps 106:30-31; 1 Maccabees 2:24-26, 54). Ancient thinkers sometimes pointed out that, before God or the bar of history, it was the unjust court rather than the victim that was on trial.

16:5-15
The Spirit's Witness

The *Spirit testifies of Jesus to the world (16:8-11, duplicating the earthly witness of Jesus) and to Jesus' followers (16:13-15). The opponents of John's readers did not claim to have the Spirit or to hear the Spirit speaking to their hearts as he had spoken to the prophets (many may have claimed to feel close to God but did not claim to hear him directly, in contrast to Christians and some apocalyptic visionaries). John encourages his readers that their intimate, personal relationship with God in the Spirit distinguishes them from their opponents.

16:5-7. The Advocate (see comment 14:16) comes to the believers, which implies that his ministry to the world (16:8-11) is through them (cf. Neh 9:30). This idea fits the common *Old Testament and later Jewish perspective on God's Spirit as the Spirit of *prophecy. Because the Spirit's activity in 16:8-11 matches that of Jesus earlier in the Gospel (e.g., 3:17-21; 8:46), the Spirit may mediate Jesus' presence through believers' preaching of him (the "Word"; cf. 1:1-18) in a way to some degree analogous to how early Judaism could envision the Spirit or Torah mediating God's presence (see, e.g., comment on Mt 18:20).

16:8-11. As was common in ancient arrangement of material, 16:8 introduces three points then developed in 16:9-11. Here the believers' Advocate may become a "prosecutor" of the world, as sometimes in the Old Testament (Jer 50:34; 51:36; Lam 3:58-66; cf. Ps 43:1; 50:8). Many Jewish people believed that God would make Israel prevail over the nations before his tribunal in the day of judgment; for John, the judgment has already begun (3:18-19). Roman courts had no public prosecutors and depended on an interested party to bring charges, although trained *rhetoricians then debated on behalf of those who could afford them. The Spirit here brings charges against the world before God's heavenly court (see Mt 5:22), as a witness against them (see Jn 15:26).

Verses 9-11 probably mean that the world's unbelief constituted their sin; *Christ being the heavenly Advocate (1 Jn 2:1) constituted the believers' righteousness; and the judging of the world's ruler (see comment on 12:31)

spelled the judgment of the world. Thus for John it is not Jesus and his people (chaps. 18–19) but the world that is now on trial. One may also compare a common motif in the Old Testament prophets: the covenant lawsuit where God summons his people to account for breach of the covenant.

16:12-13. The Psalms speak of God leading his people in truth, in his way of faithfulness (Ps 25:5; 43:3; cf. 5:8); in John, this language implies a fuller revelation of Jesus' character (14:6). Intimate friends shared confidences (see comment on 15:15). The Spirit will thus relate to the *disciples as Jesus has (15:15), so that believers' relationship with Jesus in John's day (and in subsequent generations) should be no less intimate than relationships with him were before the cross.

16:14-15. This intimacy (v. 13) may evoke a sharing of possessions that characterized ideal friendship in antiquity (see comment on 15:15); some applied this principle even to "friendship" with the gods. The specific sense of the sharing language in this context, however, is that God shares his heart with all his people, as he once shared his word with his prophets (Gen 18:17; Amos 3:7; cf. again God's Wisdom in Wisdom of Solomon 7:26-27).

16:16-33
Seeing Jesus Again

After his *resurrection, Jesus would return to the disciples to impart life (14:18-19), and through the gift of his *Spirit he would remain with them forever (20:19-23).

16:16-22. Women suffered and, as in many parts of the world even today, often died in childbirth. The prophets commonly used birth pangs as an image of suffering, often stemming from judgment (Is 13:8; 21:3; 42:14; Jer 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 30:6; 49:22-24; 50:43; Mic 4:9-10; cf. Ps 48:6). In some *Old Testament texts, these pangs signified what Jesus' contemporaries would understand as the birth pangs of a new, messianic era (Is 26:17-19; 66:7-10; Mic 5:1-4; cf. Is 9:6; 53:12–54:1; 62:5; Hos 13:13-14). Labor pains, resurrection and "a little while" appear in Isaiah 26:16-21; in Isaiah 66:8-14, after Zion travails to birth the restored people of God (66:8), God's people "see" and "are glad" (66:14; cf. Jn 16:22).

Early Judaism sometimes came to apply these birth pangs specifically to the final period of suffering before the end of the age, which would be followed by the resurrection of the dead (cf. *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QHa 11.8-11; **1 Enoch* 62:4; *rabbis). Jesus' resurrection inaugurates a new age, so that the life of the coming world is now available to the disciples in the present (see comment on 3:16).

16:23-24. See comment on 14:12-14, especially on the use of the "name" in prayer.

16:25-28. Following the Old Testament wisdom tradition, Jewish teachers often used proverbs and riddles, as Jesus does throughout this Gospel. Although the disciples are not ready for the full understanding of the new relationship with God that Jesus describes (16:12), he is getting them ready.

16:29-30. In the context of the Fourth Gospel, that Jesus knows their question before they ask reveals his special insight; see comments on 1:42 and 2:24-25.

16:31-32. The scattering of sheep may refer to Zechariah 13:7 (cf. Mt 26:31). The Old Testament often reports that God's flock was scattered for want of a devoted shepherd (e.g., 1 Kings 22:17; Ezek 34:5-6, 12, 21; Zech 11:16; cf. Is 53:6; Jer 23:1; 50:17), as one would expect with flocks (e.g., Ps 119:176; 1 Maccabees 12:53).

16:33. Early Christians recognized that final victory would come, as Jewish prophets and teachers said, when the *Messiah comes in the future; but they also recognized that the Messiah had already come and therefore had inaugurated triumph in the midst of present (eschatologically expected) tribulation.

17:1-5
Jesus Reviews His Mission

Jesus here reveals his unique relationship with the Father, sharing his glory; see comment on divine Wisdom in 1:1-18. From 12:23-33 it is clear that Jesus returns to this full glory only by way of the cross, even though for most people crucifixion epitomized shame rather than honor and glory. Many note that prayers and blessings are common in testaments (final instructions of a departing sage or hero in Jewish literature). Concluding sections frequently recapitulate major themes covered; many themes in Jesus' teachings in this Gospel recur here.

17:1. Lifting one's eyes to heaven was a

common posture of prayer (cf. perhaps Ps 121:1; 123:1). "Glory" here has a double sense, another instance of wordplay; see comments on 1:14 and 12:23-27. Moses reflected God's glory in Exodus 33–34, but Jesus is to be "glorified" in the same sense as the Father, with his preexistent glory (17:5).

17:2. The *Old Testament also often used "flesh" (KJV) in the sense of humanity ("people"—NIV; "mankind"—NASB). Only at the end, in the final *kingdom, did God promise to delegate his authority to a particular ruler (Is 9:6-7; Dan 7:13-14); this background suggests that Jesus' death and *resurrection represent no mere temporal event but the climactic inbreaking of a new world.

17:3. On knowing God, see 10:4-5. Not knowing good and evil (Gen 2:9; 3:22), but knowing God was life (cf. Ezek 37:14). Other Jewish texts written in Greek also identified knowing God with *eternal life (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 15:3); here one must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

17:4-5. On finishing the work, see 4:34 and 19:30. Moses reflected God's glory (Ex 34:29), but Jesus, who shares the Father's preexistent glory, is greater than Moses here (cf. Jn 1:14-18). The Old Testament declared that God would not give his glory to another (Is 42:8; 48:11); Jesus' sharing the Father's glory in this sense is a claim that he is divine. Judaism did have an analogy with which to compare Jesus' divine claim here: God's Wisdom reflects his glory (Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-29). John's Jewish Christian readers may have understood Jesus' identity in analogous (albeit superior) terms (see comment on 1:1-18).

17:6-19
Jesus Prays for His Disciples

This passage addresses the inevitable conflict between Jesus' followers and the world. Jesus' followers here assume the role assigned to Israel in most extant Jewish portrayals of the end times and that assigned to the remnant (the children of light) in sectarian texts such as the *Dead Sea Scrolls; they constituted the whole number of the righteous and as such were a persecuted minority within society.

17:6. In the *Old Testament Moses announced God's name (Ex 3:13, 15); more importantly, when God revealed his name, he revealed his character and attributes (Ex 33:19; 34:5, 14; for the future, see Is 52:6).

God's name also meant his honor or reputation. To "hallow" or "sanctify" God's name was to demonstrate its holiness, its sacredness. In contemporary Jewish teaching, righteous deeds hallowed God's name, and wicked ones dishonored it; the *kiddush hashem,* or sanctifying of God's name, was one of the most fundamental principles of Jewish ethics preserved in later rabbinic sources. Most Jewish people prayed for the future time when God would sanctify his name throughout the earth (see comment on Mt 6:9).

17:7-11. Although the comparison would be inadequate, some ancient hearers may have thought of how Moses received God's words and passed them on to Israel, who alone of the nations received his *law; on Jesus and Moses, see comment on 1:14-18 (esp. 1:17). The ideas of Jesus' being glorified among the *disciples and the use of God's name (17:11) may also expound Jewish traditions related to Moses in the book of Exodus. On unity, see comment on 17:20-26.

17:12. Some suggest that the fulfilled Scripture here might allude to Psalm 41:9, cited in John 13:18: the verb for "lost" appears often for the wicked in the Psalms. Jewish teaching recognized that God dealt more severely with apostates than with those who were born pagans, because apostates had known the truth but turned away from it. "Son of perdition" (NASB) or "of destruction" reflects a Semitic idiom essentially meaning, "one who would be destroyed." The passage may play on the related terms for "lost" and "destruction."

17:13-15. Jewish texts often speak of God guarding or protecting his people.

17:16-19. The Old Testament and Jewish tradition emphasized Israel's separation from and often hatred by the world. God had "sanctified," that is, "consecrated" or "set apart," Israel for himself as holy, especially by giving them his commandments (e.g., Lev. 11:44-45). (Today Jewish people still often celebrate this sanctification by the commandments in the blessing over the lighting of sabbath candles.)

God's word in Scripture was truth (Ps 119:142, 160). If God had sanctified his people, or set them apart among the nations by giving them the law, how much more are followers of

Jesus set apart by his coming as the Word made flesh (see comment on 1:1-18); Jesus treats his disciples here as the true remnant of Israel, that is, the saved covenant community within Israel. (Throughout most of the Old Testament, only part of Israel in any given generation followed God; in some times, like those of Joshua and David, the remnant was large; in other times, like Moses' generation or that of Elijah, it was small.) Other Jewish groups, notably the *Essenes who likely authored the Dead Sea Scrolls, also felt that the rest of their nation had gone astray and that they were the true remnant; the theme appears in the Old Testament prophets (cf. Is 10:20-22; Joel 2:32; Amos 9:8-12). Whereas some of the Essenes sought to separate physically from the rest of Israel, however (cf. Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 5.18; 9.8-9; CD 13.14-15), believers in Jesus remained in contact with the world despite being different from it (Jn 17:14-16).

17:20-26
Jesus Prays for Future Disciples

The unity of Father and Son models the unity to be experienced by their people in whom they dwell. Israel emphasized that their God was "one" (Deut 6:4) and recognized the importance of this factor in their own solidarity among the nations, in a world hostile to them. This passage stresses a similar idea but in a manner more related to the idea of God's personal indwelling introduced in chapter 14 (see especially comment on 14:23-24). God is glorified among his people (though he shares it with no one in the fullest sense) in Isaiah 44:23; 46:13; 49:3; 55:5; 60:1-2; God also sanctified his dwelling places with the glory of his presence (Ex 29:43).

The emphasis on unity would also speak to John's readers, who are troubled by opposition from the *synagogue and perhaps from secessionists from their own ranks (see introduction to 1 John); it is also likely that ethnic or cultural unity—perhaps among John's (emigrant?) Galilean and Asian constituencies (see the introduction to John)—is partly in view (10:16; 11:52; 12:20-23); John clearly emphasizes ethnic reconciliation in *Christ in chapter 4 (the *Samaritans). At any rate, followers of Jesus constitute a small minority in a hostile world and need each other to survive as much as other minorities normally do. On concern for coming generations compare, e.g., Psalm 78:3-7. Division was a pervasive problem in antiquity, and both philosophers and (especially often) orators challenged cities to seek unity among themselves. Jewish people celebrated God's special love for Israel; the magnitude of God's love for Jesus' followers here is evident in the comparison with the Father's special love for the Son, a Son whose death he allowed to save the others (3:16-17).

18:1-11
The Betrayer Arrives

Biographies usually conclude with an account of the protagonist's death, developing it particularly if the death was very significant. Jewish people and some *Gentiles celebrated martyr stories. The passion *narratives draw on such elements but form something distinctive. Greeks also had apotheosis stories about mortals transformed to deities, usually at their death; in John, however, Jesus is returning to the glory he had with the Father before the world (cf. Wisdom returning home in **1 Enoch* 42:2).

Contrary to detractors, how Jesus is treated in the account fits what we know of the treatment of dissent in antiquity. Apart from outright threats (like armed bands in the wilderness), Rome depended on local aristocracies in the provinces to arrest and accuse troublemakers, though Rome itself inflicted the death penalty (18:31). A generation after the scene depicted here, one Joshua son of Hananiah cried out judgment against the temple; the chief priests had him arrested and handed over to the governor. After refusing to respond to the governor's interrogation, Joshua was flogged, *Josephus says, until his bones showed (*Jewish War* 6.301-5). Because they considered that prophet insane and because he had no followers, he was then released—in contrast to Jesus, who had a movement and was viewed as a greater potential political threat. The priestly aristocracy were determined to maintain control at all costs, including by suppressing freedom of speech. The current Sanhedrin consisted especially of immediate descendants of Herod's political appointees, and other Jews (from Josephus to the *Dead Sea Scrolls to the *Pharisees) criticized a

number of *high priests in this era as corrupt and sometimes brutal.

18:1-2. "Kidron Valley" is literally the "winter-swollen-brook Kidron": this brook flowed only in the rainy season—winter—so crossing it in April would not involve even getting wet. It had a long history (2 Sam 15:23), and the site is still identifiable. Jesus and his *disciples had met there other times; cf. Luke 22:39. Gardens were sometimes walled enclosures.

18:3. Romans and others typically depended on local informers, a role that Judas fills here. Many scholars have noted that this military contingent is described in a manner much like Roman cohorts (so NASB). Nevertheless, the same language was equally used of Jewish units, and this unit is probably the Levite temple guard. (Roman troops would not be used for a routine police action like this one, would not be lent to the chief priests, and Romans would not have taken Jesus to the house of Annas—18:13—whom they had deposed.)

A full cohort in the Roman sense could have involved six hundred soldiers, but a detachment from the cohort is all that John need mean here. Both the temple police and Romans carried torches (two kinds are mentioned here) at night, although only a few need have carried them. The moon would be nearly full at Passover.

18:4-6. "I am" can mean "I am he (whom you seek)," but it can also allude to Exodus 3:14, translated literally. A Jewish tradition, purportedly pre-Christian (attributed to the early *Diaspora Jewish writer Artapanus), said that when Moses pronounced the name of his God, Pharaoh fell backward. (If Jesus' hearers had thought he was pronouncing the divine name, they might have also fallen back in fear, because magicians were said to try to cast spells in that name.) During some kinds of religious experience in many cultures, including Christian religious experiences historically (including during the Great Awakenings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), people have sometimes been overwhelmed and fallen to the ground (cf. also, e.g., 1 Sam 19:24; Ezek 1:28; Dan 10:9).

18:7-9. That Jesus' word (17:12) should be fulfilled just as Scripture is suggests his divine rank and mission. Although some Jewish writers allowed that *prophecy continued in their own time, they rarely accorded such revelations the same status as Scripture. Where no massive or violent threat existed, Romans and their allies often preferred to detain a ringleader rather than all the followers, if it was believed that the movement could not survive without its leader anyway.

18:10. As slave of the high priest, Malchus would be a powerful person with much authority; it is possible (though by no means certain) that Malchus was helping to lead the expedition. On the possible symbolic effect of his disfigurement, see comment on Mark 14:47.

18:11. Greeks might think of Socrates' cup of hemlock, but more relevant for Jesus' (and John's) Jewish context, the cup often functioned as a symbol of judgment in the prophets (see comment on Mk 10:39).

18:12-27
At the House of Annas

18:12. The officer mentioned here is literally applied to tribunes of cohorts (in principle about six hundred strong); but see comment on 18:3; comment on Acts 4:1.

18:13-14. Annas was *high priest from A.D. 6–15, when the Romans deposed him. According to Jewish *law, the high priest was entitled to rule for life; thus some Jews no doubt considered the Roman deposition of Annas invalid, and he continued to command great respect. He was father-in-law of Caiaphas, and all five of Annas's sons became highest priests at some point; he retained enormous influence until his death in A.D. 35. He was wealthy and powerful, but later Jewish literature (written by successors of those he opposed) does not speak well of him. The high priesthood had been the most powerful office in Jewish Palestine until the Roman period.

Capital cases were to be heard by a plurality of judges (according to later tradition, a minimum of twenty-three). No individual could legally act as judge in a capital case, but this law did not stop Annas from exercising his political power and privately interrogating Jesus. Perhaps he would have excused himself by a law that those tried by the supreme Sanhedrin for misleading the people first had to be tried by two lower courts. But that law may be Pharisaic and may be later

than the first century, and it is doubtful that Annas is attempting to follow any law. The predominantly Sadducean priestly aristocracy would certainly not follow the Pharisees' rules: they had to please the Romans, not the Pharisees. Roman law, like the Pharisees, posed limits on judges' activity, but in the provinces politics trumped legal ethics when peace was at stake.

18:15-17. For more detail, see comment on Mark 14:66-69. Well-to-do homes had servants as doorkeepers, though these servants might do double-duty with other jobs; an extensive estate such as this one would have a full-time porter. Doorkeepers would determine (especially at night) whom to admit and would observe who entered and left the premises. Even once people entered, if they were unfamiliar they could be asked their identity. According to later rabbinic teaching, Jewish people were permitted to deny even their Jewishness, especially by evasion (cf. Mk 14:68), to save their lives. Direct denial that allowed God's name to be reproached, however, was considered shameful. Peter probably lacks acquaintance with these specific rules, but they may illustrate his cultural setting, which did not always regard denial as severely as Jesus regards it.

18:18. The cold weather is not surprising for an April night in Jerusalem.

18:19. The changing of scene back and forth was a standard suspense-building technique in ancient literature; then, as today, it was good writing.

John does not claim that the "high priest" here is the official one Rome recognized (see 18:13, 24); like other *New Testament writers and *Josephus, John follows the common practice of labeling all prominent members of the priestly aristocracy "high priests." Later tradition suggests that those questioning a "misleader" (see comment on 7:12) would ask about disciples.

18:20. Secret teachings were sometimes considered subversive, but Jesus taught publicly. Although *rabbis offered particular special teachings only to small groups of disciples (e.g., teachings on creation and on God's throne-chariot), they had a tradition that one must teach the law openly, in contrast to false prophets, who taught "in secret." Appeals to public knowledge added *rhetorical strength to one's argument.

18:21. According to much later forms of Jewish law, interrogators were not supposed to force the accused to try to convict himself. But if this law is in effect in Jesus' day, which is at best uncertain, the priestly aristocracy, upheld by Rome and acting on what they believe to be right for the people, does not concern itself with it. As throughout the empire, powerful people could even get away with judicial murder, and other people were well aware of this.

18:22-24. Striking a captive was certainly against Jewish law. This act shows how abusive and uninterested in any form of Jewish legality Annas is; his interest in the case is political, not legal. This also fits the picture of the high priests supplied by other minorities in Judaism who had conflicts with them (Pharisees and *Essenes). See comment on Mark 14:1, 43. Jesus may be indicating that he has not violated Exodus 22:28 (which forbade cursing authorities); cf. Acts 23:3-5. Interrogating him further in a private home rather than in the Sanhedrin's meeting place on or near the temple mount violated ancient Mediterranean legal protocol. This may represent the early morning "official" meeting to produce the charge. People often cringed before the authorities; Jesus stands for truth.

18:25-27. For a disciple to repudiate a teacher was a great humiliation for the teacher. Ancient writers often contrasted characters; Peter's denial here contrasts starkly with Jesus' courage (18:20-24). On the cock crowing, see comment on 13:38.

18:28-38a
Jesus Before Pilate

18:28. Roman officials began meeting the public (especially their *clients) at daybreak and finished by noon; "early" is no exaggeration, and here may mean about 6 a.m. Although visiting officials were often swamped with plaintiffs, the priestly aristocracy, who controlled Judea for the Romans, would be able to secure an audience with him on short notice. Clamoring before *Pilate in large numbers was usually effective, because a riot was the last thing he wanted. The "Praetorium" (NASB) here was Herod the Great's old "palace" (NIV), used by the Roman prefect when he

came to Jerusalem from Caesarea during the feasts. (It was not, as some earlier commentators thought, the Fortress Antonia on the Temple Mount, where the usual Roman garrison was stationed.) He came precisely to ensure that order was maintained during the feasts, when Jerusalem was overcrowded and riots were most apt to break out.

That observant Jews (including the priestly aristocracy) would not enter this palace, lest they be defiled and thus unable to eat the Passover, fits Jewish practice. *Gentile residences were considered ritually impure, primarily because of the association with idolatry (which Pilate certainly practiced). (That priestly aristocrats cared about purity is clear archaeologically from the ritual baths common in their homes.) Their fidelity to purity regulations ironically highlights the corrupt leaders' failure to observe legal propriety in the context.

A possible conflict with the other Gospels at this point has led to considerable debate as to when the Passover described in the Gospel passion narratives occurred. According to Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus had already eaten the Passover with his disciples this night; whereas according to John, the priests plan to eat it the following night.

Of the many explanations for the apparent discrepancy, the two most prominent are probably these: (1) Several Jewish groups had different calendars and did not celebrate Passover on the same day. A dispute about when the month had begun (based on the appearance of the new moon) would also affect when the feast would be eaten. Some scholars have suggested that Jesus' disciples celebrated it a day early, thus without a lamb slaughtered in the temple. (2) Either John or the other Gospels—probably John—is making a symbolic point (John stresses that Jesus is the Passover lamb; cf. 19:14, 36; 1 Cor 5:7). Later Jewish tradition also reports that Jesus was crucified on Passover, but this report could be based on the approximate time in earlier tradition. John's language would not technically be incorrect in any case in the present verse, since many used "Passover" loosely for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately followed; nevertheless, "eat the Passover" is a very odd way to speak of eating the bread during the rest of the feast (cf. also 13:1).

18:29. Precedent exists for a Roman official's having to go outside to respect Jewish sensitivities (on the sensitivities, see comment on 18:28). Except in matters requiring military intervention, an official charge would be necessary before Pilate would be required to hear the case. Roman law had no public prosecutor in the modern sense and depended on private accusers to bring charges (although rhetoricians could be hired to debate a case, they were not supplied by the state). Accusers spoke first in a case.

18:30-31. Pilate regards the matter as one of religious law, hence to be tried in a Jewish court if the person claims to be Jewish and so submits to a Jewish court's jurisdiction; this was Roman practice throughout the empire (also, e.g., Acts 18:14-15). Pilate is also known not to have been cooperative when dealing with Jewish religious matters; unless the situation got out of hand, he did not need to cooperate as long as his probable *patron Sejanus controlled the emperor Tiberius in Rome (see comment on 19:12). *Philo reports that Sejanus was anti-Jewish, and both Philo and Josephus portray Pilate as brutal. From Pilate's initial attempt to bring idolatrous Roman standards into Jerusalem to his plundering of the temple treasury to build an aqueduct to issuing coins with the emperor's image, Pilate had displayed insensitivity to Jewish concerns. Yet Pilate also belonged to a lower order of nobility than most governors, and was politically vulnerable apart from Sejanus's patronage; ultimately he usually gave in to the demands of the Jewish aristocracy. Slowness to accept the chief priests' recommendations might reflect spite for them rather than commitment to justice. Over time, though, he probably became more politically accommodating to the locals (thus he remained in office till A.D. 36, even though his political patron in Rome, Sejanus, was executed in 31.)

Pilate expected Jewish courts to judge all internal religious cases, but capital offenses required Roman verdicts, and apart from desecrating the temple only a political charge would suffice for that. Although scholars have debated the matter, Rome apparently did not permit Jewish courts to exercise the death

penalty, except in the case of a *Gentile intruding into an inner court of the temple. They could flog and probably decree a person worthy of death; but executions not authorized by the Romans were illegal. The Romans had to try all other capital offenses. (Some later rabbinic sources place the abolition of Jewish courts' right to execute the death penalty in A.D. 70 [other rabbis place it about A.D. 30], but this would have given Palestinian Jewish leaders a right not shared by most other local officials under Rome, a right we would therefore expect contemporary apologists for Judaism like Josephus to attest. Normally only governors and client rulers exercised the "right of the sword." The Sanhedrin's possession of it is not attested early, and later rabbis often idealized the earlier legal situation, even reading their own authority back into the pre-70 period. The right to execute violators of the temple was also permitted in the case of violators of other sacred shrines, like the sanctuary at Eleusis; but the right was rarely extended beyond this violation.)

18:32. They used not stoning but crucifixion for executing noncitizens charged with treason (thus fulfilling Jesus' word about being "lifted up"—12:32-33).

18:33-35. Pilate follows a Roman procedure called *cognitio,* an inquiry to determine what really happened. As prefect, he would make the final decision and answer to no one for it unless a complaint were sent to Rome; but he investigates the matter nonetheless.

The priests charge Jesus with claiming to be a king, which is a charge of *maiestas,* treason against the emperor. (Herod Antipas was later exiled for simply requesting the title, which an earlier emperor, Augustus, had granted Herod the Great.) This was an especially deadly charge under Tiberias, the current emperor. Some other Jewish "prophet"-leaders later invited Roman intervention.

18:36-38a. Jesus' nonresistance distinguishes him from true revolutionaries in Judea. The idea that Jesus' *kingdom is not based on military or political force is repeated throughout the Gospels, but most of Jesus' hearers never grasp that meaning in his words (after all, why call it a "kingdom" if it was nonpolitical?). Pilate hears the term "truth" and probably interprets Jesus in another sense: a philosopher or some other teacher. As an educated Roman, Pilate should have known that many philosophers portrayed themselves as ideal rulers (see comment on 1 Cor 4:8); although he probably had little attachment to philosophers himself, he would have viewed them as harmless. No one could be more nonrevolutionary in practice than a *Cynic or *Stoic philosopher, no matter how antisocial Cynic teachings might be. "Truth" in *Old Testament and Jewish tradition was God's covenant integrity; the concept would sound more abstract to many Gentiles.

18:38b–19:3
Pilate Meets the Masses

18:38b. Roman law prohibited treason, not wandering, antisocial philosophers. From Pilate's Roman perspective, he had no reason to condemn Jesus.

18:39. Roman governors were not obligated to follow local (or other) customs, but out of political prudence often did so, especially at crowded festivals. Well-liked precedents like pardons were usually kept. Although unattested in extant Palestinian sources (as are many customs), the specific custom mentioned here is the sort of custom the Romans would have allowed. Roman law officially permitted two kinds of amnesty, the *indulgentia* (pardoning a condemned person) and—closer to what Pilate probably has in mind here—*abolitio* (acquitting a person before judgment). Romans and Greeks seem to have granted mass amnesty at some other regular feasts, and Romans occasionally acquitted prisoners in response to the cries of crowds.

18:40. The term translated "bandit" (NRSV, GNT) or "robber" (KJV, NASB) could mean what those titles usually imply, or, in light of Josephus's usage, could imply that Barabbas is a revolutionary (cf. NIV), a point clear in Mark 15:7. (Some warn that it is difficult to distinguish between self-seeking bandits and those desiring only to terrorize foreigners.) In either case, Barabbas was the kind of person Rome *would* want to execute. Many ancient writers used irony. The irony here cuts deeply: the people preferred a real revolutionary to Jesus, who was denounced for treason as a would-be king but had no actual record of participation in insurrection. Judean leaders on other occa-

sions used loud delegations to force governors to accept their demands.

19:1. Beatings were a regular punishment themselves, but flogging and scourging, much more severe, also accompanied death sentences. On other occasions governors had persons scourged as a warning although they did not regard them as genuine threats (cf. Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.304-5), or even handed over Roman soldiers for execution if needed to preserve public order (2.231).

In the provinces, soldiers normally administered this punishment. The person being punished would be stripped naked, then stripped to a post for the beating. Jewish *law allowed only thirty-nine lashes with a calf-leather whip; Roman law allowed scourging till the soldier grew tired, and texts report that bones or entrails were sometimes bared. Romans beat free Romans with rods, soldiers with sticks, but slaves and probably despised non-Romans with whips whose leather thongs enclosed sharp pieces of metal or bone.

19:2. Soldiers played games like throwing knucklebones, coins or dice; the chance to play games with this prisoner would come as a welcome respite from their customary boredom in a foreign land. Adorning a prisoner as a king and beating him occurred on other occasions, even when the person was not claiming kingship. Common, coarse street mimes seem to have often included mock kings arrayed in mock splendor; the Jewish ruler Agrippa I was ridiculed in this manner in Alexandria. Non-Jewish soldiers, many drawn from Syria, were often anti-Jewish and happy to ridicule a Jewish "king."

Greek vassal princes typically wore a purple chlamys—purple dye being the most expensive—and a wreath of gilded leaves. The "purple robe" that the soldiers put on Jesus may have been a faded scarlet lictor's robe or an old rug. The crown of thorns, perhaps from the branches of the thorny acanthus shrub or from the date palm (the latter would have looked more realistic), may have been meant to turn mainly outward (mimicking the wreaths of *Hellenistic kings) rather than painfully inward; nevertheless, one could not have prevented some thorns from scraping inward, drawing blood from Jesus' scalp. Only the highest king would wear an actual crown instead of a wreath, so they are portraying him as a vassal prince.

19:3. "Hail" is sarcasm derived from the customary salutation of the Roman emperor, "Ave (Hail), Caesar!" Normally in the eastern Mediterranean world one would kneel when offering such an acclamation. The abuse of prisoners (a practice not unknown today) was probably common and was sometimes public.

19:4-16
Politics over Justice

19:4. Not known to be unnecessarily cooperative with the local leaders, Pilate characteristically holds out giving in to them as long as possible. The governor's investigation has yielded a verdict: not guilty (18:35-38a). Under normal circumstances, this verdict would stand.

19:5. The garb of a mock king, as in the case of the Alexandrian dressed up to ridicule Agrippa I (see comment on 19:2), portrays Jesus to the mob not as a true king but as a harmless fool. Irony and sarcasm were common in ancient sources; the title "man" may contrast ironically with their charge: "God's Son" (19:7); it may be a mock royal acclamation, as in "Behold the king!" in 19:14 (contrast the opening acclamation of the Gospel—1:29). In another irony, it might be relevant that Pilate's "Behold the man" recalls the opening words identifying Israel's first king in 1 Sam 9:17.

19:6. Pilate's challenge may be derisive: the Jewish authorities did not have the legal right to execute capital offenders, and if they had they would normally have stoned them rather than crucified them.

19:7. The *Old Testament called the *Messiah (and all David's line) the *Son of God (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; 89:27); in a more general sense, all Israel was called God's child (Ex 4:22; Deut 8:3; Hos 11:1). But even falsely claiming to be the Messiah was not a capital offense in standard Jewish teaching, as long as one were not a false prophet advocating other gods. Political rather than theological considerations made such claims dangerous; *Roman* rather than biblical law made royal claims a capital offense. Even on their own terms, Jesus' accusers are thus mistaken about the *law's teaching about him (10:34-36); but John may intend more irony: he be-

lieved the Old Testament predicted that God's Son would die (cf. Is 53).

19:8. Pilate hears the charge very differently. Although many wandering philosophers claimed to be sons of gods and were not taken seriously, some teachers were thought to actually possess divine wisdom or power, and Pilate might be cautious not to offend such a powerful being. They also knew stories of deities coming in disguise and judging those who rejected them. Some Romans were cynical about the gods, but most believed in them, and Pilate might be especially cautious, given the reputation of Jewish magicians for being among the best in antiquity.

19:9. In ancient accounts, sometimes philosophers and especially Jewish martyrs refused to satisfy their judges.

19:10. Pilate's decree was legally binding in all capital cases; he did not even have to accept the recommendations of his *consilium,* or advisory council. He was authorized to judge in all cases regarding public order, even if no specific laws had been violated. Roman law did not take silence as an admission of guilt, but without a defense a defendant would be convicted by default. In any case, the issue with Pilate is no longer guilt or innocence but weighing the religious and political consequences of both decisions.

19:11. Judaism understood that rulers held authority only temporarily delegated them by God, who would judge in the end; "above" was sometimes a Jewish way of speaking of God (frequent in John). Here Jesus may imply that the authority of Caiaphas, unlike that of Pilate, is illegitimate; the high priesthood was to be for life, but high priests had been deposed and others installed at the whim and for the political expediency of the Romans. The Roman governor Valerius Gratus (A.D. 15–26) chose Caiaphas as a high priest cooperative with Rome, an approach Caiaphas had continued under Pilate.

19:12. Romans respected courage in the face of death (e.g., one ancient writer praises an ancient Spartan boy who silently let a fox eat away his entrails rather than break the rules of military training). Jesus' answer may also confirm Pilate's fear that Jesus is a genuinely divine messenger rather than a deluded street philosopher.

On October 18, A.D. 31, Sejanus, Pilate's political sponsor in Rome, fell from power, and Pilate had much to fear from any bad reports about him. But Jesus' trial probably took place before A.D. 31, and the accusation of 19:12 would be a fearful one even with Sejanus in power: the emperor Tiberius was suspicious of the least talk of treason, and a delegation to Rome providing the slightest evidence that Pilate had supported a self-proclaimed king could lead to Pilate's beheading. *Philo tells us that Pilate also backed down much earlier in his career when the Jewish leaders threatened to petition the emperor against him (*Embassy to Gaius* 301-2).

"Friends" of powerful *patrons were their political dependents, and to be the "friend of the emperor" (NRSV) or the "friend of Caesar" (KJV, NASB, NIV) was a special honor. "Friend of the king" had been an office in Greek and ancient Near Eastern palaces (including Israel, from David through Herod the Great; cf. 1 Kings 4:5; 1 Chron 27:33); "friend of the emperor" was likewise an official title with political implications. As a client of Sejanus, Tiberius's praetorian prefect and most trusted confidant at this point, it is possible that Pilate may have acquired this title (cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.8); otherwise it is intended figuratively.

19:13. Bad reports about one could hinder political ambitions. Some commentators have thought that the "Stone Pavement" is the pavement in the fortress Antonia on the temple mount, but that pavement seems to date from a later period. Instead the text undoubtedly refers to the raised, outdoor paved area near Herod's palace, where the governor resided when he visited Jerusalem. Other sources confirm that both Pilate and a later governor addressed audiences from this platform. Evidence suggests that the governor had to pronounce death sentences *pro tribunali,* from the judgment seat (see comment on Rom 14:10-12).

19:14. In slightly different wording, "Behold, your king" repeats part of the quotation in 12:15 (Zech 9:9), so that Pilate unwittingly proclaims truth. The "day of Preparation" (19:14, 31, 42) was the day that the Passover lamb would be slaughtered to be eaten that night (see comment on 18:28). (Jewish people reckoned days from sunset to sunset, so what most

people today would call Friday night they considered the beginning of the sabbath, or Saturday.) Later *rabbis estimated that offerings began earlier on Passover eve, but the slaughter of Passover lambs probably had to continue all day and was finally completed about the time the evening offering was slaughtered, roughly at the time (but not the day) when Jesus died in the *Synoptic Gospels (about 3 p.m.).

The "sixth hour" normally should mean noon but by a different (and much less likely) reckoning here could mean 6 a.m., close to dawn. John could use it for a symbolic connection with 4:6 or a symbolic connection with Passover (many scholars argue here that the slaughter of Passover lambs began about noon; this argument rests, however, on late and in this case improbable sources). (The other large Johannine work, Revelation, also uses time symbolically.) In any case, the narrative setting is noon, the hottest hour of the day; people would not normally be in public except for very important matters.

19:15. For Pilate to free someone accused of treason or of insulting the emperor's *maiestas* would invite the same accusation against himself, especially at this time under Tiberius, one of the most paranoid rulers of the first century. Although not accommodating when he did not need to be, Pilate is known to have acceded to mob demands on other occasions. As a provincial governor he officially had full discretion to decree the penalty. Crucifixion was the standard Roman method of execution for slaves, revolutionaries or other provincials who were not Roman citizens (such as most Palestinian Jews).

The authorities' cry is typical of the irony of John: Jewish people prayed daily for the royal Messiah, and one Jewish prayer that came to be part of the Passover celebration at least in later times acknowledges no king but God (see also comment on 8:33). (In this period, that precise language may have characterized those desiring to revolt against Rome.)

19:16. Although Pilate was not known for cooperating with the chief priests, neither was he such a poor politician as to risk negative reports about himself over a "minor" case. When a governor decreed that one would be executed, he would say something like, "You will mount the cross."

19:17-22
The Crucifixion

19:17. Normally prisoners were marched through crowds of onlookers, using a public execution to warn against rebellion. Condemned criminals normally carried their own cross (the horizontal beam, the *patibulum,* not the upright stake) to the site of the execution, where it would be affixed to the upright stake (*palus*). The victim was usually stripped naked for the procession and execution as well, although this full nakedness must have offended some Jewish sensibilities in Palestine.

Thus Jesus would probably be led from Herod's old palace, in the Upper City, through the garden gate (against the more traditional route envisioned by tourists).The probable site of Golgotha was outside the city wall and not far from Herod's palace—perhaps a thousand feet north/northeast of it. Roman custom placed crucifixions, and Jewish custom located stonings, outside towns rather than at their center (in the *Old Testament, cf. Lev 24:14, 23; Num 15:35-36; Deut 17:5; 21:19-21; 22:24; in the *New Testament, cf. Lk 4:29; Acts 7:58).

19:18. Romans could crucify people even on trees, but this public execution at a festival probably involves a more formal cross. Some scholars suggest that several stakes, normally at most about ten feet high, stood in Golgotha ready to be reused whenever executions occurred. (The stakes were low enough that dogs nibbled the feet of some crucifixion victims.) On the top of the stake or slightly below the top was often a groove into which the horizontal beam of the cross would be inserted after the prisoner had been fastened to it with ropes or nails (see some further comment on Mt 27:26).

19:19. Sometimes one would carry a *titulus* stating the reason for the condemned person's crucifixion, although it is not clear that it was usually displayed above the cross in this period. The charge against Jesus: one who attempted to usurp the prerogatives of royalty, which were properly dispensed only at the decree of Caesar. Jesus is charged with high treason against the majesty of the emperor, a charge that Jesus' followers would not have made up (followers of one executed for treason were themselves suspect).

19:20. The site of execution was necessarily outside the city, although the soldiers preferred that it be nearby (see comment on 19:17). Jewish people in the Roman Empire dealt with three or four basic languages: Greek, Latin, *Aramaic and Hebrew (of these, Greek especially was spoken outside Palestine and shared its prominence with Aramaic inside Palestine, which was the dominant language further to the east). Jewish inscriptions to foreigners were written in Greek and Latin. Even in Jerusalem, some very important inscriptions meant to warn all peoples were in both Greek and Latin; Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.194.

19:21-22. No longer faced with the possibility of mob unrest or a complaint to Tiberius, Pilate returns to his characteristic lack of cooperation. In about this same year, Pilate minted a cheap coin of Tiberius bearing the augur's wand—a pagan symbol quite offensive to Jewish sensibilities.

19:23-37
Jesus' Death

19:23. The "outer garments" would be the rectangular cloth used in bad weather, the inside "tunic" a sleeveless, tightly fitting shirt. Usually the latter was made of two cloths stitched together, so a seamless tunic was more valuable. Roman law as later codified in Roman legal Digests granted the soldiers the right to the clothes the executed man was wearing; it was customary to execute the condemned man naked. The basic unit of the Roman army was the *contubernium,* composed of eight soldiers who shared a tent; half-units of four soldiers each were sometimes assigned to special tasks, such as execution quads.

19:24. John's mention that the soldiers do not want to "tear" it might allude to the *high priest's garment in the *Old Testament (Lev 21:10), which Josephus mentions was also seamless. This interpretation, however, probably reads too much into the text; the wording in Leviticus is quite different. That it was seamless may simply suggest that, as a woven rather than knitted garment, it was more valuable. John finds two distinct acts in Psalm 22:18 (a common ancient Jewish method of interpretation), as Matthew does in Zechariah 9:9 (see comment on Mt 21:4-7). Casting lots was a conventional way to decide disputed matters, leaving the decision to deities (see comment on Acts 1:26); the soldiers may have brought dice or other games to pass the time, or they may create makeshift lots on the spot.

19:25. The evidence is disputed as to whether relatives and close friends were allowed near crucifixions; they probably usually were. In either case, the soldiers supervising the execution may have looked the other way in practice if they had no reason to forbid it; the prerogatives of motherhood were highly respected in the ancient world. People usually permitted women more latitude in mourning, even in cases when the person being mourned was a criminal, hence often not to be mourned. At the same time, ancients usually considered women less courageous on average than men, and the absence of most male *disciples could shame the absent men.

19:26-27. Because Jesus may not be elevated far above the ground, Jesus' mother and disciple can hear him without being extremely close to the cross. A dying person could make an oral testament even from the cross, so long as witnesses were available; the eldest son might be responsible for his widowed mother's care, and testaments sometimes delegated such care. If a widow's eldest son died, normally younger sons would care for her; Jesus had brothers (cf. 7:3-5). Yet Jesus formally places his mother under his disciple's protection, providing for her after his death. Dying fathers could exhort sons to take care of surviving mothers (which they normally would do); for a disciple to be accorded a role in his teacher's family was a great honor to the disciple (disciples sometimes called their teachers "father").

A primary responsibility which Jewish custom included in "honoring one's father and mother" was providing for them (cf. 1 Sam 22:3) in their old age. Jesus' mother is probably in her mid to late forties, is probably a widow and lives in a society where women rarely earned much income; she is therefore officially especially dependent on her eldest son, Jesus, for support, although after his death her younger sons would support her.

19:28. Some scholars have suggested that Jesus may have recited the rest of Psalm 22 after the verse cited by Mark (15:34); in the

light of Mark 15:35, this suggestion is not likely, but those who were most biblically informed would know how the psalm continued, and some think that John could allude here to the same psalm (Ps 22:15).

19:29-30. "Hyssop" was not the most natural instrument to use for this purpose. If this plant is identified as the *Origanum maru l.*, its stalk is over three feet long; others claim that it is a very small plant that could not have reached far, and they suggest a play on words with the similar-sounding term for "javelin." In either case, John presumably *mentions* hyssop because of its significance in the Passover (Ex 12:22), fitting the symbolism of John 19 as a whole. A low cross (cf. 19:18) would not have required a long reed. "Sour wine" probably refers to *poska,* consisting of cheap wine vinegar mixed with water; it was often used by soldiers and laborers to quench their thirst; cf. vinegar in Ps 69:21.

19:31-33. Those bound with ropes often survived on the cross several days (e.g., Josephus, *Life* 420-21). The dying man could rest himself on a wooden seat (Latin *sedile*) in the middle of the cross. This support allowed him to breathe—and prolonged the agony of his death, until (often) blood loss or dehydration killed him. When the soldiers needed to hasten death by asphyxiation, they would break the legs of the victims with iron clubs so they could no longer push themselves up; *Cicero and others attest this custom of leg breaking. Romans might have allowed the bodies to rot on the crosses (and feed vultures), but Deuteronomy 21:23 and Jewish sensitivities about the sabbath require that these executions be speeded up, and Romans often accommodated Judean leaders' wishes particularly during the crowded festivals. (Josephus declares that Jewish people always buried crucifixion victims before sunset.)

19:34. Some scholars suggest, on some evidence, that Roman execution squads sometimes pierced victims to ensure that they were dead. Jewish tradition also required certification that a person was dead before the person could be treated as dead, but Jewish observers would not treat the body as disrespectfully as this Roman does. (Probably less relevant, according to a probably first-century Jewish tradition, the priests were supposed to pierce Passover lambs with a wood pole from their mouth to their buttocks.)

A foot soldier was armed with a short sword and a *pilum,* or lance; the *pilum* was of light wood with an iron head, and was about three and a half feet long. Such a lance could easily penetrate the pericardial sac that surrounds and protects the heart and contains watery fluid. A Greek might read this description as referring to a demigod, because Greek gods had ichor (which looked like water) instead of blood. But the person who has read the Gospel from start to finish would see in it a symbolic fulfillment of Old Testament and Jewish hopes; see comment on 7:37-39.

19:35. Eyewitness accounts were considered more valuable than secondhand accounts, and narrators who were eyewitnesses (like Josephus) make note of that fact. Narrator-authors in antiquity also sometimes described themselves in the first person, third person, or both.

19:36. John here could allude to Psalm 34:20 or (fitting the context here) to the prohibition of breaking the bones of the Passover lamb (Ex 12:46; Num 9:12), or (some suggest) John could *midrashically blend allusions to both texts. Pre-Christian Jewish tradition preserves this practice of avoiding breaking the lamb's bones (**Jubilees* 49:13), and Jewish teaching (second century or earlier) stipulates a maximum corporal punishment for breaking the Passover lamb's bones.

19:37. Although a late rabbinic passage interpreted Zechariah 12:10 messianically, the passage itself seems to refer to *God's* having been pierced by the people of Jerusalem (before the coming of Jesus one would have assumed a figurative sense, "pierced with sorrow"). This would fit John's Christology, although cf. also Zechariah 12:8. (Pronouns with divine referents seem to change readily in Zechariah; cf. 2:8-11 and 4:8-9, unless an angel is in view—4:4-6.) The same passage in Zechariah (12:10) apparently refers to God pouring out his *Spirit.

19:38-42
Jesus' Burial

The traditional Catholic and Orthodox site of Jesus' tomb is probably fairly accurate. Ev-

eryone knew that burials must be outside city walls, yet this site is within Jerusalem's walls. Archaeology reveals, however, that Herod Agrippa I expanded the walls of Jerusalem while he was king of Judea (A.D. 41–44) and that this site was *outside* the walls at the historic time of Jesus' burial. The memory of the site thus goes back to within roughly a decade of the event, hence is a fresh and likely accurate memory.

19:38. Crucifixion victims were usually thrown into a common grave for criminals and were not to be mourned publicly after their death; had the Romans had their way, the corpses would not have been buried at all, but such behavior would have needlessly provoked otherwise peaceful local residents. Local Jewish leaders probably normally deposited the bodies in criminals' graves for a year before handing them over to families. But exceptions seem to have been made at times if family or powerful *patrons interceded for the body, naturally inviting comment as in the Gospels. Burying the dead was a crucial and pious duty in Judaism, and an important act of love; being unburied was too horrible to be permitted even for criminals (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.202, 264-65). Scripture and tradition mandated it before sundown (Deut 21:23; Josephus, *Jewish War* 4.317). To accomplish his task before sundown and the advent of the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea has to hurry.

Roman authorities did sometimes hand over bodies to friends or relatives who desired to bury them. Nevertheless, Joseph's request for Jesus' body was an act of courage. Especially for someone outside the family to make the request, it could identify one with the person executed for treason. Far from Joseph's wealth and influence protecting him, it could have also made him a target of special scrutiny and envy. Joseph acts more courageously here than do Jesus' previously public *disciples.

19:39. If this measure of Nicodemus's mixture is one of weight, it is as much as seventy-five modern pounds (more than thirty kilograms; Roman pounds were lighter than modern pounds); less likely, some have suggested a measure of volume identified with the *Old Testament *log,* hence less than seventy fluid ounces. In either case it is a lavish expression of devotion, as in 12:3; but seventy-five pounds is perhaps a hundred times costlier than the lavish gift of 12:3. Other accounts of lavish devotion for beloved teachers are occasionally reported (a *Gentile convert allegedly burned eighty pounds of spices at the funeral of Gamaliel I, Paul's teacher); indeed, five hundred servants carried all the spices for Herod the Great's funeral (Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.673; *Jewish Antiquities* 17.199). Myrrh was used for embalming the dead, and aloes for perfume.

19:40. John mentions the Jewish custom; Jewish people did not burn dead heroes, as some Gentiles did, or mutilate them for embalming, as Egyptians did. Bodies were wrapped in shrouds, sometimes expensive ones, especially prepared for burials. Jewish sources are emphatic that none of these actions may be undertaken unless the person is clearly dead; thus those burying Jesus have no doubt that he is dead. Here strips of linen rather than a full shroud are used, perhaps because of the imminent approach of the sabbath at sundown.

White linen garments were worn by Jewish priests, by some other ancient priests (devotees of Isis) and by angels in Jewish tradition (e.g., 2 Maccabees 11:8); they were also wrappings for the righteous dead. Spices reduced the odor of decomposition.

19:41. On the locale, see "near the city" in verse 20: according to Jewish custom, burials had to be outside the city walls (one may compare the outrage of pious Jews over Antipas's building Tiberias on a graveyard). To be buried in a tomb not yet used was no doubt a special honor and would make the tomb difficult to confuse with others in the vicinity. Tombs were sometimes in garden areas (cf. 2 Kings 21:18, 26). Most Judean tombs were private burial sites belonging to families; often caves were used, and often entrances were sealed with a large, disk-shaped stone that could not be removed from within and were moved from outside only with considerable effort. A tomb belonging to a wealthy person such as Joseph might have a stone a full yard or meter in diameter. Other tombs in this area suggest some wealth of the tomb owners (cf. Mt 27:60). On the site, see comment on Matthew 27:60.

19:42. The sabbath (or the coming of Passover—18:28) interrupted all other activities. One could wash and even anoint a body on the sabbath, due to the rapid decomposition of bodies, but more complete burial activities would have to wait. (Because Jesus was condemned as a criminal, there would be no public funeral.) The women needed to return home before dark. Joseph and Nicodemus did not need to "lay" Jesus there very carefully; this would have been only a preliminary burial even had the sabbath not approached, to be completed fully a year later, after the flesh had rotted off the bones.

20:1-10
The Discovery

Some have doubted the empty tomb story simply because Paul does not mention it (although he presupposes it, since by definition Jewish "*resurrection" left no corpse behind; cf. 1 Cor 15:3-4), but the *disciples could not have credibly proclaimed the resurrection in Jerusalem if Jesus' body were still in the tomb. Although ancient laws of evidence differed somewhat from modern ones (they depended heavily on probability), ancients, like moderns, would not have staked their lives on a report without investigating the tomb! Given how readily holy sites were venerated, many early believers probably also preserved the site of the tomb. Those modern critical scholars who have suggested that the original disciples meant only that they had a spiritual experience but did not claim that Jesus rose bodily read their own modern culture into the *New Testament: "resurrection" meant bodily resurrection and nothing else, and no one would have persecuted the disciples for claiming that they had had merely a spiritual experience. Mere belief in ghosts and apparitions was widespread and would not have embroiled them in significant controversy.

20:1. The nearest of kin would remain home mourning for seven days; Mary Magdalene, who might have grieved as much as the family, might have remained inside had it not been necessary to complete the work left unfinished due to the sabbath (19:42). But Jewish mourners as well as pagans were often known to visit tombs within the three days after the burial.

The first day of the week began at sundown on what we would call Saturday night, so the sabbath had ended hours before she approaches the tomb; going out at night, however, was rare. Although not coming at night, Mary does not wait till full light of dawn; that she would approach the tomb before daylight demonstrates her eager devotion to Jesus. Disk-shaped stones were often rolled in front of the entrances of tombs and were so heavy that they frequently required several men to roll them away.

20:2-3. Romans saw to it that those crucified were dead; on the rare occasion where a crucifixion was stopped and a person taken down and given medical help, they usually died anyway. Apart from a resurrection, which no one expected, Mary could only imagine that the body had been stolen (not very common in Jewish Palestine), that the authorities had confiscated it (to put it temporarily in a criminals' common grave), or that owners of the site had moved it. Ancient Jewish men did not accept women as reliable witnesses for most legal purposes (their witness was also limited in Roman courts), because many believed they were too moved by emotion. It had also been dark when Mary first reached the tomb. Still, they would in any case want to learn what happened to the body.

20:4. Comparison of characters was important in ancient writing and a standard *rhetorical technique; it could often elevate one person without denigrating the other, especially if they were friends. Athletic prowess was one ancient basis for comparison, especially concerning young men. Depictions of physical prowess were part of *narratives extolling characters (e.g., *Josephus outswims most others in *Life* 15). That the beloved disciple is faster than Peter fits some other comparisons in the Gospel (13:23-24; 21:7).

20:5. The stooping suggests a tomb with a low entrance leading to a lower pit; the lighting or the positioning of Jesus' body (e.g., on shelves to either side) would explain why the head veil was not visible before entering.

20:6-7. Had robbers stolen the body (a rare practice) they would have taken it hastily in its wrappings; had they left the wrappings, they would have left them in disarray (and likely left the body with it). Whoever left the

wrappings, left them there neatly. The face cloth separate from the linen is not merely "folded up" (ESV) but "rolled up" (NASB, NRSV, GNT). Again, this could be an indication of neatness, but some think that it was still rolled the way it had been when it was wrapped around Jesus' head—that his body had risen straight out of the wrappings and cloth.

The skeptic's proposal that Jesus had only swooned and then recovered would not explain how he could have loosed the strips tied around him or escaped a sealed tomb, but it also ignores the nature of crucifixion: Josephus had three of his friends taken down alive from a cross, but two of them died *despite medical attention* because their bodies had been so weakened from the crucifixion.

20:8-10. This disciple's faith may have been due to parallels with John 11 or to the way the cloths were laid (20:6-7) or to how this event climaxed the disciples' earlier experience with Jesus; John implies that they would have already believed it from Scripture had they understood.

20:11-18
The First Appearance: Mary Magdalene

Ancient Mediterranean culture did not value highly the witness of women; that Jesus first appears to a woman would not have been fabricated and shows us how Jesus' values differ from those of his culture. Even the later *church did not always maintain Jesus' countercultural stance, and they would hardly have chosen such initial witnesses in an environment where this account would reinforce pagan prejudices against Christians (see comments on Eph 5:22-33).

20:11. Jewish people took the first seven days of mourning so seriously that mourners could not wash, work, have intercourse or even study the *law. Jewish culture was serious about expressing rather than repressing grief. That the body is missing and thus people are prevented from bestowing final acts of love would be regarded as intolerably tragic; even Gentile tomb robbers usually left the body behind.

20:12-13. Among the many associations of white, angels were normally thought to be arrayed in white; see further comment on 19:40; black garments were used for mourning.

20:14. In Jewish tradition, angels could appear in different forms (e.g., Tobit 5:4; 12:19). Jewish traditions in *Pseudo-Philo also speak of God changing the appearance of some *Old Testament human characters so they would not be recognized, and this evidence might reflect more widespread Jewish tradition.

20:15. Gardeners were at the bottom of the social scale, and a gardener there would have tended to the gardening (cf. 19:41), rather than to the tomb itself. But Mary has no better guess concerning his identity. (That he could be a tomb robber does not occur to Mary; tomb robbers were unlikely to come during the mourning period, when visits to the tomb were still frequent, and such robbers would be extremely rare in Jewish Palestine.)

20:16. "Rabboni" means "my teacher" and is more personal and less formal than the title "Rabbi."

20:17. It may be relevant (depending on one's interpretation of 20:17) that ancient texts sometimes included predictions of events fulfilled only after the close of the *narrative. On ascensions, see comment on Acts 1:9-11. The verb translated "Touch me not" (KJV) is a present imperative and might be better translated "Stop clinging to me" (NASB). The reason she must release him is that she must go testify for him in the short time remaining in view of his coming ascension—despite the cultural opposition to sending a woman to testify to such an important event and one so impossible for unbelievers to accept. "Brothers" suggests that 3:3 is now in effect. People applied sibling language figuratively to members of one's people, fellow disciples, friends, and others.

20:18. Ancient Mediterranean culture esteemed the testimony of women far less than that of men (and in some circles did not normally accept it). Jesus' sending Mary with the message transcended usual cultural expectations.

20:19-23
Appearing to Other Disciples

20:19. Even aside from the Feast of Unleavened Bread still going on, the heaviest period of mourning normally lasted seven days, so none of them would have left Jerusalem for Galilee yet anyway. The *disciples would remain inside to mourn. Residences often were equipped with bolts and locks. Bolted doors

would prevent anyone from entering (a heavy bolt could be slid through rings attached to the door and its frame), unless one could walk through closed doors. Jesus' appearance in the locked room suggests a *resurrection body whose nature is superior to that often envisioned in other ancient Jewish literature. "Peace be with you" (i.e., may God cause it to be well with you) was the standard Jewish greeting, but it was meant to communicate peace (like a thoughtful "God bless you" today).

20:20. Wounds were sometimes used as evidence in court or to show how much one had sacrificed for the cause. Here their function is to identify that it is the same Jesus who died; scars could be employed to identify someone. In much of Jewish tradition, the dead would be resurrected in the same form in which they died before God healed them, so that everyone would recognize that the person who stood before them was the same one who had died (cf. **2 Baruch* 50:2-4; *rabbis). "Hands" includes one's wrists, which was presumably where the spikes would have been driven; a nail through the palm would not have secured the person in place on the cross, since the victim's weight would have ripped the hand open (though they were also tied).

20:21. In Jewish tradition prophets often appointed their successors. Judaism sometimes conceived of prophets as God's agents; the sender authorized agents with his authority to the extent that they accurately represented him (see "*apostle" in the glossary).

20:22. Jesus' breathing on them recalls Genesis 2:7, when God breathed into Adam the breath of life (it might also be relevant that later Jewish tradition sometimes connected this passage with Ezek 37, when God's Spirit or wind revives the dead). Jewish literature especially connected the *Holy Spirit with the power to prophesy, or speak for God. In the *Old Testament and early Judaism, God himself is the sole giver of the Spirit.

20:23. Acting as God's agents (20:21) the disciples could pronounce the divine prerogative on his authority (i.e., pronouncing it when he would do so).

20:24-31
Appearing to Thomas

20:24-25. In different languages, both "Thomas" and "Didymus" mean "twin," possibly a nickname. Only the evidence of his senses would persuade Thomas that the other *disciples had not seen merely a phantom or apparition; a ghost or spiritual vision as in pagan tradition, or an image produced by a magician, would not be corporeal. The *resurrection body, by contrast, was clearly corporeal, although the exact nature of such corporeality may have been debated among early Christians. Thomas does not doubt that his friends think they saw something; he doubts only the nature of their experience.

20:26. See comment on 20:19. Now that a week had passed, the feast would be over and the disciples would thus soon be ready to return to Galilee unless they received orders to the contrary.

20:27. Soldiers could bind victims to crosses with rope, but also could nail them to crosses through their wrists.

20:28. Thomas's response, the climactic confession of Jesus' identity in this Gospel, is a confession of Jesus' deity; cf. Revelation 4:11. Pliny, a governor writing near the probable location of John's readers two or three decades after John, reports that Christians sing hymns to *Christ "as to a god." By contrast, the Roman historian *Suetonius reports that the emperor Domitian (probably reigning when John was writing) wanted to be honored as "Lord God" (*Life of Domitian* 13). Most importantly, "Lord" and "God" appear together repeatedly in the *Septuagint as divine titles, including in forms similar to "my Lord and my God" (Ps 35:23 [34:23 LXX]; Hos 2:23 [2:25 LXX]).

20:29-31. Jesus' blessing (v. 29) applies to the readers of John who believe through the apostolic testimony (v. 31), and Thomas's confession (v. 28) helps define the content of saving faith in verse 31. Verse 30 is the culmination of John's signs motif: signs sometimes lead to faith and sometimes lead to opposition. Narrators sometimes noted that they had many more stories than they could recount (v. 30).

21:1-14
Appearing in Galilee

Some modern scholars have thought that John 21 was not part of the original Gospel of John because it seems anticlimactic. But the conclusion (book 24) of the most popularly read

work of Greco-Roman antiquity, the *Iliad,* is also anticlimactic; ancient readers and writers would not have viewed epilogues as "later additions" or the like because of their anticlimactic character.

21:1-3. Even around the lake of Galilee, agriculture constituted the primary occupation; fishing was nevertheless a major industry there, and fishing there often provided an ample income. Fishing was often done at night (cf. Lk 5:5). Some people have reported that fish are more easily caught at night than in the day on the Sea of Galilee (here called Tiberias); they could then be sold in the morning. Nets were probably made of rope woven from substances like flax or hemp. At night fish tended to be in the deep water, so were more easily caught with a dragnet, a net with a narrow end pulled by the men in the boat and a wider end sunk by attached weights. Fishermen working at night could use torches to illumine their work. We do not know for certain what tools the *disciples had used—only that they had not caught anything.

21:5-6. Jewish tradition recognized God as sovereign over fish (e.g., Tobit 6:2-5), which no doubt encouraged many fishermen's prayers. Some suggest that the steering oar was normally on the right side of the boat, so that casting was normally done from the left. In any case, Jesus' command is unusual, given their failure to catch fish all night.

21:7. Peter should not need help recognizing Jesus, but cf. 20:4-5. For comparisons of Peter and the beloved disciple, see comment on 20:4-5. Many hearers in antiquity respected youthful or athletic prowess, and many also viewed fishermen as tough; they might also view Peter swimming to Jesus as an athletic expression of his devotion to him. "Naked" was used as a relative term (it could mean "without an outer garment"). Greeks stripped for strenuous work, but religious Palestinian Jews avoided nakedness in public. Peter has an inner garment or at least a loincloth on; but even in the cool of dawn he may have worked up enough of a sweat to have kept his outer garment off. (The Sea of Galilee is lower in elevation than Jerusalem.) The term that John uses for Peter girding on his outer garment suggests that he wrapped it around his waist.

21:8. Deep fishing with a dragnet was often better for the night, but a single boat's net was usually more useful for fishing in shallower waters during day. Peter swam; a hundred yards is too far out for Peter to have waded.

21:9-10. Although Jesus provides as he did in chapter 6, this time he gives them a chance to share as the lad had in 6:9. The very small class of leisured, wealthy landowners in the Roman Empire despised manual labor, but most manual laborers seem to have taken pride in their work (they mention their occupations on their tombstones); Jesus affirms their fishing, even though that too had been his provision (21:5-6).

21:11. On Peter's lavish display of physical prowess devoted to Jesus, see comment on 21:7. Jerome claimed that ancient zoologists counted 153 kinds of fish, but extant copies of their writings do not support his hypothesis, which may have stemmed from an attempt to explain this verse; various counts of their number circulated. Various symbolic interpretations of "153" have been offered (from Hebrew words that total 153 when their numerical value is reckoned, to it being a triangular number that would have impressed ancient *Pythagorean philosophers). But ancient miracle stories would stress numbers to heighten the reality of the miracle (e.g., 2 Kings 19:35); 153 is no doubt used because the disciples were impressed enough to have counted the fish. (What fishermen would not have counted such a catch?) The risen Lord has provided them more fish than they could possibly eat by themselves.

21:12-14. The host or the head of the household would usually pass out the bread; cf. 6:11. The term for the meal here in this period could also apply to a light midday meal, though it had earlier applied to a light morning meal (cf. 21:4).

21:15-23
Two Commissions

21:15-17. Most scholars view the two Greek words for "love" here as being used interchangeably, as they are elsewhere in John and generally in the literature of this period; use of synonyms for *rhetorical variation was common in antiquity. The point is not (against some popular interpreters) in the different terms, but that love for Jesus must be demon-

strated by obedience to his call and service to his people. As a "follower," Peter is one of the sheep himself (10:4; on "sheep," see comment on Jn 10:1-18; for the background on faithful shepherds to feed them, see Jer 23:4; cf. Ezek 34).

21:18-19. Predictions in antiquity were often enigmatic; this one indicates that Peter will not have control even over dressing himself (cf. 21:7) for a journey—in this case, being prepared for execution. Some others employed dependence as an image of powerlessness. Stretching out hands could apply to supplication, but in this context may fit instead voluntary submission to binding, which preceded execution. Some early Christian texts, perhaps developing the idea here, apply "stretching out hands" to crucifixion. For "glorifying" God like Jesus in martyrdom, see 12:23-27; strong tradition declares that Peter was crucified in Rome under Nero about A.D. 64.

21:20-23. Jesus told Peter that the beloved disciple's call was not a matter for Peter to know about, but this tradition was misinterpreted to mean that the beloved disciple would live till Jesus' return. The point is that Jesus has the right to choose who will be martyred and who will survive. According to strong (though not unanimous) tradition, John was one of the few original *apostles to escape martyrdom.

21:24-25
Attestation of Witnesses

21:24. Greco-Roman and Jewish legal documents typically ended with attestation by witnesses. "We know that his witness is true" may be a postscript added by John's own *disciples, attesting to the veracity of his eyewitness, although it is not beyond John to write such words himself (19:35; cf. the plural witness in 1 John, e.g., 1:1-4).

21:25. When writers had more data before them than they could record, they often noted that they were being selective. Thus, for example, the exploits of Judas Maccabeus were too many to narrate all of them (so 1 Maccabees 9:22), or no human could recount all the sufferings of the Achaians (Homer, *Odyssey* 3.113-17). Greek, Jewish and *Samaritan writers often included *hyperboles like this one as well, sometimes speaking of how the world could not contain the knowledge a particular *rabbi had of the *law, and so forth.

Acts

Introduction

Authorship. The style and themes of Acts clearly reflect the same authorship as those of the Gospel of Luke. Luke varies between Greek contemporary prose style and a Jewish style of Greek heavily influenced by the *Septuagint.

The author claims to be an eyewitness of some secondary incidents (see comment on Acts 16:10), to have therefore known direct sources for much of his information, and to have acquired thorough knowledge of the rest (Lk 1:1-4). The idea of modern scholars that Luke's use of "we" in Acts to indicate something other than his actual presence reflects a modern agenda rather than sensitivity to the first-century background, for historical works in antiquity barely ever used "we" fictitiously.

Once one accepts the possibility that a traveling companion of Paul authored the work, the tradition that Luke (a physician, Col 4:14) is the author of Luke-Acts has nothing against it and fits what little we know about Luke. A number of terms in Luke-Acts are frequent in medical literature, although most of these terms also occur elsewhere, so this terminology alone would not prove Lukan authorship. Physicians could be lower class, even slaves, but were generally well educated; the presence of women in that field (especially midwifery) may have made some physicians more conscious of women's concerns (which Luke-Acts is).

Date. Most scholars date Luke-Acts between 70 and 90, with a smaller number dating it in the 60s and a still smaller number dating it later. Because Acts breaks off before Paul's death, some scholars have suggested that Acts (and hence Luke or its hypothetical earlier draft, proto-Luke) was written before A.D. 64. Others, reading Luke 21, suggest a date after A.D. 70, saying that Acts breaks off about A.D. 62 for literary reasons or because Luke needed only *positive* legal precedents. (Acts is not a biography of Paul, and Luke has reason to end on the climactic note of the *gospel reaching Rome.) The evidence is not conclusive on either side, but because Luke clearly used the Gospel of Mark as a source, dating Luke-Acts to A.D. 62 would call into question the usual dating of Mark to A.D. 64. Because of this and possible allusions to the temple's past destruction, the majority of scholars therefore date Luke-Acts later, sometime after 70. Neither the dating of Mark nor that of Luke-

Acts is secure, but this commentary tentatively accepts a date for the latter in the early to mid-seventies. Later dates appear less likely. Because Acts recalls in some detail riots that would be counterproductive to narrate unless one could not avoid the truth that they happened, it undoubtedly reflects recent memories that must be addressed. (The charge that Paul was guilty of stirring riots, 24:5, would disturb people loyal to Roman order, and the riots would need to be explained both during his custody and in the wake of his execution.)

Purpose: Legal. One purpose of the work is to record consistent legal precedents in favor of the early Christians. In Acts every Roman court declares Christians not guilty, and this record has so impressed some scholars that they have suggested Luke wrote Acts as a court brief on Paul's behalf. Acts, however, is a *narrative, not a list of precedents. More likely, Luke cites a wide range of legal precedents from different local courts (which would be helpful but not binding) for the same reason that *Josephus does on behalf of Judaism: to argue that Christianity should enjoy continued legal protection in the empire. Luke thus gives Christians legal ammunition (Lk 21:15) and paves the way for later Christian lawyers and philosophers like Tertullian and *Justin Martyr, who would argue for the toleration of Christianity. That Paul's custody and several speeches consume the final quarter of Acts reveals how important it is for Luke to answer the false charges against him.

Purpose: Apologetic. The apologetic in Acts extends beyond Roman law and beyond Paul's case. All history was written with a purpose; it was influenced by *rhetoric and (to a lesser extent) wider literary and dramatic conventions, and was also used to illustrate moral principles. Josephus uses it to justify God and Israel after the war of A.D. 70; *Plutarch and *Livy use it to teach morals; even *Tacitus writes as an aristocrat longing for the grandeur of old Rome. History with a theme or focal point (church history, social history, African-American history, etc.) is no less history for having an interest or editorial perspective. Luke's apologetic purpose is often advanced in the book's speeches.

Acts works on several fronts: the gospel confronts Roman law courts, Greek philosophers, rural Asian farmers and others on their own terms, and nothing can stop it. A major theme is the relationship of Christianity to Judaism. Ancient religions were respected by virtue of their age, and Christians needed to demonstrate that the *Old Testament was their book and that they were the authentic voice of Judaism (despite the opposition of much of the Jewish community of Luke's day to this claim). Luke develops this theme by displaying the fulfillment of Old Testament motifs.

Genre: History. The majority of scholars view Acts as a historical monograph, that is, a historical work focused on a specific topic (in contrast to many historians' multivolume histories of expansive subjects). Historians were permitted a

wide degree of latitude on details, although they were expected to get the bulk of a story right insofar as their sources were accurate. By ancient standards, Luke is meticulously careful with his sources in the Gospel (Lk 1:1-4), and we may regard him as no less trustworthy in Acts, where we can often check him against letters of Paul (few of which would have been available to Luke). Some sections of Acts also include eyewitness accounts of someone who journeyed with Paul; contrary to the opinion of some scholars, "we" normally *did* literally mean "we" in ancient narratives. Luke is a careful enough editor that had he not meant to include himself in the company of Paul, he would not have allowed an earlier source's "we" to stand. First-person pronouns appear in historical writing (such as Josephus) as well as novels, but only historical works had historical prologues (Lk 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2).

Many historical writers also sought an entertaining, lively style just as novelists did; thus the mention of "plot devices" in the following commentary means only that Luke was a good writer, not that he was an inaccurate historian. He was, however, a more popular and less rhetorical historian than most extant ancient historians; like them, he was interested in recounting a cohesive story, but unlike them, he was not interested in showing off lavish rhetoric. "Historian" was not a distinct profession and was practiced by many educated people. Even elite historians who were professional orators, however, like Tacitus, could stick very close to the events (and the substance, though usually not the wording, of speeches) as their sources provided them.

The question of the speeches' historicity invites special comment. Ancient writers never recorded speeches verbatim (cf. even Acts 2:40); they took notes if they were present, got the gist and were guided by their knowledge (when available) of the speechmaker's style and proper speechmaking technique. Historians sometimes fabricated speeches (as Josephus does for a speech at Masada with no surviving credible witnesses) but used the basic thrust of the speech when data about it was available. Luke's editing brings out some consistent themes in the apostolic-proclamation speeches in Acts, but we may also be confident that they also reflect whatever Luke knew of the speeches or kind of speeches in those settings. Acts's speeches are significant for the book's purpose; they make up roughly one-fourth of the book.

Luke-Acts may be closer to standard forms of Greco-Roman historical writing than are the other Gospels, which resemble ancient biography. Whereas Matthew, Mark and John wrote forms of ancient biography, Luke's second volume shows that he wrote history as well. Some multivolume histories had a volume or two devoted to an individual person; when viewed by itself, that volume would be read as biography, but when read with the rest of the work, as a part of a larger history.

Luke and Acts are each roughly the same length as Matthew, with Mark one-half

and John two-thirds that length, indicating scrolls of standardized lengths (Matthew, Luke and Acts were each close to the maximum length for normal scrolls, between thirty-two and thirty-five feet). In the first volume, Luke writes about Jesus; in the second volume, Luke writes about the *Spirit's activity in the Jewish and *Gentile *churches, especially through the figures of Peter and Paul. Many ancient writers would make comparisons between figures as part of their historiographic technique. (*Plutarch is especially known for paralleling Greek and Roman figures in his biographies; perhaps more to the point, 1 Kings 17–2 Kings 13 seems to compare Elijah and his successor Elisha.)

Message. Aside from the themes already mentioned and typical Lukan emphases on prayer, signs and wonders, and the Spirit, Luke's whole book is structured around world evangelization (1:8), with six or eight summary statements throughout the book displaying the spread of the *gospel (see 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31). For Luke, the ultimate goal is crosscultural communication and world evangelization, and the requisite power to carry out the task is only the *Holy Spirit.

Commentaries. For the background used here, see in greatest detail Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary,* 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–). Many other commentaries also provide much useful background, including C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles,* 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994–1998); Darrell L. Bock, *Acts,* BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary,* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* AB 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998); Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles,* SP 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992); Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts,* PCNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); and Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Other helpful works for background include especially Bruce Winter, ed., *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting,* 6 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993–), all vols.; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004); and F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity,* 5 vols. (1933; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979). Examples of excellent monographs on specific topics include, among many others, Loveday C. A. Alexander, *Acts in its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles,* LNTS 298 (London: T & T Clark International, 2005); Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, ed. Conrad H. Gempf, WUNT 49 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989); Youngmo Cho, *Spirit and Kingdom in the Writings of Luke and Paul: An Attempt to Reconcile these Concepts* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005); Martin Hengel and Anna Maria

Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Osvaldo Padilla, *The Speeches of Outsiders in Acts: Poetics, Theology and Historiography,* SNTSM 144 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Stanley E. Porter, *Paul in Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001); Brian M. Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and Clare K. Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the Rhetoric of History: An Investigation of Early Christian Historiography,* WUNT 2.175 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

1:1-5
Preparing to Go

In a two-volume work it was common to recapitulate the theme or the end of the first volume in the beginning of the second. Thus Luke 24:36-53 is recapitulated in Acts 1:1-14, repeating many points in greater detail. Historians had freedom to arrange materials in their own words and to paraphrase, and readers would have regarded different wording in two volumes of the same work as variation for the sake of readability, not as an accidental oversight. (This pattern also should warn us not to read modern expectations of verbatim quotation into ancient works that no one read that way.)

1:1. This is not an uncommon way to begin a second volume. "Began" is common Lukan style and could simply reflect a Semitic or Koine (the common Greek dialect) figure of speech, but theologically it may indicate that Acts continues a report of Jesus' works through the *church. Theophilus may be the *patron, or sponsor, of the work, to whom Luke formally dedicates it (as was frequent; see comment on Lk 1:3-4). A writer could also dedicate a work to any person of status who might help circulate the work or whose name in the dedication might be thought useful to circulating the work. Theophilus was a common *Diaspora Jewish name and undoubtedly represents a real person; although the name means "lover of God," symbolic dedicatees were virtually unknown.

1:2-3. Sample evidences were reported in Luke 24, and the forty days here (perhaps mirroring Luke 4:2) allows for the Galilean ministry reported in the other Gospels. Greeks also wanted eyewitnesses to document the epiphanies (or appearances) of their gods or goddesses, but those appearances were not clearly physical or sustained over such a long period of personal contact.

1:4. "Gathering together" (NASB) is literally "took salt together," but this was already an idiom for table fellowship. Eating together was the ultimate sign of physicality (in many Jewish traditions, angels could not genuinely eat human food; cf. Lk 24:42-43) and intimacy (see comment on Lk 5:29-32).

1:5. The *Holy Spirit was associated both with purification (thus "*baptism") and wisdom or *prophecy in segments of ancient Judaism. But the emphasis was usually on the ability to prophesy (speak for God under his inspiration), and Luke especially emphasizes this aspect of the Spirit (see esp. 2:17-18).

1:6-11
Coming and Going

1:6. This question was the most natural one for the *disciples to ask Jesus. He had been talking about the *kingdom (1:3), and the references to the outpouring of the *Spirit in the *Old Testament were all in the context of Israel's restoration (Is 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 36:25-28; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28–3:1).

1:7. See Matthew 24:36. Jewish *apocalyptic writers often saw history as divided into epochs determined by God, yet they sometimes used their calculations of the epochs to predict that they were near the end. Jesus says that the Father has determined the time but not revealed it. Some Jewish sources believed that human obedience could hasten the end; others that God had ordained the time immutably. (Because much of Judaism embraced both God's sovereignty and human will, these options need not always have been mutually exclusive.)

1:8. Although the time of Israel's restoration might be unknown, the end-time mission given to Israel, to be Spirit-anointed witnesses (Is 42:1, 4, 6; 43:10-12; 44:3, 8), is being given now. The disciples are thus to serve as the prophetic remnant within Israel, and Isaiah's witnesses for God here are witnesses for Jesus. (When Israel had disobeyed God, he had always kept a remnant; see comment on Rom 11:1-5.) In Luke-Acts, "power" is often expressed in healings and exorcisms (Luke 4:36; 5:17; 6:19; 8:46; 9:1; Acts 3:12; 4:7; 6:8; 10:38), which can be construed as signs of the kingdom era (Is 35:5-6 in Luke 7:22).

Different ancient texts referred to different places by the phrase "ends of the earth." Writers commonly meant Ethiopia (8:27; cf. Luke 11:31), but in Acts the short-term strategic goal is Rome (perhaps the phrase's use in *_Psalms of Solomon_* 8:15), to make an urgent impact on the empire. From a long-range perspective, however, all peoples are meant (Ps 67:1, 7; Is 45:22; 49:6; 52:10). Scripture informs this mission (Lk 24:45-49), especially Isaiah's

emphasis noted above (see esp. Is 49:6, cited in Acts 13:47). Many Jewish writers portrayed Jerusalem as the world's center (certainly theologically). Many scholars treat 1:8 as a summary statement of or outline for Acts; many ancient documents included such statements (often much more detailed than Luke's).

1:9-11. In Greek stories, various heroes ascended to heaven, usually by dying and becoming gods (like Heracles on his funeral pyre). For Luke, however, the ascension is only a confirmation of Jesus' status at the *resurrection, a coronation of the king who was both human and divine all along. Jewish accounts of Elijah (from the Old Testament) and others (from later traditions) taken up to heaven show that Jewish readers would understand the ascension, but again, the difference is between the exaltation of a pious man and the exaltation of the Lord, to faith in whom they are to summon humanity. Angels ascended and descended, but Luke's contemporaries did not regard these angelic movements as unique events. (Judaism also spoke figuratively of divine Wisdom ascending or descending but never in a *narrative context, because Wisdom was a personification, not a historical character.)

The most obvious ascension known to Jewish people from Scripture was Elijah's ascension in 2 Kings 2. In that same context, Elijah's successor Elisha received a double portion of Elijah's spirit to carry on the task (2:9-10). Here Jesus' ascension prepares for the church's prophetic empowerment (Acts 2:17-18) by the Spirit that empowered Jesus.

Moses had passed on his work to Joshua, Elijah to Elisha, and *rabbis and philosophers to their disciples. This model of succession created occasional "succession narratives" that described the passing on of a teacher's call. Jesus' ascension immediately after the commission of 1:8 leaves believers as his successors, responsible for the job of world evangelization, until his return in the same glorified body (1:11). Clouds often aid ascents in ascension narratives; one may think here of the cloud of divine glory (in texts like Ezek 10:4, but especially Dan 7:13, used in Luke 21:27). Angels (as well as priests and others) were often portrayed as wearing white robes (e.g., Dan 10:5; *1 Enoch* 71:1; 2 Maccabees 11:8).

1:12-14
The Prayer Meeting

Given the fifty days from Passover to Pentecost, and subtracting Jesus' time in the tomb and the forty days of 1:3, this meeting may have lasted close to a week. (In church tradition, possibly based on this passage, it is ten days before Pentecost.)

1:12. Mount Olivet was the place of the Lord's expected coming (Zech 14:4; cf. Zech 14:5, evoked in Luke 9:26). It was about half a mile east of the temple and several hundred feet above it—close to "a sabbath day's journey," which was two thousand cubits (sometimes estimated at roughly 2,880 feet). (*Essenes had a shorter measure, but Luke's measure corresponds with the tradition probably most commonly observed by religious Judeans.) This expression is used as a measure of length, not to indicate that it was the sabbath.

1:13. The wealthy part of Jerusalem was the Upper City, where upper rooms were more common and more spacious. Although upper rooms in many Palestinian homes were nothing more than attics, ancient texts do report gatherings of large numbers of sages in more spacious upper rooms.

The list of the names of the Twelve varies slightly in different *New Testament texts. But business documents from the period show that it was common for people to have two identifying names, either or both of which could be used. The insertion of "brother" before Judas in the KJV is unlikely; ancient inscriptions use Greek phrases like "Judas of James" to mean "Judas *son* of James." Some have taken "zealot" as a technical term in use by Luke's day, but it could also mean one "zealous for the *law."

1:14. Given the forty days of 1:3, Jesus' time in the tomb and the fifty days between Passover and Pentecost, the *disciples continued to wait for close to a week. Given the culture's usual downplaying of women's public roles, the full participation of women is noteworthy. Nevertheless, women were not necessarily segregated from men in *synagogue services, as some have maintained. The text need not imply uninterrupted prayer by each individual, but it must mean more prayer than

usual or Luke would have no reason to mention it.

1:15-26
Replacing an Apostate Apostle

Retaining the number twelve for the leaders remained important for its symbolic message about the restoration of God's people (cf. Lk 22:30). When the probably *Essene community of the *Dead Sea Scrolls chose a group of leaders that included twelve special officials (cf. 1QM 2.1-2; 11Q19 57.11-13), it was meant to symbolize that this community was the true remnant of Israel, faithful to God even though the rest of the nation was apostate. Jesus had chosen twelve special disciples to make the same point, so the number had to be restored to twelve official leaders at least until the point of having twelve had been effectively communicated. Judas had forfeited his place by apostasy.

1:15. According to a Jewish tradition of uncertain date, 120 elders first passed on the *law in the time of Ezra. Then again, the Dead Sea Scrolls required one priest for every ten men, so 120 may be the number of people a team of twelve leaders could best accommodate; other disciples may not have all been present at one time. But Luke may simply record the number to emphasize that many more than the Twelve gathered.

1:16-17. The masculine address, "Men" (here and often in Acts) was a regular Greek way of addressing large assemblies, and did not always exclude the presence of women (cf. 1:14). Jewish people believed that Scripture "had to be fulfilled" and that God was sovereign over the events of history. Greco-Roman writers used fate as a plot-moving device, but Luke sees history moving in accordance with God's revealed purposes in Scripture.

1:18-19. *Digressions were common in ancient literature; Luke makes a brief one here. The account has features in common with and diverging from Matthew 27:1-10; these similarities and differences can be explained on the basis of two authors reporting different details and ancient historians' freedom on such details. (Some ancient spoofs on suicide attempts report ropes breaking while a person was attempting to hang himself or herself, but these accounts were normally fictitious and at best would have been uncommon in real life! More plausibly, Luke might depict the fate of the corpse if it was cut down.)

1:20. "It is written" was a common Jewish quotation formula. Here Peter might follow the Jewish interpretive principle *qal vahomer,* a "how much more" argument: if the psalmist (Ps 69:25; 109:8) could speak thus of prominent accusers of the righteous in general, how much more does this principle apply to the epitome of wickedness, the betrayer of the *Messiah? (*New Testament writers appropriately apply many of the points of Ps 69, a psalm of the righteous sufferer, to Jesus.)

1:21-22. Eyewitnesses (cf. 1:8) were very important in ancient times, as they are today; hence the need to select someone who had been with Jesus from his *baptism to his *resurrection. Going "in and out among" people was idiomatic in the *Old Testament for freedom of movement and close association.

1:23. Double (in the case of Joseph Barsabbas, triple) names were quite common, especially with common names (like Joseph) that required qualification. "Barsabbas" is *Aramaic for "son of the sabbath"; normally such a name would apply to someone born on the sabbath.

1:24-25. Greeks and Romans often claimed that particular deities knew or saw matters, and Judaism regularly emphasized the true God's omniscience. Judaism affirmed that God knew people's hearts (Ps 7:9; Jer 17:10), and some called God "Searcher of hearts."

1:26. The lot was often used to select people for special duties in the Old Testament (1 Chron 24:7; 25:8) and in the Dead Sea Scrolls; Romans and Greeks and other peoples also cast lots for this purpose. Lots were also used to decide other matters (so the rabbis, the Jewish historian *Josephus and others), and as a form of divination in Greek circles. Jewish people used the lot because they believed in God's sovereignty (God even made it work for pagans in Jon 1:7, to expose Jonah's disobedience; cf. also Esther 3:7), although they forbade all forms of divination. Lots could be stones or pottery fragments, sometimes with markings, placed in containers (vessels or bags); one designating a person could fall out during shaking, or people could draw lots designating different outcomes.

2:1-4
The Proofs of Pentecost

Scholars have compared some of the signs of the *Spirit's coming in Acts 2:1-4 with the revelation of the *law on Mount Sinai and other theophanies and especially with expectations for the end time. (Many Jewish expectations for the end appear as fulfilled in the NT, because the *kingdom's promised *Messiah had come and been resurrected.) Jewish people associated the outpouring of the Spirit especially with the end of the age (1:6), and several signs God gave on the day of Pentecost indicate that in some sense, although the kingdom is not yet consummated (1:6-7), its powers had been initiated by the Messiah's first coming (2:17).

2:1. Pentecost was celebrated as a feast of covenant renewal in the *Dead Sea Scrolls; some texts celebrate the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, but these sources are later than Acts. Some commentators have suggested that Luke intends a parallel between Moses' giving the law and Jesus' giving the Spirit, but other scholars argue that little in Acts 2 suggests that Luke makes the connection, even if some Jewish Christians before him might have. Perhaps Luke's real or at least main reason for mentioning the feast, however, is the crowd it would have drawn in terms of both size and geographic diversity; see comment on 2:5.

2:2. God elsewhere used wind to symbolize his Spirit, who would revive the dead at the future restoration of Israel (Ezek 37). This symbol shows the eruption into history of what was anticipated for the future.

2:3. Storm phenomena (cf. 2:2) and fire sometimes appear in theophanies in the *Old Testament (including at Sinai, Ex 19:18). Moreover, God cast his glory on each tabernacle in which he chose to dwell before the exile (Ex 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11). But fire was also used to describe God's impending judgment in the day of his fury and thus could serve as a sign of the future (Is 66:15; cf. comment on Lk 3:16). (Others have suggested an allusion to fire's use in purifying metals; cf. Mal 3:2-3.)

2:4. Some (esp. those who emphasize Sinai allusions here) note the ancient Jewish interpretation in which God offered the law at Sinai first to the seventy *Gentile nations, each in their own language. Some scholars have adduced instances of incoherent speech in other cultures as parallels to this speaking in tongues, but most scholars today view the purported parallels from Greco-Roman antiquity as weak. Luke presents this speech not as incoherent but as worship in languages they do not know, and he points to an Old Testament background in the gift of *prophecy (see comment on 2:16-18). Inspired worship in others' languages suits Luke's larger emphasis on cross-cultural inspired speech (witness, in 1:8).

2:5-13
The Peoples of Pentecost

The most sensible setting for the encounter Luke describes here is the temple courts, where one could preach to such a large crowd (2:41). If the *disciples are still meeting in the "upper room" of 1:13 (this point is debated), they would be near the temple and could have moved to the temple courts; very large upper rooms were found only in Jerusalem's Upper City, near the temple.

2:5. Many Jewish people from throughout the Roman and Parthian worlds would gather for the three main feasts (Tabernacles, Passover and Pentecost). Because Pentecost was only fifty days after Passover, some Diaspora visitors who had spent much to make a rare pilgrimage to Jerusalem stayed the seven weeks between the two feasts. Pentecost was probably the least popular of the three pilgrimage festivals, but *Josephus attests that it was nevertheless crowded. Besides those who stayed between the festivals, some other Diaspora Jews settled in their people's "mother" city (see comment on 6:1).

2:6-8. The Jews from Parthia would know *Aramaic; those from the Roman Empire, Greek. But many of them would also be familiar with local languages and dialects spoken in outlying areas of their cities. (Even most Palestinian Jews were functionally bilingual, as are people in many parts of the world today.)

2:9-11. Although these are Jews, they are culturally and linguistically members of many nations; in keeping with his theme (1:8), Luke thus emphasizes that even from the *church's inception as an identifiable community, the Spirit proleptically moved the church into

multicultural diversity under Christ's lordship.

Among suggested backgrounds for the list of nations here, the most compelling is the proposal that Luke has simply updated the names of nations in the table of nations in Genesis 10. As the Bible's first such list, it was the most obvious background that Luke shared with his hearers. The nations of Genesis 10 were in the very next chapter scattered at the tower of Babel, where God judged them by making them unintelligible to each other; here God transforms the judgment in a miracle that transcends the language barrier.

Many Jews had never returned from exile in Mesopotamia, and most of these lived in Parthia. Many Jews also lived in some of the provinces of Asia Minor, in Syria, and in Alexandria and Cyrene in north Africa; for Jews in Rome, see comment on 28:17; see also "*proselyte" in glossary. "Arabians" applies especially to the Nabateans, a kingdom headquartered in Petra, though Nabateans were widespread, including many in Herod Antipas's territory of Perea. Jerusalem had much trade with Nabatea. Although the Nabateans were mostly pagan, Jews succeeded in converting some to Judaism.

2:12-13. Hecklers were common and speakers had to learn to deflect their ridicule. This scene occurs in April, and the grape vintage ended by early fall; in speaking of (literally) "sweet wine," the speakers are mocking, not trying to make a factual statement. Ancient writers sometimes described inspiration in terms of drunkenness; Greeks believed in frenzied inspiration by the gods, and in particular *Philo, a Jewish writer thoroughly in touch with Greek ideas, wrote of divine intoxication. Thus experiences of the transcendent (whether God-inspired or moved by base spirit possession) sometimes appeared to outsiders as ecstasy similar to drunkenness. Some denounced particular ideologies as madness (see comment on 26:24-25). (Although drunkenness was common in Greek parties, it would viewed negatively in Jewish Palestine.)

2:14-21
The Prophecy of Pentecost

2:14-15. In Greco-Roman society, public speakers would normally stand to speak. "Men of [a locale]" was a very frequent form of direct address in ancient speeches. Peter answers the questions (2:12-13) in reverse order. People usually got drunk at night (cf. 1 Thess 5:7), at banquets, not at 9 a.m.; people might have a hangover in the morning, but only in the rarest cases would anyone act drunk then.

2:16-18. "This" (2:16) refers to the speaking in tongues (2:6, 12), which Peter says fulfills Joel's message about the *Spirit of *prophecy, perhaps evoking an implied Jewish *qal vahomer* ("lesser to greater") argument: If the Spirit can inspire them to speak languages they do not know, how much more could he inspire them to prophesy the word of the Lord in their own language? Visions and dreams were especially prophetic activity, and Peter underlines this point by adding "and they will prophesy" at the end of 2:18 (not in Joel).

Peter reads Joel's "afterward" (2:28) as "in the last days," a phrase that in the prophets normally meant after the day of the Lord (Is 2:2; Mic 4:1), which fits Joel's context (Joel 2:30–3:3). Because the future age was to be inaugurated with the *Messiah's coming, it has been inaugurated in at least some sense because the Messiah, Jesus, had come—a point the outpouring of the Spirit on his followers is meant to demonstrate. Luke elsewhere emphasizes the crossing of barriers noted here (such as gender and age) and especially the ministry to all peoples implied in "all flesh."

2:19. Joel 2:30 has "wonders" but not "signs"; Peter may add "signs" because he wishes to show that at least some requisite signs took place on earth (Acts 2:22; cf. Deut 26:8). "Blood, fire and columns of smoke" is especially the language of war.

2:20-21. In Joel the sun would be blotted out and the moon discolored especially by the locust (and/or human) invasion (Joel 2:2, 10; 3:15). Peter suggests that in some anticipatory sense, this final time of God's salvation for Israel has begun. Tongues prove that the Spirit of prophecy has come, which proves that salvation has come, which proves that the messianic era has come, and thus that the Messiah has come.

Peter breaks off his quote from Joel here, but resumes with the final line of Joel 2:32 ("as many as the Lord calls") at the end of his sermon (Acts 2:39). Thus his sermon is a conventional Jewish (*midrashic) exposition of

the last line he quoted, and answers the question: What is the name of the Lord on whom they are to call? In the Hebrew text, "Lord" here is the sacred name of God (Yahweh), which readers in a Judean *synagogue would pronounce as the word for "Lord" (Adonai); in the Greek text that Peter probably cites to communicate with hearers from many nations, it is simply the Greek word for "Lord," but all biblically literate hearers would know that it means "God" here.

2:22-40
The Preaching of Pentecost

Kenneth Bailey has argued that Peter's sermon here involves an extensive *chiasmus, a reverse-parallel literary structure: A. Jesus whom you crucified (2:23, 36b); B. David said, "The Lord . . . is at my right hand" (2:25, 34b); C. David died/did not ascend (2:29, 34a); D. David prophesied/the Spirit is evidenced (2:30a, 33c); E. God swore/the promise of the Spirit (2:30b, 33b); F. *Christ enthroned (2:30c, 33a); G. David foresaw/the eleven testify (2:31a, 32b); H. Jesus' *resurrection (2:31b, 32a); I. Jesus did not rot (2:31cd). Point G connects the disciples' witness with prophetic empowerment (see comment on 1:8).

2:22. See comment on 2:19. Speakers sometimes explicitly appealed to what their hearers already knew. "Signs and wonders" also characterized the first exodus (Deut 26:8).

2:23. Both Jews and most *Gentiles recognized that a divine plan or plans prevailed in human life. Most early Jews did not regard God's sovereign plan and human choice and responsibility as mutually exclusive. Crucifixion was a particularly shameful form of execution that Romans applied especially to slaves and low-class provincials. Some anti-Semites have used texts like 2:23 to attack Jewish people in general, but Peter's critique of their corporate responsibility (cf. killing by means of others in 2 Sam 12:9) is no harsher than that of *Old Testament prophets (e.g., Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah), and cannot rightly be used as if it were.

2:24. Although noting Jesus' death (2:23), Peter focuses on his *resurrection; speeches generally lingered on their central point. He derives the phrase "pangs of death" from the Old Testament (e.g., LXX 2 Sam 22:6); his language of being "loosed" or "freed" from these may reflect Semitic idiom from the Old Testament.

2:25-28. Peter quotes Psalm 16 to establish his point (developed in Acts 2:29-32): God would raise the *Messiah from the dead. Jesus' resurrection without corruption fulfills the psalm's highest aspiration.

2:29-31. Peter argues that the psalm cannot refer to David, because David did see corruption (rot). (A tomb in David's honor had been dedicated outside Jerusalem, along with one of Huldah the prophetess.) Rather, the psalm refers to David's ultimate descendant, who was widely agreed to be the Messiah (the anointed king), by definition (Acts 2:30; Is 9:6-7; Jer 23:5-6; cf. Ps 89:3-4; Ps 132:11).

2:32. Having noted the Scripture, Peter now proclaims that he and his colleagues were eyewitnesses that Jesus fulfilled it, and their witness is confirmed by the outpouring of the Spirit, which has no other biblical explanation (2:16-21, 33).

2:33. In the Old Testament, God pours out his Spirit (as was explicit in Joel 2:28-29 in Acts 2:17-18); Jesus' role here is quite exalted (see comment on 2:34-35).

2:34-35. Jewish interpreters often linked texts using the same word or phrase (the principle was called *gezerah shavah*). Peter thus introduces Psalm 110:1, a more clearly messianic passage that includes "right hand" and speaks of exaltation just as Psalm 16 does. (Those commentators who see a link with Moses here point out a Jewish tradition that Moses ascended to heaven to receive the *law; but the text makes better sense as a simple exposition of the psalm in question.) Ancient Near Eastern art sometimes depicted defeated enemies as under the conqueror's feet.

2:36. Peter shows that the resurrected one of Psalm 16 is the one whom David in Psalm 110 called "the Lord." Thus he bears the name of "the Lord" that Joel mentioned (2:32; see comment on Acts 2:21).

2:37-38. See "*repentance" and "*baptism" in the glossary. Peter instructs the people how to call on the Lord's name (2:21): be baptized in Jesus' name. Because baptism was a sign of conversion to Judaism normally reserved for pagans, Peter's demand would offend his Jewish hearers and cost them re-

spectability. He calls for a public, radical testimony of conversion, not a private, noncommittal request for salvation with no conditions. "In the name of Jesus Christ" distinguishes this sort of baptism, requiring faith in Christ, from other ancient baptisms; this phrase simply means that the person being baptized confesses Christ. (Acts always uses this phrase with "be baptized"—the passive, never the active; presumably it thus does not denote a formula said over the person being baptized, but rather indicates the confession of faith of the person receiving baptism; see 2:21 and 22:16.)

Although different segments of Judaism tended to emphasize different aspects of the Spirit (e.g., purification and wisdom in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, or *prophecy by the *rabbis and many others), and Luke's writings specifically emphasize the Spirit of inspiration and prophecy, Luke concurs with other *New Testament writers that the Spirit's work is theologically all one package (cf. comment on 8:14-15).

2:39. Those who read the whole book of Acts will suspect that those who "are far off" are the *Gentiles (Is 57:19; cf. Acts 2:17), though Peter probably is thinking of Jewish people scattered outside Palestine. This universal outpouring of the Spirit was reserved in the Old Testament for the end time and was expected to continue throughout that time. Isaiah 57:19 is the source of the wording.

2:40. Ancient historians edited and arranged speeches; they did not cite them verbatim (nor could anyone have done so unless the speech was short—*rhetoricians sometimes continued for hours—and the speaker provided the author his prepared manuscript). The best historians merely communicated the gist insofar as their sources allowed this. Luke thus summarizes Peter's point. The exhortation here evokes Deuteronomy 32:5, which also laments a crooked generation (using the same description in the *Septuagint).

2:41-47
The Power of Pentecost

Ancient historians sometimes included summary sections (as here in 2:41-47). Luke's account of the *Spirit's outpouring climaxes with a transformed community of believers. Luke may here include another chiastic structure:

A People turning to Christ
(through proclamation, 2:41)
  B Shared worship, meals (2:42)
    C Shared possessions (2:44-45)
  B' Shared worship, meals (2:46)
A' People turning to Christ
(through believers' behavior, 2:47)

2:41. Considering *Josephus's estimate of six thousand *Pharisees in all Palestine, three thousand conversions to the new Jesus movement in Jerusalem is no small start! Still, it is a limited percentage; even without festal pilgrims, Jerusalem's population in this period was probably seventy thousand or higher (some estimate eighty-five thousand; in contrast to lower earlier estimates). The temple mount had many immersion pools that worshipers used to purify themselves ritually; mass *baptisms could thus be conducted quickly under the *apostles' general supervision.

2:42. Most special groups in antiquity ate together (Greek associations, Pharisaic fellowships, etc.). Many Greek associations met for communal meals only once a month, however (contrast 2:46). This earliest Christian practice of daily meals (less practicable in later New Testament settings) is thus noteworthy.

Table fellowship denoted intimacy and trust. Music or other entertainment, but also discussions and even lectures, were frequent at common meals in antiquity; the topic of discussion recommended by Jewish pietists was Scripture. Given such background and especially what this text says about teaching and prayer (possibly including participation in the temple prayers—3:1), early Christian fellowship undoubtedly centered more on intimate worship, sharing and learning the Scriptures and the apostolic message than its modern Western counterpart often does.

2:43-45. The Greek language Luke uses here resembles language that *Pythagoreans and others used for the ideal, utopian community; others also compare the ancient ideal of "friends" sharing things in common. Luke clearly portrays this radical lifestyle positively, as the result of the outpouring of the Spirit.

Some Jewish groups, such as the group that lived at *Qumran, followed a model similar to that attributed to the Pythagoreans and turned all their possessions over to the leaders of the community so they could all withdraw from society. Differences also remain clear: the Christians do not withdraw from society, and they apparently sell off property to meet needs as they arise (4:34-35), continuing to use their homes (though often as meeting places for fellow Christians, 2:46). These actions do not reflect an *ascetic ideal, as in some Greek and Jewish sects, but instead the practice of radically valuing people over possessions, acknowledging that Jesus owns both them and their property (cf. 4:32). Such behavior reportedly continued among Christians well into the second century, and it was long ridiculed by elite pagans (poor pagans were more appreciative and sometimes converted through it) until pagan values finally overwhelmed the church.

2:46-47. By way of contrast with the daily meetings here, Greek associations (trade guilds, etc.) often met just once a month. Temples were among the most spacious and useful public places to gather, and people often congregated there, especially under the colonnades. There were hours of public prayer at the morning and evening offerings (3:1).

3:1-10
Healing in His Name

Luke here provides the most prominent example of the wonders he mentioned in 2:43, on one of their occasions of prayer in the temple (cf. 2:42, 46).

3:1. There were hours of prayer at the morning and evening offerings (cf. 2:42); the time of prayer for the evening offering mentioned here is about 3 p.m. (The *Dead Sea Scrolls and later sources suggest also a third time of prayer, probably at sunset.)

3:2-3. The "Beautiful Gate" may have been a popular title for what later sources call the Nicanor Gate (named for its Alexandrian donor), covered with bronze. *Josephus indicates that the temple's main and largest gate was made of the most expensive bronze, more beautiful than gold (*Jewish War* 5.201-4). (Some identify the beautiful gate instead with the Shushan Gate facing east, but based on sources possibly no earlier than the fifth century.) In either case, it was accessible from Solomon's Portico (cf. 3:11). Any gates leading to the outer court or to the Court of Women on the east may have hosted beggars on its steps who could appeal to those entering.

Although Scripture forbade further entrance only to the unclean, some scholars (noting rules at *Qumran) suspect that the purity-centered temple establishment would have excluded the disabled from the inner courts. Begging alms at public places was common in antiquity, although other peoples did not stress individual charity as the Jewish people did. In Judaism only those who could not work made their living this way, but charity was highly regarded, and the blind or those unable to walk would not have to go hungry, especially if they were near the temple. Congenital infirmities were thought harder to cure than other kinds (Jn 9:32).

3:4-10. Ancient miracle workers usually prayed or invoked spirits rather than commanded the sick person to be healed (the *New Testament also recommends prayer—Jas 5:14); but the *Old Testament has ample precedent for doing miracles by simply declaring the word of the Lord, as a prophet speaking God's will (e.g., 2 Kings 1:10; 2:14, 21-22, 24; 4:43; 5:10). "In the name of Jesus Christ" here probably means "acting as his representative, (I say to you)" or "Jesus cures you" (Acts 3:16; 4:10-12; 9:34; cf. comment on Jn 14:12-14). It credits Jesus exclusively with the honor for the healing (as in 3:12-16).

Many people in the Greco-Roman world were suspicious of potential charlatans who practiced religion or philosophy to acquire wealth for themselves; the *apostles' lack of resources (3:6) helps to confirm their sincerity.

3:11-26
A Preaching Opportunity

Signs and wonders often provide opportunity for witness in Acts, but Luke's primary emphasis is always on the proclamation of the good news itself.

3:11. From the steps of the Beautiful Gate Peter, John and the beggar pass through the temple courts to the eastern colonnade, which supposedly remained from Solomon's temple (see comment on Jn 10:23).

3:12. Jewish people often thought wonderworkers did miracles (e.g., causing rain) by their great piety. Luke emphasizes that the *apostles were normal people, filled with God's *Spirit (Acts 14:15).

3:13. The "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" was celebrated in the daily prayers; "servant" (3:13, 26) alludes to Isaiah's servant (see comment on Mt 12:15-18), who also was "glorified" (the *Septuagint of Is 49:3, 5; 52:13). See the glossary entry on "*Pilate."

3:14. "Holy One" applied especially to God in Jewish literature; "Righteous One" was also commonly a title for God, although it applied to Enoch, Noah, some *rabbis and others as well; the Dead Sea Scrolls spoke of their founder as "the teacher of righteousness." The context would indicate to whom the title applied. It could apply to Isaiah's servant evoked in Acts 3:13; see Isaiah 53:11.

Because the healing did not occur during a feast, most of Peter's audience is now Jerusalemite or Palestinian (contrast 2:23); but the corporate accusation against his hearers here is no stronger than denunciations of *Old Testament prophets (e.g., Amos 2:6–3:8). Calling a revolutionary (Barabbas) a "murderer" (cf. Lk 23:19) starkly distinguishes the apostles from the sort of people who had revolutionary sympathies.

3:15. "Prince" (NASB) or "author" (NIV) was used for founders and protectors of Greek cities, for heads of clans or military judges (Old Testament), or for commanders who lead the way; it was sometimes applied to Greek divine heroes such as Heracles. Here it may mean the leader who pioneered the way of (*resurrection) life (contrast the murderer of 3:14), who forged on ahead of others to make the way for them to live as well. Luke's language employs irony and antithesis (frequent literary devices): when the Jerusalemites accepted a murderer (3:14), they killed the author of life.

3:16-17. The Old Testament and Judaism regarded willful sin (Num 15:30-31) as far more heinous than sins of ignorance (Num 15:22-29), but both were sinful, and they also regarded ignorance of God's truth as sinful (e.g., Is 1:3; 29:11-12; Hos 4:6). Most people in antiquity viewed ignorance as reducing the guilt for crimes.

3:18. Later Jewish teachers sometimes said hyperbolically that the entire message of the prophets dealt with the messianic era or Jerusalem's restoration, or with other favorite topics. Some later rabbis said that a *Messiah would suffer and spoke of two Messiahs, one who would suffer and one who would reign, but the Christians seem to have been the first to proclaim the concept of a suffering Messiah.

3:19. Jewish teachers differed on whether Israel's *repentance had to precede its ultimate restoration, or whether God would simply bring it about in a predetermined time (or, as is possible in early Christians' theology, on some level both). Normally in the Old Testament prophets, Israel's repentance had to precede it; following the Old Testament, some later Jewish traditions (e.g., *Jubilees* 1:15-18; 23:26-27) stressed Israel's repentance as the goal of history.

3:20-21. *Christ would not return again until the time to restore Israel (1:6) and the world had come. *Stoic philosophers spoke of the universe's "cycles": it was periodically destroyed by fire and reborn. But Jewish people expected Israel's restoration; this was a central message of the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Is 40:9-11; Jer 32:42-44; Ezek 37:21-28; Hos 11:9-11; 14:4-7; Amos 9:11-15), and Peter seems to have it in view here (see Acts 1:6-7; though cf. cosmic associations in Is 11:6-9; 65:17-18).

3:22-23. Other New Testament texts also apply Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18 to Jesus. Some other sources (e.g., *Samaritan documents and the Dead Sea Scrolls) also applied this text to a future prophet like Moses. In the first century, some leaders whose followers thought they were prophets tried to duplicate miracles of Moses or Joshua (by trying to part the Jordan or to make Jerusalem's walls fall), probably indicating that they sought this role. Josephus states that their miracles failed, however; Jesus' resurrection places him in a quite different category.

3:24-26. Peter's hearers are spiritually "heirs of the prophets"; on the prophecies, see comment on 3:18. Because Abraham's blessing for the nations/families of the earth (Gen 12:3; 22:18) was to come through Israel, the servant (3:13) had been sent to be the blessing to them first.

4:1-12
Arraigned by the Temple Authorities

4:1. The *Sadducees controlled the temple hierarchy and most of the resident priesthood. The *sagan,* or captain of the temple guard (a local police force permitted by the Romans and made up of Levites; cf. Neh 13:22), is known from other sources and is probably the same official called "the king's captain" in Herod the Great's day. Later tradition reports that he was a Sadducean aristocrat of very high rank and also that he could be very harsh, even with his own guards.

4:2. Sadducees disagreed with the Pharisaic doctrine of the *resurrection, but *Pharisees posed less of a threat to them than the Christians, for the Pharisaic doctrine was only a theoretical hope for the future. From the Jewish perspective, the apostolic witness that one person had already been raised would proclaim that the resurrection had been inaugurated. By guaranteeing rather than simply teaching the future hope of the resurrection, the *disciples threatened the Sadducees' security as leaders of the people.

4:3. Peter and John had come up to the temple about 3 p.m. (cf. 3:1), hence sundown is near. No longer dealing with someone overturning tables in the temple, the aristocracy is content to follow the law and wait till the next day to try them (night trials were illegal, and most business of any regular sort stopped by sundown).

4:4. Estimates of Jerusalem's population at this time vary from twenty-five thousand to eighty-five thousand; the higher range is more likely in view of more recent research. *Josephus said that there were only six thousand Pharisees in Palestine. A total of five thousand Jewish Christian "men" in Jerusalem, not including women and children (so the Greek here), is thus quite substantial. (Whoever counted or provided the estimates apparently employed the typical ancient practice of numbering only the men.) Because they were in the outer court, the converts surely included women as well.

4:5. The Jewish authorities mentioned here represent the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling court of Jerusalem; presumably they gather in their meeting hall in the vicinity of the temple.

4:6. These officials were widely known. Like other writers of his day (especially Josephus), Luke uses "*high priest" loosely for any officials of the high priestly household; Caiaphas was officially high priest at this time (see comment on Jn 11:49; 18:13). The *rabbis and *Dead Sea Scrolls (as well as other sources like **2 Baruch*) offer an unflattering picture of the final generations of the temple aristocracy, with whom they did not get along. Even Josephus, a first-century Jerusalem aristocrat himself, depicts abuses, plots and even violence among the leading priests.

4:7. Trial scenes, as much as pirates and other hardships, were standard suspense-builders in ancient stories. Throughout the empire, nonelites also recognized that they were subject to the decisions of the elites, who controlled the courts as well as most other institutions.

4:8. In the *Old Testament, the *Spirit often came upon God's servants for specific tasks (e.g., Ex 35:31; Judg 14:6) and is especially often associated with *prophecy and prophetic speech (i.e., the ability to speak what God is saying).

4:9-12. Salvation "in the name" (v. 12) alludes to Peter's earlier exposition of Joel 2:32 (Acts 2:21); the term translated "saved" includes making whole (i.e., healing the man—so v. 9, literally). Peter learned this use of Psalm 118:22, cited here in verse 11, from Jesus; see Luke 20:17. The "good deed" (4:9, NRSV) or "benefit" (NASB) is literally a "benefaction": a kind act for which one would normally be praised. In ancient legal debate, a person who could argue that it was actually a praiseworthy act for which they were on trial cast the accusers in a negative light. It was common to charge one's accusers with a crime, and that reversal is simple enough here: Jerusalem's elite instigated Jesus' execution (cf. also possibly Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.64).

4:13-22
God's Authority Rather Than the Hierarchy's

4:13. The elite were surprised by the *apostles' "boldness" or "confidence." Moralists and philosophers often praised such frankness, loyalty to truth without fear of consequences, even when addressing rulers. Biblical prophets often demonstrated the same sort of behavior,

and it could also characterize martyrs (cf. *4 Maccabees 10:5). "Unschooled" means not trained in Greek *rhetoric (public speaking), unlike much of the priestly aristocracy. (It could also mean that they were not trained under a recognized rabbi, if the aristocrats were too arrogant to count Jesus as a recognized rabbi.) Ordinary people did not always resent this "unschooled" label, but they knew that elites looked down on them. Many popular Greek philosophers used to boast that they were not educated in rhetoric and lived simple lives, so what strikes the Sanhedrin as a weakness of Peter and John might strike many of Luke's readers as a strength. But the reason for their "uneducated" boldness is obvious: they had been educated by Jesus, who was himself bold and "uneducated." (It was widely understood that disciples regularly reflected the lifestyle and character they had learned from their teachers.)

4:14-16. Both the disciples and the priestly aristocracy recognize that there is no valid basis for a legal charge. Still, as custodians of the temple, the priestly aristocracy has the police power to control what they consider subversive teachings on what they consider their grounds. Authorities sometimes accommodated popular sentiment to prevent unrest, but despised demagogues who enticed the uncritical populace with what the elite viewed as flattery or idle promises. Some later Jewish teachers argued that miracles would not validate another's teaching if it did not accord with their own reasoning from Scripture and tradition.

4:17-18. In a society emphasizing honor and shame, the elite would lose face if they allowed the apostles the final word. Authorities in the Roman Empire might be satisfied to execute a movement's ringleader if the group did not threaten further instability. The apostles so far pose no clear serious threat, so that a warning is deemed sufficient.

4:19-20. Philosophers often stressed obeying God rather than people, following truth rather than social convenience; Socrates, who refused to be silent even on pain of death, was a notable example. The *Old Testament prophets (such as Nathan, Elijah and Jeremiah, who confronted kings, or Uriah, who suffered martyrdom—Jer 26:20-23) are even clearer examples. Some modeled nonviolent civil disobedience (Dan 3:16-18; 6:10, 13); Maccabean martyrs offered particularly stark examples. Whether the readers' background is Greek or Jewish, it would be clear to them who is on the side of right.

4:21-22. Although the municipal authorities back down, they do not admit wrongdoing, which would be a matter of shame. Pharisees were more popular with the people, but the politically dominant *Sadducees were less in touch with the people. Elites usually despised populist speakers, whom they considered demagogues, who had exceptional influence with the people.

4:23-31
Praise in the Face of Persecution

4:23-24. Although choruses in Greek drama recited lines together, here "with one accord" (KJV, NASB) simply means "together, in unity" (the same word occurs in 1:14; 2:46; 5:12). This is not a unified liturgy as eventually became standard in *synagogues; scholars do not even all agree that prayers were recited in unison in most Palestinian synagogues in this period. Instead, the text probably means simply that someone inspired by the Spirit led the prayer.

The title for God as "Master" or "Sovereign Lord" here was used for deities in Greek sources and, more relevantly here, for the one true God in Jewish sources. The prayer begins by confessing God's sovereignty (his power to answer prayer) with lines from Psalm 146:6, a context praising God's faithfulness to vindicate the oppressed; he is greater than their opponents.

4:25-26. Psalm 2 refers plainly to a royal descendant of David, and would be applied particularly to the *Messiah ("the anointed one") against whom the rulers were gathered. (Later rabbis applied this text to Gog and Magog, nations gathered against the Messiah and Israel).

4:27-28. In verse 27 the believers recognize the fulfillment of that opposition in Jesus' opponents (even Jewish "peoples," though the psalm focused on *Gentile ones). Others also employed "Herod" as a title for Herod Antipas (e.g., Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.104-6, 243-255). The rejection of the servant might evoke Isaiah (see Is 53:3, 7-9; comment on Acts 3:13),

especially in view of his anointing here (Is 61:1; cf. Lk 4:18; Acts 10:38). This is a recognition that the opposition to Jesus (and to themselves) is according to God's will. God acting "by his hand" reflects *Old Testament language.

4:29-31. Prayers for vindication were common in the Old Testament and Judaism (see 2 Chron 24:21-22; Ps 109:6-20; Jer 15:15; see also Rev 6:10), but this is a prayer for faithfulness and boldness (cf. Ps 138:3). Occasionally ancient texts reported shaking of places in response to prayers; the parallels most obvious to most of Luke's audience specifically would be biblical theophanies (e.g., Ex 19:18), especially the shaking of God's house in the context of Isaiah's empowerment for his mission (Is 6:4). Although Judaism boasted stories of rare miracle workers and paganism had local healing shrines and some magicians, a movement trusting God for such widespread miracles through individuals (cf. Acts 2:43; 5:12) is unparalleled.

4:32-37
Continuing Revival

As in 2:41-47, the outpouring of God's *Spirit here leads not only to miracles and inspired verbal witness but also to actively caring for one another and sharing possessions. For background, see comment on 2:43-45.

4:32-33. In the *Old Testament, God's favor and the Spirit could be "upon" individuals (cf. Num 11:24-29; Ezek 11:5).

4:34-35. In the *Dead Sea Scrolls, community officials distributed contributions to the community; later sources suggest that in most of Palestinian Judaism, supervisors of charity distributed funds given them. For discussion of the sharing, see also comment on 2:44-45.

4:36. Many Jews lived in Cyprus. "Joseph" was a quite common Palestinian Jewish name, inviting the addition of a nickname. The *Aramaic "Barnabas" can mean "son of encouragement" (i.e., encourager) or perhaps "son of a prophet," that is, prophet and exhorter (cf. 13:1). Nicknames were commonly given to describe personal attributes.

4:37. Donations like Joseph's happened often (4:34), but Luke wishes to state a positive example before the negative one (5:1-11) and to introduce an important character here (9:27). Contrasting positive and negative examples was a recommended technique of ancient speaking and writing. Although Levites did not own land under Old Testament *law, they commonly did own it in the first century (cf. Barnabas's relatives in 12:12-13), and some, like the Sadducean priests, were even rich.

5:1-11
Addressing Sin in the Camp

Ancient writers often compared positive and negative examples; Luke contrasts Barnabas (4:36-37) with Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11). In the *Old Testament, the sin of one man who had kept spoils for himself had once brought judgment on all Israel and the death of many, and only the death of the transgressor allowed Israel to move forward again (Josh 7). God took the corporate purity of his people, and the importance of sincerity in claims to total commitment, very seriously.

5:1. Ananias (reflecting the Hebrew Hananiah) was a common name; "Sapphira" was rare and seems to have belonged especially to well-to-do women. Since husbands usually married wives of comparable social status, this couple probably has more money than most.

5:2-3. The Greek term *nosphizo* here may evoke Joshua 7:1, where an "insider" acts secretly regarding property not one's own. Achan kept some of Jericho's forbidden wealth and brought judgment on the entire assembly until he and his family (who knew of his activity) were executed. Gehazi also took wealth, lied about it, and was punished (2 Kings 5:27).

5:4. Ancient groups that required members to turn over their possessions usually had a waiting period during which one could take one's property and leave (see the *Dead Sea Scrolls and the *Pythagoreans). The early Christians act not from a rule but from love, but this passage treats the offense of lying about turning everything over to the community more seriously than others did. The Dead Sea Scrolls excluded such an offender from the communal meal for a year and reduced food rations by one-fourth; here God executes a death sentence. Both 2 Kings 5:20-27 and a Greek inscription from Epidauros show that most ancient people knew the danger of lying to gods, God or one of his representatives.

5:5. God protected the sanctity of the tabernacle by striking down wicked priests (Lev 10:1-5). Judgment miracles were recognized in Greek tradition and are frequent in the Old Testament (e.g., Num 16:28-35; 2 Sam 6:6-7; 2 Kings 1:10, 12; 2:24; 2 Chron 26:16-21). Judgment miracles also appear in later Jewish tradition; for example, when an adulteress drank the bitter waters of the temple (Num 5) she immediately died; or some *rabbis allegedly disintegrated foolish pupils with a harsh look.

5:6. Ancients covered corpses to preserve the dignity of the deceased. It was customary to bury people on the day they died, although normally the wife would know of the burial (5:7). If relevant here, bodies might also need to be carried out of a holy place (cf. Lev 10:4-5). Perhaps Ananias and Sapphira owned no family tomb because they had handed over so much property to the *church.

5:7-11. The Old Testament (e.g., Deut 21:21) and later Judaism (*Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbis, etc.) in many cases prescribed the death penalty so that others might "fear" (v. 11), to deter further crime. Judgment miracles sometimes had the same effect (Num 16:34; 2 Kgs 1:13-14).

5:12-16
Miracles Increase

Although a few ancient teachers were known as miracle workers, only the most prominent were reported to have done miracles like those attributed to the *apostles here (with Elijah and Elisha as major biblical models for Jewish ones), and these reports are not from contemporary sources. More contemporary sources credited such miracles to deities housed in temples (for the early Christian view of which, see 1 Cor 10:20).

5:12. On Solomon's "porch" (KJV) or "Colonnade" (NIV), see 3:11 and comment on John 10:23.

5:13. "No one else" seems to refer to nonbelievers rather than to other Christians (2:42, 47; in contrast to some Greek sects like that of Pythagoras, which reportedly counted only selected people worthy of entering his presence, or the unapproachability of Moses at times, Ex 34:30). Many non-Jews attended *synagogue and believed in Israel's God without fully converting and keeping Jewish rules (see comment on 10:2); it is possible that a similar group of Jewish outsiders who respect the Jesus movement without converting to it is in view here. In context, people fear to associate with the movement without full commitment, knowing the fate of Ananias and Sapphira.

5:14-16. Ancient people thought that one's shadow was attached to oneself. In Jewish *law, for example, if one's shadow touched a corpse one was as unclean as one who physically touched the corpse; some Greeks felt that one could suffer harm through injury to one's shadow. The public's emphasis on needing to touch healers may be drawn from magical superstition (power as a substance was a pagan magical concept), but God still meets their need through his appointed representatives (cf. 19:11; Mk 5:28-30).

5:17-32
Arrested Again

5:17. The *Sadducees were politically powerful but never gained the popularity that the *Pharisees enjoyed. Although the political situation required them to maintain relations with the Pharisees, it is not surprising that they would be "jealous" (cf. Mk 15:10) and act with hostility toward the apostles. *Josephus described the Sadducees as a "sect" (alongside Pharisees and *Essenes), the same term Luke uses here (so most translations; cf. "party"—NIV, GNT; see also Acts 15:5; 26:5); Josephus also wrote for a Greek audience, for whom the term could mean a philosophical school. Ancient sources (biographies, novels and histories) often cite jealousy as a motivation for hostile behavior; envy was common in the honor-based, competitive and stratified culture of ancient Mediterranean cities.

5:18. Jails were normally used for detention until trial, not for imprisonment as a punishment. The Roman garrison in this period controlled the Fortress Antonia on the temple mount; the Levite temple police thus jail the apostles in a different location, though it might also be near the temple. The elite had accommodated the apostles' popularity so far, but now risked losing face if they continued to fail to act.

5:19. Stories of miraculous escapes from prison appear occasionally in Greek tradition

(e.g., the Greek deity Dionysus, imprisoned by King Pentheus, in Euripides's *Bacchae* and subsequent writers) and in one pre-Christian story about Moses in the *Diaspora Jewish writer Artapanus. Of course, even the exodus from Egypt was a miraculous deliverance from captivity (cf. also Lev 26:13; Ps 107:10-16).

5:20-21. The gates of the temple opened at midnight, but the people returned only at daybreak. The hearing for the apostles had been scheduled for daylight, because trials were not to be held at night (4:3, 5).

5:22-23. These guards are fortunate that they are Levites policing for the Jewish temple aristocracy rather than recruits under the Romans or Herod Agrippa I, who might have executed them (see 12:18-19).

5:24-25. Such events would cause these leaders to lose face further.

5:26. Jewish tradition suggests that the Levite temple guards were known for violence during the corrupt administrations of these *high priests; but political sensitivity determines their actions here. Once out of control, ancient mobs often stoned those who acted contrary to their sentiments.

5:27. The high priest presided over the Sanhedrin, or ruling judicial council.

5:28. Transgressors were often given a first warning (hence the first and now a second hearing). But now the apostles' defiance had publicly challenged and shamed the city's leaders, who had approved Jesus' execution; it therefore risked unrest, something too dangerous to tolerate. "Bringing blood on them" is a serious charge, invoking the biblical concept of blood guilt. Biblically, those guilty of murder had to be punished to remove judgment from the land. The charge against the apostles is that they are trying to incite unrest against the municipal aristocracy which the Romans approved, by accusing them of responsibility for Jesus' execution. (The Sanhedrin conversely viewed Jesus' execution as eliminating a revolutionary who was creating unrest.)

5:29-30. See comment on 4:19-20. The apostles claim that the Sanhedrin *is* responsible for Jesus' execution. A famous line attributed to Socrates was his obedience to God rather than his judges (*Plato, *Apology* 29D); the elite, educated Sadducees would have known this, whether or not Peter did. Although people were sometimes crucified on trees, no one treated that as the only way to crucify people; the use of "tree" here (literally) alludes to Deuteronomy 21:22-23, which the *Dead Sea Scrolls applied to crucifixion. Philosophers valued frankness and truth rather than diplomatic language at the expense of truth; Luke's audience undoubtedly appreciate these words much more than the Sanhedrin did. It was customary for defendants to charge their accusers in court, but it was considered dangerous to charge one's judges.

5:31. See comment on 3:15. The Sadducean leaders of the Sanhedrin might view the apostles' claim that Jesus is a king after all, reigning for God and vindicated by him after the Sanhedrin had executed him, as an error; but more significantly in this case they would view this claim as a direct challenge to their political power and wisdom.

5:32. On witnesses, see 1:8; the *Holy Spirit is the Spirit of *prophecy inspiring them to witness, so that the apostles claim to speak for God, an authority higher than the Sanhedrin. Many expected the Spirit to be available only in the end time or only to the extremely pious. The apostles' reply indicates that they do not regard the Sanhedrin as obedient to God (contrast 5:29).

5:33-42
A Pharisaic Moderate's Support

Whether Sadducean aristocrats with political agendas or Pharisaic teachers with pietistic agendas, all the Sanhedrin members claimed to be followers of Israel's God and would not wish to oppose him.

5:33. The apostles' refusal to be intimidated threatens the honor assumptions of the elite. Because it is not a festival and the procurator is thus out of town, the apostles' critics probably could have lynched them, as illegal and against all protocol as it would have been (cf. chaps. 6–7); they lacked legal authority under the Romans to conduct executions. Pharisaic traditions reported that the leading priestly families in this period sometimes used force to guarantee their will. But lynchings were rare, and once tempers are subdued they revert to a more traditional punishment (5:40).

5:34-35. That Gamaliel I, reputedly the

most prominent pupil of the gentle *Hillel, was widely respected may be an understatement; he was probably the most influential Pharisaic leader of the time and held prestige as a Jerusalem aristocrat as well. Later *rabbis extolled his piety and learning, and accorded him the title "Rabban," which later belonged to the rulers of the Pharisaic courts. Josephus mentioned Gamaliel's aristocratic son Simon, indicating the family's power in Jerusalem. (The later tradition that Gamaliel was Hillel's son is probably wrong.)

Pharisees had comparatively little political power and did not believe in executing someone for political reasons. Even if the Christians were in serious error, as long as they kept the *law of Moses the Pharisees would not believe in punishing them. Pharisees were known for leniency and devised rules that, if followed, made executions quite difficult (a conclusion particularly convenient since Rome normally prohibited locals from exercising the right to executions anyway). Luke portrays Gamaliel I as acting according to the Pharisees' noble ideals (see also 22:3).

5:36. Gamaliel compares the Jesus movement with some populist revolutionary movements, revealing a misunderstanding perhaps widely shared in the Sanhedrin. If Josephus is accurate, Theudas arose about A.D. 44—some ten years after Gamaliel's speech. The name Theudas is not a common enough name to make an earlier revolutionary named Theudas likely, although the name does occur (e.g., in a Jerusalem tomb inscription). Luke may simply fill in names of the most prominent revolutionary leaders known by his own period rather than a less-known name Gamaliel might have cited (historians sometimes adjusted characters' speeches in their own words); the alternative would be that either Luke or Josephus is mistaken. But ancient historians had more flexibility with the content of speeches than with events, and that would be especially a speech to which the apostles themselves were not privy.

Theudas was a Jewish "magician" (he probably viewed himself as a prophet) who gathered followers to the river Jordan, promising to part it. The Roman governor Fadus sent troops who killed and captured members of the crowd; Theudas was beheaded (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.97-98).

5:37. Judas the Galilean led the tax revolt of A.D. 6 (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.56, 118; *Jewish Antiquities* 18.23). The Romans retaliated by destroying Sepphoris; Judas's model led to the revolutionaries who later came to be called the *Zealots. Judas's sons also revolted in the war of 66-70; they were crucified (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.102; cf. *Jewish War* 2.433-34). Judas was helped by a certain Saddok—a Pharisee. Gamaliel would naturally view such revolutionaries more favorably than the *Sadducees would, since the Sadducees had more vested interests in Roman rule.

5:38-39. Continuance was often viewed as a proof of divine help; "fighting against God" (found in combating Jewish martyrs in 2 Maccabees 7:19) may reflect a familiar Greek saying, perhaps originating with the Greek tragedian Euripides but quoted in anthologies for students learning Greek. Many of those in the Sanhedrin might have used such anthologies and hence been familiar with this expression. Gamaliel and many others would also know the context in Euripides: after a god miraculously released his followers from a prison (see Acts 5:19), one who opposed that god was ultimately destroyed.

Waiting for the Romans to take care of this problem would appeal more to Pharisees, who in this period were more convinced than the Sadducees that a future *Messiah should intervene to establish God's cause and overthrow the current order. (They were also far more affirming of the idea of *resurrection.) Like many of his successors, Gamaliel wants no trouble with Rome, but he is sure that the Romans could take care of revolutionaries themselves—unless God is with the revolutionaries. By comparing the Jesus movement to followers of Theudas and Judas, however, he shows that he still misunderstands it in merely political terms.

5:40. The Pharisaic element would especially listen to Gamaliel, having great respect for teaching of their elders; perhaps reconsidering the extremeness of an illegal lynching, the predominant Sadducean element also concurs. Lynching or even handing over to the governor for execution leaders of a popular movement could provoke a popular backlash, so they hoped to manage the problem differ-

ently. Scourging as a civil punishment unconnected with execution is well-known (Lk 23:16; see comment on Jn 19:1); such beatings were intended to inflict public humiliation as well as pain. If the beating resembled later rabbinic practice, the victim would be bound to a post or laid on the ground, then flogged with a calf-leather strap twenty-six times on the back and thirteen on the chest. Even if Sadducees considered Pharisees too lenient in general, they undoubtedly would observe Deuteronomy 25:2-3, especially in public (see comment on Mt 10:17).

5:41. In Jewish tradition, the righteous could rejoice when they suffered, because of their reward in the world to come; nevertheless, disobeying a ruler's decree was considered courageous, and Judaism extolled martyrs who did so. (The apostles' continuing to teach publicly in the temple courts is especially courageous.) Perhaps relevant to *Gentiles in Luke's audience, many philosophers also taught rejecting worldly definitions of shame and learning to celebrate sufferings as a way of redefining true freedom. Ancient hearers would respect this description of the apostles. When Jewish people suffered on behalf of the "Name," they normally meant the divine name, a concept here transferred to Jesus' name as divine (cf. Acts 2:21, 38).

5:42. "Teaching" is primarily instruction; "preaching" is especially proclamation of the saving *gospel.

6:1-7
The Seven Distributors of Charity

Those with political power generally repressed complaining minorities; here the *apostles hand the whole system over to the offended minority that had felt marginalized. In so doing, they affirmed a minority that would someday yield the *church's future.

6:1. Some scholars think that the "Hellenists" (NRSV) here are simply Greek-speaking Palestinian Jews, but most Jews in Palestine were bilingual, and Greek was probably the first language for many Jerusalemites. The more likely proposal is that this text refers to Greek-speaking *Diaspora Jews who have settled in Jerusalem, as opposed to more bilingual natives of Judea and Galilee.

The Bible mandated caring for widows, who had no other means of support if they had no family nearby. Judaism took this responsibility very seriously. But because it was considered virtuous to be buried in the land of Israel, many foreign Jews would come to spend their last days there, then die and leave a disproportionate number of widows. (In later centuries, Palestinian rabbis provided further theological incentive to immigrate to the holy land: according to one common tradition, the dead would be resurrected only in Israel, so the righteous dead of other lands would have to roll the whole way back to Israel underground. This was supposed to be a very unpleasant experience for the corpses!)

Thus an apparently disproportionate number of foreign Jewish widows lived in Jerusalem, which did not have enough foreign Jewish *synagogues (6:9) for their distributors of charity to supply all the widows adequately. This urban social problem of Jerusalem spilled over into the church.

6:2-4. "Seven" was a reasonable number for leaders; *Josephus suggests that an average of seven elders governed most towns (*Jewish Antiquities* 4.214, 287; *Jewish War* 2.571). Moses also delegated his work to other leaders who met some spiritual and moral qualifications (Ex 18:21), so Moses could focus on interceding for the people before God (18:19) and teaching his Word (18:20). The term for "select" need not imply voting, but given the usual Greek practice familiar to Luke's audience, that might be what he intends. (There seems to be some evidence for some elective offices in Jewish circles as well. Greek voting could be through ballots or raised hands.) Distributors of charity filled an office in later Palestinian Judaism. Reputation was important for the sake of public credibility; see comment on 1 Timothy 3:7. There was *Old Testament precedent for having the people themselves choose these distributors and the leader ratify their choice (Deut 1:13), and the *Essenes reportedly elected their officials. When Moses laid hands on Joshua, the latter was filled with the *Spirit of wisdom (Deut 34:9; cf. Ex 28:3; 31:3; 35:31).

6:5. Tomb inscriptions show that some Jerusalemites had Greek names whether or not their parents or grandparents had lived outside Judea. But even in Rome, under forty percent of Jews had any Greek in their name,

and only one or two of the apostles had a Greek name. That all seven of these men have Greek names suggests that they are obvious *Hellenists (6:1), first-or second-generation Jewish immigrants to Palestine—hence members of the offended minority. One is even a *proselyte—a former *Gentile who had converted to Judaism; many of these lived in Antioch (cf. 11:19).

6:6. The laying on of hands communicated blessing in the Old Testament (cf. Gen 48:14; still occasionally attested in the apostolic period), but the idea here seems to be that of ordination or transfer of spiritual power for ministry, as in Numbers 27:18, 23 (cf. 11:25); Joshua was filled with the Spirit of wisdom because Moses laid hands on him (Deut 34:9). Later *rabbis ordained rabbis by laying on hands (with heavy pressure), called *semikhah* (cf. 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). (Rabbis applied this rite of laying on hands only to sacrifices and to ordaining scholars.) If so, the apostles considered their new colleagues' office of social ministry quite important.

6:7. In ancient literature, summary statements sometimes concluded literary sections. There were probably well over two thousand priests in Jerusalem alone. Although most upper-class priests were *Sadducees, the poorer priests, many of whom came to Jerusalem only several weeks of the year, were not; some priests were even *Pharisees. Priests were accorded high status in the *Qumran community, and Luke's Diaspora audience would have probably been impressed with them as well. Priests did not represent any given ideology or economic status (Josephus complains that rich priests sometimes oppressed poorer priests), but their conversion here shows that the Christians are making inroads even into the temple establishment, or at least the lower eschelon of priests who served there.

6:8–7:1
Stephen Arraigned

Despite Jesus' orders to engage in the *Gentile mission (1:8), the *apostles had stayed in Jerusalem and remained there as late as 15:2. It is ultimately the bicultural minority within the Jerusalem church that holds the strongest promise for the future. Luke gives us examples of two leaders from that minority (6:5), Stephen (chap. 7) and Philip (chap. 8).

6:9-10. Stephen's fellow Hellenists were debating new ideas more than the church's Hebrew faction (see comment on 6:1). Jerusalem had many synagogues (though not the 480 of later tradition), including some of those mentioned here. Freedpersons constituted a particular class in Greco-Roman society in the first generation; later rabbis ranked freedpersons just below proselytes, but they were probably not thinking primarily of Roman freedpersons. The specific term here is the Latin loanword *libertinus;* the synagogue was established by freed slaves of Roman citizens, who were therefore Roman citizens themselves. Most were probably Judeans enslaved by the Roman general Pompey in the first century B.C., afterward freed by Roman Jews; as Roman citizens, those who returned to Jerusalem would have high status, a status maintained by their descendants so long as they continued to marry and bear other descendants of citizens (cf. 22:28). Archaeologists have found an inscription (the "Theodotus inscription") from a Greek-speaking Jerusalem synagogue from this period; Theodotus's father, Vettenos, was probably a Jew from Rome and, given the name, probably a freedman.

Later sources attest the synagogue of the Alexandrians and that of the Cilicians; the capital of Cilicia was Tarsus, Paul's hometown (for Paul's possible descent from Jews enslaved by Pompey, see comment on 16:37). Other ancient cities with large Jewish immigrant populations also sported diverse synagogues. Luke's description here may be a single synagogue of freedmen constituted by those who have returned from the various locations where they or their ancestors settled for a time after being freed.

6:11. Some ancient *rhetorical handbooks that taught public speakers how to win court cases explicitly instructed them how to prepare false witnesses to be persuasive. "Blasphemy" here does not have the later technical sense of pronouncing the divine name of God but the more general sense of the Greek term, namely purported disrespect for God. Ironically, perjury (6:13) was always considered disrespectful to deities.

6:12. Ancient courts normally depended on accusers to arraign those they wished to

charge. The Sanhedrin was not likely to be favorably disposed toward Stephen; the Jewish *law of rebuke required a warning, but the Sanhedrin had already warned the leaders of this movement (5:40), and from this point the Sanhedrin would have to take action.

6:13-14. On training false witnesses, see comment on 6:13. Ancients viewed perjury as an affront to the god in whose name the false witnesses had sworn an oath. False witnesses in a capital case were to be executed if found out (Deut 19:18-19; also under Roman law), but in this case Stephen will seem to confirm half their charge in reply to the *high priest's interrogation (7:1). He is for the law (cf. the bulk of his quotations in chap. 7) but in some sense challenges the unique role that many of his contemporaries assigned to the temple (chap. 7); for "this holy place" (6:13), see comment on 7:33. Even publicly predicting the temple's destruction could lead to arrest and scourging (as happened a generation later to a figure reported in Josephus). The temple was famous for its beauty and grandeur; it was also central to Jerusalem's economy (e.g., Josephus claims that its completion in A.D. 62–64 put eighteen thousand people out of work). Jewish tradition praised those who had suffered to preserve the ancestral traditions based on Scripture; its defenders would regard Stephen as apostate. The accusers spoke first in a case.

6:15. Like Jesus (Lk 9:29) and Moses of old (Ex 34:29-30, 35), Stephen is somehow transfigured; Stephen will soon mention an angel's glory to Moses (Acts 7:30, 35) and will see Jesus' glory (7:55-56).

7:1. The high priest opens the questioning of the accused; his broad statement would give Stephen the opportunity to deny the charge.

7:2-7
The Abraham Narrative

Reciting Israel's history in ways to make points was common (historical retrospective, e.g., 1 Sam 12:7-12; 1 Maccabees 2:49-69; Sirach 44–50), and one need not study Acts 7:2-53 long before the point becomes clear: Stephen answers the charges (6:11, 13-14). Although he upholds the *law, making his case profusely from Scripture, he denies that the temple or even the land of Israel is necessarily central to God's short-term working in history. Although *Old Testament prophets had made the same case (e.g., Jer 7; Jonah), Stephen is bound to draw at least as much opposition as they did. Where Stephen's points differ from the standard Hebrew text, they generally agree with the *Septuagint or sometimes the *Samaritan text.

7:2-4. Abraham was the respected ancestor of the Jewish people, the model of faith and obedience, lauded in many Jewish texts. Palestinian Jewish tradition strongly emphasized the specialness of the land of Israel, and some teachers even claimed that God revealed himself directly only in the land of Israel (with a few explainable exceptions; *Mekilta Pisha* 1:35-88). Here, although God calls Abraham to the Promised Land, he reveals himself to Abraham in Mesopotamia, far to the east. In Luke's *narrative, the experience of God's glory that Stephen infers in Genesis 12:1 will anticipate Stephen's own in Acts 7:55. Genesis does not portray Abraham's father as dying before Abraham's departure for the promised land, but some other Jewish traditions do so.

7:5-7. Although Abraham was the ideal man of God, neither he nor his descendants for four centuries were allowed to possess the Holy Land. Alluding to Genesis 17:8, Stephen in Acts 7:5 adapts it with inheritance language from Numbers and Deuteronomy and "not even a foot" from Deuteronomy 2:5. In Acts 7:6-7, Stephen uses especially Genesis 15:13 to anticipate a subsequent section of his speech, regarding Israel in Moses' time.

7:8-16
The Joseph Narrative

Samaritans viewed Joseph and Moses as the greatest leaders of the past. Jewish literature also spoke of them highly.

7:8. For the covenant of circumcision, see Genesis 17:13.

7:9. The patriarchs were jealous of the one whom God planned as their deliverer (Gen 37:11; cf. 37:4). They were the ancestors of most of the Jewish people (for which reason some postbiblical Jewish stories tried to mitigate their guilt). Thus Stephen begins the secondary emphasis of his sermon: you oppose the real leaders God gives you. Returning charges was characteristic of defense speeches, and Stephen is already preparing for this offensive strategy

that supplements his defensive one.

7:10. The place where God exalted and blessed Joseph was Egypt, not the Promised Land.

7:11-13. Joseph rescued his family, but at first they did not recognize him. They heard of the grain in Egypt in Genesis 42:2; Pharaoh's hospitality appears in Genesis 45:16-20.

7:14. Citing the Old Testament in Greek for a Jewish audience whose first language is Greek, Stephen follows the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew text for the number of people in Joseph's family—seventy-five (the usual Hebrew text has seventy; two Hebrew texts from the *Dead Sea Scrolls agree with the Septuagint; but Deut 10:22 suggests that seventy is the earlier reading).

7:15-16. Summaries sometimes condense, telescope and omit information so that some details are missing. Thus Jacob, not Abraham, bought this site (Gen 33:19), although Abraham bought another site for a tomb in the Promised Land (Gen 23). Jacob, Joseph and his brothers died in a foreign land, although their bones were later moved to the Holy Land (cf. comment on 6:1). Scripture does not record that they were all buried in Shechem. (Jacob was buried near Hebron—Gen 23; 49:29-32; 50:13; Joseph was buried at Shechem—Josh 24:32. *Josephus has the other sons buried at Hebron, but because they died after Jacob's burial, their burial at the same time and place as their brother Joseph seems somewhat more likely.) But Stephen here agrees with Samaritan tradition, which naturally accorded Shechem this honor because it had become the leading city of the Samaritans (see comment on 8:5). Judean purists would be interested in their ancestors being buried not only in the promised land, but in the Judean part of it.

7:17-34
The Moses Narrative

Stephen follows the Old Testament closely, avoiding the extensive elaboration on Moses' life found in other writers of the period. Here he ties together both his preceding themes: God reveals himself outside the Holy Land, and Israel rejects its deliverers. His connection of Old Testament leaders, noting a pattern of rejection, is not his own invention but is rooted in Genesis and Exodus themselves. Compare, for example, Joseph and Moses, as shown in table 5.

By highlighting connections among biblical leaders (to foreshadow the ultimate leader, Jesus), Stephen merely develops connections

Table 5. Old Testament Parallels Between Joseph and Moses

Joseph	Moses
Brothers sold him into slavery	Family, who were slaves, saved him from slavery
Midianites sold Joseph into Egypt	Midianites welcomed Moses when he fled Egypt
Joseph became Pharaoh's "father" (Gen 45:8)	Moses became a son to Pharaoh's daughter
Joseph was abruptly exalted from slavery, made a prince over Egypt	Moses abruptly lost his Egyptian royalty by defending slaves
Joseph made all Egypt Pharaoh's slaves (47:19)	Through Moses God freed slaves
Through Joseph God delivered Egypt during famine	Through Moses God devastated Egypt's economy
Joseph, exiled in Egypt, marries the daughter of an Egyptian priest	Moses, exiled from Egypt, marries the daughter of a Midianite priest
The name of Joseph's first (of two named) sons evokes Joseph's sojourn in a foreign land	The name of the first (of two named) sons evokes Moses' sojourn in a foreign land
Future deliverer's leadership initially rejected by brothers	Future deliverer's leadership initially rejected by his people

Table 5 is adapted from Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2014), 2:1363.

already implicit in earlier biblical *narrative.

7:17-18. That they "grew and multiplied" echoes Exodus 1:7; the other king who did not know Joseph quotes Exodus 1:8. Israel's hard times in Egypt, during which a deliverer was needed, resemble the difficulties in first-century Palestine; many people were looking for another prophet like Moses to deliver them from oppression.

7:19. In the *New Testament period, non-Jews often left their children out to die, but Jews (and in this period, Egyptians) abhorred this practice; here Luke uses the same term often used for child abandonment, increasing revulsion for Pharaoh. In Luke's period some rescued discarded babies, but most often reared them as slaves; it was known, however, that the biblical Pharaoh did not want babies rescued. Stephen's hearers might think also of the wicked *Gentile oppressor Antiochus Epiphanes, who killed Israel's babies (1 Maccabees 1:61; 2 Maccabees 6:10). For Pharaoh's mistreatment of Israelites summarized here, cf. Exodus 1:9-11, 22.

7:20. Cf. Exodus 2:2. Some writers (especially though not exclusively later *rabbis, perhaps adapting earlier stories about Noah) related fantastic stories about Moses' birth (that his beauty at birth was so great that it lit up the room, that he was born circumcised, that his mother hid him "in her womb" for three more months, etc.); Stephen reports exactly what the Old Testament says about Moses' birth.

7:21. Cf. Exodus 2:5-6, 10. Josephus also interpreted Pharaoh's daughter's action in Exodus 2:10 as adoption (though using a less technical phrase for it than Stephen, who plays on the Septuagint wording). Adoption was widely practiced in the Roman world; the adopted son lost his former legal identity and was counted the legal son of the adopter. Most ancient Jewish sources elaborate the biblical narrative more extensively than Stephen does here; for example, Jewish tradition elaborated on Pharaoh's daughter (e.g., naming her Thermuthis, Tharmuth or later Bithiah).

7:22. Like Josephus, other writers elaborated extensively on Moses' Egyptian education and legendary exploits as an Egyptian general. Stephen infers Moses' Egyptian education, presumably correctly (for all boys in the royal family), yet he simply tells what needs to be told. His emphasis on Moses' Gentile education would not disturb his Greek-speaking hearers the way his emphasis on geographically diverse revelations may have (e.g., 7:2-4, 10). His mention of Moses' Gentile education, though brief, contributes to Stephen's polemic that God planned to reach beyond Israel even from the beginning.

7:23. "Forty" could reflect the average figure for a generation and other numbers in the narrative (Ex 7:7; Deut 34:7). But it also roundly fits other Jewish traditions (forty-two in **Jubilees* 47:10-12; forty in later rabbinic sources, e.g., *Sifre Deuteronomy* 357.14.1).

7:24. Cf. Exodus 2:12. Like both later rabbis and earlier Greco-Jewish writers such as *Philo and Artapanus, Stephen presents Moses' murder of the Egyptian in a positive light; writing Jewish history for Gentile readers, Josephus omits the incident entirely.

7:25-28. Cf. Exodus 2:13-15. Although Moses sacrificed his standing in Egypt to identify with his people, as a bringer of deliverance (the word usually translated "salvation") for them, they rejected him. See comment on 7:35-37.

7:29. Jewish tradition elaborates Moses' escape (e.g., that Moses killed the assassin sent to slay him), but Stephen's speech sticks to the basic story. Exodus reports Moses' sons (2:22; 4:20; 18:3-6; 1 Chron 23:15); in a narration notable for its conciseness, the *digression on this point may underline Moses' interethnic union (Ex 2:21-22; cf. Num 12:1), highlighting Luke's theme of good news for Gentiles.

7:30-34. Added to the forty years of 7:23, the figure in 7:30 allows Moses' age of eighty in Exodus 7:7. God not only revealed himself to Moses on Mount Sinai and sent him to Egypt, but he also called the mountain "this holy place" (v. 33), a term Stephen's accusers reserved for the temple (6:13). Stephen's narration condenses Exodus 3:2-10.

7:35-41
A Rejected Savior Like Moses

7:35. Like Jesus, Moses was rejected by his people as a deliverer. In 7:35-38, Stephen four times begins with "This one"; orators employed such emphatic repetition to drive home a point.

7:36. Like Jesus, Moses did signs and wonders.

7:37. As many Jewish people and the Samaritans recognized, God would send a deliverer like Moses (Deut 18:18). In the style of a good ancient Jewish expositor of Scripture, Stephen asks, "In what way will the prophet be like Moses?" He answers: he will be rejected by his people (7:35, 39); his hearers' very opposition proves his point (cf. Is 53:1-3).

7:38. The Jewish people celebrated that Moses had received the *law and passed it on to Israel (Stephen uses terms that might translate those used for Jewish teachers receiving and passing on traditions, though not as strong as those in, e.g., 1 Cor 11:23). The term that Stephen uses for the "congregation" in the wilderness was a legitimate Greek translation for the assembly of Israel (though less common in the Septuagint than the word also translated as "*synagogue"), but it is also the early Christian word for "*church," allowing Stephen another connection between Moses and Jesus.

7:39. Yet Moses' own generation rejected him; why is it so hard to believe that the one whom the Jewish leaders of Jesus' generation rejected might not also be a deliverer for them?

7:40-41. That Egyptians worshiped animal figures was widely known and widely despised in the Greco-Roman world (where most preferred human figures for deities). Egyptians worshiped some cow-figures; Israel may have borrowed this practice. The episode of the golden calf was so embarrassing that Josephus omitted it. It was the incident in Israel's history of which the rabbis were most ashamed; they felt it was the most sinful of Israel's acts. But they grew defensive when pagans queried them about it, and several centuries later they argued that the pagans who accompanied Israel, not Israel, made the calf (against Ex 32:1-6). Israel had worshiped idols right after deliverance under Moses; yet, Stephen is going to imply, his accusers also follow the "works of their [human] hands"—an expression often used for idols in the Bible and other Jewish sources but equally applicable, in a literal sense, to their humanly built temple (Acts 7:48).

7:42-50
God's View of the Temple

Now Stephen replies to the charge directly: Scripture does not support the importance his opponents attach to the temple. To the keepers of the temple—which was the symbol of the unity of Jewish people throughout the empire—Stephen's accusation sounds like the sort of accusation that *Samaritans or other despisers of the Jerusalem temple might bring. Even the schismatic *Essenes condemned only the impurity of the leadership in the temple, while longing for a restored temple.

7:42-43. The "star" and "host of heaven" might imply astral deities (Deut 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3, 5; 23:4-5); by this period most people in the Mediterranean world viewed stars as divine. In a *prophecy also favored in the *Dead Sea Scrolls (Amos 5:25-27; see CD 7.14-17), Stephen plays on the term translated "tabernacle" (KJV, NASB) or "shrine" (NLT): Israel carried the tabernacle of a pagan god in the wilderness. He follows the Septuagint rendering of the deities' names. "Beyond Damascus" becomes "beyond Babylon," perhaps to warn of an impending captivity in addition to the earlier captivity in Babylon (cf. Lk 21:24).

7:44-47. Stephen quickly qualifies that God did tell Moses to build the tabernacle in a particular way (see comment on Heb 8:1-5), and the tabernacle had remained until David's time; the temple was not built till Solomon's time. Stephen does not deny that God blessed and approved the building of the Old Testament temple; but he denies that God meant it to be the idol that he argues his hearers have made it. In verse 46 Stephen echoes Psalm 132:5.

7:48-50. Isaiah 66:1-2 attest that God does not need the temple made with human hands; his own hands made everything. Although Stephen focuses on the Law (more emphasized by both *Sadducees and many *Diaspora Jews), like many synagogue expositors he afterward explains the Law in terms of a reading from the Prophets. The title "made with hands" may recall 7:41 where, as often elsewhere in Scripture and Jewish tradition, it applies to idols. In verse 50, God's "hand" made everything, so he is not limited to houses made by human "hands" (7:48).

7:51-53
Stephen's Climax

Stephen preaches like the prophets he mentions. Closing arguments of speeches often included intense emotion. The conclusion of a Greco-Roman deliberative speech was meant to produce change or decisive action. Stephen's speech also includes elements of forensic speech, however—more to convict his hearers than to defend himself. Forensic speeches often charged the accusers with the very sort of crime with which they charged the defendant—in this case, with subverting God's *law (cf. 6:13). Courageously, Stephen condemns not only his accusers but also his judges; such behavior, when followed on rare occasions by philosophers and prophets, often led to losing one's case or (as in a serious case like that of Socrates) martyrdom.

7:51. "Stiff-necked" and "uncircumcised heart" are standard prophetic insults in the Old Testament; they appear together in Deuteronomy 10:16. Moses emphasized circumcision (7:8), but those who were spiritually uncircumcised were especially cut off from the covenant (e.g., Deut 10:16; 30:6). Stephen could hardly choose harsher words. His point is that his hearers, like their ancestors, reject God's messengers; the *Holy Spirit was especially seen as the Spirit who had inspired the prophets (with implications for the application of Acts 7:52).

7:52. Jewish tradition had heightened Israel's responsibility for the death of the prophets (1 Kings 18:4, 13; Neh 9:26; cf. 2 Chron 24:20-22; Jer 26:21-23) beyond what was found in the Old Testament, so Stephen's hearers could not deny his charge. Like Socrates in Greek tradition, but more relevantly like Jesus, Stephen allows his words to provoke his accusers to kill him, thereby proving his point: they are like their ancestors who killed the prophets.

7:53. Aside from the angel who appeared to Moses in the bush, the Old Testament does not say that God mediated the law through angels; Jewish tradition had added them to heighten reverence for the law (Deut 33:2 LXX; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.136; perhaps Ps 68:17-18; 4Q521; cf. also Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). Stephen concludes that his accusers are wrong; they, not he, are guilty of breaking the law, and are thus uncircumcised in heart. Like Socrates who turned the charge of impiety against the gods upon his accusers, he knows what the result will be: martyrdom.

7:54–8:4
The First Martyr

After speaking like the prophets and noting that prophets get martyred (7:52; cf. 7:9, 35), Stephen experiences a prophet's martyrdom. Romans did not permit subject peoples to execute capital punishment, but Stephen's hearers are so enraged that they lynch him according to their own Jewish *law. Stephen's death proves his point, laying the theological groundwork for the expansion of the Jesus movement outside Palestine; it also leads to further persecution and thus the direct spread of the faith (8:1); and it sows a seed in a certain Saul (7:58)—a seed whose fruit would later be reaped on the road to Damascus (9:3-4; cf. the similar themes shared by Stephen's and Paul's preaching in Acts).

Ancient writers sometimes paralleled figures, and *disciples often imitated their teachers; Stephen's death follows the example of Jesus: compare Acts 7:56 with Luke 22:69; Acts 7:59 with Luke 23:46; and Acts 7:60 with Luke 23:34. Luke may also reverse the charges in his portrayal: note comments below on the *Son of Man standing (7:55), the false witnesses stripping themselves (7:58) and Stephen's prayer for them (7:60). Such reversal of charges was standard in forensic rhetoric; ancient thinkers also sometimes spoke of unjust courts (such as the one that condemned Socrates) being those really on trial before truth or world opinion.

7:54-55. Looking to heaven was a common posture in prayer. Witnesses typically stood to testify, and judges normally stood to render verdicts (certainly when referring to God; cf. Ps 3:7; 7:6; 9:19; 10:12; 12:5; 17:13; 82:8; Is 3:13); the point might be that Jesus, the true judge, is now vindicating his servant even as his opponents prepare to condemn him. As elsewhere in the narrative, Luke leaves no doubt as to who is really on trial before God (see comment on 7:57-58, 60; cf. Is 54:17).

7:56. In Daniel 7:13-14, the coming of the Son of Man would vindicate the righteous

(Israel) against their oppressors (the nations); Stephen's hearers would know in which category he places himself and in which category he places them.

7:57-58. Death by stoning was a common mob action throughout the ancient world, but it was also a legal form of execution in the Torah (including for blasphemy, Lev 24:16). Mob violence and lynchings often used stones, including in Judea; Scripture reported God's people stoning or threatening to stone his agents (e.g., Ex 17:4; Num 14:10; 2 Chron 24:21). Although Stephen's death is a lynching, Jewish traditions about appropriate methods of execution might shed some light on how Stephen's accusers killed him. According to tradition, a condemned criminal would be taken out to the edge of a city (cf. Num 15:35-36) and thrown over a drop at least twice his height. The witnesses would be the first (cf. Deut 17:7) to hurl large stones on top of him, aiming for the chest (though precision was impossible), till the victim died. Under Jewish law, they were to strip the *criminal* before killing him; here Stephen's accusers strip *themselves,* probably because they are hot, as Greeks stripped for athletic activities. (Such self-stripping also appears in some other ancient accounts of violence.) But Luke may record the detail to identify the guilty parties—those stoning Stephen figuratively admit their own guilt by stripping themselves. (Stripping was customary before beatings or execution; nakedness also publicly humiliated those so stripped, especially given Jewish and Middle Eastern revulsion against being seen naked.) Under Mosaic law, false witnesses in a capital case were to be executed themselves (Deut 19:19).

Luke's first-time hearers probably know the name Paul, but perhaps not his other name, Saul (13:9); like a good ancient (or modern) writer, Luke might reserve an important revelation for later. "Young man" or "youth" is not very precise; the usual sense of "youth" extends from fourteen (or twenty-one) to twenty-eight years old, but the word used here can extend up to forty (though Saul is much younger than that here). In Jewish tradition (based on Num 4:35) one did not qualify for some offices before age thirty, but this point is probably irrelevant to Saul's mission in 9:2, especially if he is single (a common Jewish tradition also encouraged men to marry by age twenty). That Saul is in his twenties (the most common age to which the term translated "youth" referred) is a reasonable guess. People associated young men with vigor, intense feelings, rashness and valor in battle or other violence. Those who could gain respect while young were considered exceptional (cf. Gal 1:14).

7:59. Stephen's prayer parallels Jesus' cry in Luke 23:46. Ancient writers often liked to draw parallels between different figures; Luke wants his readers to see that Stephen, an ideal representative of the church, follows in the steps of his Lord in martyrdom.

7:60. His final cry parallels Luke 23:34; see comment on Acts 7:59. At least according to later rabbinic ideals, the person being executed was to confess his sin and pray, "May my death *atone for all my sins." Stephen confesses not his own sin but that of his false accusers (see 7:57-58). Sometimes Jewish people (and less often *Gentiles) would kneel in prayer (as a sign of submission), often with hands lifted toward heaven (1 Kings 8:54; 2 Chron 6:13; Ezra 9:5). Ancients often described death euphemistically as "sleep" (so literally here).

8:1. It took persecution and the scattering of believers—especially the bicultural, foreign Jews (11:19-20)—to get the *church to begin to do what Jesus had commanded them back in 1:8. As the second-century North African theologian Tertullian pointed out, "the blood of Christians is the seed" of the church's growth.

8:2. Dying unburied was the greatest dishonor possible in the ancient Mediterranean world; many Gentiles even believed that those who died unburied were denied entrance to the netherworld, hence condemned to roam as ghosts. Usually only the cruellest of rulers would deprive even their enemies of burial, though it was sometimes denied criminals; but some prohibited burial for the worst criminals, leaving it to vultures and dogs to pick their bones clean. Most people, however, considered it honorable to bury the dead, and risking one's life to bury the dead (e.g., in the stories of Antigone or Tobit) was considered honorable and heroic. Adult sons or those closest to the deceased would take charge of burial. Although Judaism required burial (often in a criminals' dishonorable grave), and

publicly mourning the dead was normally a pious duty in Judaism, Jewish law forbade public mourning for a condemned criminal. Stephen's pious friends ignore the illegal ruling of the highest Jewish court to honor their friend.

8:3. Prison was normally a holding place till trial; that Saul detains women as well as men suggests that he is more zealous than most of his contemporaries would have felt necessary (Gal 1:13-14; Phil 3:6). Crackdowns usually targeted men, but women were included during the most severe crackdowns (e.g., in the cult of Dionysus in earlier Rome). Perhaps the only charge against the church members is an assumption of their opposition to the temple, aroused by Stephen's speech.

8:4. Although Acts focuses on prominent individuals (as was common in ancient history), we learn here that many people were involved. Most ancient religions were spread by traveling merchants or other travelers more than by prominent individuals.

8:5-13
The Conversion of Samaria

Having finished narrating his first example from the Seven (Stephen), Luke now turns to his second example, one of those "scattered" in 8:4.

8:5. "The city of Samaria" could refer to the *Old Testament site of Samaria, now a pagan Greek city called Sebaste, dedicated to the worship of the emperor and full of occult influences (see comment on 8:10). But the bulk of Sebaste's people were Greeks rather than *Samaritans, so the phrase probably refers to the main Samaritan town of the district of Samaria, later called Neapolis, on the site of ancient Shechem (cf. 7:15-16). This was the religious center of the Samaritans. Inscriptions from Mount Gerizim show that at least many Samaritans knew Greek, and in this urban center the *Hellenist Philip could preach in his first language.

8:6-8. Signs were accorded high evidential value in antiquity. That the modern Western educated elite tends to denigrate them is more a commentary on our culture than on theirs; most cultures in the world today (virtually all cultures not influenced by Western deism or atheism) accept some forms of supernatural activity. People often respected exorcisms that included outward signs of the spirit coming out, as here.

8:9. Magicians usually drew large followings in antiquity; given the prominence of Jewish magicians in Greco-Roman antiquity, a Samaritan magician should not surprise us; Samaria had even more Greek influences than Judea. Like the Old Testament, official leaders in mainstream Judaism opposed *magic, but later magical *papyri show considerable Jewish influence, and even a minority of later *rabbis reportedly indulged in something like sorcery, claiming simply to exploit insight into the secrets of God's laws of creation. Whether someone was called a miracle-worker or a magician often depended on whether the writer liked him, but in general magicians were thought to act less publicly and particularly to act more for personal gain.

8:10. In nearby Sebaste many Greeks were synthesizing the various Greek gods into one universal male deity and the goddesses into another female one. This synthesis followed a trend that had been developing among some educated Greeks for centuries. A second-century Christian writer suggested that Simon claimed to be the avatar, or incarnation, of the male form of the deity, while his consort Helena was its female form. Samaritans themselves were monotheistic, but syncretism was common on a popular level. Throughout history and in many cultures today people are convinced about God through what missiologists have called "power encounters," where God's power is revealed as greater than that of those claiming to be spiritual competitors (earlier, cf. e.g., Ex 7:10-12; 1 Kings 18:28-39).

8:11. Judaism allowed that *Gentile sorcerers could perform signs; many Jews attributed this to Belial (*Satan). The Old Testament taught that pagan sorcerers could duplicate some of God's signs on a small scale (Ex 7:11, 22; 8:7), but that their power was definitely limited (Ex 8:18-19; 9:11).

8:12. Familiar with Samaritan opposition to Judaism, Jewish people would have found this scenario remarkable. Already circumcised, Samaritans would have converted to Judaism by *baptism alone; but such conversion rarely if ever occurred, because it would have seemed tantamount to betraying one's own people. For Philip, a Jew, to present the *gospel in such

terms that a Samaritan could follow a *Messiah proclaimed by Jews (probably by not demanding adherence to the Jerusalem temple) would be viewed by many Judeans as a betrayal of Judaism. Philip follows the same theological program of decentralized witness supported by Stephen in chapter 7 and outlined by Jesus in 1:8.

8:13. Some writers have argued that Simon was not genuinely converted, given his subsequent behavior (8:18-24), but this issue depends on the meaning of "conversion"; like Judaism in the same period, early Christianity lamented not only false converts but also apostates (e.g., 1 Sam 10:6; 16:14; 2 Pet 2:21; 1 Jn 2:19).

8:14-25
Apostolic Ratification of the Samaritan Conversions

Philip's crosscultural ministry has broken new ground, of the sort that might draw opposition from some conservative elements in the Jerusalem church (8:12). It is thus important for Luke to describe the response of the Jerusalem *apostles and the blessing of God on the work.

8:14-15. From a theological standpoint, the work of the *Spirit is one package (2:38-39), but in the experience of the church not all aspects of his work are necessarily manifested simultaneously. Luke emphasizes the prophetic-empowerment dimension of the Spirit (1:8) so much that he rarely mentions other aspects of the Spirit's work known in the *Old Testament and early Judaism; this prophetic-empowerment aspect could be in view here, although Philip's hearers were already converted in 8:12.

8:16. "Into the name" is a literal translation that could reflect the language of ancient business documents, meaning that the converts have transferred ownership of their lives to Christ. Conversely, it could simply reflect the increasing ambiguity of Greek prepositions in this period (thus simply meaning, "with reference to Jesus"). Cf. "*baptism" in the glossary.

8:17. Ancient Judaism provides rare examples of laying on hands for prayer (one in the *Dead Sea Scrolls); in the Old Testament hands were laid on to impart blessings in prayer (Gen 48:14-20), among other matters (see comment on 6:6).

8:18-22. The only category into which many Greeks could fit the miracles performed by the apostles would have been that of magical works, but this text clearly distinguishes an amoral, magical interpretation of the miracles from the apostolic miracles, which are much more like those of Old Testament prophets such as Elijah and Elisha. Sorcerers could buy magical formulas; no one could buy the Spirit. One of the ways ancient observers distinguished *magic from miracle is that the former involved greed and self-aggrandisement. Those defending miracle-workers often had to distinguish them from magicians.

8:23-24. "Gall" and "bitterness" appear together in the *Septuagint of Lamentations 3:15, 19, for suffering, but most relevantly in Deuteronomy 29:17; 32:32, in the context of paganism. "Bond of injustice" may reflect Isaiah 58:6.

8:25. After the new mission was pioneered by the bicultural witnesses of Acts 6, the apostles finally begin to develop their own mission (1:8). Far from the apostles fixing or correcting Philip's inadequate conversion of the Samaritans (as some commentators have suggested), the whole *narrative indicates that they recognize and ratify the propriety of his work and develop what he began. Because *Aramaic would be the dominant language of the Samaritan villages (as opposed to Neapolis; see comment on 8:5), Peter and John could press into villages where Philip had not ministered.

8:26-40
Conversion of an African Official

Luke devotes nearly as much space to the conversion of this one foreigner, who can function as an indigenous witness in his own culture, as to the mass conversion in Samaria. Because *Samaritans were not considered fully Jewish, this is the first fully *Gentile convert to Christianity (probably unknown to most of the Jerusalem church—11:18).

8:26. Two roads led south from near Jerusalem, one through Hebron into Idumea (Edom) and the other joining the coast road before Gaza heading for Egypt, both with plenty of Roman milestones as road markers. Old Gaza was a deserted town whose ruins lay near the now culturally Greek cities of Askalon and New Gaza. Philip might have no one to preach to on a little-traveled road that would

lead by a deserted city, and after the revival in Samaria this command must seem absurd to him; but God had often tested faith through apparently absurd commands (e.g., Ex 14:16; 1 Kings 17:3-4, 9-14; 2 Kings 5:10). The term translated "south" can also mean "noon"; traveling at noon was very rare (see 22:6; comment on Jn 4:5-6), so this detail, if intended, would make the command seem even more absurd.

8:27. The Greek term *Aithiopia* ("Ethiopia") referred not specifically to modern Ethiopia, but to Africa south of Egypt. Ethiopia figured in Mediterranean legends and mythical geography as the very end of the earth (sometimes extending from the far south to the far east), and the most commonly mentioned feature of Ethiopians in Jewish and Greco-Roman literature (also noted in the *Old Testament—Jer 13:23) is their black skin; some sources also depict their hair and other features in ways that leave no doubt that black Africans are in view.

He hails from a black Nubian kingdom south of Egypt partly in what is now the Sudan, a kingdom that had lasted since about 750 B.C. and whose main cities were Meroë and Napata (this should not be confused with Abyssinia, which came to be called Ethiopia in more recent times and converted to Christianity in the fourth century A.D.). Meroë was so powerful that Rome settled for a peace treaty and trade ties rather than its empire venturing south of Egypt. This official and perhaps members of his entourage would have known Greek, necessary for his kingdom's trade with cities in Egypt. He is probably a Gentile "God-fearer" (see comment on 10:2). As the queen's treasurer, this man is a high and powerful official. Meroë was wealthy, so the treasurer probably supervised considerable wealth. The empire's capital, also named Meroë, was roughly one hundred miles northeast of modern Khartoum and roughly two hundred miles south of modern Egypt—no small journey to Jerusalem. Although this kingdom had some trade with Rome, even the treasurer for Meroë's queen would not normally have business so far north.

Various queens of this African kingdom bore the title "Candace" (*kandak'a*), which Greeks viewed as a dynastic title of the queen mother of Ethiopia, whom they believed ruled in Ethiopia. In fact queens may have born this title whether or not they were reigning; at least some, however, did rule Ethiopia. If the Candace here is regnant, she might be Queen Nawidemak or one of the queens about whom we lack sufficient knowledge.

When meant literally (which was not always the case—Gen 39:1 LXX), "eunuch" referred to a castrated man. The term's fivefold repetition in this narrative probably signals that the official was a true eunuch, as was often the case of close associates of queens in some regions. Although eunuchs were preferred court officials in the East, many Mediterranean peoples mocked them as deficient in manliness. The Jewish people opposed making men eunuchs, and Jewish *law excluded eunuchs from Israel; the rules were undoubtedly instituted to prevent Israel from neutering boys (Deut 23:1). Thus this official, while Jewish in faith (8:27, 30), would not have been accepted as a full convert to Judaism. But God could certainly accept eunuchs (Is 56:3-5, even foreign eunuchs; Wisdom of Solomon 3:14). An Ethiopian "eunuch" in the Old Testament turned out to be one of Jeremiah's few allies and saved his life (Jer 38:7-13).

8:28. Most people walked, the more well-to-do rode animals, but only the most well-to-do had chariots or carriages. Expensive carriages could be covered and have four wheels, and could be drawn by horses, donkeys, mules or oxen. (The official would probably use the carriage only as far as Alexandria; from there he would sail south on the Nile.) As a wealthy person, he could have had a reader, but as an educated person, he may have been reading the scroll himself (as Luke's wording probably suggests). People were occasionally known to read while sitting in expensive carriages; thus the chariot may be moving while the eunuch is reading.

8:29-30. Although taught along with reading aloud in modern times, the skill of reading silently was not practiced as often in antiquity; those who could read generally read aloud. Meroë had its own language and alphabetic script. Nevertheless, because of Meroë's trade contacts with Greek-speakers in Egypt, the official knew Greek (the trade language in Egypt's cities). Because Philip understands what he is reading and they go on to commu-

nicate, the official may be reading a copy of the *Septuagint. The situation here is obviously divinely arranged (cf., e.g., Gen 24:13-27). The chariot probably was not traveling quickly; its maximum speed might be only twenty-five or thirty miles per day. People in antiquity valued youthful vigor, a vigor Philip employs to good effect here.

8:31. Often only one attendant would accompany the official in a chariot; the wealthy eunuch might have more, but there is still room for Philip.

8:32-35. Earlier servant passages in Isaiah refer explicitly to Israel, but 49:5 distinguishes the servant from the rest of Israel, and in 53:1-3 he is rejected by Israel; in 53:4-12 he bears the sins of Israel, although he himself is not guilty (53:9; contrast 40:2) and suffers voluntarily (53:12). The official's confusion is understandable, but one can well imagine how Philip explained the passage. (Luke does not report all of Is 53, but the context is implied; because chapter and verse references had not yet been assigned, one had to cite part of a passage to let the readers know where one was reading.) Three chapters later Isaiah speaks of God welcoming foreigners and eunuchs (Is 56:3-8).

8:36-38. There are some wadis near Gaza (wadis are dry creek beds that fill with water during the rainy season); because Jewish *baptism presupposed full immersion, this is no doubt what Luke intends here. As a eunuch (a designation highlighted by Luke five times), the official could not be a full *proselyte, hence would have been denied circumcision (Deut 23:1). Now, however, he expresses readiness to embrace baptism. As a God-fearer, the Ethiopian undoubtedly understands the usual Jewish view that full conversion includes baptism; in Jesus, he is welcomed fully into God's people (cf. Is 56:3-5).

8:39. Christianity especially began to expand in Abyssinia through lay witness in the third century, and that empire was declared "Christian" about the same time as the Roman Empire was. Nubia (the region of this official) converted later; no certain record of this Ethiopian's witness remains, but with Luke we may suppose that he testified of his faith in high places.

Some magicians claimed the ability to fly (not very commonly demonstrated!), but the language of Philip's removal suggests supernatural movement more like that suggested as possible for Elijah (1 Kings 18:12; cf. 2 Kings 2:11, 16) or other biblical sources (Ezek 3:12, 14).

8:40. Ancient writers sometimes framed sections with parallel language; Philip's preaching as he is going might echo 8:4 and 8:25. Philip's continuing ministry involves the coastal plain, again in advance of Peter's mission in the same region (see 9:32, 43; 10:24). The Judean Azotus, about four kilometers from the Mediterranean sea, had been the Old Testament's Philistine city of Ashdod. It was twenty to twenty-five miles northeast of Gaza (about a day's walk) and about thirty to thirty-five miles west of Jerusalem, situated roughly halfway between Gaza and Joppa. Caesarea Maritima (the coastal Caesarea, not Caesarea Philippi) was over fifty miles to the north of Azotus, just off the same coastal road; this city, Judea's Roman capital, will become significant for Acts in 10:1 (cf. 21:8). Although Jews also lived in Gaza, Azotus and Caesarea, these cities all included large numbers of Gentile residents; Philip foreshadows the mission of other *Hellenists (11:20).

9:1-9
Jesus Arrests Saul

The three accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts display some differences (chaps. 9, 22, 26; all fit the accounts in his letters). Classical literature sometimes reports messages given to messengers and then repeats them verbatim on their delivery. *Rhetorical style by Luke's day preferred variation, which makes the repeated *narratives much less repetitious, hence more interesting to read. Luke's three accounts fit their varied audiences.

9:1. Saul may have been a prominent person (cf. Gal 1:14) from a prominent family (cf. Acts 22:3; 26:5) to have direct access to the *high priest.

9:2. Official letters of introduction authorizing or recommending their sender were common, and *Josephus confirms that Palestinian agents could take orders from the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. Jewish communities outside Palestine respected the high priest, and letters from him authorize Saul to carry out his mission with the full cooperation of *synagogues there. (Saul rather than the high priest

initiates the action here.) Because Jerusalem high priests earlier exercised extradition rights over fugitive Judeans when they ruled Palestine, local synagogues in Syria may have still recognized this right, although the local ruler would probably not. These synagogue communities could cooperate with Saul in his mission to weed out the Jewish Christians. Contrary to some modern romanticized readings, intra-Jewish conflict occurred and sometimes even became violent (see, e.g., 1 Maccabees 3:8; *Dead Sea Scrolls CD 1.20-21; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.213).

The *Essene sect at *Qumran also described itself as "the way"; this was a natural designation for a group that believed that it alone followed the way of righteousness (cf., e.g., Prov 8:20; 12:28; 16:31; they also explicitly drew on Is 40:3). Essenes had apparently also settled in Syrian Damascus, if their writings on this point are meant literally. Tens of thousands of Jews lived in Damascus (as many as eighteen thousand were massacred there in A.D. 66).

9:3. Damascus lay roughly 135 miles north of Jerusalem on the Great North Road, about a six days' walk (shorter if they rode horses, as is possible, but cf. 9:8). The light from heaven indicates the Shekinah, God's presence (related to the concept of *yeqara*, "glory"), as God often revealed his glory in the *Old Testament. A number of Old Testament calling narratives include a theophany or other direct experience; see Exodus 3:1–4:17; Isaiah 6:1-13; Jeremiah 1:4-19; Ezekiel 1:1–3:15; cf. Judg 6:11-24. Jewish people also recognized that God might suddenly intervene to convert a persecutor (2 Maccabees 3:24-36).

9:4. In the Old Testament and Jewish literature, people often fell to the ground when confronted with divine or angelic revelations (e.g., Ezek 1:28; Dan 8:17). Usually the revealer then commands the person to stand (e.g., Ezek 2:1; Dan 8:18); the lack of such instruction here likely suggests that Saul's behavior is not an object of divine favor. In Jewish literature names are often repeated when God calls to someone, drawing special attention to what is about to be said (e.g., Gen 22:11; 46:2; Ex 3:4; 1 Sam 3:10). In Jewish literature, a voice from heaven almost always belongs to God himself; usually it was in *Aramaic or Hebrew, as is apparent here (from the form of "Saul" and from 26:14). Given the nature of the revelation, "Lord" here means more than "Sir"; perhaps Saul wonders if God or an angel is addressing him, or perhaps he simply cannot believe he is opposing God.

9:5-6. Persecuting his followers is persecuting Jesus, because they are his representatives (Lk 10:16). Letters of recommendation (cf. Acts 9:2) often identified the sender with the person recommended; here Jesus identifies with his persecuted followers. In the Old Tesament God evaluated the treatment of some people as if it were treatment of himself (Ex 16:8; 1 Sam 8:7; Prov 19:17).

9:7. The reaction of Saul's companions is analogous to that in Daniel 10:7.

9:8. God sometimes struck people with blindness to stop them from an evil purpose or as a temporary measure to get their attention (Gen 19:11; 2 Kings 6:18-20; note also the contextual play on spiritual blindness and sight in 2 Kings 6:17).

9:9. Three days was not uncommon for a fast (Esther 4:16); but without water one would become dehydrated, and to continue without water would eventually lead to death. *New Testament examples usually conjoin fasting with prayer, but fasting was commonly an expression of mourning or *repentance. According to this narrative, Saul does not change religions; he learns the true way to follow his Jewish religion. Social studies of conversion suggest that a convert sometimes retains some basic structures of thought but initially reverses his or her approach.

9:10-19a
Ananias's Mission

The pairing of Ananias's and Saul's visionary experiences, like the pairing of those of Cornelius and Peter in chapter 10, confirm the supernatural character of the revelation (as in some other ancient sources; e.g., Judg 7:9-15).

9:10. Another individual bears the name Ananias elsewhere in Acts (23:2), but this was a common name, the Greek form of the Hebrew Hananiah (e.g., Jer 28:1; Dan 1:6). His response is the proper one for an obedient servant of God ready to obey orders (1 Sam 3:10; Is 6:8). His biblically appropriate response to a theophany (cf. Gen 22:11; 46:2; Ex 3:4;

1 Sam 3:4-8; Is 6:8) contrasts with Saul's less informed approach above. (Damascus, capital of modern Syria, was then the capital of the Nabatean Arabs.)

9:11-12. Each is informed about the other in a vision. Such twin visions occur rarely in ancient literature (e.g., *Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.13; cf. Tobit 3); when they occur they allow no misunderstanding that the event was divinely coordinated (cf. Gen 41:32). Ancient Jewish hospitality was great, and accommodations with a fellow Jew in Damascus would not be hard for Saul to secure, whether or not Judas has advance notice of Saul's coming. Cities built before the *Hellenistic era, like Damascus, would have many narrow, winding streets. Damascus, however, was reconstructed on the Greek grid pattern, with fairly evenly spaced east-west and north-south streets. Many scholars believe that Straight Street is the long, main east-west street through Damascus, where tradition still places Judas's ancient home (near the street's west end). This important street ran parallel to the Barada River, which passed through Damascus, and was fifty feet (fifteen meters) wide, with colonnades on either side. (We cannot be certain that this was the street, however.) Once one found a street, one normally asked neighbors for directions to the house (although according to local tradition, Ananias's house was near the same street, albeit near the eastern end).

Jews are attested in ancient Tarsus, the capital and most prominent city of Cilicia in southern Asia Minor. Civic strife was apparently characteristic of Tarsian (and more generally Cilician) culture; Cilicia's reputation for viciousness might reflect the influence of the region's common violence a generation or two before. A Hellenized city prosperous from trade, it also had prominent schools and boasted many philosophers, though many of its own residents chose to do advanced studies abroad. But cf. comment on 22:3.

9:13-14. Ananias is naturally less eager to obey his orders (9:10) after he finds out what they are (but he does obey, 9:17). Even after saying, "Here I am" (9:10; cf. Ex 3:4) one might voice objections (e.g., Ex 4:10; see also Acts 10:14). On commands that seem absurd, see 8:26.

9:15-16. The language here is that of *Old Testament call or commissioning narratives; Saul is apparently converted already and is about to be called to ministry. "On behalf of my name" or "for my name" (NIV) means either for Jesus' honor or that these sufferings would be incurred while Saul is acting as his representative (cf. comment on Jn 14:12-14).

9:17. "Brother" was often used for coreligionists, fellow members of the same Greek association or fellow Jews (usually in Acts it applies to fellow believers in Jesus).

9:18-19a. Saul would know the popular Jewish story of the healing of Tobit's blindness, in which white film and scabs (the same language in Greek as here) were removed (Tobit 3:17; 11:11-13); the analogy might underline for Saul the miraculous character of his own experience. Damascus had plenty of places available for *baptism (e.g., the river Barada, running through Damascus near what may have been "Straight Street").

9:19b-31
Confrontations in Damascus and Jerusalem

9:19b-21. Although Saul had carried the letters authorizing his mission (9:2) on his own person and presumably not delivered them, word of his mission had gotten around in Damascus's Jewish community. "*Son of God" is characteristic of Paul's style more than Luke's; writers tried to imitate the style of those whose speeches they reported, and it is not likely that Luke would know Paul's style this early unless he knows him personally (which he undoubtedly did; see the introduction to Acts; 16:10).

9:22. Saul's position presupposes that he is already expert in the Scriptures; now he turns this expertise against his former mission.

9:23-24. Saul's Jewish opponents plan to assassinate him, not to execute him legally; but his own account in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 indicates that they had secured the cooperation of the (*Gentile) Nabatean ethnarch. Saul's preaching in other cities under the control of Aretas IV of Nabatea (9 B.C.–A.D. 40) for as long as three years (Gal 1:17) had possibly aroused such opposition. The collusion of such interests made Paul's situation in Damascus politically impossible. A city's gates

would be closed at night, though individuals might be able to exit with permission.

9:25. Houses were sometimes built into city walls; Saul's escape method has biblical precedent (Josh 2:15; 1 Sam 19:12). A pre-Arabic, Roman-period tradition claims that Ananias's house was built on the wall; if the tradition is early (by no means certain; it could simply reflect on Paul's experience), the house might have even been that of Ananias. That he has gained *disciples there suggests that he has worked like a Christian *rabbi, or teacher, and that he has the requisite training to present himself as such (cf. 22:3; but contrast Mt 23:8).

9:26-29. As provocative as his evangelistic predecessor Stephen, Saul appears headed for the same fate, until he is sent to Tarsus. The only representatives of the *apostles he gets to know well are Peter and James (Gal 1:18-19).

9:30. Caesarea, perhaps two days' journey away on the Judean coast, was the Roman capital of Judea, and Paul could catch a ship from there northward to southern Asia Minor. "Sending him off" may imply also that they paid his fare. Because he had been born in Tarsus (22:3), he possibly had relatives there; but his training had been thoroughly Palestinian Jewish (Phil 3:5), so it is during this period in his life that Saul begins to relate especially to Gentiles from Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

9:31. In ancient literature, summary statements sometimes concluded literary sections.

9:32-43
Continuing Miracles Through Peter

9:32. Lydda and Joppa (9:36) were the most prominent cities on the coastal plain that were almost completely Jewish. Lydda, about twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem, was the most significant Jewish city of the Sharon plain. Capital of one of the Judean districts that included non-Jews, it escaped most of the devastation of the later Judean revolt and eventually hosted many prominent rabbis and a rabbinic school.

9:33. Jewish piety included visiting the sick. Although Aeneas is a familiar *Gentile name, a number of Jews also bore it (which seems likelier here). Aeneas could have been paralyzed from a stroke or another problem with the central nervous system, or from an accident (such as a fall from a roof), or from tuberculosis affecting the spine, or from some other cause. Apart from massaging the person with olive oil, little treatment was available.

9:34-35. Sharon is not a town but the coastal plain that extended from Lydda toward Mount Carmel in the north. Most writers in Greek designate it a "plain" or the like, but Luke has a simple transliteration of the Hebrew expression. The Christian presence was still notable in Lydda in the second century A.D.

9:36. Joppa, modern Yaffa, now joined with Tel-Aviv, was a profitable port city, about eleven miles from Lydda. It was about 30 miles south of Caesarea Maritima (8:40; 10:1, 5), and controlled one of Judea's administrative districts. It was under Jewish control for about forty years until it came under direct Roman authority in A.D. 6. Tabitha is a Semitic name and Dorcas a Greek one (both meaning the same thing, "gazelle").

Jewish women were active in charity projects. In Greco-Roman culture in general women were sometimes *patrons, and it has been suggested that Tabitha may have been a patron or benefactor of the widows mentioned in verse 41. But whether officially (as a benefactor) or unofficially, she was looking out for their interests.

9:37. Jewish dead were always washed before burial. Only women prepared women's bodies for burial. The upper room may evoke 1 Kings 17:19, 23; 2 Kings 4:10-11, 32 (although on other occasions also bodies were kept in upper rooms).

9:38. It is important that Lydda is near Joppa, because corpses had to be buried right away (ideally before sundown). The distance of fewer than twelve miles meant perhaps roughly four hours' journey each way (for the messengers to Peter and Peter to Joppa); because it was customary to bury the corpse before sundown, even if Tabitha had died early in the day they could afford no delay.

9:39. Upper rooms were usually small (1:13 is an exception), generally attics built on the flat rooftops; this one is at least large enough to accommodate a few people. Making clothing was one of the domestic tasks assigned to women in that culture. Well-to-do

Roman women had maids to do it but were still considered responsible for it getting done. Caring for widows was a fundamental act of piety in early Judaism; Tabitha had been their benefactor. If we may extrapolate from a somewhat later painting somewhat further to the east, Judean women, or at least those with some means, may have worn ankle-length tunics with wide sleeves at the elbows; over this tunic they might wear a shorter dress.

9:40. In accordance with Jewish scruples, Tabitha's body would be covered before Peter is brought into the room. On Peter's sending the others out, cf. 1 Kings 17:19; 2 Kings 4:33.

9:41-42. The resuscitator normally presented the raised person to the suppliants who had requested the resuscitation (1 Kings 17:23; 2 Kings 4:36; Lk 7:15).

9:43. It was customary to name people by their occupation or parentage. Tanning was a despised trade; because of the odors associated with animal carcasses (perhaps less offensive to a fisherman), tanneries usually existed only outside towns. Strict observers of Pharisaic opinions likewise avoided tanners whenever possible, because their stripping of animal hides continually involved them with unclean carcasses. Second-century rabbis reported that tanners were forbidden in cities, especially Jerusalem (many rabbis were more lenient if the tannery were near water, as Simon's house is—10:6). They even insisted that a tanner must allow his wife a divorce if she could not endure the smell! But Judaism stressed hospitality, and Peter, who probably never followed Pharisaic opinions anyway, is happy to receive it.

10:1-8
Cornelius's Vision

Compare comment on the twin visions of Paul and Ananias in 9:12.

10:1. Herod the Great had renamed Strato's Tower "Caesarea" in honor of the emperor; it now had a splendid theater seating more than four thousand, an amphitheater, temples and a massive harbor complex. By this period, it was a mixed city of both Jews and *Gentiles, with the latter predominating, but the two groups often were in conflict; a generation later, local Syrians slaughtered much of the Jewish population (*Josephus estimates twenty thousand in one hour in A.D. 66; *Jewish War* 2.457). Most local soldiers were anti-Jewish. Nevertheless, some Gentiles honored, and even converted to, Judaism there.

The residence of the Roman governor of Judea (23:23-24), Caesarea held a regular Roman garrison of a cavalry unit and five infantry cohorts. (Even during the brief reign of Agrippa in A.D. 41–44, Gentile troops remained stationed there; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.356-65.) The soldiers were auxiliaries, that is, provincials recruited to the Roman army; most were Syrian by birth, although they received Roman citizenship on retirement. Centurions commanded units of roughly eighty men (rather than their official designation of one hundred). Unlike the aristocrats who could directly become tribunes or legates, centurions were often soldiers who worked their way up through the ranks. Some took twenty years to achieve this rank; others achieved it more quickly.

His century was part of a "regiment" (NIV, GNT) or cohort (NASB, NRSV), one-tenth of a legion, made up of up to six hundred men. Five cohorts were stationed in Caesarea and another in Jerusalem. We have attestation for this particular cohort in Palestine a few decades later. More than one cohort in antiquity bore this name; the name simply indicates that the cohort's original members were Italians, sometimes reflecting a cohort's earlier history. Sometimes auxiliaries took a Roman name (such as Cornelius) when enlisting, receiving citizenship only later; but perhaps Cornelius was a Roman citizen and a member of the legion in Syria, lent to an auxiliary cohort for service there (perhaps because of complaints about the behavior of local auxiliaries). Others think that he was retired.

Military service was a preferred occupation. Some estimate that only roughly half those who enlisted survived the twenty years of service (generally ages seventeen to thirty-seven; it became twenty-five years of service later in the first century), but apart from legions that saw heavy fighting the actual figures were probably higher. In any case, rewards for survivors were high. Noncitizens could not join legions but could become auxiliary troops who received citizenship upon their discharge.

10:2. Cornelius is clearly not yet a full convert to Judaism (10:28), but his almsgiving

and the appreciation of Jews who know him (10:22) testify to his devotion. Although the term "God-fearer" had a broader usage, it generally functions technically in Acts and in some other Jewish sources for righteous Gentiles who had not been circumcised. Josephus, *Philo, inscriptions and even the pagan philosopher *Epictetus mention this class of incomplete converts. Inscriptions indicate a high level of religious interest among many of the soldiers.

If these events are before 41, as many scholars think, Cornelius would probably be retired (centurions could retire at the age of sixty) by the war of 66–70 (if he was not already retired at the time of this *narrative, as some think). Nevertheless, most Jewish Christian readers after A.D. 70 would not be fond of Roman officers stationed in Syria-Palestine, and this account would challenge their prejudices. Recruits had all sworn oaths of allegiance to the divine emperor.

Cornelius's "household" (NASB, NRSV) or "family" (NIV, GNT) is of interest. Luke would certainly know that military personnel were not officially permitted to marry. Cornelius might be retired, but otherwise he would not be married *officially*. Soldiers, often recruited from the local areas where they served, commonly had illegal concubines whom superiors ignored, but centurions were moved around somewhat more often and thus could maintain long-term informal marriages with local concubines less often than other soldiers might. Thus while Cornelius may have unofficially married a concubine, it is also possible that he did not. It was considered proper for a wife to share her husband's religion, so if he *was* married, her shared devotion here would be natural. But the term translated "household" could include servants or *freedpersons; although a cheap slave would cost about one-third of a regular soldier's annual pay, centurions received fifteen times the pay of rank-and-file soldiers. "Household" here might mean simply "servants" (v. 7).

10:3. The "ninth hour" (KJV, NASB) is about 3 p.m.—he keeps the Jewish hours of prayer, which corresponded to the morning and evening offerings in the temple (3:1).

10:4-8. In the *Old Testament as well God looked out for many Gentiles who were seeking him, whether or not they had yet become full converts (e.g., Josh 6:25; 2 Sam 12:9-10), and revealed himself to individuals other than Abraham's descendants (Gen 5:24; Num 22–25). "Memorial" (v. 4) may be the language of sacrifice (Lev 2:2), which would be fitting for prayers offered during the time of sacrifice in the temple. Ironically, Joppa (Acts 10:5; cf. 9:36-43) was where Jonah began fleeing to avoid preaching to Gentiles (Jon 1:3).

10:9-16
Peter's Vision

Compare Cornelius's vision in 10:1-8; on such cases of "double vision," compare the comment on 9:12.

10:9. Caesarea was about thirty miles north of Joppa. If Cornelius's messengers left even immediately after 3 p.m. (10:3) on the same day (some commentators believe they left the next day), they must have traveled part of the night on foot, or (less likely) Cornelius must have found horses for them to ride, because here they approach Joppa by noon ("the sixth hour"—KJV, NASB). Thus their task must be urgent.

The flat rooftops were used for drying vegetables and for prayers. If one reclined under a canopy, the rooftops were cooler even at midday than the poorly ventilated rooms of most Palestinian homes (although this home may be larger than most; cf. 10:17). Noon was not a regular hour of prayer (3:1), so Peter prays in addition to the traditional hours followed by many of his contemporaries.

10:10. Peter is not hungry from any special fast; noon was the normal time for a meal in Rome and some other locations and may have been in Joppa as well. Some Jewish writers described mystical experiences when the soul would be so filled with God that one would lose touch with one's surroundings; but in contrast to those who sought mystical experiences, Peter has done nothing intentionally to bring it about.

10:11-13. Even Palestinian Jews most lenient in other regards kept kosher. By conservative standards, any animals that were clean by themselves would have been contaminated by contact with the unclean animals. Thus this vision would present a horrifying situation for any first-century Palestinian Jew (and the vast majority of foreign Jews as well):

God commands Peter to eat all these animals, some of which are unclean, forbidden creatures. Hungry he may be (10:10), but he is not *that* hungry!

10:14-16. In another vision half a millennium before, God had similarly called Ezekiel, a priest, to eat something unclean, and he had offered the same protest; in that case, God granted an improvement (Ezek 4:13-15). Jewish people had preferred death to eating unclean (nonkosher) food in the time of the *Maccabees; thus Jewish readers would be appalled that God would require anything so disgusting (from the perspective of cultural cuisine) and impious (from an *Old Testament perspective). The point of the vision, that God can declare anything clean, applies especially to the Gentiles Peter is about to meet (10:28; 15:9). Repetition of a revelation is not unusual (1 Sam 3:4-10).

10:17-23a
Receiving the Gentiles

10:17. Joppa was a large town, but knowing Simon's profession and that his house was near the sea would make it easy to find him. In many cities of the Roman world, people of the same trade would live in the same district; most people in Joppa would know the right district. Moreover, tanners normally lived outside or near the edge of a city, preferably near a water source. Asking directions was common. That Simon has an outer gate indicates that he is a man of some means.

10:18. Being knowledgeable about Judaism themselves (10:2), Cornelius's messengers "call out" rather than simply going up to the house to enter (10:28), although as representatives of a Roman centurion they could surely have done so with official impunity.

10:19-21. Peter "went down" to them possibly by a ladder but much more likely by an outside staircase leading from the flat roof.

10:22. Although many stories tell of Jewish teachers talking with *Gentiles, strict Jews would not enter a Gentile's house or allow a Gentile in theirs. Thus Peter faces a problem in being invited to Cornelius's house. Although more lax Jews would probably not object (v. 23a), Peter has to be concerned about stricter elements within the Jerusalem *church, which eventually included even *Pharisees (15:5).

10:23a. Pharisees and other pietists were concerned about impure table fellowship; lodging Gentiles overnight, no matter how exhausted the guests may have been, contradicted strict Jewish piety (though it was understood that in some regions one could not avoid Gentiles altogether). Although some allowed eating with Gentiles, so long as the food was "pure," others opposed eating with Gentiles altogether. Many forbade eating with them on the principle that they were evil company (**Jubilees* 22:16). Perhaps Simon, being a tanner, is less concerned with strict rules; although most of his customers were probably Jewish, Joppa was a mixed town and his was a profession despised by strict pietists anyway. (Even later *rabbis allowed some short-term business contacts with Gentiles and recognized that some shops employed both Gentile and Jewish workers.) But Peter's vision probably has something to do with the treatment the guests receive.

10:23b-33
Cornelius Receives Peter

10:23b. Peter's companions are no doubt brought partly to serve as witnesses that he behaves properly (10:45; cf. Deut 17:6; 19:15).

10:24. The return journey is less rushed (if the messengers rode to them, which is uncertain, Peter and his companions lack horses). Had they left around sunrise, after the Gentiles had lodged in his house overnight (NASB "he arose"—v. 23), and walked at a fast pace without stopping, they could have arrived at Cornelius's house that evening, but they did not. "The following day" here means that they all stopped for overnight lodging along the way (v. 30), presumably in a mixed town (perhaps in Apollonia, just under halfway along the Mediterranean coast, or perhaps a town further along the way). That Cornelius is patiently "waiting" (NASB, GNT) for them means not only that he trusted his servants not to run off but also that he is eager to hear Peter's message. Whereas Roman policy had failed to reconcile Jew and Gentile in Caesarea, divine visions succeeded, at least for the circles of their recipients.

"Friends" here could include social dependents as well as peers (see comment on Acts 19:31). The term translated "relatives" (NASB,

NIV) can also mean "countrymen." If it means relatives, it could mean distant relatives who were soldiers stationed in the same city, although that coincidence is unlikely. Because soldiers in this period were often stationed in the region from which they come, these may be local Syrian kin of either Cornelius or his wife or concubine (if he had one; cf. comment on 10:2). It is not the usual way to describe one's immediate family (cf. also on 10:2), but it is even less likely to include servants. That he had "called them together" suggests that they are not infants (cf. also v. 46), and nothing in this passage requires the reference to infant *baptism that some writers have seen here (v. 48).

10:25-26. Greco-Roman paganism believed not only in gods but in semidivine men, often sons of the gods, who had supernatural powers (14:11; 28:6; cf. 12:22-23). One would offer obeisance to gods by falling at their feet and worshiping them, as Cornelius does to Peter here. Cornelius should know better (10:2) than to treat Peter with such reverence; perhaps he intends only a special form of homage (as was customary for Eastern rulers), which a servant of Jesus finds inappropriate (cf. Lk 22:25-27). Even Greeks considered it hubris for a mortal to accept worship, and respected those who declined divine honors. Yet people often fell at others' feet or sometimes grasped their knees (an ancient Greek approach) to beg for mercy or an essential request.

10:27-29. Devout Jews would not enter into idolaters' homes lest they unwittingly participate in idolatry; some may have extended this custom to not entering any Gentile's home. Strict Jews considered it unclean to eat Gentiles' food or to drink their wine; although this purity regulation did not prohibit all social contact, it prevented dining together at banquets and led much of the Roman world to feel that Jews were antisocial. Cornelius is probably accustomed to accepting reluctant (10:22) snubs, so Peter's statement in 10:28 would mean much to him. Hospitality obligations would demand (sooner or later) the new guests being fed, which would also raise questions about table fellowship (see comment on 10:23).

10:30-33. See comment on 10:3-6. By ancient reckoning, "four days" means at least parts of four different days (thus the NIV, "three days ago").

10:34-43
Peter's Message

10:34-35. Peter begins this speech to Gentiles with a complimentary *exordium*, or preface, according to *rhetorical custom (and perhaps polite propriety in any case). Judaism heavily emphasized God's impartiality; cf. Romans 2:11. Some Gentile thinkers also envisioned their chief deity Zeus as impartial and universal.

10:36. Jewish people in general would call *God* "Lord of all" (Wisdom of Solomon 6:7; 8:3). "Preaching peace" alludes to the concept of Israel's redemption, found in Isaiah 52:7 and similar passages, although even God-fearing Gentiles might not catch this allusion (but perhaps cf. Is 57:19 in Acts 2:39). This was a better hope than the empire's fictitious promise of "Roman peace."

10:37. "Judea" here apparently includes Galilee and is used in the broader sense (common in *Diaspora usage) of "the Jewish land." This makes sense in addressing Gentile hearers.

10:38. "Doing good" is literally "benefacting"—the sort of thing a ruler, deity, or some other powerful person would do when bestowing gifts or mercy on those of lower status (often cities or groups). Depending on how much Cornelius knows about Judaism, he may recognize that anyone anointed with the *Holy Spirit in his own time would be considered extraordinary by his Jewish contemporaries. On the *Christ as "anointed one," see "*Messiah" in the glossary; the present allusion is to Is 61:1 in Luke 4:18.

10:39. Hanging on a tree alludes to Deut 21:22-23, where it is a shameful death.

10:40-41. Some Greeks seem to have believed that heroes or gods sometimes remained invisible; cf. also Num 22:23, 27-28; 2 Kings 6:16-17. But Peter has no thought here of Jesus' remaining selectively invisible; rather, he comes only to those whom God had chosen.

10:42. Although subordinate human judges do appear for the judgment of the dead in both Jewish and most often Greek tradition, Jewish tradition especially emphasizes God as the ultimate judge.

10:43. Many prophets had messianic prophecies, but only a few of them (e.g., Is 53) directly connected the *Messiah and the for-

giveness of sins. Peter probably means this in a general sense: all the prophets testify of forgiveness through God's *grace, which will be provided in the time of the Messiah (cf., e.g., Jer 23:5-6).

10:44-48
Saved Gentiles

10:44. Luke's audience, familiar with public speeches, would understand that Peter's speech remained *rhetorically incomplete; the *gospel message, however, is complete. Interruption was a common literary device; when enough has been said, the author allows the speaker to be interrupted. Of course, it happened in real life as well as in the literature that imitated it; public speakers were often interrupted by individuals in the crowd. "Fell upon" is equivalent to "filled" here (cf. 2 Chron 7:2-3). The *Spirit "upon" appears in both of Luke's most prominent programmatic texts from Scripture (Lk 4:18; Acts 2:17-18); in the *Old Testament, the idiom usually refers to empowerment, whether to prophesy (most often), lead, or show superhuman strength (Num 11:17, 25-26; Judg 3:10; 6:34; 1 Sam 19:20, 23; Ezek 11:5).

10:45-47. Most Jewish teachers felt that the Spirit inspired only the most pious with divine utterances, or that the Spirit would mark God's people in the future age. That Gentiles would receive the gift was unthinkable. Most importantly, the Spirit was an *eschatological promise only for the people of the covenant (e.g., Is 44:3; Ezek 39:29). Gentiles obviously could not receive the gift if God had not accepted them, so he clearly *had* accepted them—even without circumcision.

10:48. *Baptism was used as a public declaration of conversion (see comment on 2:37-38)—but accompanied by circumcision, which is not demanded here. Peter's lodging at a Gentile home for several more days would compound the offense to Jewish piety but drives home Peter's lesson (10:28).

11:1-18
Called to Account

11:1. On "brethren" (KJV, NASB) or "brothers" (ESV), see comment on 9:17.

11:2-3. Not all Jews were this strict, but some were, especially in Judea (see comment on 10:23), and the Jerusalem leaders here are as strict about eating as were the *Pharisees in Luke's Gospel. Table fellowship created a covenant between host and guests. Most Jews welcomed God-fearers (10:2), but *Gentiles had to be circumcised to convert fully to Judaism. (This requirement is a natural inference from the *law and continues to be an issue as late as 15:1, 5.) No one objected to Peter preaching *Christ to Gentiles; the issue is that he ate with them even though as Gentiles they were ritually unclean (10:28; cf. Gal 2:12).

11:4-15. See comment on 10:9-46. On repeating a story in slightly different words, see the introduction to 9:1-9. Claiming (truly or falsely) divine authorization or sanction (v. 12) was a common means of defending one's actions in antiquity; Peter's ultimate evidence, then, is in 11:16-17.

11:16-17. Peter may imply a standard Jewish "how-much-more" argument: if God gave them the greater *baptism, how could he withhold the lesser one? Because Judaism used baptism alongside circumcision to signify conversion, if God had baptized someone in his *Spirit, he had certainly accepted their conversion—with or without circumcision.

11:18. The believers in Jerusalem marvel that God has given "even the Gentiles" (cf. NIV, NRSV; likelier than merely "also"—KJV, NASB, GNT) the gift. Jewish people believed that Gentiles could be saved by converting to Judaism; many also believed that Gentiles could be saved simply by being righteous, which for some meant keeping the seven laws God gave to Noah (according to developing Jewish tradition). But no one had believed that Gentiles could be welcomed on the same terms as Jewish people, who had been chosen for salvation by God's sovereign *grace. More importantly, more conservative Jewish movements (such as the *Essenes) believed that even most Jewish people were lost, so the salvation of the Gentiles without fully embracing Judaism appeared difficult.

11:19-30
The Ministry at Antioch

The Jesus movement shifts from a predominantly rural movement in Galilee to an urban movement in Jerusalem to a cosmopolitan movement in Antioch. Such a rapid transition is virtually unparalleled in antiquity and indi-

cates considerable social flexibility. That Judaism had already adapted to these various settings over the centuries provided a conduit for these rapid transitions within the Jewish Christian community.

11:19. The large Jewish communities in Phoenicia, Cyprus (4:36) and Antioch (6:5) were natural places for Jewish Christians to settle after 8:1-4.

11:20-21. Antioch on the Orontes in Syria was the third (or possibly fourth) largest urban center of the Roman empire (after Rome and Alexandria), though population estimates range from one hundred thousand to six hundred thousand. As the seat of Syria's Roman governor, it was the headquarters of Rome's Syrian legion. Rome granted it the privilege of being a "free city," mostly governing itself. With a famous cult center of Apollo within walking distance and Seleucia, its port city off the Mediterranean coast, only a brief river journey, it boasted numerous *mystery cults and was known for its pagan religious diversity.

Because of its cultural pluralism, it included an upwardly mobile and *generally* accepted Jewish element with many "God-fearers" (see 10:2) and was far less segregated than Alexandria. The Jewish community here was large; some guess roughly twenty thousand, perhaps around ten percent of the city's population. Antioch, in contrast to most predominantly *Gentile cities in the region, spared its Jewish inhabitants in the war of 66–70, though they did not fully trust them. Some more liberal non-Palestinian Jewish people saw their witness to the God of Israel among the Gentiles as making monotheism reasonable and contacting the best in pagan philosophy; circumcision was to them a lesser issue. Antioch's cosmopolitan nature allowed for much interchange of different cultural ideas. Many *proselytes and God-fearers attended Antioch's *synagogues. Thus Antioch was a more natural place for Gentiles (here, perhaps "Hellenizing" Syrians) to hear the *gospel without circumcision than Judea was (15:1).

11:22-24. Barnabas trusts God's work in people (9:27; 15:37-39).

11:25. Tarsus was about a hundred miles to the north, but Jerusalem was more than three hundred (to the south). This is no short journey, but Barnabas knows of Paul's calling.

11:26. "Christians" occurs in the *New Testament only here, as a nickname given by outsiders, and in 1 Peter 4:16, as something like a legal charge. The title is formed on the analogy of adherents to a political party: the "Caesarians," the "Herodians," the "Pompeians" and so forth. Had it been interpreted politically ("partisans of the executed Judean king") it could have stirred persecution, but here it apparently functions merely as derision. At least by a later period, Antiochans were known for making fun of people. By the early second century, however, Jesus' followers had welcomed the title.

11:27. That the movement had a number of prophets would impress those outside the movement; few if any movements even claimed to have many prophets acting together, although Greek oracles still operated at cultic centers (less popular than in the past), and *Josephus claimed that many *Essenes could prophesy. Syria was known for its oracles, so Antiochans are probably also impressed by Christian prophets.

11:28. A person would rise to speak in an assembly. A series of famines devastated Mediterranean agriculture in the time of Claudius: *papyri show high grain prices around A.D. 46; a grain shortage in Rome nearly led to Claudius's being mobbed in the streets (about A.D. 51); Queen Helena of Adiabene bought Egyptian grain "for large sums" (due to famine there) to help Judea (about 45–46).

11:29. Antioch was a wealthy city with many trade connections, and some of the Jewish community there was also wealthy. Most Jewish relief efforts were local except in severe cases, for instance, when Queen Helena helped famine-stricken Palestinian Jews. But this local focus was due more to the nature of the Roman Empire—where multiprovincial organizations were suspect—than to the nature of Judaism; cf. comment on 2 Corinthians 8–9. Wealthy *patrons often alleviated food crises in cities, but here all the believers participate. What is significant here is that the believers act in advance of the famine through faith in the *prophecy (cf. Gen 41:33-36)—even though the hardship is likely to strike Antioch as well.

11:30. "Elders" reflects the traditional Israelite leadership structure for towns and villages, continuing in this period. Ancient historians had to compromise between following the action of their story and events occurring elsewhere at the same time; Luke postpones taking up the completion of the project until 12:25.

12:1-24
Peter's Deliverance

12:1. This Herod is Agrippa I, brother-in-law, and son of a half-brother, of Antipas, the Herod of the Gospels whose attempt to gain as much power as Agrippa cost him his own kingdom. (Antipas's fatal jealousy of Agrippa was instigated by his own consort Herodias—*Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.7.1-2, 240-44, 250-54—although she had helped her brother Agrippa out after he had wasted all his money in Rome and returned to Palestine in debt—*Jewish Antiquities* 18.6.1-2, 143-49.) Herod Agrippa I had partied with Gaius Caligula in Rome; when Caligula became emperor, Agrippa I became the first official Jewish "king" since his grandfather Herod the Great. Although Caligula kept Agrippa in Rome, the following emperor Claudius sent him to Judea, where he reigned from 41 until his death in 44. Because his grandmother Mariamne was a Hasmonean princess, he was ethnically Jewish as well as Idumean (in contrast to Herod the Great). He was thus very popular with the people, on behalf of whom he used his influence. He was pro-*Pharisee and frequented the temple.

12:2. Formerly often performed with an ax, in this period beheading was performed with the sword and was the more merciful form of execution given to Roman citizens and others for whom crucifixion was considered too cruel. As king, Agrippa had the legal right of life and death that had been denied the Sanhedrin before and after him. Like Judaism, early Christians believed that death did not come apart from the sovereign purpose of God.

12:3. Luke may specify the Feast of Unleavened Bread to recall to the reader the time of Jesus' execution (Lk 22:7). Although Agrippa gave generously to *Gentiles outside Judea, his policies made him much more popular with his Jewish subjects (to whose majority whims he catered) than with his pagan subjects. He identified with and appealed to Judean values despite his past aristocratic Roman lifestyle. He worked hard to please people, and had sometimes spent lavishly to do so, though ancient writers (normally from the elite) viewed with contempt "demagogues" who catered to what elite writers regularly portrayed as the fickle whims of the "masses." His brief reign seems to have ignited conservative nationalist sentiments that ultimately clashed with Roman rule.

12:4. Agrippa I resided in Jerusalem. Luke does not mention the specific place of Peter's imprisonment, but the fortress Antonia on the temple mount is one possibility. As a trusted client ruler of Rome, Agrippa could have his own army, so the soldiers mentioned here need not be Romans, although they are described in terms of Roman organization. The basic unit of the Roman army was the *contubernium,* composed of eight soldiers who shared a tent; half units were sometimes assigned to special tasks, as here (sixteen soldiers total). Perhaps these groups of four worked in four three-hour shifts during the night. Agrippa perhaps feared armed resistance. Luke may use "Passover" in its general sense in this period to refer to the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread. Following Roman custom, he was known to execute criminals for public entertainment. Executions during festivals provided optimum propaganda value, though Romans usually waited until afterward.

12:5-6. Prisoners who were chained between guards (as often they were—21:33; cf. 28:16, 20) had no human hope of escaping. Peter was chained between two guards, with the other two watching the door.

12:7-11. On miraculous escapes, see comment on 5:19-20. Agrippa wielded much more direct power than the Sanhedrin had, and his guards were much more efficient. Prisons did not supply clothes, so the cloak and sandals (12:8) are Peter's own. Outer garments were often used for sleep at night, so Peter may have been using it as a blanket. To "gird" himself might refer to wrapping a sash or belt around his waist, or tucking his robe into his sash, to allow free mobility. In a popular Greek story, Dionysus had made chains drop off and locked doors open; doors opening "by

themselves" appear in ancient literature from Homer to Josephus (see esp. Euripides, *Bacchae* 447-48). They appear in the *Hellenistic Jewish story of God freeing Moses from Pharaoh's prison (Artapanus in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 9.27.23). Thus we can understand why Peter might think he is dreaming.

12:12-13. A home with an outer gate, a servant girl who could serve as a porter and a gathering much farther back in the house would suggest the home of a fairly wealthy resident of Jerusalem's Upper City. (For another indication of the family's wealth, cf. Col 4:10 with Acts 4:36-37. As Levites—4:36—they may have had ties with the priestly aristocracy; many well-to-do priests lived in the Upper City.) Thus the home is not far from the temple mount (hence not far from the fortress Antonia, where Peter may have been held). In fact, one branch of Jerusalem's main street (although Luke's term here could refer to an alley) ran along the temple's western wall from the Antonia southward; from there Peter could cross Wilson's Arch into the Upper City. That Rhoda (a common slave name) has to come to the door, rather than being a full-time porter, however, suggests that though they had means, they were not extremely wealthy. Household slaves often lived in better economic conditions (and had far better chances of improving their positions, including gaining freedom) than free peasants, but they had other disadvantages. Among Gentiles, female household slaves could be subject to sexual harassment; but Jewish ethics despised this behavior (though it happened), and this household headed by a woman made it much less likely here.

Believers met in homes rather than church buildings for the first three centuries of the *church (e.g., Rom 16:5). Greek and Roman associations without their own buildings usually met in homes, and many *Diaspora *synagogues apparently started the same way. House gatherings thus followed association patterns available (as well as practical) in the culture.

"Mary" was the most common woman's name in Palestine. "Mark" is a Latin name, but as a *praenomen* it need not indicate Roman citizenship; still, the name was rare in Palestine, and its use hardly indicates antipathy toward Rome or its interests in Jerusalem, and may again suggest the family's wealth (see 12:13).

12:14-16. In Greek comedy, a slave sometimes utters foolishness; here, however, it is her free hearers who serve for comic relief. Given the purpose for this prayer meeting (12:5), their surprise (and Peter's having to keep pounding on the gate—which could wake up some of the other neighbors, who are probably from aristocratic priestly families and hence potentially dangerous) is ironic; ancient hearers probably would have picked up on the irony (cf. Lk 24:10-11, 37). In some popular Jewish traditions the righteous would become like angels after death.

12:17. The hand gesture for silence was a raised right hand, extending the smallest finger; a gesture preparing for one's speech extended the thumb and next two fingers. "James" (literally "Jacob," as with every use of "James" in the *New Testament) was a common Jewish name; this is not the James of 12:2, but the James of 15:13, 1 Corinthians 15:7 and Galatians 2:9. Jewish sources tell us that this James, Jesus' younger brother, was highly reputed for his devoutness in Judaism (cf. Acts 21:18-20), and when he was later martyred some leading Jerusalemites protested his death (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.200-203). *He* would thus be more safe from Agrippa, who catered to the conservative Jewish masses (12:1-3).

12:18-19. Given the soldiers' precautions (chains, doors and different guards posted for each—12:6), it was humanly impossible for Peter to have escaped without all the guards having aided him. Agrippa examines them for information, perhaps under torture, but they have none. Under Roman law, a guard whose prisoner escaped would pay for it with the penalty due the prisoner—in this case, his own life (cf. 16:27; 27:42), a custom Agrippa, deprived of a favor for the masses, chooses to follow (at least with the final shift of guards). Since Agrippa cannot acknowledge divine intervention on Peter's behalf, he executes the guards for their complicity or negligence.

12:20. The *Hellenistic (culturally Greek) cities of Tyre and Sidon were dependent on Agrippa's territories for vital food supplies; he had been withholding trade from them (perhaps a special problem now; 11:28).

12:21. Agrippa I liked to flaunt his power;

his self-display had unfortunately led to anti-Jewish riots in Alexandria earlier. His public meeting with these emissaries is in the theater of Caesarea, built by his grandfather Herod the Great; the foundations of this theater still remain today. (This was a mercantile port city easily accessible to Tyrian and Sidonian delegates.) According to Josephus this speech occurred on a festival day in honor of the emperor (*Jewish Antiquities* 19.343).

12:22-24. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus reports that on this occasion Agrippa flaunted his power, and his flatterers praised him as a god—the sort of flattery toward royal *patrons common for centuries in the Greek East. But in the Roman period Caesar expected even pagans who were not emperors (such as the general Germanicus in Egypt) to humbly deflect such praise. Because Agrippa does not repudiate their praise, he collapses immediately. Josephus reports that he was carried to the palace, where he died at the age of fifty-four, after five days of stomach pains (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.344-50). Deaths from bowel diseases and worms were thought among the most horrible (e.g., 2 Chron 21:15-19; 2 Maccabees 9:5-9; Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.453).

12:25–13:3
Antioch Sends Out Missionaries

Despite the commission of 1:8, the Galilean *apostles are still in Jerusalem (15:6). The leaders of the *church in Antioch, however, discovered success in the *Gentile mission (11:19-26) and are moved to ratify the apostolic call of two of their number.

12:25. The journey from Jerusalem to Antioch was over three hundred miles. It was customary for ancient teachers to take *disciples with them, and it was safer to travel in groups.

13:1. All the overseers of this church are probably understood to be both prophets and teachers. What sounds normal in early Christianity would sound phenomenal to its culture, for prophets were thought to be rare. Simeon and Manaen (= Menahem) are Jewish names, suggesting strong Jewish representation still in the leadership of the church (no doubt because they had better background for teaching Scripture). But Simeon's surname "Niger" was a very respectable and common Roman name; he may be a Roman citizen, although this is not clear—the name was also used by Jews and is here apparently a *nickname*. Nicknames were common and usually significant in antiquity; the meaning of Simeon's Latin nickname suggests a dark complexion and allows for the possibility that he was descended from *proselytes from the Romanized coast of North Africa (as could have been the case also with Lucius). Cyrene, on the North African coast, had a large Jewish population and a large Greek population as well as including indigenous residents from the area. Jewish residents revolted there in A.D. 115–17 and were decimated.

That Manaen (who may be in his sixties) was "brought up" with Herod could mean they had the same wet nurse, but the term also had broader connotations. Slaves who grew up in the master's household with the son who would inherit them were often later freed by the son, who had been their companion at play; even as slaves they were powerful because of their relation to the owner. Other boys brought up with princes at the royal court and tutored by the same elite teachers also attained prominence. Especially in Greek culture, friendships from youth determined political alliances and favors. Thus, until the fall of Herod Antipas ("the tetrarch") perhaps a decade before, Manaen had held a socially prominent position (and could well be Luke's main source, directly or via Paul, for the Antipas material unique to his Gospel).

13:2-3. Fasting was rare among Gentiles, although sometimes used in mourning. Jewish people fasted to mourn or repent, and some fasted to seek revelations; special fasts for prayer related to mourning were called in the face of great crises such as droughts. Here fasting is apparently simply conjoined with seeking God in prayer. The *Holy Spirit was especially known as the Spirit of *prophecy, so "the Holy Spirit said" probably means that one of the prophets prophesied. For the laying on of hands, see comment on 6:6.

13:4-12
The Pronconsul of Cyprus Believes

Messengers customarily traveled by twos. Students of the *law also preferred having companions to study with, even on journeys; Saul,

Barnabas and Mark (v. 13) no doubt discussed Scripture during many of their long walks. Roman roads were good and generally safe during the day, and travel was easier than it ever had been or would be again until close to the modern period.

13:4. Antioch lay inland on the Orontes; its port roughly fifteen miles to the west was the heavily fortified, free mercantile city Seleucia. Seleucia was Antioch's port city on the Mediterranean. The island of Cyprus is a natural destination if Barnabas knows the culture and has relatives there (4:36). In addition to being Barnabas' homeland (and connected politically to Paul's homeland Cilicia a generation earlier), Cyprus was prosperous and strategically located at a connection of many sea routes.

13:5. Salamis was the chief city of Cyprus, with (by some estimates) more than a hundred thousand residents (its theater seated fifteen thousand). It was a port city only perhaps sixty miles from Seleucia, a straight voyage by ship. As visiting teachers skilled in the law, Barnabas and Saul would be asked to speak in local *synagogues (with its large Jewish community, Salamis must have had several synagogues). Roughly seventy years later, in the early second century (A.D. 116), the Cypriot Jewish community is said to have attacked Salamis in a revolt and to have itself been destroyed.

13:6. New Paphos (also called Augusta), a harbor town on the west side of Cyprus, had long been the provincial capital and maintained some trade relations with Judea. The area around Paphos (especially at old Paphos, some seven miles to the southeast) was traditionally associated with the local cult of the goddess Aphrodite. Jewish magicians were reputed to be among the best in the Roman Empire (though forbidden in Scripture and mistrusted among pious Jews). It was not unusual for Roman aristocrats to attach philosophers to their court; while magicians would be less appealing, the proconsul probably sees Bar-Jesus ("son of Joshua") as a useful prophetic adviser from a "Jewish" perspective. Even some emperors had astrologers as advisers, and "Magi" were highly reputed for predicting the future. (Romans generally distrusted *magic, but *Josephus said that Felix, a Roman governor of Judea, counted among his friends a Cyprian Jew reputed to be a magician. His name is not Bar-Jesus, but he and Bar-Jesus attest to the same activity of Jewish magicians on Cyprus and their appeal to some Roman officials.)

13:7-8. Sergius Paulus was proconsul of Cyprus (the highest Roman official on the island) about A.D. 45–46. As always, Luke has the correct, specific local title of the Roman official, even though these titles varied from place to place and decade to decade, and the only way to check all the proper titles would be to go to those places. Although we lack the names of most (more than eighty percent) of the proconsuls of Cyprus, for Sergius Paulus to be proconsul there at this time fits his known senatorial career. He was one of the first senators from the east. Inscriptions indicate that his Roman family lived in southern Asia Minor. A rectangular room in what is thought to be the governor's palace in Cyprus contains a raised apse where the governor may have sat; as it has survived, the room is decorated with floor mosaics and wall panels, including a scene about the mythical hero Achilles as a baby.

13:9. Roman citizens had three names. As a citizen, Saul had a Roman *cognomen* ("Paul," meaning "small") given (or sometimes inherited) at birth (not at Paul's conversion, against some); his other Roman names remain unknown to us. "Paul" was a fairly respectable Roman name and rare among non-Romans, especially in the Greek East; it is difficult to imagine why Jewish parents would give their child this name if they were not Roman citizens. Inscriptions show that Jews sometimes took Roman names that sounded similar to or carried meanings similar to their Jewish names. Paul's Roman name sounded similar to his Jewish name (Saul, from the name of the *Old Testament's most famous Benjamite; cf. Phil 3:5). This is not a name change; now that Paul is moving in a predominantly Roman environment, he begins to go by his Roman name.

13:10-11. Paul's rebuke of Elymas sounds like an Old Testament judgment oracle. In Jewish literature, temporary blindness was sometimes a judgment to prevent further damage from sin (**Letter of Aristeas* 316); see 2 Kings 6:18 and comment on 9:8.

13:12. The proconsul's employ of a Jewish "prophet" demonstrates his openness to Judaism (v. 6), but Paul and Barnabas show superior power and a better presentation of Judaism than Bar-Jesus had provided.

13:13-52
Sermon in Pisidian Antioch

The cities that Paul and his companions visit in 13:13–14:26 were along the same Roman military road, the Via Augusta, which was built roughly half a century before.

13:13. Pamphylia was north of Paphos, on Asia Minor's southern coast. They probably landed at Attalia, the main harbor, then proceeded by road to Perga, approximately ten miles north and at least five miles from navigable water. It was part of the district Pamphylia-Lycia in this period (A.D. 43 to about 68). Perga was one of the leading cities of Pamphylia, perhaps as large or nearly as large as Salamis (see comment on 13:5).

13:14. Antioch near Pisidia (not to be confused with Syrian Antioch in v. 1) was a Roman *colony; it was ethnically Phrygian (and officially Galatian, as part of that province), but people identified it as near Pisidia to distinguish it from another Phrygian town of the same name. The second largest town in the province of Galatia, its wall enclosed some 115 acres, with probably more than five thousand Roman citizens of the colony, plus a much larger number of other residents. The town was fairly prosperous, sustained by the produce of the surrounding territory; as a colony, it boasted of its ties with Rome. A prominent local Phrygian deity was *Men Askaenos,* but the town's most prominent temple was one devoted to the worship of the emperor.

If Sergius Paulus (13:12) had supplied them with letters of recommendation (cf. 9:2) to the local aristocracy, they would receive immediate hospitality; his own relatives were from this region. (Some of the largest land holdings in the region belonged to the Sergii Paulli, about halfway between Antioch and north Galatia's capital.)

Pisidian Antioch lay more than a week's walk (roughly 125 miles, 200 kilometers) uphill into the mountainous interior (3600 feet above sea level). Instead of rugged mountain trails they could follow the paved Via Sebaste from Perga; it continued on after Antioch to Iconium (13:51) in the east. Based on later remains and writings, some people sat on benches along the synagogue walls or elsewhere, with the most prominent sometimes on a raised platform with the Law scroll. Regular Jewish public gatherings at the synagogue in this period were normally only on the sabbath and festivals.

13:15. Other sources make clear that people read Scripture in synagogues in this period (see comment on 1 Tim 4:13). In a later period, the biblical readings (especially from the *law) were fixed; this might not be the case this early, especially in the *Diaspora (and especially from the prophets). Later the synagogue sermon would be a homily on the texts read, similar to the one in this chapter; homilies (expositions of texts) were probably already used in this period. In this period, synagogues probably did not have regular preachers, and maybe not always expositions; but educated members did try to explain the Scripture readings. "Rulers of the synagogue" are attested in Jewish inscriptions throughout the empire. In many cases the titles are honorary—for example, for *Gentile donors—but sometimes they do refer to Jewish people (even if they achieved their influence as wealthy donors or community leaders), as here and normally in the *New Testament.

13:16. Many scholars have drawn parallels between Paul's speech here and the synagogue teaching form that came to be known as the "proem homily"; others have questioned whether the proem homily can be documented this early so far from Palestine (the similarity could reflect the influence of Greco-Roman *rhetoric on both). Whichever is the case, Paul's Scripture-laced exposition in 13:16-43 contrasts plainly with 14:15-17 and 17:22-31, showing that Paul adapted to different audiences in his speeches, as he did in his letters. Such adaptation was recommended rhetorical practice (as well as common sense). In Jewish Palestine, one sat to expound the law; in the Diaspora one would normally stand to speak. If Diaspora Jewish speakers used gestures similar to Greeks, the hand motion mentioned here may involve the right hand stretched out, with the thumb pointed

upward, the bottom two fingers folded inward, and the two fingers beneath the thumb extended. Speakers often started with an appeal to "listen" to them.

13:17-21. "450 years" may be a rounded figure that includes the estimated four centuries in Egypt (see 7:6) and 40 years in the wilderness. The forty years of Saul's reign is taken from early Jewish tradition, also preserved in Josephus (although alternative traditions also existed).

13:22-24. David's reign is the climax of centuries of waiting through other models of leadership; Jesus is the descendant of David, the *Messiah of whom the prophets spoke. Thus they proclaim one greater than the ancient hero David.

13:25. Only servants dealt with the master's feet; John thus claims he is not even worthy to be the coming one's servant (though *Old Testament prophets were called the Lord's "servants").

13:26. "Children of Abraham" are his Jewish hearers; "God-fearers" here may refer to interested Gentiles (cf. 10:2) or perhaps full *proselytes (cf. 13:43).

13:27. Luke's speech summary might allude to texts that he cites elsewhere. For the Jerusalemites' fulfilling the Scriptures in condemning Jesus, see especially Isaiah 53, which states that the servant would be rejected by his own people; early Christians also cited psalms of righteous sufferers (Ps 22 and 69). Luke does not cite all Paul's references, because he would not have room in his scroll to record the whole speech (see comment on 2:40).

13:28-29. The Sanhedrin lacked capital authority; only Rome could legally execute Jesus.

13:30-32. Paul needed to bolster especially this section of his proclamation with Scripture (13:33-35), because Judaism did not expect the death of a Messiah or his *resurrection *within* history.

13:33. Psalm 2:7 was already applied to the messianic enthronement in Judaism (most clearly in the *Dead Sea Scrolls). Psalm 2 celebrated the promise made to David of an eternal dynasty, a promise that was repeated regularly in the temple worship, in the hope of the ultimate Davidic king who would fulfill it completely.

13:34. Paul cites Isaiah 55:3 (and perhaps originally 55:4, with its hope for the Gentiles) to indicate that Israel's future hope was bound up with the promise to David. Paul might connect "David" in his quotation in verse 34 with the implicitly assumed author of the psalm cited in verse 33.

13:35. Rabbis used a technique called *gezerah shavah* to connect passages that used the same key word; thus here Paul may use "holy" in Isaiah 55:3 to lead into a citation of Psalm 16:10, which guarantees that the object of David's promise would never rot (cf. also Acts 2:25-28).

13:36-37. "Sleep" was a common metaphor for death. Paul *midrashically demonstrates that David could not have fulfilled the promise himself, so it must apply to his descendant.

13:38-41. Paul concludes with Habakkuk 1:5; he says "in the Prophets" (NASB) because some of the smaller books of the prophets were grouped together and treated as a single book. Habakkuk refers to impending judgment under the Chaldeans (1:6), which only the righteous remnant will endure by faith (2:4, a verse possibly cited in the fuller Pauline exposition behind Luke's summary at Acts 13:38-39); here the principle is applied to the judgment of the end. The Dead Sea Scrolls apply the text to those who violated God's covenant by disbelieving the Teacher of Righteousness (the founder of the *Qumran community).

13:42-43. Luke speaks here of *proselytes, but other Gentiles were interested as well (13:44-45). According to *Josephus, many *Gentiles attended synagogues with great interest. Even as late as the fourth century, the Christian preacher John Chrysostom complains that Gentiles—in this case Christians—were still attending synagogue services. Those who were interested in Judaism but unattracted to circumcision might well find Paul's message appealing.

13:44. When famous speakers (e.g., Dio Chrysostom) would come to town, much of the town would go to hear him. Word of a skilled new speaker thus spread quickly in cities, especially a smaller inland town like Antioch. Most of the Gentiles who came had worshiped at the major imperial temple in Antioch, and probably most also had worshiped the local deity *Men Askaenos*. Paul, probably originally more comfortable giving

expositions of Scripture than public speeches in the Greek style, is billed as a *rhetorician or philosopher.

13:45-46. Paul and Barnabas's response to their opponents here has some Old Testament precedent (cf. Lk 4:24-27; Amos 9:7) but goes further. It had always been God's purpose to bless the Gentiles in Abraham (Gen 12:3), but the tenacity of ancestral religions as part of cultural tradition is well known; when ethnic religion loses its uniquely ethnic component it may attract outsiders but simultaneously weaken its own constituency.

13:47. Here they quote the mission of the servant of Isaiah 49:6. The servant is clearly Israel in 49:3-4; in 49:5-7 it is the one who fully carries out the servant's mission and suffers on behalf of Israel (as in 52:13–53:12), whom the early Christians recognized to be Jesus. As followers of Jesus, Paul and Barnabas take up the servant's mission, part of which was revealing the way of salvation to the Gentiles.

13:48-49. Because the Jewish people believed that they were predestined for salvation by virtue of descent from Abraham, the idea that many Gentiles had been "ordained to *eternal life" (KJV) could be offensive—but was apparently what Isaiah 49:6 implied (see Acts 13:47).

13:50. Ancient sources report that many prominent women were interested in Judaism (partly because their wealth gave them leisure to consider it, partly because they, unlike men, did not have to face circumcision if they became serious about it, and partly because it did not diminish their status the way it diminished that of men); these women in turn could influence their powerful husbands. (Women appear on only forty percent of tomb inscriptions, yet they comprise fifty percent of proselytes and eighty percent of God-fearers.) Local aristocracies made up a fraction of the population but held great wealth and most of the political power; from them came *decurions* for the local councils, and their opposition could drive someone out of town. In Pisidian Antioch, these leaders would have been Roman citizens, descendants of the Roman veteran colonists who founded the city, who took great pride in their status. The two leading families of Antioch known to us were the Caristanii and relatives of Sergius Paulus. But the leaders' authority was only local, and by going to Iconium Paul and Barnabas move out of their jurisdiction.

13:51-52. Iconium was further along the same road (the Via Sebaste) at the very east end of Phrygia-Galatia (assuming, as is probable though disputed, that this region was called "Galatia" in this period). Iconium was apparently more than eighty-five miles beyond Antioch, so the *apostles walk for at least four days in 13:51. Using the main road, the Via Sebaste (Augustus Highway), made them easier to follow (cf. 14:19). They had no choice but to take this road unless they wished to retrace their steps; this was the only easily passable east-west route available in this mountainous terrain.

Showing one's heel or shaking dust was a visible way to show rejection. Jewish tradition suggests that many Jewish people on returning to the Holy Land would shake the dust of a pagan land from their feet; because the temple was considered holier than the rest of Israel, they would also shake the dust from their feet when they entered the temple. Paul and Barnabas probably imply that those who reject their message are pagan and stand under God's judgment. Jesus had commanded his *disciples to follow this practice even in Jewish Palestine (Lk 10:10-12).

14:1-7
Opposition in Iconium

14:1-4. Although Iconium was a wealthy and prosperous town, it was hardly the size of a city like Ephesus or Smyrna. It was apparently not yet a Roman *colony. "Greeks" might distinguish Paul's hearers here not only from Jews but also from the less Hellenized people of the countryside (despite Iconium's identity also as Phrygian). Whereas urban culture in the empire tended to be uniformly Greco-Roman, rural society preserved local language and customs, and a town like Iconium would have its share of both. Traveling teachers would undoubtedly have drawn more attention in a town like Iconium than in larger cities. Inside the synagogue the language would be Greek. Outside the synagogue, because the native language of Iconium was Phrygian, Paul and Barnabas may address mainly the Greek-speaking upper social strata, or they may speak

through interpreters (cf. 14:11, 14); but it is more likely that most of the crowd understands Greek, even if it is not their first language.

Among the deities that the *Gentiles of Iconium worshiped, the most prominent was Cybele, the Phrygian mother goddess; Phrygian *mystery cults were also common. But Iconium's civic religion included the cult of the emperor, and in general Gentile religion there was more Greek than Phrygian. Inscriptions testify that the Christian faith spread and Iconium later became a major center of Christianity in Asia Minor.

14:5. Under law, city magistrates could do whatever necessary to quell disturbances; in the case of Paul and Barnabas, the officials could quell the disturbance simply by legally banning them from the city. Thus the plot to kill them goes beyond the law.

14:6-7. Iconium was in Phrygia near the border of Lycaonia, which contained Lystra and Derbe. In this period Iconium was a Greek city culturally distinct from the surrounding countryside; most ancient writers counted it part of Lycaonia, but it was culturally Phrygian, so writers sometimes counted it part of Phrygia (whose culture and political administration it shared). It shared elements of each local culture; from a political standpoint it belonged to the larger province of Galatia. (Some argue that Iconium was in Isaurian rather than Lycaonia in this period; at the least, they left the Phrygian linguistic and cultural sphere for Lycaonia.)

Some people considered flight undignified, but others recognized it as common sense in some situations. Jewish teachers preferred it to death, unless flight required denying the *law of God. The estates of the Sergii Paulli are about 110–20 kilometers north of Iconium, but there were few possible evangelistic goals to the north, and the *apostles venture south. Although they continued on the paved Via Sebaste, their flight was likely not pleasant; the plateaus of Lycaonia tended to be cold and poorly watered. The road to Derbe, over sixty miles southeast of Lystra, may not have even been paved.

14:8-20a
Preaching at Lystra

14:8. Lystra, a thriving market town, was about twenty to twenty-five miles (thirty-five to forty kilometers) south-southwest of Iconium. For half a century Lystra had been a Roman *colony, beginning with the settlement of perhaps a thousand Romans; its own citizens were accorded privileges as citizens of Rome. It valued its local culture and its Roman character alongside Pisidian Antioch and against the geographically closer Greek cities of the region. Greek flourished in the countryside, but nearly a third of Lystra's inscriptions are Latin (though some of it poor Latin). But although it viewed Antioch as a sister city, it emphasized its Roman character less than did Antioch.

Although some philosophers lectured in halls or served wealthy *patrons, many preached their philosophical wares on street corners or in marketplaces; powerful speakers like Dio Chrysostom criticized philosophers like *Epictetus who reserved their lectures for the classroom. Higher classes normally disdained those who preached in the open market, but would-be sages may have outnumbered those who could hire them in more professional settings. Like some ancient philosophers, Paul here preaches on the street rather than in a *synagogue (perhaps Lystra has none; see 14:19). Paul's approach should not surprise us; his own letters indicate that he shares some of this philosophical ideal (1 Cor 4:11-13), and he often uses the *Cynic-*Stoic preaching style in them (which could be used both on the street and in the classroom). What is surprising is not that Paul would occasionally preach this way but that he draws such a vigorous response; perhaps the controversy his opponents create helps him. Secluded philosophers tended toward academic discourse, while those on the streets were ready to denounce the folly of their hearers to secure their attention.

14:9-11. The parallels between the healings in 3:6-8 and 14:8-10, like many other parallels in Luke-Acts, are probably deliberate, fitting ancient literary conventions that highlighted such possible parallels. Local Phrygian legend told of an ancient visitation by Zeus and Hermes to Phrygia. In the story only one couple, Baucis and Philemon, received them graciously; the rest of the population was destroyed in a flood. Knowing some form of the story in their own language, the Lycaonians

are not about to make the same mistake ancient Phrygia had made; they want to honor Paul and Barnabas, whom they mistake for gods. People sometimes considered miracle workers as gods. Lystra's colonists, who were Roman citizens, employed Latin for official business; those speaking Lycaonian here are the longstanding indigenous residents of the area (who may have been more prone to listen than the more elite citizens).

14:12. Hermes was the messenger of the Olympian gods who spoke for the more dignified Zeus (though in other stories Zeus was less dignified and out chasing women or occasionally boys for his sexual delights). Like most early Jewish and Christian writers (cf. also Is 46:5-7), Luke is not above making fun of what he viewed as paganism's folly.

14:13. Inscriptions show that Hermes and Zeus were worshiped together in the Phrygian region. An inscription allows that Lystra's temple of Zeus may have had multiple priests, though only one is acting here. People could wear garlands at festivals, but sacrificial animals were often decorated with garlands before being offered. Oxen and bulls were among the most expensive sacrifices; priests sometimes were wealthy benefactors who donated their services to the community, including at times sacrifices. Temples "outside the city gates" or "just outside the city" (NIV) were quite common in Asia Minor; some scholars, however, believe that the gates belong instead to the sacred enclosure of Zeus (it is not clear that Lystra had walls in this period). The disabled man had probably been healed at the gate, because disabled people often made their living by begging, and beggars normally found their best income at such places of transit (cf. 3:2).

14:14. Villages of the East usually kept their own ancient language after Greek had become the language of the cities. Landowning citizens of Lystra spoke Latin, but outside the town proper people spoke Greek and the local dialect; Lystra was a market town for the surrounding territory. (outside Lystra, most inscriptions are Greek, but names are local, suggesting use of a mother-tongue in addition to the more geographically widespread trade and literary language.) Although the hearers would have understood Greek, they spoke among themselves in their mother tongue. Paul and Barnabas are preaching to the masses, the abundant Anatolian noncitizens who lived there; only at verse 14 are they informed of what the crowds are saying. Jewish people were required to tear their robes when they heard blasphemy (forming an ironic contrast with 14:19!)

14:15-16. One may contrast this speech, to rural farmers, with the somewhat similar philosophic speech in 17:22-31 and the very different synagogue homily in 13:16-47; *rhetoric emphasized adaptability to one's audience. "Turning" was biblical language for *repentance, and "vain things" for idols; "the living God" is also biblical language, and "maker of . . . all that is in them" evokes Ps 146:6 (cf. Ex 20:11; Neh 9:6). Although using biblical language, Barnabas and Paul preach to these Anatolian farmers in terms they would not need to know the Bible to understand, emphasizing the God who rules nature, who was already recognized by paganism. Jewish people often pointed to pagan philosophical teachings on the supreme god, which Jews felt contradicted the pagan worship of idols. Jews called idols "vain" (futile), in contrast to the "living" God. Jewish people sometimes believed that God allowed a lower moral standard for *Gentiles; but idolatry, like sexual immorality, was not an issue on which God would permit compromise. They often mocked the worship of other gods (see comment on 19:37). Perhaps God's patience here evokes Wisdom of Solomon 11:23.

14:17. Phrygia was fertile, and Phrygians especially worshiped the mother goddess who was supposed to provide fertility to the earth. Lycaonia was less fertile, but Lystra's residents were mostly rural in orientation. Various philosophers, especially Stoics, believed that nature itself testified to the character of the supreme god. Jewish teachers agreed that nature testifies to God's character (this is biblical; cf. Ps 19:1; 89:37) and taught that he provides all peoples with health, food and so forth. Scripture already emphasized that God was the source of these agricultural blessings.

14:18-20a. The visitors from Antioch had no legal authority outside their own territory, but they are able to persuade the mob to accomplish what had failed in Iconium (14:5-6).

A mob could change its views quickly (cf. Lk 23:18), especially in a case like this one: when Paul and Barnabas deny the gods, they would be considered impious and hence would appear to fit a different category of ancient paganism. Now they were not gods after all, but dangerous magicians. (Whereas gods were popularly regarded as generally beneficent, sorcerers were viewed as secretive and usually harmful.)

Iconium was only twenty miles away, but Antioch was four or five days' travel, nearly a hundred miles from Lystra by road. Nevertheless, it is known that Antioch and Lystra were in contact with each other, considering themselves sister cities. Sources show that particularly effective speakers could sometimes (though not always) calm mobs. Stoning was an appropriate penalty for blasphemy (for Luke's audience an ironic treatment of the monotheistic preacher in 14:14-18). See 7:58 for details on Jewish stoning, but stoning was also the most common form of urban mob violence in the Gentile world. Stones, tiles and cobbles were readily available in ancient streets. When Jewish crowds stoned a transgressor, they sought the transgressor's death; Paul's survival undoubtedly points to divine protection. Normally such executions were performed outside the city, and they may have dragged him out of the city for purity reasons; that he not only survived but could walk afterward must be understood as miraculous.

14:20b-28
Consolidating the Work

14:20b. The site usually considered Derbe today was some sixty miles (about ninety-six kilometers) southeast of Lystra; Luke reports that the journey toward Derbe started on the next day, but presumably it took more than a day to complete. Unlike the Via Sebaste from Iconium to Lystra, this road was apparently unpaved. Derbe had only recently begun to achieve some status (it became a Greek polis, Claudioderbe, only in Claudius' reign); but it would be out of the way of their enemies. Luke does not report *legal* action against Paul and Barnabas in Lystra, but even if there had been, decrees from one town were not automatically binding in another.

14:21. From Derbe they could have crossed the Taurus mountains (it was presumably not yet winter) to Paul's home town of Tarsus (perhaps over a week's walk, about 150 miles), but they wanted to revisit the *churches. Returning to towns where they had faced persecution required courage (praiseworthy in ancient accounts), though the opposition may have usually involved mob actions (even with officials' cooperation) rather than official decrees. It would offer a model of faithfulness to local believers who could not leave so easily.

14:22. Judaism also demanded perseverance (as opposed to apostasy). Much traditional Jewish teaching spoke of a period of intense suffering before the time of the *kingdom (cf. Dan 12:1); Paul could allude to this idea in verse 22, although "tribulation" (KJV, NASB) here could also be more generic.

14:23. Elders had always governed and judged in towns and villages in the *Old Testament (and in much of the rest of the Mediterranean world as well), and the evidence is abundant that this form of rule continued in many places in the *New Testament period. Many ancient synagogues had several elders who filled a religious office (acting as councils rather than as individuals); indeed, a "council of elders" ruled the massive Jewish community in Alexandria. Normally rule was exercised by a council of elders, not a single elder. On fasting, see comment on 13:2.

14:24. It was known that Pamphylia was near Pisidia; given their proximity, ancient writers sometimes treated Pisidia and Pamphylia together. Both peoples were reputed to be especially adept in augury (predicting the future by the flights of birds)—forbidden by the Old Testament prohibition of divination (Deut 18:10).

14:25. Perge (see comment on 13:13) in Pamphylia was largely *Gentile, perhaps explaining why Luke does not mention the *apostles preaching there in 13:13-14; perhaps they have gained more confidence now. The Via Sebaste probably ended in Perge, so they would have taken a lesser road to Attalia. Attalia was Pamphylia's main port, and it lay on the mouth of the Catarractes. Most of Attalia lay on a steep elevation just above the sea. That port town included some high-status Roman settlers (notably the Calpurnii), and had many ships sailing to Syria, being a major port for trade with that region.

14:26-28. When they return to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas report on their missionary work to the sending church. Although Jewish people in the *Diaspora were concerned to propagate a favorable impression of their religion and to gain converts when possible, they do not seem to have engaged in a concerted effort at what we call "mission." Yet synagogue communities throughout the Diaspora informally remained in contact through travelers who reported news, and reports of large numbers of converts to Judaism would have been considered news when it occurred. The Antiochan church's commitment probably goes beyond such interest, because the early Christians' interest in missions was far more central than that of other Jewish sects; Luke-Acts is clear that missions is at the heart of Jesus' purpose for his church. For "open door" as an idiom, see comment on 1 Cor 16:9.

15:1-5
The Controversy

15:1. Many Jewish people believed that *Gentiles were saved simply by avoiding major sins (such as idolatry and sexual immorality; later *rabbis summarized these as seven laws allegedly given to Noah); some others believed that Gentiles had to convert to Judaism by being circumcised (if male) and (according to most of this group) baptized (whether male or female). (*Josephus reported that some Jews insisted on a Gentile king being circumcised, whereas others believed that his acceptance of Jewish faith was sufficient. Indeed, some of Josephus's colleagues demanded the circumcision of Gentiles who had come to them for refuge, but Josephus himself forbade this requirement.) Of course, even those Jewish people who believed that righteous Gentiles could be saved without converting to Judaism did not accept them as part of God's people Israel unless they converted (cf. comment on Galatians, where inclusion in God's people, rather than salvation, may be in view).

15:2. Strife was common in ancient Mediterranean public life. These believers would "go up" because Jerusalem is higher in elevation than Antioch (the image of "ascending" to Jerusalem recurs often in the *Old Testament). The *churches of the *Diaspora, like the *synagogues, were ruled by local elders, not by a hierarchy in Jerusalem; but just as synagogues respected messengers from the temple authorities in the homeland, the non-Palestinian churches need to resolve the issues raised by those purporting to speak for Judean Christians (15:1). (Josephus pointed out that Jerusalemites, priests and those who knew the *law well were given great respect by others. He reported that some who were qualified in this way were sent to subvert his own similar qualifications as an officer in Galilee.)

15:3-4. Their testimonies, like Peter's (11:12; 15:8), appeal to divine attestation, which was widely accepted in both Jewish and Gentile circles. But many strict *Pharisees believed that even miracles were insufficient attestation if they contradicted traditional interpretations of the law (15:5).

15:5. "Sect" or "party" was a standard way of referring to the Pharisees (and other Jewish groups like *Sadducees and *Essenes), found also in Josephus. Among the Pharisees, the stricter school of *Shammai may have prevailed at this time; the school of *Hillel, which predominated later, was more generous toward Gentiles. Other Jews respected Pharisees for their piety, and the Jerusalem church no doubt accorded them high status for their knowledge of the law. Nationalism and conservative sentiments had been on the rise in Judea since the hopes stirred by the brief reign of Agrippa I (A.D. 41–44; see comment on 12:1) a few years earlier.

15:6-11
Peter's Response

In ancient *rhetoric, citing a voice respected by one's opposition was strategic. Having the backing of the leading minister to the traditional constituency (Gal 2:7) on one's side (Acts 10–11) is certainly strategic in granting credibility to the very different ministry of the Antioch church.

15:6-7. The *apostles do not rule without the elders, and both engage in vigorous debate, as Jewish teachers did in their schools. Jewish assemblies often sought to function by majority opinion or consensus among themselves rather than fiat. In later rabbinic schools, rabbis often had to agree to disagree, though submitting to majority opinion; this assembly seeks to achieve consensus (v. 22). The *Es-

senes reportedly worked by consensus, but it was difficult to achieve in most of ancient society, which was very divisive.

15:8-9. The Spirit was an *eschatological gift for Israel (Ezek 36:27). Gentiles were continually impure by virtue of their state as Gentiles; for this reason, they were expected to undergo *proselyte *baptism when they converted to Judaism. Peter, however, emphasizes that God enacts that "cleansing" (NASB, NRSV) or "purifying" (NIV, KJV; cf. 10:15) simply through their faith. For God knowing the heart, see 1 Samuel 16:7.

15:10-11. Here Peter may refer to the common Jewish tradition of the "yoke" of God's *law or his *kingdom as opposed to the yoke of worldly care. Most Jewish people saw the law not as a burden but as a gracious gift; they believed that its duties freed them from real burdens (cf. Mt 11:29-30). If he refers here to the law, Peter may think of its inadequacy only in the sense found in Jeremiah 31:32: the ancestors broke it, but under the new covenant God would write the law in their hearts (Jer 31:33-34). Later rabbis sometimes offered more lenient rulings for the sake of the majority of their people, who could not live by the stricter ones.

15:12-21
James's Response

15:12. See comment on 15:3-4. "The multitude" (KJV, NASB) means "the assembly" (NIV, NRSV), as in the *Dead Sea Scrolls.

15:13-14. In the *Old Testament "a people for his name" (KJV, NASB, NRSV, literally; or "a people for himself"—NLT) normally meant Israel (whom he "took" for his name in Ex 6:7); James derives this title for Gentile Christians from Amos, whom he cites in verse 17.

15:15-16. James refers to "the Prophets" (plural) in this case presumably because he is speaking of the scroll containing the twelve smaller books of the prophets, including Amos.

"Tabernacle of David" (Amos 9:11) probably means the "house [line] of David," fallen into such pitiable disrepair that it is called merely a tabernacle (KJV, NASB), or tent (NIV). Rebuilding David's house would mean raising up a *Messiah after the Davidic line's rule had been cut off. The Dead Sea Scrolls also cited this text as messianic, along with 2 Samuel 7:10b-14.

15:17. James uses the *Septuagint, appropriate for an argument that will be used in the Diaspora; later rabbis mixed and matched variant readings as they suited their point. Amos 9:12 says "the remnant of Edom," but by slightly changing the spelling (as Jewish interpreters often did to make points), the Septuagint (followed by James and Luke here) can read the text as if it said "the remnant of Adam," meaning "of humanity." (Amos 9:12 refers to "possessing" Edom, and nations being "called by my [God's] name" (NASB) could refer to conquest rather than willing submission. But God's people are also "called by his name" (Deut 28:10; Is 63:19; Jer 14:9; Dan 9:19). The point is that the nations will come under the rule of God (cf. Is 19:24-25; Zeph 3:8-9; Zech 2:11; 9:7), and the context in Amos (9:7) suggests that God is concerned for the nations themselves.

15:18. James may blend in an allusion to Isaiah 45:21.

15:19-20. God forbade Noah and his descendants to eat meat with blood in it (Gen 9:4); Jewish people thus deemed as unacceptable even for Gentile consumption animals killed by strangling without draining the blood. The few requirements James suggests they impose may derive from requirements for Gentiles living among Israelites in Leviticus 17–18 and are representative of the handful of laws that Jewish tradition came to believe that God gave Noah. According to the more lenient Jewish position, any righteous Gentiles who kept those basic laws would have a share in the world to come. Because even stricter Pharisees had to get along with the majority of more lenient people, these teachers did not try to invalidate other teachers' rulings if they had majority consent. James provides a compromise approach that gives each side the basic element of what they need to work together (and not lose face with their constituencies): even conservative Jewish believers should treat Gentile Christians as saved provided they follow the minimal Jewish expectations for God-fearers. This means that cooperation was possible based on shared common ground; it does not mean that everyone in the Jerusalem church consented to Paul's view (articulated in his letters) that Gentiles were full members of God's people.

15:21. James's statement here could mean that Moses already has enough observers of his *law; or it could mean that believers are to abstain from the practices in verse 20 lest they offend the many people of verse 21. *Synagogues existed in major cities throughout the empire, and those who wished to observe the law as *proselytes could learn about it there.

15:22-35
The Church's Decree

15:22. When views were disputed in the later rabbinic academies, the majority view always prevailed; here a partial compromise (in favor of the Antioch church) seems to command consensus. Other Jewish groups also had "general sessions," such as at *Qumran, where the priests, elders and people would gather. "Silas" and "Silanus" are attested as names used by Jewish people; the nearest Latin name is "Silvanus" (1 Thess 1:1). (Some also suggest that "Silas" may be an *Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew "Saul.")

15:23. That ethnic *Gentiles should be called "brothers and sisters" is significant (though sometimes Jews had called Gentile allies this; cf. 1 Maccabees 12:6; 14:40). The greetings are standard for Greco-Roman letters; the address shows that it is a circular letter, to be copied and circulated by its messengers to these different regions. Central authorities sometimes sent their authorized agents bearing circular letters. Both novels and historical works sometimes cited the contents of letters. The letter is of average length (papyrus letters averaged eighty-seven words, and this one is just over a hundred). Antioch was the leading city of Syria; Cilicia adjoined Syria and was administered as a common province with it in this period.

15:24. One sign of the respect the Jerusalem church shows the Gentile believers is the care with which they craft the letter; 15:24-26 is a "periodic sentence," the most intricately designed rhetoric in the entire book of Acts. Division and rivalry characterized ancient urban life, but moralists often exhorted people to unity; "harmony" was a major topic of ancient civic rhetoric and the discussion of moralists (on consensus, see comment on 15:22).

15:25-27. In accordance with custom, the messengers they send to deliver the decree will be widely respected as trustworthy and representative of the council (analogies occur elsewhere, e.g., **Letter of Aristeas* 40).

15:28. Because the *Holy Spirit was frequently associated with prophetic inspiration or special enlightenment, readers would understand that the apostles and elders are claiming that God directly led the decision of their community. "It seemed good" (also v. 22) appears in Greek decrees in the sense, "Be it resolved" or "it was decided," often associated with votes in citizen assemblies (or decrees from emperors or local councils).

15:29. See comment on verse 20. Greco-Roman letters normally ended with "Farewell," as here.

15:30-31. Most people could not read, especially a letter in such sophisticated Greek; someone would read it while others listened.

15:32-35. The frequency with which prophets turn up in Acts would seem phenomenal to ancient readers. Although some ancient *Essenes and others claimed to be prophets, this was a rare phenomenon and no group boasted prophetic activity to the extent that Christians did; many Jews felt that there were no genuine prophets in their own time. To send people away "in peace" indicates that they had been received in an acceptable manner (Gen 26:29, 31; 2 Sam 3:21-23).

15:36-41
Returning to the Mission Field

15:36-40. That Israelite literature reported the failings of its heroes even during the epic period may be noteworthy, but by this time it had long been standard for Greco-Roman biographers to admit their heroes' weaknesses. Luke surely intends us to see God's blessing on the new Paul-Silas team (15:40; cf. 16:37), but this does not signal his approval of the dispute between Paul and Barnabas, handled so unlike the council in 15:22.

15:41. Cilicia (Paul's home province) adjoined Syria (which included Antioch, from which he was being sent); see comment on 15:23. From Tarsus, the new team could then take the Roman trade route over the Taurus mountains (it would not be winter) to Lycaonia.

16:1-5
Spreading the Word

On Derbe and Lystra, see 14:8, 20. Palestinian Jews considered intermarriage between Jews and pagans a horrible sin (Tobit 4:12; 1 Esdras 8:68-96; 9:7-9), but views were no doubt more lenient in places like Lystra, where the Jewish community was smaller. Under Jewish *law at least as early as the second century, a person was presumed Jewish if his or her mother was Jewish. But even if that ruling was in effect in Paul's day (which is questionable), Timothy would not have been accepted as fully Jewish, because he had not been circumcised. (Wives were expected to submit to their husband's religion, and Timothy's father had probably refused to let him be circumcised.)

Paul makes him a full Jew for the sake of his witness to the Jewish community (cf. the different situation addressed in Gal 2:3-4, where the issue is not witness but coercion). Paul opposed forcing circumcision on Gentiles (Acts 15:1-2), but not someone Jewish or partly Jewish identifying with their Jewish heritage for witness to their community. The Gentile community already recognized Christians as proclaimers of a form of Judaism; thus, offended as many of them were by the idea of circumcision, they would not be more offended by a circumcised Jewish Christian than by an uncircumcised Christian. For the decrees, see 15:29 (though these were specifically addressed only to Syria and Cilicia, see 15:23).

16:6-10
The Spirit's Guidance

16:6. The Greek phrase here may view Phrygia and Galatia together as a unit (though cf. 18:23); most scholars believe that Paul's letter to the Galatians covers the Phrygian regions included in Acts 14. The phrase here likely involves "Phrygia-Galatia," that is, the southern part of the province of Galatia encompassing traditional peoples of Phrygia. ("North" Galatia is about two hundred kilometers away from the most obvious route between Lystra and Mysia.) "Asia" is the Roman province in western Turkey, whose leading city was Ephesus; journeying west on a major road that passed Colosse and Laodicea would have taken him there. In antiquity, both Israelites and *Gentiles sought divine guidance. Most Jewish groups believed that the *Holy Spirit was no longer active in the *Old Testament sense, and none paralleled the magnitude of the Spirit's working regarded as normal among the early Christians.

16:7. They were opposite Mysia, possibly at a city on its eastern border in northern Phrygia; there they could turn right to Bithynia in the north (a strategic region), or left to Mysia and Asia in the west. They pass northwest through Mysia in 16:8.

16:8. The Troad (including Troas) was in northwest Mysia. Troas was directly to the west of much of Mysia; Bithynia was a senatorial province northeast of Mysia. Thus Paul and his companions go from eastern Mysia (near Bithynia and just north of Phrygia) westward toward Alexandria Troas, which was about ten to fifteen miles south-southwest of the more famous ancient Ilium, Homer's Troy. (Because Rome traced its mythical lineage to Troy, the site had symbolic significance for Rome.) Troas was not the most accessible site, so they probably journeyed there not for convenience but because it was a strategic site not forbidden to them by the *Spirit. Troas, a Roman *colony with population estimates as high as a hundred thousand, had a mixed population of Roman citizens and natives who never quite adjusted to one another's presence; it was also where two major routes from the East toward Rome converged, and those traveling from Asia to Macedonia or the reverse regularly passed through the port of Troas. Alexandria Troas's artificial harbor had made it the leading mercantile port between Macedonia and Asia Minor, and Greco-Roman history and legend amplified the area's importance.

16:9. Macedonia had been a Roman province since 146 B.C. In some respects it was strategically more important to Rome than Achaia (most of Greece) was, because it was the link between Rome and the whole eastern part of the empire along the Via Egnatia (the Egnatian Way), a road originally constructed about 148 B.C. The narrow body of water between Troas and Thrace was the famous divider of Asia and Europe. (Old Troy's status as a traditional boundary between Europe and Asia was highlighted, for example, by Alex-

ander the Great's invasion of Asia there; by contrast, the *gospel of peace here moves from Asia to Europe. Romans counted themselves as part of Europe, but believed themselves descended from a Trojan.) Because deities in Greek religion used visions to send people on missions, even unconverted Gentile readers would understand Luke's point here.

16:10. Most people believed in divine guidance through dreams, or at least through some dreams. In contrast to the views of some scholars (who regard "we" as a fictitious literary device because it appears in some novels as well as in historical works), "we" in ancient historical texts nearly always *meant* "we." (A fictive eyewitness claim might have also made the narrator more central to the *narrative or emphasized his presence on more dramatic occasions such as Pentecost; Luke instead indicates his presence in passing here, leaving off at Philippi, then picking up at Philippi years later [20:6] until the end of the book.) Luke is writing a historical work (novels did not have historical prologues or address very recent historical characters), so he is no doubt reporting that he was with Paul as an eyewitness on this and subsequent occasions when he uses the term. Personal eyewitness experience was considered the most dependable source for history. Historians sometimes mentioned their own presence or activity in either the first person or the third person (or both).

16:11-15
A Response in Philippi

16:11. The mountainous and thus easily visible island of Samothrace (with Mount Fengari over five thousand feet high) is the first port travelers would reach; it was about halfway on the voyage and was a major landmark. Its northern port city (also called Samothrace) was a natural location for spending a night in port. Samothrace was famous for the nocturnal mysteries of the Cabiri. Neapolis was one of the two best ports of south Macedonia, directly serving Philippi (the other major port was Thessalonica). A voyage from Troas to Neapolis covered over 150 miles; a two-day voyage indicates favorable winds (cf. 20:6), probably from the northeast. Except during the winter (mid-November to early March), sea travel was quicker and less expensive than land travel, allowing one to cover perhaps a hundred miles a day.

16:12. Neapolis was the port of Philippi, which lay about ten miles to the northwest across Mount Symbolum. This was the eastern end of the Via Egnatia, which led westward to Dyrrhachium, an Adriatic port from which one could sail to Italy. Philippi had been a Roman *colony (see comment on Phil 3:20) since Rome had settled veterans there in 42 B.C. Some 85 percent of Philippi's inscriptions are in Latin, roughly double the proportion in an earlier colony Paul visited, Pisidian Antioch. Although not all its residents were citizens of Philippi, its citizens also held Roman citizenship. Its population is sometimes estimated at five to ten thousand. Although prosperous, it was more an agricultural than commercial center, unlike many urban areas Paul visited.

Thessalonica, not Philippi, was Macedonia's capital; moreover, Amphipolis (17:1) held the designation of "first" city of the district. Philippi was considered in the "first part" or "first district" (GNT) of Macedonia, which was divided into four districts. More importantly for Luke's account, Philippi was also a "first" or "leading" city of the province in the sense that it was one of the most eminent there (alongside Thessalonica); it was the wealthiest and most honored city of this district.

16:13. "Place of prayer" was a customary non-Palestinian Jewish term for a *synagogue, but the gathering here seems to be without a building. According to later Jewish pietists concerned about assimilation, a minimum of ten Jewish men was necessary to constitute a regular synagogue and thus indicate a city where Jewish people would be likely to form their own community; this number of Jewish men may not have lived in Philippi. But in places with no official synagogue, Jewish people preferred to meet in a ritually pure place near water; ritual washing of hands before prayer seems to have been standard in *Diaspora Judaism, and excavations show the importance of water to synagogues.

The nearest major body of flowing water, the Gangites (a tributary of the Strymon), is about one and a quarter miles (2.4 km) west of Philippi. It was thus more than a "sabbath day's journey" by Pharisaic standards (see comment on 1:12), suggesting that they were more con-

cerned with assembling near a pure place than with the technicalities of Palestinian legal ideals. If Luke has this river in view, the "gate" is probably the colonial archway of the city, through which the Via Egnatia (cf. 16:9) went out to the Gangites. Some others prefer a site on the Krenides creek, nearer the city, or to the east, at a stream that existed in antiquity.

16:14. Conservative Roman writers often complained that women pursued religions from the eastern Mediterranean, and both *Josephus and inscriptions attest that tremendous numbers of women (far more than men) were attracted to Judaism. The sphere of religion was the one sphere in Greek culture where women were given some public responsibility, and the Diana cult in Philippi may have made women more prominent than in other Greek centers. Macedonian women traditionally exercised more freedom than Greek women, and Roman women also had more freedom than Greeks (relevant for Philippi as a Roman colony heavily influenced by Roman custom). But Greek religion consisted of ritual, not teaching, and without a local *synagogue there would be little study of the *law. Thus these women would have had little training in Scripture and would welcome Paul's teaching. Many men looked down on preachers who catered to women, especially when they felt that these speakers undermined women's loyalty to their family religion.

The name "Lydia," though common, would be especially natural for a woman from Thyatira, which was in the region of ancient Lydia. Thyatira was known for its dyers' guilds and textiles, and inscriptions show that other Thyatiran business agents also sold purple dye in Macedonia, becoming prosperous. (Although Macedonians, like inhabitants of most of the empire, were generally poor, Macedonia had historically been one of the more prosperous provinces.) Some plausibly suggest that her name and trade may indicate that she was a freedwoman (former slave); many traders in purple dye were freedwomen who continued to work as agents of their former masters' businesses. Other traders, however, were free born. The most expensive purple was dye that Tyrians, in Phoenicia, extracted by crushing shellfish. Some estimate that it took 10,000 shellfish to produce a little of the costly dye; despite the foul odor associated with the dye, its rareness made it a symbol of wealth and power. Some suggest that Thyatira used a cheaper form of purple from the madder plant (see comment on 16:15).

16:15. By this period, some women gained wealth through business; even slave women could become managers, just like slave men. More than likely Lydia has some means as a seller of purple, a luxury good associated with wealth throughout Mediterranean culture for over a thousand years. (The dye had been especially procured from the murex shellfish near Tyre, but in Macedonia it could have been procured from the mollusks near Thessalonica. Thyatiran purple often came from the madder plant, not the more expensive Tyrian shellfish.) Well-to-do women sometimes became *patrons, or sponsors, of pagan religious associations; those attracted to Judaism helped support Jewish causes.

Paul and his companions might have been staying at an inn till the sabbath (a less than ideal choice; inns were notoriously dangerous and immoral), but Lydia immediately offers the proper Jewish hospitality and invites the *apostles into her home, thus serving as a patron of their work (cf. 1 Kings 17:13-24; especially 2 Kings 4:8-11). Jewish people often displayed hospitality by welcoming fellow Jews into their homes (sometimes for up to three weeks) if they had reason to trust them. Some people would have looked askance at the group staying in a woman's home, but she was not alone, having a "household" (which could include servants). She appears to be the head of a household consisting mainly of servants, though it is not impossible that she is married to a husband who simply leaves her religious activities alone (contrast the usual custom in Acts 16:31-32; cf. 2 Kings 4:8-23). Widowhood could explain Lydia's independence, though it could also be explained in other ways (being a divorcée or a freedwoman).

16:16-22
Exorcisms and Economics

16:16. This slave girl (as in 12:13, the Greek implies that she is very young) has literally a "spirit of a pythoness"—the same sort of spirit that stood behind the most famous of all Greek oracles, the Delphic oracle of Apollo

whose priestess was called a pythoness (she was named after the "Pythian Apollo," slayer of the great Python). Thus Paul and his companions confront a powerful *demon here.

16:17. "Most High God" is ambiguous, a common designation for God in Jewish texts but also occurs in pagan sources for Zeus or for the Jewish God with whom pagans sometimes identified Zeus. Magical texts show that pagans respected this supreme God, often identified with the Jewish God, as the most powerful. The spirit ambiguously reduces the missionaries' deity to a chief role in polytheism.

16:18. Exorcists sometimes tried to use names of higher spirits to evict lower spirits (see comment on 19:13); but for the use of "the name of Jesus Christ" here, signifying that Paul acts as Jesus' agent, see comment on 3:6 (cf. also comment on Jn 14:12-14).

16:19. On shared ownership, see comment on Matthew 6:24. The "authorities" here are the "magistrates" (v. 20), the most common Greek title for the Latin *duoviri,* the two Roman officials of Philippi, who probably called themselves by the more dignified title of "praetor." What most translations call the "marketplace" was normally the square agora at the center of a Greek town, the center of all civic activity. Philippi, however, was a Roman colony. The commerical agora was nearby, but the passage refers to the central agora, the colony's Roman rectangular forum. It stood on the main road, the Via Egnatia, that passed through the city. At 230 by 485 feet, the forum could hold many people. In the ancient system, accusers were responsible for charging the accused before the magistrates, here at the raised platform near the forum's main, north entrances. The raised platform was the rostrum or bema, approached by stairs on both its sides.

16:20. People could be jailed for disturbing the peace; normally the plaintiffs could be assured the court's favor if their social status was higher than that of the defendants. The accusers are property-owning Philippian citizens, hence Roman citizens (see comment on 16:12), hence fancy themselves of higher status than the foreign preachers (unaware of their citizenship, 16:37).

The charge of "property damage" would be difficult to prove, so they charge them with disturbing the peace—a prisonable offense—and that they preach non-Roman customs. These charges were particularly sensitive in a Roman colony since the emperor Claudius' recent expulsion of Jews from Rome (see comment on 18:2). The Jewish-Roman contrast (16:20-21) is a taste of common ancient anti-Judaism, although the assumption that one could not be both Jewish and Roman will not hold up in this case (16:37). Proponents of traditional ways always demanded avoidance of new or alien gods, and one of the main complaints Romans brought against Jews was that they were always converting people to their religion (especially when the converts were Roman women). Although the Jewish population of Philippi was very small, there was a large native non-Roman population, and other immigrants from the East had settled there.

16:21. Philippi was extremely Romanized; despite its location, over half of its inscriptions are in Latin, more than usual in most eastern Mediterranean colonies. Because Philippi was a Roman colony (16:12), its citizens enjoyed Roman rights, used Roman law, were exempt from tribute and modeled their constitution on that of Rome. Foreigners and noncitizen residents did not acquire Roman rights simply by settling in Philippi.

16:22. Unless the accused were Roman citizens, they could be beaten even before trial as a means of securing evidence (this was called the *coercitio*); in practice, lower-class persons had few legal protections. Roman magistrates' six attendants, called lictors, walked single-file before duoviri and carried *fasces,* or bundles of rods, which they could use for beatings, as here. Normally, as here, the accused were stripped first. Public beatings served not only to secure evidence but also to humiliate those beaten and to discourage their followers. The mob's role here reflects badly on the magistrates, who were officially responsible to maintain order. Roman citizens were not allowed to be beaten with rods, but ancient reports show that local officials sometimes ignored this rule in practice, so Paul and Silas could not be certain to gain exemption even if they protested. (Governors acted with greater freedom in Judea, the setting the pair knew best. It turns out that Philippi, however, with its close ties to Rome, took the rule quite seriously; 16:38.)

Perhaps because of the mob situation, or because this advantage had not yet occurred to them, or because they did not have their travel documents on hand, or simply because they wished to put the court in a situation where it would have to negotiate afterward (16:37-39), Paul and Silas cannot or do not reveal their citizenship.

16:23-40
Prison Ministry

16:23. Some jailers were public slaves. Prison directors (whether slave or free, as may be likelier here; cf. 16:33-34) could receive good pay. Prisons were typically filthy, risking infection for the men's wounds. Jailers were often known for, and sometimes chosen for, their brutality. Women did not have separate facilities, but men were the majority of prisoners.

16:24. The jailer guards them "securely" (16:23)—far more than needed for those who have just been beaten with rods. A prison's "inner cell" was usually its harshest, least ventilated, and most degrading part; jailers sometimes secured all prisoners there for the night for security reasons, here undoubtedly producing crowding. (Such conditions led to excess heat and dehydration, as well as spreading sickness.) Wooden stocks, anchored to the floor, were often used for torture as well as detention, with extra holes so the legs could be forced into painful positions. They were normally reserved for prisoners of low social status; prisoners in stocks could barely shift position.

16:25. Jewish sources praised the ability to glorify God amidst suffering and shame, and Greco-Roman philosophers praised the wisdom of being content and thankful in one's situation. Ancient sources honor sages who lived consistently with their teachings about endurance. Most people were usually well into their sleep around midnight, which was also not a customary time for Jewish prayers (though cf. Ps 119:61-62). Prisoners apparently often slept on the floor, using a cloak for a cover.

16:26. Miraculous deliverances are common in Jewish and other traditions (cf. the exaggerated deliverance of Abram by an earthquake in *Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 6:17). Earthquakes are known to occur near Philippi, but an earthquake severe enough to split the staples of prisoners' bonds from the wall could have brought down the roof as well but miraculously does not. Although some ancient intellectuals offered naturalistic explanations for earthquakes, most people viewed them as acts of deities.

16:27. When confronted with execution (in this case, for letting prisoners escape), Romans considered suicide a noble alternative (contrast Mt 27:5). Falling on one's sword was a preferred Roman method. (Many Jews, however, considered it normally shameful, as people generally considered it under normal circumstances. Ancient Christian sources oppose suicide.) Although a jailer would not be responsible for earthquake damage, he could be responsible if deemed negligent in adequately securing the prisoners (cf. 12:19). The jailer was asleep (though we cannot say whether his subordinate guards or servants were).

16:28. The other prisoners may have remained for fear of the guards (the jailer "calls for" torches—v. 29—hence he has subordinates) or because of the missionaries' witness (v. 25). Roman law treated escape from custody as a criminal act, but often treated with favor those who refused to escape.

16:29-30. An inner cell (16:24) would be very dark, even if it had not been night; the jail official requests torches or perhaps lamps from his subordinates. Asking how to be saved is a motif in Luke-Acts (Lk 3:10; 10:25; 18:18; Acts 2:37); the jailer in this case may be familiar with the report about their teaching (see the "way of salvation" in 16:17; the report in 16:23 is merely a summary). The term translated "sir" often means this in direct address, but in other contexts can mean "lord" (as in 16:31).

16:31-32. Romans expected the whole household to follow the religion of its head; they also expected the head to lead his household to the worship of Roman gods. Here conversion is not automatic; the whole household must hear the word.

16:33. Prisoners normally were unable to wash or trim hair in jails. Since jails were usually in city centers, many sources of water were available in the public area of Philippi near the likely area of the prison, helpful for the jailer's washing of the prisoners and their washing of his household in *baptism (al-

though these could have increased the risk of being seen by Philippi's night watchmen). If the jailer removed them from the prison, he risks punishment for negligence if they escaped (cf. 16:23; but cf. also 16:28).

16:34. Prison rations were meager at best; normally prisoners depended on those outside the prison to supply food. In view of 16:20-21, the jailer risks getting in serious trouble here. If discovered, a jailer eating with prisoners was punishable, potentially even by death (and minimally by loss of job; cf., e.g., Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.230-33). Because the jailer would not likely have fully kosher food available, Paul and Silas accepting his food (cf. Luke 10:8) might be offensive to some fellow Jews, who sometimes subsisted even on figs and nuts in prison to avoid eating unclean food.

16:35-36. Perhaps the magistrates felt that public humiliation would have been sufficient punishment to silence the troublemakers. Or the magistrates could have regarded the earthquake as a sign, perhaps from the gods or dangerous magicians. The financial intercession of Lydia may have helped, but because she was not likely a citizen her effectiveness with the officials was less likely.

16:37. Because public stripping and beatings involved shame, that shame would follow the new *church unless Paul and Silas can receive a measure of public vindication. Even Paul's name probably indicates his citizenship; usually only Roman citizens bore this cognomen, and Jewish people rarely if ever bore it if they were not citizens. (Silas' Roman name is "Silvanus," e.g., 2 Cor 1:19.) Roman citizenship in the provinces in this period was a mark of high status. (Paul's ancestors may have been among Jewish captives taken by the Roman general Pompey; these slaves received Roman citizenship when they were freed. The Julian law forbade binding or beating Roman citizens without trial; sometimes ancient officials ignored these rules, but Philippi, proud of its Roman heritage, did not. No one would lie about Roman citizenship once they had nothing to gain from it except to recoup their honor; falsely claiming citizenship was a capital offense, and, given enough time, documentation could be checked.

16:38. Ancient writers tell of a Roman citizen who cried out that he was a citizen during a scourging, thereby humiliating his oppressors, who had not properly recognized his high status. By waiting until after the beating (cf. 22:29) to inform the authorities that they were citizens, the missionaries had placed the magistrates themselves in an awkward legal position: now the magistrates, not the missionaries, are forced to negotiate. The duoviri could act without trial only against noncitizens, and had simply assumed without inquiry that Paul and Silas were not Roman citizens. Paul and Silas could bring a case against the magistrates; if found guilty of depriving Roman citizens of rights, the magistrates could be barred from office, and their city could (in principle, though it was rare) lose privileges. This strategy might help secure the future safety of the fledgling Christian community.

16:39. The magistrates had no legal authority to expel Roman citizens without trial, but a trial would bring up their own breach of law; thus they are reduced to pleading. To force Paul and Silas to leave secretly would reinforce the public humiliation; Paul demands vindication. The officials still want them to leave to prevent trouble, but by forming their escort from the jail (which was probably in or near the forum) the officials had to humble themselves and offer at least some vindication to those they beat in Philippi, a highly honor-conscious city.

16:40. To visit the believers shows boldness and refusal to accept the humiliation; but per the officials' request, Paul and Silas do leave quickly. The western city gate was thirteen hundred feet (four hundred meters) from the forum. Through it ran the Via Egnatia, on which Paul and Silas would have headed north alongside the Krenides and then west to the river Gangites; ahead on the same road are the cities of 17:1.

17:1-9
Turmoil in Thessalonica

17:1. Amphipolis on the Strymon (thirty-three miles, over fifty kilometers, beyond Philippi), Apollonia (twenty-seven miles, forty kilometers, or a day's travel, beyond Amphipolis), and Thessalonica (thirty-five miles west of Apollonia) were all on the Via Egnatia (16:9, 12); this road continued further westward into

Illyricum (Rom 15:19), but Acts reports only Paul's turn to the south, off this road, to Berea (17:10). Roads were usually no more than twenty feet wide, but they were better and safer than most European roads before 1850, and especially inviting to those who traveled on foot or with donkeys or mules.

Luke may well mention Amphipolis and Apollonia as night stops; these were slightly uphill from Philippi hence could represent significant haste, though it is possible that they did stop elsewhere on the way or stayed longer than overnight. The longest leg of the journey, however, to Thessalonica, was mostly downhill. Thessalonica was an important city in this period, Macedonia's largest port, capital of its old second district and now residence of the provincial governor. Although the real population must have been much lower, the highest estimates of Thessalonica's population place it at about two hundred thousand, roughly ten times the population of the average ancient city. While Rome did not grant Thessalonica "*colony" status (unlike Philippi; see 16:12), it made it a "free" (mostly self-governing) city.

17:2-3. Thessalonica's non-Greek religious importations included not only Judaism but the Egyptian cult of Serapis and Isis. Paul had to be there long enough to receive support from Philippi (Phil 4:15-16), about a hundred miles away; until then, his occupation, which would allow him to set up shop in the agora, must have supported him (1 Thess 2:9).

17:4. Macedonian women had earlier gained a reputation for their influence, which they probably still exercised in this period (though they did not always exercise as much influence as men of their own social class). As *patrons within *church or *synagogue, upper-class women could also enjoy higher status than was available to them in society at large due to their gender. Social conditions made it easier for well-to-do women than for men to convert. *Gentile women are attested as following Judaism far more often than Gentile men.

17:5. Despite the city's economic strength, many people in Thessalonica were poor and many were unemployed. Ancient examples attest that the idle unemployed of the marketplace, usually despised in ancient sources, could be stirred to mob action. Jewish inhabitants were a small minority in Thessalonica, so those Jews whom Paul did not persuade (v. 4) would need help to oppose Paul effectively. The most likely site for the Jewish quarter in Thessalonica is not far from the forum. "The people" (KJV, NASB, GNT) means the citizen body (cf. "assembly"—NRSV); as a "free city," Thessalonica's gathered citizen body performed judicial functions.

17:6. Jason was a common Greek name but was also common among Hellenized Jews, as inscriptions and business documents alike testify (cf. Rom 16:21). He is probably a Jewish host with whom Paul and Silas stay while working there. *Delatores,* or accusers, were necessary to open a case under Roman law; dragging a person to court was one way to ensure their appearance. Polemical *hyperbole about "the world" was common in ancient literature. Anti-Jewish Gentiles in this era sometimes slandered Jews as "stirring unrest," but the charge here comes from Paul's own people. So serious was the charge that it could warrant even execution.

17:7. Romans could understand proclaiming another king (i.e., the *Messiah—v. 3) as treason against the majesty of the emperor; they could take mention of signs indicating this new ruler's coming (see 1–2 Thessalonians) as predictions of the current emperor's demise, and such predictions violated imperial edicts. That Jesus had been crucified on the charge of sedition only lent further credibility to the charge against Paul and his associates. Citizens who pledged loyalty to Caesar also pledged to report any possible treason; Thessalonica's devotion to the imperial cult made this a religious matter as well. Thessalonica had a temple for the worship of the emperor and its coins honored Julius and Augustus Caesar as gods. The distorted accusations here, however, are slander; ancient *rhetorical handbooks in fact supported attacking opponents' character with any believable charges. Like John, Luke likes to show the denseness of the *gospel's opponents; cf. 17:18.

17:8. Luke uses the precise designation for Thessalonica's city officials, "politarchs" (also v. 6), a term virtually restricted to Macedonia; there were between three and seven politarchs at given times during the early Roman Empire period. Rome gave them a free hand to run the

city, although they ultimately had to answer to Rome for inappropriate actions. Evidence indicates that local officials in the eastern Mediterranean were responsible for enforcing loyalty to Caesar.

17:9. As their host (v. 6), Jason is held responsible for their actions and required to post bond for them, as if they were members of his household. Nevertheless, the officials possibly recognized that Paul and Silas posed little real threat to order, and simply accommodate the mob to allow the situation to quiet down. Usual punishments for genuinely stirring unrest were serious. By contrast, a fine was a lenient penalty as far as Roman courts went, and a bond to curtail troublemakers would not have been unusual. But given the charge (v. 7), had Paul himself been caught, he might not have been so fortunate. The politarchs' decision would stand till they left office (cf. 1 Thess 2:18). Laws and rulings in Greek cities did not apply outside their area; so long as Paul and Silas keep moving, his antagonists must charge him anew in each city.

17:10-15
Response at Berea

17:10. One who fled trial could be presumed guilty, but given the seriousness of the charge and the local forces against them, Paul and Silas are better off escaping. The Via Egnatia (17:1) continued westward, but it is now safer to travel south, off the major Via Egnatia. Berea, some fifty miles southwest of Thessalonica, was not even on the main coastal road south; off the beaten path, it might throw off pursuers for awhile. Still, it was a significant town, possibly the second most important city in the province of Macedonia as well as a center of the imperial cult. Some considered fleeing by night cowardly, but it was also acknowledged as the most practical way to escape undetected.

17:11. Judaism regarded nobly those who checked everything against the Scriptures and diligently listened to teachers; Greek philosophers likewise praised those who listened attentively.

17:12. For the special mention of women (especially before men), see comment on 17:4.

17:13. Thessalonians had no legal jurisdiction in Berea, but mobs are not prone to follow the law and could create political pressure in Berea as they had in Thessalonica.

17:14. Messengers rarely traveled alone, and travelers over long distances were safer to travel in the company of those they knew. If a direct land route to Dion on the coast existed, Paul journeyed some thirty miles; if not, he may have been forced into a roundabout journey of some fifty miles. Once reaching Dion, he could take a ship south to Athens. The intervening land of Thessaly was apparently sparsely inhabited in this period, and Paul may have also wished to be farther from his slanderers on this occasion.

17:15. At least three miles inland, Athens had port towns, such as the walled seaports Piraeus and (less used in this period) Phalerum. Cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:1.

17:16-20
Entering Athens

Athens's fame rested mainly on the glories of its past; even as a philosophical center, its primacy was challenged by other centers in the East such as Alexandria and Tarsus. (Even in its immediate vicinity Corinth had long surpassed it in power, population and prosperity.) But Athens remained the *symbol* of the great philosophers in popular opinion, so much so that it made a useful foil for other cities or groups (for example, later *rabbis liked to tell stories of earlier rabbis besting Athenian philosophers in debate). Romans did not always trust philosophers, but Acts records other speeches to appeal to those with less philosophical tastes. This speech is Paul's defense of the gospel before Greek intellectuals.

17:16. Some majestic temples on Athens's Acropolis, such as Athena's temple (the Parthenon), were visible from afar; sanctuaries and images stood even in Piraeus and other ports of Athens. The second-century travel narrator Pausanias depicts in detail the various idols that consumed much public space in Athens; one could not avoid them. Shrines filled the agora and Acropolis, city streets were often lined with statues of men and gods, and Athens was decorated with the *Hermae,* pillars mounted with heads of Hermes; many visitors wrote of the evidences of Athenian piety. From an aesthetic standpoint, Athens was unrivaled for its exquisite architecture and statues. Paul's

concern is not aesthetics, however, but the impact of idols on human lives.

17:17. Inscriptions attest the Jewish community in Athens, but it was not prominent. Those without an official post in rhetoric could at least speak in the marketplace.

17:18. *Epicureans were influential only in the educated upper classes, and their views about God were similar to deism (he was uninvolved in the universe and irrelevant); if there were gods, they were only those known through sense knowledge, like stars or planets. Life's goal was pleasure, which they defined as the lack of physical pain and emotional disturbance. *Stoics were more popular, opposed pleasure, and criticized Epicureans (though not as much as they had in previous times). Here, as in 23:6, Paul practices the maxim "divide and conquer": 17:22-29 is calculated to gain a Stoic hearing, but Paul and the Epicureans have much less common ground.

Although Stoics still professed belief in the gods, many philosophers were considered impious, because they questioned the old traditions, although allowing them for the masses. The charge against Paul, "proclaimer of strange deities" (NASB), would remind Greek readers of the charge of impiety against Socrates centuries earlier (cf. 17:19-20; e.g., Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.1; Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 43.9). Others had been prosecuted for the charge in earlier centuries, and it still violated the Athenian psyche in Paul's day.

"Babbler" (NIV, NASB) translates a Greek expression applied originally to birds pecking up grain but which came to apply to common chatterers in the marketplace or those who simply gathered and spread scraps of others' opinions. But in the same verse Luke lets these critics demonstrate their own ignorance: they think Paul is preaching *gods* (plural), because he preaches Jesus and *resurrection—"Resurrection" (Anastasis) was also a woman's name.

17:19-20. Socrates had also been "led" or "brought" to the Areopagus many centuries before, as was well known. Socrates was the ideal philosopher, and Luke may portray Paul as a new Socrates for his Greek audience; given the outcome of Socrates's speech (which, like Stephen's, provoked his hearers to martyr him), this allusion builds suspense, although no one would expect the Areopagus to execute anyone for ideas in this period.

The Areopagus is here the council, not the site earlier used for this council (the literal hill of Ares). In this period the council may have met in the Stoa Basileios, in the Agora where Paul had already been ministering (v. 17). Because Rome had made Athens a "free" city, it had its own ruling bodies: another council, the city assembly, and, highest of all, the Areopagus. It was Athens's chief court, consisting in this period of probably roughly a hundred elite members. They had authority to evaluate new cults coming to town, and city officials would also evaluate potential lecturers who sought official platforms (though mere discussion in the market would require no accreditation).

17:21-31
Before the Areopagus Council

Paul's views are quite different from those of the Stoics, but he emphasizes the points of contact, even when they are only verbal (e.g., Paul believed that God's presence was everywhere, but not in the Stoic sense, which could divinize creation itself)—until the climax of his sermon. Defenders of Judaism had worked for centuries to make their faith philosophically respectable, and here, as in his letters, Paul draws heavily on his Jewish predecessors' arguments. Ancients valued the rhetorical skill of being able to communicate relevantly to different audiences; Paul communicates in synagogues (13:16-41), to farmers (14:15-17), and to the philosophically educated (17:22-31). Given its brevity, this speech summary is rhetorically sophisticated, with many rhetorical devices (e.g., alliteration) in Greek, and some high-class Greek (e.g., use of the optative).

17:21. Athens was proverbial for its residents' curiosity and their captivity to novelty. By the first century, Athenian desire for entertainment also extended to gladiatorial shows, but the city was especially known for seeking intellectual stimulation.

17:22. It was customary to begin a speech by complimenting the hearers in the opening *exordium,* designed to secure their favor. Some scholars think that this practice was forbidden at the Areopagus, but numerous examples show that even in Athens, speakers usually

praised their hearers. "Religious" meant that they were religiously observant, not that he agreed with their religion. Paul's hearers would naturally assume it to be a compliment; Luke's audience will recognize the term's potential ambiguity (cf. KJV: "superstitious"). Many people thought of philosophers as unreligious (even though Stoics tried to accommodate the beliefs of the masses; see comment on 17:18). But Paul is thinking of the religious interest expressed in the idols (17:16).

17:23. A visiting speaker would sometimes start by commenting on a city's splendid sites, building rapport with the audience. Paul preaches here no "foreign deities" (17:18), but a deity that was near them (17:27-28). One Athenian tradition about the altars—associated with one of the very poets Paul may quote in 17:28 (Epimenides)—would have served Paul's point. During a plague long before Paul's time, no sacrifices had successfully propitiated the gods; Athens had finally offered sacrifices to the unidentified deities of the sites where the sacrificial sheep lay down, immediately staying the plague. These altars of nameless deities were still standing, and Paul uses them as the basis for his speech. Paul does avoid, however, the practice of some of his Jewish predecessors and some second-century Christian successors of accusing pagan philosophers of plagiarizing their good ideas from Moses.

17:24. While rooted in Scripture, most of Paul's speech until the end emphasizes points of contact shared with Stoicism (his letters also reveal his familiarity with some Stoic language). For at least three centuries Jewish apologists (defenders of Judaism) had worked to make their faith respectable to Greek philosophers, so Paul is able to draw on a long heritage here. His rhetoric here is of the highest quality, as would be essential before the Areopagus. Paul preaches differently to philosophers (here) than to farmers (14:15-17) and synagogues (13:16-47); good rhetoricians were supposed to be able to adapt to their audiences. Paul's language here is fully biblical, yet chosen also to be intelligible to his audience.

Some philosophical trends in this era combined deities, moving toward a single supreme god. Non-Palestinian Jews sometimes identified their God with the supreme God of the pagans, hoping to show pagans that their highest religious aspirations were best met in Judaism. *Epicureans rejected temples and sacrifices; Stoics believed that God permeated all things and therefore was not localized in temples (cf. Is 66:1, cited in Acts 7:49), though by this period some Stoics sacrificed in them. The idea had a respectable intellectual pedigree; nevertheless, Paul's words would contrast starkly with all the temples (those of Hephaistos, Athena, Ares, Zeus and the deified Augustus) in plain sight of the council!

17:25. Stoics and Greek-speaking Jews emphasized that God "needs nothing," using the same word Paul uses here; the concept was also biblical (Ps 50:8-13), as was God giving breath to all (Gen 2:7; Is 42:5).

17:26. For Jews, creation from "one" meant from Adam; it contradicts an Athenian tradition of a special origin of Athenians from the soil. Jews and many Greeks agreed that God was creator and divider of the earth's boundaries and of seasons' boundaries; here, however, Paul probably has in mind especially human epochs and (as in Genesis 10) the boundaries of peoples. Jewish people commented especially on the four world empires of Daniel 2:37-44 and 7:3-8, which they believed climaxed in Rome. Stoics also believed that the universe periodically dissolved back into God, but on this belief they had no point of contact with mainstream Judaism.

17:27-28. Jewish people usually spoke of God as a father to his people (in the *Old Testament, e.g., Deut 32:6; Is 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:4). But Greeks (including some Stoic thinkers), *Diaspora Jews and some second-century Christian writers spoke of God as the world's father in the sense of creator, as here. Stoics believed that deity pervaded all things, though *Hellenistic Jews applied such language to God's omnipresence, not (as in many early Stoics) to pantheism. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) has long been attributed to the Greek poet Epimenides (from the same poem as Tit 1:12), who in one tradition was the person who advised building altars to the unknown gods (cf. 17:23). The other quotation, "we are his offspring," is likeliest from the third century B.C. Greek poet Aratus, who was from Paul's region, Cilicia (a similar line appears in the Stoic

Cleanthes). It appears in Jewish anthologies of proof texts useful for showing pagans the truth about God, and Paul may have learned it from such a text. (Greeks cited Homer and other poets as proof texts in a manner similar to how Jewish people cited Scripture; they also exhibited their education by their array of quotations.) Some philosophers criticized poets as too mythological, but others freely used their wording to prove their own case.

17:29. Many philosophers viewed images of deities as at best props to remind people of the deities; most at least retained them for their symbolic value, however, unlike Jews, including Paul (v. 30).

17:30. Speakers sometimes reserved their most controversial arguments for the end of the speech, first building agreement where possible. After building rapport with some of his hearers through much of the speech, here Paul breaks with his audience's views; although philosophers spoke of conversion to philosophy through a change of thinking, Paul here clearly communicates the Jewish doctrine of *repentance toward God. Many philosophers emphasized knowledge of God; Paul's claim of their ignorance (here and in v. 23) would not be flattering.

17:31. The Greek view of time was that it would simply continue, not that history had a future climax in the day of judgment. (The closest idea, the Stoic conception of a cyclical repetition of history, is quite unlike the biblical prophets' future "day" of judgment.) Most offensive is Paul's doctrine of the *resurrection; see comment on verse 32.

17:32-34
Response of the Intellectuals

Although Paul's message to the intellectual elite of his day does not produce massive immediate results, his ministry to the Areopagus is effective, apparently reaching even some of the elite.

17:32. Unlike many philosophers, *Epicureans (17:18) denied the soul's immortality: they believed that the soul was material, like the body, and died with it. Greeks traditionally believed in a shadowy afterlife in the underworld (perhaps similar to the *Old Testament *refa'im*); some no longer believed in afterlife; some now accepted reincarnation (found in some philosophers); under *Plato's influence some Greeks sought to free the immortal soul from worldly existence so it could escape back to the pure heavens from which it was created. Stoics believed that the soul lived on after death (although, like everything else, it was cyclically resolved back into primeval fire), but like other Greeks they could not conceive of a *resurrection of the body. Many Greeks believed in ghosts (disembodied souls) on the earth, but physical "resurrection" would conjure images of reconstituting corpses. Those who wanted to hear him again apparently maintained intellectual interest in something "new" (cf. 17:21); Epicureans (17:18) were likely among the mockers.

17:33-34. The Areopagus probably held about a hundred members but included only those of highest status in this university community, so the conversion of Dionysius is significant. Modern readers who judge Paul's work in Athens a failure on the basis of 1 Corinthians 2:1 have missed Luke's point (the emphasis of Acts is on his success, and the original readers of Acts could not simply turn to 1 Corinthians).

Damaris would not have been a member of the ruling Areopagus court and might have simply been listening in the marketplace (17:19-20), but she may have belonged to the elite. Although traditionally the most educated and publicly seen women in Athens were prostitutes and foreigners, some schools of philosophers (including Epicureans, Pythagoreans and some Stoics) had some women *disciples, though they were always a minority. Damaris may have been a philosopher, or (more likely) the student of one.

18:1-11
The Church in Corinth

18:1. Corinth was fifty-three miles (eighty-five kilometers) west of Athens, so the next natural stop for Paul; but it was also strategic. Rome destroyed Corinth in 146 B.C.; some Greeks continued to live on the site, but it was revived as a city again only when Julius Caesar refounded it as a Roman *colony in 44 B.C. Although one of Athens's ancient rivals, after being revived it had long since surpassed Athens. Its citizens were citizens of Rome, and official inscriptions emphasize its Roman

character, but many Greeks (and others) continued to live there, with an apparent influx of more non-Romans in this period. Roman Corinth was the political and economic center of Greece, the capital of the Roman province of Achaia and the transit point for all maritime trade between Rome and the prosperous Roman province of Asia.

18:2. Like Tiberius, an earlier emperor, Claudius officially expelled the Jewish community from Rome (probably around A.D. 49); probably only some of the Jewish community actually left, but those who left undoubtedly included leading figures in the controversy that precipitated the expulsion. (Jews who were Roman citizens probably would not have been forced to leave.) *Suetonius, a Roman historian, is often understood as indicating that the Jewish community was expelled because of disturbances about the *Messiah, perhaps caused by opposition to Jewish Christians. Given Luke's emphasis on legal precedents in favor of Christianity (18:14-16), it is easy to see why Luke would omit that detail. Corinth was a major conduit for trade with Rome and a primary destination of Roman ships; it was heavily Romanized and a natural destination for someone leaving Rome for the East.

18:3. In the ancient economy, people of the same trade usually lived together in the same part of town and formed trade guilds. Their trade guilds normally adopted a patron deity, and they ate sacrificial food at their regular banquets together. This cultic orientation of trade guilds would exclude practicing Jews from the fellowship, making Jews delighted to find other Jews of their own trade.

Women could be artisans, and many worked alongside their husbands in small shops. Arrangements varied, but multistory apartment buildings with ground-floor workshops were common; a number of urban artisans lived onsite, sometimes in a mezzanine level above their ground-floor shops. (We cannot be certain about the arrangements here.) Although many sold from shops in their homes, it is also interesting that Corinth's *agora* (central marketplace) had one of the longest lines of colonnaded shops in the empire.

By this period, the term translated "tentmaker" was also applied to leatherworking in general; scholars debate which is intended here. Leatherworkers were artisans; Paul could have also carried his leatherworking tools from city to city. Artisans were typically proud of their work, despite the long hours they had to invest to succeed, and were higher than peasants in status and income; but they were despised by higher classes, who thought most labor with one's hands degrading (see the conflicts described in the introduction to 1 Corinthians; comment on 1 Cor 4:12). Some sages worked (*Cynics even begged), but the elite usually preferred to pay sages a salary or be their patrons. (Many Jewish teachers viewed labor more positively; boys learned trades as apprentices, often to their own fathers.) Artisans' long hours in their shops afforded them much time to talk while doing their work, but Paul apparently is able to discontinue the labor (1 Cor 4:12) when his companions bring a gift from the Macedonian *church (v. 5; 2 Cor 11:8-9; 12:13; Phil 4:15).

18:4. Many foreign religions had settled in Corinth, including Egyptian religions (mushrooming in popularity by the second century). An inscription from a Corinthian *synagogue has also been recovered near the *agora* (central marketplace); its location suggests that some members of this synagogue had wealth and social status (see vv. 7-8). The inscription is from a later century, however, and the Jewish situation in Corinth after Claudius's decree (18:2) may have felt less comfortable (note also the probable attendant influx of more Roman Jews). In any case, most Jewish Corinthians in this period were probably immigrants or children of immigrants, holding the somewhat stigmatized status of resident aliens.

18:5. A gift from the Macedonian Christians apparently allowed Paul to spend less time on manual labor (2 Cor 11:8-9; 12:13; Phil 4:15).

18:6. One could shake a garment to warn violators of God's law that God would judge them (Neh 5:13). In Ezekiel, one who fails to warn people to *repentance has blood on one's head, that is, is morally responsible for the people's judgment (Ezek 3:18-21; esp. 33:4).

18:7. The church met in houses for the first three centuries (12:12; Rom 16:5). Synagogues also sometimes gathered in homes until the Jewish community could afford a special building, and between persecution and the

need for funds to free slaves, feed the poor and support missionaries, the churches had no money left for buildings anyway. Some scholars note that patrons' homes in Corinth normally reclined nine to twelve in the *triclinium* (the best room) and as many as forty others in the adjoining *atrium* (the largest furnished room). Larger homes are possible, since homes varied in size; most homes were much smaller. (Poorer people could live in upper-story tenement apartments that offered little more than room to sleep.)

For God-fearers, see comment on Acts 10:2. The status and thoroughly Latin name of "Titius Justus" identify him as a Roman citizen and part of the Roman culture (Corinth was both Greek and Roman in this period); he may have been from one of the Roman families established there in the time of Julius Caesar. Some have identified him with Gaius (Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14); Roman citizens had three names (Gaius being a *praenomen*).

18:8. "Crispus" is a typical Roman name. It was not uncommon for Jewish people to have Latin names ("Crispus" and "Crispina" appear several times in Jewish inscriptions), but the proportion of Latin names among Paul's associates is so much higher than generally in inscriptions (even though inscriptions were normally made by the well-to-do) that it is likely that a number of Paul's Jewish and Greek associates were also Roman citizens. To be "synagogue ruler" means that Crispus is a person of status and wealth, responsible for the synagogue services. Given the many public baths and fountain houses in Corinth, finding nearby water for *baptism would not be problematic.

18:9-10. In "assurance oracles," God often told people not to fear because he was with them (e.g., Gen 15:1; 26:24; 28:15; Jer 1:8; 15:20). In Greek literature gods or goddesses often appeared to people at night, frequently while they slept; but such revelations from God or his angels are no less common in the *Old Testament (e.g., Gen 26:24; 28:12-15; 31:24).

18:11. This duration probably meant that the biennial Isthmian Games occurred when Paul was in Corinth, perhaps providing both some additional "tent-making" or leather business, and additional opportunities to spread his message.

18:12-17
Gallio's Refusal

18:12. A proconsul governed Achaia (most of Greece) from 27 B.C. to A.D. 15 and from A.D. 44 on. Gallio apparently began his two-year term of office July 1 of A.D. 51 (or possibly 52); it was cut short by sickness, so we may reasonably date this appearance in A.D. 51–52, somewhat more likely before the end of 51. His brother, the *Stoic philosopher *Seneca, Nero's tutor, speaks well of him. Luke could not have had access to names of such officials at precise dates unless he learned them from Paul; there were no reference works listing them.

As proconsul, Gallio would decide important cases at his judgment seat in the morning. This "judgment seat" (KJV, NASB) is probably the then-recently constructed ceremonial rostrum that archaeologists have found on the south end of the Corinthian forum, in full view of the public, although some scholars have suggested a tribunal (cf. NRSV) in an administrative building at the forum's eastern edge.

18:13. If Paul's views put him outside Judaism, his followers would not have the protection Roman tradition gave to Judaism by virtue of its antiquity. Corinth's dedication to the imperial cult might potentially render suspect nonparticipants who lacked the excuse accorded to the Jewish community as members of an ancient religion. Others, however, doubt that the governor was enforcing imperial worship in Corinth, where commitment to Rome was not much in question.

18:14. A Roman magistrate's first decision was whether to accept a charge and so decide a case. Gallio's wording in 18:14-15 fits standard Roman legal usage.

18:15. Although some Corinthian Jews were likely Roman (and Corinthian) citizens, most would be considered resident aliens. Gallio dismisses the case. Roman courts decided violations of Roman law; but various individual edicts throughout the empire had given Jewish courts jurisdiction over internal Jewish affairs, and Gallio is not about to meddle in them. Gallio thus accepts Paul's religion as a variant form of Judaism, rather than

a new and illegal religion (*religio illicita*). Although precedent was not binding in Roman law, it was important and could be followed by other provincial governors; if involved in legal cases, Luke's Christian readers can cite this case on their own behalf.

18:16. That Gallio "drove them away" (NASB), perhaps with the force of his lictors' (attendants') rods, betrays more than a tinge of Roman impatience for Jewish religious disputes. Many upper-class Romans viewed Jews as uncultured troublemakers, classing them alongside other religions from Syria and Egypt (cf. 16:20-21). The emperor's own action in 18:2 would give free rein to other *Gentiles' disrespect of Jewish people.

18:17. Law courts (especially if held at the forum, or *agora*) were typically loud and crowded, and tempers flared. Luke may mean that the Jewish community disciplined a leader who was a Christian sympathizer (if this is the same Sosthenes as in 1 Cor 1:1—it was a somewhat common name), or that they beat their leader for getting them into political trouble. Or Luke may mean that, given Gallio's expression of his anti-Jewish sentiments, some local Gentiles felt free to vent their own. Other Roman officials had encouraged or done worse. Crowds often became unruly during public hearings, though they would normally lead to violence in front of the governor himself only if he were thought sympathetic to the abusers' cause. If the synagogue officials had publicly charged Paul to dissociate themselves from a potential troublemaker (cf. 19:33-34), the plot backfired.

18:18-23
Paul Returns Home

18:18. On the naming of Priscilla before her husband here, see comment on 18:26. Cenchrea was Corinth's port on the Aegean side of the isthmus; it also harbored temples of Isis, Artemis, Aphrodite, Asclepius and Poseidon. Travel was easier, faster and cheaper by ship than by land. But ships were generally meant as cargo transports, so seafarers had to bring their own food and bedding.

Some pagan priests (e.g., of Isis) shaved their heads; hence a pagan observer who did not know Paul could have taken him for such a priest (in view of the Isis temple in Cenchrea). But Jewish people shaved their heads after completing a Nazirite vow, and Paul's faith in Jesus had not diminished his own Jewishness in the least (21:23-24). Technically one shaved at the completion of the vow when offering sacrifice (Num 6:18), thus in Jerusalem. Paul may have shaved before a vow fulfilled later in Jerusalem in Acts 18:22 (if he stopped in Jerusalem) or two years later in 21:17-26. Or Paul may have taken a less Jerusalem-centered approach of *Diaspora (non-Palestinian) Jews who had not the time or money to travel to Jerusalem very frequently. Even in Judea, one could vow to abstain from various matters (here, cutting one's hair) without it being a technical Nazirite vow (see comment on Mt 26:29).

18:19. Ephesus was the leading city in the Roman province of Asia and the governor's seat. Many centuries old by this period, it may have held at least a hundred thousand people in Paul's day (many estimate even twice that number). It was often ranked the fourth city in the empire. It hosted many foreigners, and a recent economic elite not dependent on ancestral nobility. The Jewish community had long held rights there as Ephesians (*Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.39).

18:20-21. "If God wills" was a standard statement of pious Greeks and some Jews.

18:22. Summer winds were generally northerly but often east of north, which made Caesarea easier to reach by ship than Antioch's port city of Seleucia. But because Antioch was such a major destination (probably the empire's third largest city), sailing to Caesarea, only to walk more than two hundred miles north to Antioch, seems out of the way. Many commentators thus suspect that Paul stopped in Jerusalem as well (thus "went up" to greet the church—Jerusalem being in the hills), though this is not explicit (in the Greek; it is reasonably added in some translations). (The Roman province of "Syria" in 18:18 can include Judea; see Lk 2:2-3.)

18:23. The general time of year seems fairly clear: only by late spring or early summer was the land route open from Antioch through the Cilician Gates (a pass in the Taurus mountains) on into Galatia and Phrygia; it would become impassable again in winter.

18:24-28
Apollos's Enlightenment

18:24. Many Alexandrian Jews had names compounded with "Apollo," a prominent Greek god (Apollos might be a contraction for Apollonius). As in other ancient uses of the term, "eloquent" (NASB) or "learned" (NIV) most likely means "formally skilled in *rhetoric," the more practical form of advanced learning to which well-to-do pupils could attain (the other was philosophy).

Alexandria, the empire's largest city after Rome, may have had the largest Jewish community in the empire outside Syria-Palestine, with numerous synagogues. For the most part, however, only Greeks (perhaps a third of the residents) were citizens of Alexandria. The Jewish aristocracy (including *Philo) had worked hard to be culturally acceptable to the Greek privileged class, and they resented their own inferior status. (Most of the ethnocentric Greeks in Alexandria despised Jews and Egyptians, who made up the other possibly two-thirds of their city; thus they spoke of "Alexandria near Egypt.") Later, the clash of cultures and oppression of Jews ultimately led to a Jewish revolt—and the massacre of the Jewish community.

18:25. Scholars disagree whether "fervent in spirit" (NASB) refers to Apollos's own spirit or to him being fervent in God's *Spirit. Although the matter is debated, early Christian usage and context might favor the latter.

18:26. Normally husbands were named first, unless the wife was of higher status, but Priscilla (the formal form of which is "Prisca," as in Paul's letters) is named first twice as often in the *New Testament as Aquila. Her role here is fairly unusual by ancient standards (enough that it drew notice from some ancient commentators and apparent discomfort in the later Western text). Although most men in Mediterranean antiquity resented women speaking in public and generally did not respect women teaching, Priscilla teaches privately, and many men did recognize exceptions for exceptional women.

18:27-28. Letters of recommendation were standard in Greco-Roman society (see comment on 9:2). Apollos's learning might well appeal to the educated elite of the Corinthian church (see the introduction to 1 Corinthians). *Rhetoric (see comment on 18:24) was highly prized in urban Greco-Roman society, notably in Corinth.

19:1-7
The Spirit Poured Out in Ephesus

19:1. Ephesus afforded an opportunity to influence all of Asia (not meaning the continent, but the Roman province "Asia" in what is now western Turkey). It was the most populous city of the most prosperous and populated province in the empire. Although Pergamum remained the official capital of Asia, Ephesus became the chief city with the real seat of provincial administration. Some argue that Paul's approach by the "upper country" (NASB) means that he took a higher road further north, one that would lead to the Cestrus valley, rather than the customary route by the Lycus and Meander valleys. Highland travel could avoid the intense heat of the lowlands if the travel were in summer.

"*Disciples" means adherents or students, here perhaps of John (19:3; but cf. 18:25). The Roman world was cosmopolitan, and other Palestinian Jews also settled in Ephesus, which had a large, ancient and influential Jewish community.

19:2. They had to have heard something about the Holy Spirit (Ps 51:11; Is 63:10), though they had not heard that the Spirit had *come* (cf. Jn 7:39). In most of ancient Judaism and in Luke-Acts, the *Holy Spirit is the Spirit who inspired the prophets. Paul can somehow tell these disciples lack this measure of inspiration, despite much sound knowledge (18:25).

19:3-5. For John's *baptism, see comment on Mark 1:5; for baptism in Jesus' name, see comment on Acts 2:38. Water sources were widely available in and near Ephesus. The Selinus River passed the Artemisium; probably more accessible were Ephesus' many public baths and fountains (other cities also had these).

19:6-7. The tongues and *prophecy, as inspired speech, evidence their reception of the Spirit of prophecy; see comment on 19:2.

19:8-12
Word Spreads in Ephesus

19:8-9. Established philosophers and other teachers often lectured in rented halls; this

could have been a guild hall, but because it is named for a person it seems likelier a "lecture hall" (NIV), where Tyrannus is the landlord or (somewhat more probably) the customary lecturer. "Tyrannus" (a common name in Ephesus) might be a nickname, perhaps for a severe teacher. Public life in Ephesus, including philosophical lectures, ended by noon; most people in antiquity rested for one or two hours at midday, and advanced education lectures might finish by 11 a.m. Thus if Tyrannus lectured in the mornings Paul used it in the afternoons (perhaps doing manual labor in the mornings, cf. 20:34). In any case, residents of Ephesus would view Paul as a philosopher or sophist (professional public speaker). Many early Greco-Roman observers thought that Christians were a religious association or club (like other such associations in antiquity), or a philosophical school that took the form of a such an association. To outsiders, groups that taught ethics and lacked the sacrifices and idols characteristic of most religious groups could appear like philosophic schools.

19:10. Ancient audiences would understand the *hyperbole of "all Asia" (cf. 19:17, 20); such hyperbole fits frequent ancient usage. Nevertheless, in antiquity travelers did spread word quickly around a region; Luke reiterates the theme in 19:17 and 19:20. Ephesus genuinely was a cosmopolitan center from which word would spread quickly, especially if Paul were training disciples (as philosophers and *rabbis typically did) and sending them out to spread the message.

19:11-12. Paul's "handkerchiefs and aprons" (NIV) could be rags tied around his head to catch sweat and his work aprons tied around his waist (cf. 20:34; or, less commonly suggested, pieces of his teaching uniform); some suggest that they were taken without his knowledge. Although practitioners of *magic might try to use materials associated with a powerful person, Luke repudiates magic in the following context (19:13-19). Sometimes power was communicated by contact even in the *Old Testament (e.g., 2 Kings 13:21); if contact in the Old Testament communicated uncleanness, it could also be used to communicate God's power (cf. Num 27:23; Deut 34:9; 2 Kings 4:29). Cf. Acts 5:15.

19:13-20
The Inadequacy of Magic

Although some Ephesians who knew no better may have regarded Paul as a magician, God seems to have healed them anyway to draw their attention to his message (19:11-12); but God did not bless unauthorized use of Jesus' name. Ephesus was widely reputed for its trade in *magic and the need for exorcisms and protection against evil spirits.

19:13. Magic was widespread, but Ephesus had a reputation as one of its centers. Magical exorcists often invoked the names of higher spirits to cast out lower ones. According to magical theory, exorcists could coerce a deity or spirit to do their will by invoking its name. Exorcists sometimes "adjured" spirits (cf. comment on Mk 5:7). Ancient magical texts show that many exorcists were Jewish or drew on some knowledge of Judaism, and these texts include every possible permutation of vowels as guesses for pronouncing the unpronounced name of God (cf. comment on 2:20-21). Others invoked Solomon's name in expelling *demons (*Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.47). Some later ancient magical texts invoked the name of Jesus alongside other formulas, recognizing, as do the exorcists in this *narrative, its efficacy when employed by Christians to expel demons.

19:14. "Sceva" is a Latin name; although Judeans used "*high priest" loosely for the highest members of the priestly aristocracy, it is possible that Sceva simply appropriated the title for himself, since few in the *Diaspora could have easily checked. Inscriptions and texts testify to other irregularities in Jewish priestly claims outside Jewish Palestine. Because Jewish chief priests would be thought to have access to the sacred name (v. 13) and hidden names, especially of the supreme god, were thought to wield great power in magical circles, Sceva is probably highly reputed in those circles. "Sons" could mean they were part of Sceva's guild, although it is probably meant literally.

19:15. Spirits behind oracles could grant recognition to inquirers (cf. 16:17); these spirits instead insult the exorcists. Ancient literature reports that demons were typically unimpressed with orders from those who had

no power over them, although they feared God and could be controlled by the manipulation of spirits more powerful than themselves (who may have appreciated the influence this gave them with the magicians).

19:16-17. Paul has more power than the magicians (cf. Gen 41:8, 39; Ex 7:11). Both in antiquity and today, some of those thought to be spirit-possessed can act violently, sometimes demonstrating feats of pain immunity or unnatural strength.

19:18. When people recognize that Paul's Jesus cannot be manipulated like lower spirits, they understand that he is a servant of God and not a mere magician. Some translate "confessing practices" (NASB, NRSV) as "divulging spells," a possible meaning; divulging secret spells was believed to deprive them of their power.

19:19-20. Magical *papyri contained spells; Luke's term "books" or "scrolls" (NIV) may refer to such papyri. Briefer charms were rolled up in small cylinders or lockets used as amulets around the neck. These magical incantations were so common in Ephesus that some concise magical terms used in charms and amulets were apparently called *Ephesia grammata,* or Ephesian writings. Books were commonly burned in antiquity to repudiate their contents (in the *Old Testament, cf. analogously the destruction of idols in Deut 7:5, 25; 1 Chron 14:12). The total price of what is burned comes out to about fifty thousand days' wages for an average worker.

19:21-22
Changing Course

Ancient writers sometimes had statements outlining the rest of the book (this one resembles Lk 9:51), though clearly Paul also did have these plans (Rom 15:24-26). Luke shows that Paul had already planned to leave Ephesus before he knew that trouble was coming (19:23-41), and also sets the pace for the rest of the book, outlined as one more trip through Greece, then to Rome via Jerusalem. Joshua served Moses, Elisha served Elijah, and Gehazi served Elisha; sages in a later period (esp. rabbis) also sometimes expected disciples to serve them. If this is the same person, Erastus may have been the *aedile,* or commissioner of public works, in Corinth for a time (see comment on Rom 16:23); if so, this text shows that status in the *kingdom and in the world are not determined on the same terms.

19:23-41
Artemis and Economics

When Jewish people could show that not they but their enemies started riots, they could appeal for the government's reaffirmation of their rights; Luke is emphatic that not Paul but his enemies started the riot. As often, religious piety becomes a thin cloak for personal economic interests. The temple of Artemis served as a bank as well as a temple, and people from all over the world deposited funds there. Amassing significant wealth, the temple apparently controlled more than seventy thousand acres of agricultural land, and some of the temple's wealth benefitted the city itself. About A.D. 44 (roughly a decade before Paul's arrival), inscriptions there show that the proconsul had to get involved in the temple treasury due to some serious financial irregularities: temple monies were being funneled to private individuals. In Ephesus, politics and religion were as heavily intertwined as religion and economics, and local civic pride was inseparable from the worship of the Ephesian Artemis.

19:23. The month of Artemis's reputed birth was called Artemisium and hosted a major festival in her honor, at which Asiarchs (see comment on 19:30-31) would be present (v. 31). Some scholars have suggested that this narrative makes the most sense if it happened at that time; although this theory is possible, loyalty to Artemis ran strong all year long, and processions from Ephesus went out to the temple once or twice a month. The Asiarchs who knew Paul best were those who resided in Ephesus anyway.

19:24-25. Ephesus was growing rapidly, the most prominent city in the empire's wealthiest province. "Demetrius" was a common name in Ephesus and elsewhere. Metalworkers were usually of low status, though in Ephesus some craftsmen joined the rising class of new and even respected wealth. Members of the same trade united to form professional guilds, or *collegia,* which set standards for their own trade and united to defend their economic interests. Gathering them would not be difficult, since members of similar trades normally lived in the same section of a city; silversmiths'

shops in Ephesus were probably close to the theater, apparently on what was later called Arkadiane Street, the full half-kilometer length of which ran from the harbor to the theater (on which see 19:29). Miniature shrines were made as souvenirs and amulets; most of the ones we know about were terra cotta, so Demetrius was probably one of the most prestigious shrine-makers. Demetrius's guild may be that of silversmiths or metalworkers more generally, many of whom did make statuettes of Artemis. Small gold and silver images of Artemis weighing three to seven pounds were dedicated in her temple. Sculptures and other artwork featuring Artemis were common in Ephesus.

19:26. "Not gods at all" was the refrain of Isaiah (e.g., 37:19; 44:9-20; 46:1-11), other prophets (Jer 2:11) and Judaism. Although Demetrius exaggerates (the way ancient audiences expected demagogues to do), mass conversions could have a local impact. By the early second century the Roman governor of a nearby province complained that the temples of the gods were being forsaken due to conversions to Christianity. After the arrest of many Christians, the governor reported, more people did buy animals for sacrifices again (Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96).

19:27. In the view of many intellectuals, speakers who manipulated religious emotion without offering evidence were demagogues; nevertheless, orators often sought to stir indignation against their enemies. Ephesus did not take well to anyone insulting their patron goddess; earlier, forty-five residents of Sardis accused of assaulting a group of followers of the Ephesian Artemis received the death penalty. Artemis, Ephesus' patron deity, appears on coins and many statues from Ephesus. "The world worships" reflects the fact that the Ephesian Artemis, distinct from other forms of Artemis, had cult centers dedicated to her in at least thirty-three places in the Mediterranean world. Her fame is widely attested in antiquity: she commanded followers in visions to spread her cult; her temple, on a platform that measured 130 by 70 meters, was roughly four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens and was listed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world; Jewish texts also mention her temple. It was a mile and a half northeast of Ephesus proper. Ironically, Artemis's worshipers depicted her as compassionate, and her temple was to be a place of refuge even for foreigners.

19:28. Riots and unrest were common in Asia Minor's cities in this period. Crying out "Great is [such and such a deity]" seems to have been a standard way of expressing devotion. People could be worked into a frenzy, chanting together. Ephesians often employed the title, "great goddess Artemis," and used the acclamation reported here and others like it.

19:29. News and trouble spread quickly in ancient cities, which were very crowded (at least in Rome, perhaps two hundred people per acre, a population density found today in the West only in slums). Evidence currently suggests that silversmiths worked in a business district on the road between the harbor and the theater; the street would be crowded during the day, and, more clearly, the large market near the theater would be full of people. Thus one could easily stir a large portion of the populace before entering the theater. The citizen assembly held its normal meetings in this open-air theater, which in this period accommodated some twenty thousand people, was almost five hundred feet in diameter and contained many statues of deities. This was not a regularly scheduled assembly of the citizens, but some, assuming that officials had summoned the crowd, may have believed it was a special assembly.

19:30-31. Asiarchs were the most prominent men of the province; former Asiarchs retained the title, and some filled the office more than once. Many lived in Ephesus; of more than two hundred Asiarchs known from over the course of antiquity, over half came from or were related to Ephesus alone. Because of their elite status, some of them had probably also presided in one-year terms over the cult of the emperor and the goddess Roma. Different cities in the Greek East competed for the honor of having the largest imperial cult, so its priests were important to local civic pride. They had authority over the theater, but here they cannot quell this riot; they can only try to stop their Jewish Christian friend from entering. In accordance with Roman customs, they may have viewed their "friendship" with Paul in terms of providing him support as pa-

trons; the wealthy often enhanced their public reputation by acting as patrons of arts or respected teachers. Benefactors acted in return for honor. The public controversy, however, risks their embarrassment, inhibiting Paul's entrance; they may count it more prudent to work through the town clerk (19:35), a member of their class.

19:32. Greek comedy frequently parodied people's stupidity; Luke's hearers could laugh at the crowd not knowing the purpose of their rioting (cf. 21:34), even though this ignorance characterizes mob psychology well. Luke may employ the Greek term for "citizen assembly" here ironically: it is in fact a mob, not a legal gathering (v. 39). In addition to its regularly scheduled gatherings, the citizen assembly could have emergency meetings, which some participants in the present gathering may assume has happened.

19:33-34. Ancient sources confirm that securing a hearing in a noisy assembly was difficult. Various cities had taken action against their resident Jewish populations at times, and Jewish people in Roman Asia sometimes had to offer defenses of their rights. They were normally careful not to offend the local residents, and Alexander no doubt intends to explain that the Jewish community did not instigate the current confusion; they want to dissociate themselves from this more controversial monotheist (cf. 19:9, 26). But Greek anti-Judaism was common and *Gentiles often resented Jewish monotheism and dietary "separatism." The knowledge that the Jewish community accepted only one God leads to the assumption that the Jewish community instead wishes to explain their *responsibility* for the riot. (This event may help explain the Asian Jewish community's dislike for Paul in 21:27.) Controversial public trials were also often punctuated with shouts.

19:35-36. The clerk here makes a deliberative speech, intended to change the mob's course of action (v. 36). The "city clerk" (NIV) was the top civic official in Ephesus, who made known the citizen assembly's rulings and represented the city to the Roman provincial officials also headquartered in Ephesus. Civic pride was common in the cities of Asia Minor, and praising a city was common in the opening of a civic speech. Slightly later sources from Ephesus show that it prided itself on being "guardian" of the imperial cult; no less did the city pride itself on being wardens of their famous local cult.

Other statues worshiped in ancient Asia Minor also purportedly fell from heaven. No records survive of this claim for Ephesus's Artemis image; the clerk might even be simply currying favor with the religiously motivated crowd. Luke's own audience might laugh at what "everyone" here supposedly "knows"; they understand that rather than falling from heaven, the statue was "made by hands" (19:26). The bulbous appendages on the statue have been variously identified as breasts, castrated appendages, fruits, or bee or ostrich eggs; these interpretations suggest an Asian fertility goddess related to the local mother goddess and quite different from the Greek virgin Artemis. (Other scholars suggest that the objects represent planets, which fits the picture of Artemis as deliverer from Fate and its astrological agents.) Whatever the appendages are, literary sources show that in this period the Ephesian Artemis remained the virgin huntress of traditional Greek religion.

19:37. "Temple robbery" was considered one of the most impious of crimes, a capital offense, and the term eventually came to stand for sacrilege in a broader sense. Some Jewish apologists claimed that Jewish people did not mock other deities (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.207; *Against Apion* 2.237; *Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.205), but many Jewish people did mock them (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 13:10–14:7). In Greek, the masculine noun for deity with a feminine definite article here seems strange, but inscriptions reveal that Ephesians sometimes used precisely this form for their patron goddess Artemis.

19:38. The proconsul met with the gatherings of citizens on various days in nine different cities of the province, hence was available in Ephesus only on particular days; from the wording some suspect that he was in Ephesus at the time. Each province had only one proconsul, but some think that Luke may use the plural because the proconsul of Ephesus had recently died (A.D. 54), after which several officials carried out his administrative functions till the new proconsul arrived. Alternatively, it could simply be a gener-

alizing plural. Publicly naming Demetrius would shame him before the assembly; Demetrius might try to recoup honor by bringing charges (19:38) and certainly by depicting himself as defender of the Artemis cult. The city clerk's source of information may be from Paul's Asiarch benefactors (19:31), who would belong to the clerk's social circle.

19:39. A later source suggests that this assembly met three times a month. Rome allowed Ephesus to hold public meetings legally, having granted it the title of a "free" city. The lawful gathering of the citizen assembly, however, differed significantly from a mob (as here): the former met with Rome's favor, but the latter could lead to Roman disciplinary measures against the city (in principle even revocation of their status as a free city).

19:40-41. Other examples show that leaders of cities warned their people that Rome would hear of their riots; other riots are recorded as having happened in Ephesus, although Rome never did withdraw their privileges. But the special privileges Ephesus enjoyed as a "free city" (including its own senate) depended completely on Rome's favor, and other cities had had such privileges revoked. A famous late-first-century *rhetorician named Dio Chrysostom warned the citizens of another Asian city that those who abused the right of free speech had that right taken away.

20:1-6
To and from Greece

The *narratives of Acts 20 and 27 presuppose correct data on the length of travel between the places listed and take into account seasonal wind patterns and so forth. In short, they read like the report of an eyewitness.

20:1-2. Hinted in Acts only at 24:17 but clear in his letters, Paul's purpose is to collect the offering of the Macedonian (Philippi, Thessalonica) and Achaian (Corinth) *churches to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem, to demonstrate the unity of Jewish and *Gentile Christians (see comment on Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1, 5; 2 Cor 8–9). He may have gone through Illyricum from Macedonia's Via Egnatia (Rom 15:19; cf. comment on Acts 16:9); if so, many months pass before he reaches Achaia.

20:3. The three months may be three winter months, during which travel was difficult. Paul wrote Romans from this area (Rom 15:26-28). Although some sailors and shipowners were Jewish, most were Gentiles. On a ship to Syria, however, many travelers may have been Jewish—especially if the ship planned to reach Syria by Passover (Judea was part of the Roman province of Syria); cf. Acts 20:6. Travel to Philippi may have consumed two weeks if they traveled on foot; Paul will miss Passover but still has time to reach Jerusalem for the next major pilgrimage festival, Pentecost (20:16).

20:4. *Disciples often traveled with teachers, More relevantly here, just as prominent representatives from each of the Jewish communities would bring the annual temple tax to Jerusalem, so Paul has traveling companions from different Christian communities serving the poor in Jerusalem (20:1-2; cf. earlier, 2 Cor 8:18-24). This offering would show the Jerusalem church that the Gentile Christians still recognize the Jewishness of their faith (see Rom 15:26-27). Travelers, including pilgrims headed for Jerusalem, often voyaged in groups, especially those carrying much money (including those carrying the temple tax).

20:5-6. The "we" picks up where it left off; Paul had left Luke in Philippi (16:10-17). They spend the week in Philippi for the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. When one adds the remaining days (with parts of days reckoned as wholes, as generally in antiquity) presumed in the narrative, from their arrival in Philippi to their arrival in Jerusalem requires over thirty days. Thus they would arrive in Jerusalem before Pentecost (fifty days after Passover) in time for this one of the three major pilgrimage festivals (20:16). "Five days" (i.e., parts of five—perhaps four) was a slow voyage to Troas (16:11) but may include the half-day land journey from Philippi to Neapolis. Paul's letters show that at some point he had founded a church at Troas.

20:7-12
Resuscitation at Troas

20:7. Most religious associations in the Greco-Roman world met together once a month. Although some early Christians may have met daily (2:46), at some point they began meeting

especially on the first day of the week (Sunday), probably because of the *resurrection (Lk 24:1) and to avoid conflicting with *synagogue gatherings on the sabbath (Saturday).

This may be a special meeting, because Paul is leaving the next day. Christians may have often met early, before sunrise, but would have to work Sunday mornings like everyone else in the empire; so this meeting may have have begun late Sunday afternoon or Saturday at sunset. It depends on whether one reckons days from midnight to midnight, like the Romans and modern Westerners, or from sundown to sundown, like ancient Jews. In the former case, the first day means Sunday; in the latter, it started on what we consider Saturday evening. Most likely, this meeting began Sunday evening and ended Monday morning. Whatever view one takes, because most people went to bed not long after sunset, midnight was well into one's sleeping time. (Lacking electric lighting, people usually rose at sunrise, hence most people did not stay up late.) Long speeches were common in antiquity—though not usually at night! Paul wants to impart as much insight as possible before his departure the next day.

20:8. Lamps would be needed in night meetings. Scholars sometimes speculate that the odor or heat of the oil lamps may have helped produce drowsiness; more likely, the lamps showed that the meeting had taken the best precautions available against sleep. Most homes did not have so many lamps, so people have come ready and eager for Paul's long night of teaching.

20:9. Open windows were generally blocked off in the winter, but during summer one could sit in a large one to cool off. (Only a very few windows in this period had glass; they were especially rare in the eastern Mediterranean.) Either the heat from the lamps (midnight in April at Troas was not normally hot) or likelier the crowdedness of the room had forced Eutychus to take a window seat. Many looked down on pupils falling asleep (though lectures were normally in mornings, not at midnight!). Homes in much of the empire were a single story, but they were often in apartment buildings with two or more stories in more crowded urban areas. While most apartment dwellings were small, they might have met (with residents' approval) in the long hall (with windows) that connected the apartments. This is a fall from what the British would call the second floor (which most languages call the "third floor"), which is not necessarily fatal; but someone who was sound asleep could not break one's fall.

20:10. For Paul's action, cf. 1 Kings 17:21-22 and 2 Kings 4:34-35.

20:11-12. When people had not seen each other for a long time, it was common to stay up late filling each other in on one another's lives.

20:13-17
Continuing the Journey

More than many modern readers, ancient readers were often interested in travel details; educated people knew many of these locations. As elsewhere, Luke's travel details (e.g., the sequence of locations and the length of time spent traveling between them in view of seasonal wind patterns) fit the geography precisely, as one could expect for an eyewitness account.

20:13. Assos, the best harbor between Troas and Adramyttium, was about twenty miles directly overland from Alexandria Troas, the main port; this was about a day's journey on foot. The actual road, however, was not direct; following the coast, it was closer to thirty-eight miles. We can only speculate why Paul chose the land route, though walking would be cheaper than buying passage on a boat.

20:14. Mitylene was the largest city on the island of Lesbos, with two functioning harbors. Sailing in from the north, they would have come to the deeper northern harbor, near a smaller island that contained part of Mitylene's population.

20:15. They take the customary sea route, across from the large island of Chios (probably near Cape Argennum. From Chios it was quicker to sail by the island of Samos and straight to Miletus, rather than cutting in toward the Asian coast to Ephesus. They put in at the Lion Harbor at Miletus, which sported a temple of Apollo; the city also had a sizable Jewish community (as did Samos, where the worship of Aphrodite and Isis was prominent).

20:16-17. Waiting for messengers to bring elders from Ephesus would require a minimum of four days. Various reasons for Paul avoiding Ephesus are possible, including any or all of

the following. Their ship had avoided the busy harbor of Ephesus, which was out of the way by the route across Chios and Samos; this ship may have been the only one available going the right direction and with room for all, but had not been going to their exact destination; or the captain could have changed plans. Perhaps more likely, hospitality obligations would risk detaining him in Ephesus. Although Luke does not mention it, some of Paul's elite supporters or former supporters may have felt that it was better for both Paul and his supporters if he remained away from the city (19:23–20:1; esp. 19:38; cf. 21:27 and comment on 19:31).

The land route for messengers to reach Ephesus was over thirty miles, so they would have to travel quickly to arrive by Paul's third day; for those who could leave their work, to do so would be a big sacrifice. But Paul's mission to Jerusalem was urgent; he needed to present the offering at a festival, when Jerusalem would be full and this symbol of the church's ethnic unity would make the loudest statement. It may have also appeared safer for Paul and his Gentile guests. After Pentecost, it would be three months before the next major pilgrimage festival.

20:18-35
Paul's Farewell Speech

Farewell speeches developed a standard form in antiquity. (Jewish "testaments," in which a dying or departing figure left important, wise instructions for his children or followers, were one specific kind of farewell speech; against some scholars, they are less relevant here, because Paul bids farewell rather than dies at the end of the speech.) The language of the speech is more like Paul's than Luke's. Although historians tended to rewrite speeches in their own words, regular *rhetorical training included practice in imitating others' styles (*prosopopoia*). Because Luke presumably had little access to most of Paul's letters (they were not collected from various churches till long after Paul's death), he must have learned Paul's style from direct contact with him. In this case the speech includes even Pauline phraseology and possibly undeveloped hints of the Scripture texts he used, supporting an eyewitness account (he alludes in 20:26 to Ezek 33, and probably in Acts 20:28-29 to Ezek 34:1-8). Ancient speakers were expected to avoid self-praise except in special circumstances such as offering a positive example. The endearing language of the speech fits other intimate speeches (like philosophic discourse to disciples), and the emotional "pathos" was appropriate to farewell speeches.

20:18-19. Appeals to what an audience already knew were common. Many philosophers customarily appealed to their hearers in endearing terms, such as Paul uses here, and reminded them that any reproofs were given as signs of true friendship, as opposed to the flattery of false friends. That this language was common means only that it was culturally relevant to the hearers' needs, not that it was merely an empty *rhetorical form; Paul and most others who used such language also meant it sincerely. Likewise orators often employed moving emotional language, but many who spoke with emotion also felt it. In ancient rhetoric, noting one's misfortunes or struggles against adversity could help dispose audiences well toward oneself.

20:20-21. Moralists often emphasized that they were frank and withheld nothing needed for their hearers' benefit. Ancients often conceptualized the world in private (domestic) and public spheres; the best sages were thought able to address both. Romans considered what was only private to be potentially subversive, but Paul spoke publicly as well.

20:22. True intellectual heroes in Greco-Roman tradition were those who believed their teaching so much that they were willing to die for it. Paul stands in the *Old Testament prophetic tradition of speaking God's message no matter what the cost, but he also presents his message in a manner that resonates with the best in his hearers' culture.

20:23. "The *Holy Spirit's testimony" surely includes prophecies (21:4); early Judaism viewed the Spirit especially as the agent that had inspired the prophets.

20:24. Farewell speeches often explained the need that compelled one's departure. "Finish the course" (e.g., NASB) or "finish the race" (NIV) is an athletic image; philosophers and moralists often used such images to describe their own mission (cf. GNT).

20:25-27. The image of secondhand guilt for someone's blood is common in the Old

Testament (e.g., Deut 21:1-9), but here Paul refers especially to the watchman who does not warn the wicked to turn from his or her way (Ezek 3:18-20; esp. 33:8-9). If Paul is explaining a text, it would not be surprising to proceed to the shepherd image of Ezekiel 34 in Acts 20:28-29.

20:28. "Overseer" was usually a Greek term for a ruling officer, but it appears in the same sense in the *LXX, and the *Dead Sea Scrolls include a Hebrew equivalent. The image of shepherd as a leader (ideally a benevolent one) was pervasive in antiquity, but those schooled in Scripture would think especially of Old Testament language for the leaders of God's people. God would call shepherds to account for how they watched over his flock; see Ezekiel 34:1-8 and comment on John 10:1-18. "Take heed" was standard language for moral exhortations.

20:29-30. Both figuratively and literally, ancients often contrasted predatory wolves with helpless sheep, which the shepherd (20:28) must defend. "Wolves" were viewed as treacherous, unfaithful, deceptive, and greedy for plunder or to exploit in other ways. Jesus had warned of false prophets, and Jewish *apocalyptic texts foresaw great trials for the righteous before the end.

20:31. Exhortation often appealed to people to remember. "Night and day" was a standard way of saying "all the time"; parts of a night and of a day could be reckoned as the whole, and "three years" includes a year and at least parts of two others (cf. 19:8-10). Good public speakers were supposed to feel their speeches enough to express proper emotion and to move the crowds emotionally; both might be moved to tears.

20:32. Jewish people believed that they had been "set apart" by God's covenant. "An inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (NASB) (i.e., "set apart," "separated" or "consecrated" for God) refers to the Jewish hope that God's people would inherit the world to come, just as Israel had "inherited" the Promised Land. Paul applies this language to the believers present.

20:33. Philosophers were often accused of seeking personal monetary gain, and many (especially those who acted from sincere motives) had to deny it, providing supporting evidence for their denial. "Clothes" (NASB) were part of one's substance in the ancient East, just as silver coins were.

20:34. Sages sometimes presented themselves as examples or models. Working with one's hands was not humiliating to an artisan, but in most cities the small upper class (who drew their income from landowning) and most of the philosophical elite despised manual labor. Many *rabbis had trades, but philosophers preferred charging fees, sponging off rich *patrons or (especially in the case of *Cynics) begging. The motives of those who gave freely (what ancients called benefaction) were harder to question, as philosophers who lived off charity and moralists who demanded no return often pointed out. In Ephesus Paul's manual labor may have generated less concern than elsewhere; Ephesus had both many wealthy artisans and a rising class of *nouveau riche,* gradually supplanting the earlier elite class.

20:35. One could close a speech by quoting a familiar maxim. Cf. Luke 6:20-21, 24-25, 35, 38.

20:36–21:6
The Affection of Paul's Friends

20:36-38. Brief kisses might be used in momentary greetings, but repeated kissing and embraces were signs of great affection, such as one would bestow on a family member, a dear teacher or a close friend; thus Paul had bonded deeply with these Christians (cf. 1 Sam 20:41; comment on Rom 16:16). Although some Romans and Greek philosophers believed that it was not proper for men to cry, narrative sources often report it in moving circumstances, such as a sad parting. Narratives sometimes thereby use pathos to emphasize how the persons they describe valued each other (e.g., 1 Sam 20:41). Accompanying a departing loved one to the ship displayed affection.

21:1-2. They put into Cos overnight; a small island, it was on the usual route to Rhodes and had a large Jewish community. (Its chief coastal city was also named Cos.) Wealthy and famous Rhodes was a regular stopping place for ships; its capital bore the same name as the island, and had an influential Jewish community. It had one of the best harbors; on the island's northeast, it faced Patara and was very acces-

sible from Cos to its northwest. Alexandrian grain ships hugging close to the coast of southern Asia Minor frequently made tedious stops at each port, due to the uncertainty of land breezes; thus after they have put in at the prominent Lycian port of Patara in southern Asia Minor, Paul and his companions find a larger ship sailing across open water directly for Phoenicia, cutting along the south of Cyprus, still under a slight time constraint (20:16). Patara was a major port from which Alexandrian grain ships voyaged to Rome (though less significant than Myra, 27:5). At Patara they found a larger ship that could sail the 350 miles (roughly 550 km) across the open sea to Tyre (a voyage of perhaps four or five days) without hugging the coast and putting into many small ports.

21:3. The southern shore of Cyprus, by which they passed, was shallow and had no harbors, so the ship did not try to put in there. The Roman province of Syria included not only Antioch to the north but also Phoenicia and Judea to the south; they had saved considerable time by sailing across the open sea toward Tyre, which would provide safe harbor throughout the year. A large ship could take a month to unload fully; apparently this one takes a week (21:4-6).

21:4. Tyre was just two days' walk from Ptolemais, so mere ship's delays were not what kept them there. Jewish people and Christians could expect hospitality from other members of their groups wherever they traveled; it was an expected part of their culture, honored their host and was an incomparably superior alternative to spending the night in inns, which usually doubled as brothels.

In light of the standard Jewish view that God's *Spirit especially inspired *prophecy, prophecy is surely somehow involved in their exhortation. Yet this phrase is not Luke's usual description of prophecy and probably indicates that they were simply warning him not to go *on the basis of* their prophecies about what would happen (20:23; 21:11). Ancients recognized that prophecies were often ambiguous; among Greeks, they were sometimes virtually riddles. Interpretations of prophecies could be fallible (cf. Jer 35:5; Lk 7:19-20). In Elisha's day, other prophets recognized that Elijah would soon depart (2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7), but their understanding was incomplete (2 Kings 2:15-18); Elijah and Elisha had the fuller understanding (2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6, 9-10), as does Paul here (Acts 21:13-14).

21:5-6. Tyre was known for its smooth sand beaches.

21:7-16
Agabus's Prophecy

21:7. Greetings were a prominent part of ancient Mediterranean culture. Ptolemais was some thirty miles (roughly 48 km) south of Tyre. Ptolemy II had made Ptolemais, a strong fortress once named Acco, an important harbor. It had been under Roman control for over a century, but Claudius had made it a Roman *colony just recently, in A.D. 51. Jewish people as well as *Gentiles lived there (*Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.477)

21:8. Caesarea was thirty to (more commonly estimated) forty miles south of Ptolemais, and if the text suggests that they made the journey in one day, they must have gone by boat. Given the nature of ancient hospitality, much time was probably spent in conversation; guests carried news, and Luke may have heard stories shared by Philip and his former persecutor Paul.

21:9. Some Gentiles associated virginity with spiritual power (as with a special Roman order of celibate women called the Vestal Virgins), but the point of "virgins" here is probably that Philip's daughters are young, under the age of sixteen (cf. 2:17). (Palestinian Jewish women usually married fairly young, between the ages of twelve and eighteen.) The verb tense indicates that they prophesied regularly or habitually. Despite frequent gender and age prejudice in antiquity, most people did respect prophetesses. The Jewish tradition about Job's prophetically endowed daughters (in the **Testament of Job*) might be later, but it illustrates the high esteem in which such prophetesses were often held in antiquity.

21:10. Agabus "came down" from the mountainous part of Judea, including Jerusalem. Caesarea was the Roman headquarters for Judea, but Luke here uses "Judea" in the narrower sense of Jewish Palestine or the region of ancient Judah, rather than the stricter Roman sense. Caesarea had a mixed Jewish and Gentile population.

21:11. *Old Testament prophets often acted

out their prophecies in ways similar to Agabus's action here (e.g., Jer 13:1-11; 27:2). Some commentators point out that the details were not all fulfilled literally (it was the Gentiles who bound him, although his accusers were Jewish), but one need not study the Old Testament prophets long before it is clear that they were allowed a large measure of poetic license, even though the essential message had to be accurate (e.g., 2 Kings 19:7, 28, 33, 35). The girdle was a long cloth wrapped around the waist several times and sometimes used as a pocket; not everyone wore them in this period.

21:12-14. Greeks and Jewish people under the influence of Greek oracular thinking saw predictive oracles especially as preventive warnings (e.g., Jer 18:7-8; Jon 3:4-10); but Paul is convinced that God wants him to face the test (see comment on 21:4). Accounts of martyrs frequently include exhortations to avoid the martyrdom (on account of age, youth, etc.); people also often urged their friends against leaving and against danger. Paul's friends act out of love but must acknowledge his mission (v. 14).

21:15. The journey from Caesarea to Jerusalem would take two or (probably) three days; they lodge overnight with Mnason (v. 16).

21:16. Cyprus had a large Jewish community, some of whom had migrated to Jerusalem and been among the first *disciples (4:36). Mnason must be a person of means to be able to host this sizeable group (20:4-5). "Mnason" was an old Greek name; Jews more often preferred the Greek name, "Jason," but occasionally used "Mnason" too (e.g., a later *rabbi in Rome). Mnason is thus apparently a *Hellenistic Jew; that he provides hospitality for Paul's Gentiles is significant (see 10:23, 28). That Jewish Christians from Caesarea travel with Paul's Gentiles underlines that church's unity, as did Philip's hospitality; Caesarea was bitterly and often violently divided between Jew and Gentile.

21:17-26
Paul's Jewish Identity Affirmed

21:17. This gracious reception would necessarily include hospitality for the whole delegation—including offering lodging in Jewish Christian homes to uncircumcised *Gentile Christians (although Paul himself could have stayed with his nephew's family—23:16). This line thus has more significance than would normally strike the modern reader (see comment on 10:28).

21:18-19. Paul delivers the collection from the Gentile Christians at this time (24:17; cf. comment on 20:1-4).

21:20-22. The Jerusalem believers accept the Gentile work but in so doing are confronted by a conflict with their culture. Jerusalem is not what it had been in Acts 2; tensions are rising, and in the temple *sicarii,* or assassins, are murdering aristocrats suspected of collaborating with the Gentiles. Jewish nationalism has been on the rise since the brief reign of Agrippa I (see comment on 12:1), and nationalism's exclusivity often makes it intolerant of supposedly faithful members of its people who have fellowship with members of other peoples. Thus it is incumbent on Paul to prove the integrity of his Jewishness; he cannot compromise the Gentile mission, but he will intentionally affirm his Jewish heritage at any cost short of unbiblical exclusivism.

The Jerusalem *church is providing an effective indigenous witness within its culture, which is good; but most did not understand Paul's valuable mission to other cultures. James says literally that "many ten thousands" of Judeans believe (v. 20)—though Palestine's estimated Jewish population might be just half a million and the estimated number of *Pharisees just six thousand. It could be *hyperbole, but the estimated number of believers here is not implausible; Jerusalem alone may have had close to eighty thousand residents, and the surrounding Judean countryside would include far more people. James himself was martyred, along with some other *law-observers, by the *high priest a few years after this time, but his witness to his culture had been so effective that those diligent in the law (possibly Pharisees) demanded the removal of his killer from office. The rise of Judean nationalism, however, was also affecting Judean believers. Jews almost universally despised apostates from Judaism and those whose teaching was held to undermine the law. Rumors spread quickly, and those away from the centers of power (earlier, e.g., Caesar from Rome) could not readily defend their reputations.

21:23-26. These precautions are to protect

Paul from false accusations, especially if he is going to move about publicly in the temple courts. Paul pays the fees for the devout Jerusalem Christians who are completing a Nazirite vow. One shaved one's head on the seventh day if corpse impurity interrupted a vow and offered sacrifice in the temple on the eighth day (Num 6:1-21), but the minimum period of the vow according to widespread Jewish tradition in this period seems to have been thirty days, so scholars differ on the exact meaning here; that Paul is purified and helps them need not mean that he participated in their vow. Those (like Agrippa I) who used their own funds to pay the expenses of Nazirites were considered pious (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.293-294).

21:27-36
Riot in the Temple

Under Cumanus, the Roman governor immediately preceding Felix (23:24), a Roman soldier lewdly exposed himself in the temple area; Josephus estimated that ten thousand people were trampled to death in the ensuing riot (*Jewish War* 2.224-27; doubled in *Antiquities*). When another soldier burned a Jewish Law scroll, Cumanus acceded to the crowds' demands and executed him (*Jewish War* 2.229-31). Hostility against *Gentiles and collaborators with Gentiles had been mounting, and in less than a decade would lead to a war that would produce massacres (reportedly over twenty thousand Jews slaughtered in Caesarea in an hour; *Jewish War* 2.457-58) and culminate in the temple's destruction.

21:27. "Asia" means the Roman province of Asia, in what is now western Turkey. The chief city of Roman Asia was Ephesus, where Paul had incurred some enemies in the Jewish community (19:9, 33-34); thus they recognized an Ephesian Gentile in 21:29.

21:28. The temple mount consumed most of northeastern Jerusalem. Although Scripture welcomed Gentiles to the temple (1 Kings 8:41-43), a later understanding of purity led to their separation from the Court of Israel (exclusively for Jewish men) and even the Court of Women (which excluded Gentiles; Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.102-5). The barrier between the outer court, open to the Gentiles, and the Court of Women was about four feet high, with warning signs posted at intervals in Greek and Latin: "Any foreigner who passes this point will be responsible for their own death" (the inscriptions are reported in ancient literature and one has been found by archaeologists; cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.417; *Jewish War* 5.194; 6.125-26). This was the one offense for which Jewish authorities could execute capital punishment—even on Roman citizens—without consulting with Rome. (This special privilege was also accorded the Greek temple at Eleusis; but Rome delegated the right of execution only in rare cases like these, because local nationalists could otherwise use the penalty against Rome's own supporters.)

21:29. Ephesus was the chief city of the Roman province of Asia, and the Jewish community there knew Paul and his companions well (19:33-34; cf. 18:19-21, 26). Although the assumption of these Jews from Asia is false, it is occasioned by Paul's relationships with Gentile Christians, which he would not compromise.

21:30. Antipathy toward Gentiles and their collaborators was growing (and would lead to war with Rome less than a decade later). Reports of temple desecration could lead to uncontrolled riots; a few years earlier, as noted when a Roman soldier exposed himself in the temple, a riot led to hundreds of trampling deaths (never one to underestimate, Josephus guesses twenty thousand; *Jewish Antiquities* 20.112). They drag Paul "out of the temple," from its inner courts, into the outer Court of the Gentiles. Most of the temple's gates each had two doors, somewhere around fifty feet high (around fourteen meters) and more than twenty feet (or about seven meters) wide (Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.202-5); the largest gate was perhaps eighty feet (roughly twenty-five meters) high and more than sixty feet (close to twenty meters) wide (*Jewish War* 5.205).The *sagan,* or chief of the Levite temple guard, may have ordered the doors at the Court of Women shut to keep out other intruders or to keep the violence certain to ensue from spilling into the temple proper; bloodshed violated a sanctuary. (Josephus regarded the shedding of blood in the sanctuary as the "abomination of desolation"; keeping bloodshed from the sacred precincts

was important.) Alternatively, outer gates may have been shut to prevent escape; or (perhaps most likely) all gates were shut for the moment.

21:31. That the report "came up" to the officer and (in 21:32) the soldiers came down fits the topography of the temple. On the northern part of the Temple Mount was the fortress Antonia, which housed a permanent Roman garrison of 480 to (at its heaviest strength) 600 men; from its towers guards watched for disturbances, especially during festival seasons (relevant here; see 20:16). (Its southeastern tower was more than one hundred feet, or over thirty meters, high, allowing guards to observe the entire temple mount; Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.242.) To rush into the outer court of the temple, they had only to rush down the stairs from the fortress. The "commander" is a *chiliarch,* or tribune, literally commander of 1,000 but actually of 480 to 600 troops. Most tribunes were drawn from the small, well-to-do Roman "knight" class, using the office briefly as a political stepping stone. (This tribune is an exception; see 22:28.)

Judea's Roman governor lacked a full legion (some six thousand troops), but had five auxiliary cohorts, each with about 480–500 infantry. Most cohorts stayed with the governor in Caesarea, but one resided in the Fortress Antonia, on the northern side of the Temple Mount; the cavalry in 23:23 suggests a cavalry unit at this time (which added 120 riders to the infantry). The garrison's strength was bolstered for festivals, possibly relevant here (cf. 20:16).

21:32. Because "centurions" (KJV, NASB, NRSV) is plural, many soldiers are likely in view (a centurion commanded about eighty troops, although this rapid, emergency deployment may not involve such precision). These troops would be enough to disperse a crowd (cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.111), although they had not always been effective in the recent past. The beating was presumably to kill Paul, to avenge the temple's sanctity.

21:33-34. Paul is apparently bound between two soldiers (12:6); chains were considered shameful. Apparently believing reports that the crowd has captured a troublemaker, the tribune reasonably asks for coherent witnesses with specific charges; guesses vary (21:34; cf. one guess in 21:38). Ancient audiences were well aware that confused mobs were unreliable; such were those who opposed Paul (cf. 19:29, 32).

The "barracks" by the temple is the old castle Antonia, called Baris by the Hasmoneans but renamed for Mark Antony by his friend Herod the Great.

21:35. The steps of the fortress Antonia led directly down to the temple's outer court.

21:36. Some Greek writers of this period liked to draw parallels between analogous historical figures; Luke's record here parallels Jesus and Paul (Lk 23:18).

21:37–22:2
Paul and the Tribune

21:37. In the eastern part of the empire, Latin was confined to use in the military and in documents concerning Roman citizens. The public administration of Syria-Palestine used Greek, which was also the first language of the Jerusalem aristocracy, and most Jewish people in Palestine knew at least some Greek. The "tribune" (NRSV) or "commander" assumes that Paul is a particular troublemaker (v. 38); most rabble-rousers he would know of would have spoken *Aramaic by choice. But most Egyptian business documents of this period were in Greek, which Egyptian Jews normally spoke; he thus should not be surprised that one he supposes to be an Egyptian speaks Greek. The point is not that Paul speaks Greek; it is that he speaks it without an accent, like someone educated and fluent in the language by Aegean standards, which the tribune assumes the Egyptian Jew who had caused problems would not be. Egyptians were normally supposed to have a distinctively Egyptian accent.

21:38. *Josephus wrote (*Jewish War* 2.261-63) of a Jewish false prophet from Egypt who gained a following of roughly thirty thousand (a figure less realistic than those given in Acts), leading them from the wilderness to the Mount of Olives. The Roman governor Felix (23:24) defeated him, but the Egyptian himself escaped. Many of the messianic-prophetic figures reported in this period gained followings in the "wilderness," probably partly because they were safer there from official intervention, but perhaps also expecting deliverance to come like a new exodus under a new Moses.

The word for "assassins" (NASB) or "terrorists" (NIV) here is *sicarii.* These were Jewish terrorists who carried curved daggers under their cloaks and brutally stabbed to death aristocrats in the midst of crowds in the temple, then slipped back into the crowds unseen. A few years after this encounter they kidnapped people to secure the release of their own adherents held by the procurator. Others terrorized the countryside. Josephus's final reports of them are at the fortress Masada, where they finally perished in A.D. 73. The tribune might be confusing two different kinds of threats, perhaps based on conflicting guesses from the crowd (21:34).

21:39. Romans and Greeks in this period often looked down on Egyptians (21:38), but Tarsus was a respected city. Citizenship in a Greek city gave one higher status than the many who were merely "residents" of the city (who were in turn considered above transients and rural people). One became a citizen only by birth in a citizen family or as a grant from the city authorities. City pride and rivalry were fierce in antiquity, especially in Asia Minor, and Tarsus was a prominent city. It was one of antiquity's chief educational centers. Rome had made Tarsus a "free" city, the highest honor a city in the empire could receive next to being a Roman *colony. Tarsus's citizens were not automatically *Roman* citizens (it was not a Roman colony), but dual citizenship was allowed in this period. Paul saves his disclosure of Roman citizenship as a trump card in case he needs it later. Although most Jews were not citizens of Gentile cities, some of their most prominent members were. Paul's Roman citizenship was more important than his Tarsian citizenship, but perhaps based on what he had learned in 16:37-40, he saves that privilege for later use in case he needs it.

21:40. The tribune grants Paul permission to speak, probably hoping that he will clarify his identity to a crowd he thinks has wrongly supposed him a leader of temple assassins. Good speakers were supposed to be able to quiet crowds (cf. 19:35), and certain gestures would indicate a request for attention (the tribune's presence would have helped). "Hebrew" (a language Paul would have studied; cf. 22:3) is possible, but is here probably a loose expression for *Aramaic (so NIV), long the vernacular of much of rural Syria-Palestine and all lands to the east (cf. Neh 8:8). It is especially significant for Paul's purposes that Aramaic was the vernacular of the Jewish nationalists, and that Paul speaks it as well as they (cf. Phil 3:5). Neither the tribune nor his Asian Jewish accusers (21:27-29) would understand any of what Paul is saying, however; Aramaic is similar to Hebrew, but bears little relation to Latin and Greek (see 22:24).

22:1. This typically Greek way to begin a speech reflects the extent to which Greek culture had permeated Palestine (Greek loanwords even occur throughout rabbinic Hebrew; Paul's hearers would not automatically associate his words with Gentile culture). The parallel with Stephen (7:2), who provoked his audience to martyr him, also builds suspense for Luke's readers.

22:2. Those who thought that they had caught a *Diaspora collaborator with the Gentiles must have reconsidered after they heard his fluent Aramaic (see comment on 21:40).

22:3-21
Paul's Speech in the Temple

Rhetoricians urged building rapport with one's audience at the beginning of a speech, if possible. Of the three accounts of Paul's call, this is the one clearly designed for a nationalistic Jewish audience; good *rhetoric included adaptation for one's audience. Despite his clear Jewishness, however, his refusal to compromise God's call to the *Gentiles in the end incites the crowd's wrath (22:21-22). Paul was always sensitive to his audience but never willing to compromise the *gospel. Speeches usually included a *narrative component; this component takes up Paul's whole speech, perhaps because he is not permitted to complete it. The outcome of this speech during the Pentecost season (20:16) contrasts starkly with the outcome of Peter's Pentecost message in chapter 2.

22:3. Tarsus was famous for its education, but while many Tarsians did their studies there, many also went abroad. Alexandria might be a more prestigious center for studying rhetoric, but for the study of Torah a *Diaspora Jew could have no greater place for education than Jerusalem. Paul, however, may have emigrated before this advanced stage. In

ancient statements, "brought up" and "educated" (NASB) typically refer to different periods in a person's life; thus Paul was raised in Jerusalem (cf. 23:16; see comment on Phil 3:5) and studied to become a teacher of the *law under the prestigious Gamaliel I—the famous successor of *Hillel (see comment on 5:34-35). (Paul's family was probably well-endowed to be able to fund such an education.) Although he was born in another country, he can therefore explain that he is really a Jerusalemite by upbringing and an orthodox Pharisaic teacher by training.

As a son in an educated and perhaps aristocratic home (his father being a citizen; cf. also 9:1), Paul may have begun to learn the law around his fifth year and other Pharisaic traditions around his tenth year, and to pursue training to be able to teach the law sometime after turning thirteen (cf. also Gal 1:14 and his letters' debate style). He would have probably completed his role as *disciple no later than age twenty (and perhaps much earlier). Although Gamaliel's household may have included education in Greek, Paul's tertiary academic focus, in whatever language, was Scripture; those focused on rhetoric or philosophy normally did tertiary study elsewhere. People who could afford to do so normally sat on chairs (or reclined on couches for banquets); sitting at someone's feet was taking the posture of a disciple. Paul's model for "zeal" may have been Phinehas, who killed for God (Num 25:13), and his successors in the *Maccabees, who because of zeal killed those they considered traitors in Israel (1 Maccabees 2:26, 54; 3:8; cf. *4 Maccabees 18:12). Within eight years of Paul's speech the revolutionaries were calling themselves "*Zealots," those zealous for God; this title may thus have appealed to Paul's more nationalistic hearers.

22:4-5. See comment on 9:2. Prisons were usually temporary sites for detention until trial or punishment. A different *high priest is now in office than when Paul received letters of authorization (23:5), but Paul may depend on the leaders' collective memory.

22:6. People normally tried to avoid the noonday sun if possible, seeking shade for themselves and their animals and often eating and/or taking a siesta at that time. Nevertheless, it was unavoidable on urgent missions and on long journeys which required that much of the day be spent traveling.

22:7-15. The background is essentially the same as in 9:4-17, although this speech emphasizes different features, such as Ananias's Jewish piety, which would commend themselves to Paul's nationalistic hearers. Minor differences of detail would not have concerned ancient audiences the way they sometimes concern modern ones.

22:16. Some *Old Testament texts speak of ritual washing away of sins (Lev 14:19, 31; 16:30; Num 8:21), but other texts apply the language figuratively (e.g., Ezek 36:33; 37:23; 43:22), most prominently Ezekiel 36:25.

22:17. The ancient Near East and eastern Mediterranean world had a long tradition of receiving revelations (often dreams) in sanctuaries or holy places. God had revealed himself to his servants in such places in the Old Testament (1 Sam 3:3-10; 1 Kings 3:4-5), and Paul's hearers would regard the temple as the most appropriate place to receive revelations (cf. comment on 7:2-7).

22:18. If Paul had been in danger in the past (as he narrates here), he is in even more danger now, with hostilities rising against Gentile collaborators; Paul would not be able to speak long after this point and could not realistically intend to get past the *narratio* of his speech (the narrative part occurred early in a speech).

22:19. At least in later times, the *chazan,* or *synagogue attendant, was normally responsible for beating wayward Jews as public discipline for their crimes, after judges (probably elders; *rabbis in a later period) pronounced judgment. If Paul had been given this responsibility, it was due to some respected authorization (similar to that mentioned in 22:5).

22.20. See comment on 7:58.

22:21. Like Jesus (Lk 4:22-30), Paul knows that this statement will offend his hearers, given the escalation of Jewish-Gentile tensions in Palestine in recent years, tensions that would soon escalate into war (A.D. 66–73). But he cannot compromise the gospel that makes siblings out of believers from different peoples and backgrounds. Ironically, it is Paul's commitment to welcome Gentiles that will lead momentarily to his Roman custody.

22:22-29
Examining Paul

22:22. The reaction is predictable; see comment on 21:20-22; cf. Luke 23:18, 21. On interruption, see comment on 10:44.

22:23. Throwing dust on one's head was a sign of mourning; removing it from one's feet meant removing what was unholy (13:51); they may also shake dust from their removed garments to repudiate Paul (cf. 18:6). Here they might wish to stone him but have nothing else to throw at him at the moment (cf., e.g., 2 Maccabees 4:41). They may throw off their cloaks for the same reason (perhaps they also tore them, as one would after hearing blasphemy), although Luke may record it ironically to underline their guilt: see comment on 7:58.

22:24-25. Even had Paul not been a Roman citizen, the tribune would have no authority to try a provincial belonging to another jurisdiction (21:39), after he had quelled the unrest. But it was legal to scourge slaves or aliens, to extort confessions or to determine the truth concerning a situation. In younger days, Paul had experienced Jewish synagogue beatings and lictors' rods. But this scourge is with a more dangerous Roman whip, which typically included either iron chains ending in metal balls or leather thongs into which pieces of metal or bone were woven. It could tear open the flesh, leaving it hanging in bloody strips or even exposing bones. It could easily lead to the victim's death, and would certainly scar and probably maim him. Centurions were sometimes left to supervise executions and related duties.

But the Porcian and Valerian laws exempted Roman citizens from such beatings without trial. Paul's citizenship excluded him from being tortured for information, and together with his being untried, it excluded him from punishment.

22:26-27. In this period, Roman citizenship was not common in the east, especially among the non-elite, so no one had expected it for this prisoner. Paul might wait until he has been chained for the same reason as in 16:37: he now has legal room to maneuver against *them*. Law prohibited even *binding* a Roman citizen without trial; although not all governors followed the law, the tribune would be wise to avoid a breach that could bring him into trouble with the governor. If one claimed to be a citizen, officials were supposed to treat him as such until documentation could be procured or checked.

22:28. Scholars note that one could achieve Roman citizenship in several ways: one could be (1) born to a Roman father (so Paul); (2) a citizen of a Roman *colony (say, Pisidian Antioch, Corinth or Philippi); (3) a retired auxiliary soldier; (4) given a special privilege from Rome (granted to groups or individuals), sometimes as part of a municipal aristocracy or other group honored by Rome; or (5)—and this was most common after being born in Rome or in a colony—a slave freed by his or her owner (so perhaps Paul's ancestors).

This tribune or commander, Lysias, bought his citizenship by a bribe, which was common under the preceding emperor, whose name he took (23:26). To achieve the status of a tribune, he must have had a powerful *patron or been one of the rare individuals who toiled his way up through the ranks to this position, probably partly with more bribes. Tribunes were usually equestrians (the Roman knight class) working their way up the political career ladder; this one had not even been born a Roman citizen. But the current governor himself was not an equestrian, so Lysias may not have experienced much disadvantage.

Lysias the tribune may want to assess Paul's relative status. Some commentators note that the cost of citizenship bribes declined toward the end of Claudius's reign, so he may be suggesting, "You probably acquired your citizenship more cheaply than I acquired mine!" (Claudius's successor reduced such corruption, so the information Luke reports here reflects the period in question.) Paul may have replied in Latin: he was *ingenuus,* a citizen by birth (though cf. his family in 16:37). Those who were born citizens had higher status in that regard than those who achieved it; Paul thus has superior citizenship status in some sense.

22:29. See comment on 22:26-27. Not all officials would have cared about violating the law—some Roman procurators crucified Jerusalem aristocrats who were Roman citizens—but a tribune was not a governor, and could be held more accountable for actions if accusations came and the governor deemed it politically expedient.

22:30–23:10
Before the Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin was the highest Judean court. The *Pharisees and *Sadducees disagreed on many points. The Pharisees apparently had less power and representation on the council, but some of them (like the aristocratic Simon son of Gamaliel I) would have had some power.

22:30. Because Paul's offense is clearly a religious one related to the temple, the perplexed official is going to try to ascertain the charge by consulting the Sanhedrin. This council met regularly (though not all members were present on every occasion) and would undoubtedly grant a hearing requested by the Roman garrison's tribune.

23:1. *Rhetorically, Paul's claim here (cf. also 24:16; Phil 3:6) may seek to build rapport with devout hearers in his audience (cf. Acts 23:6). In court cases, much often hinged on the person's known character; whenever the accused could claim to have lived his life previously free of reproach, it counted in one's favor rhetorically.

23:2-3. Ananias was *high priest from A.D. 47 to 58 or 59, at which time Agrippa II removed him (see comment on 24:27). Ananias was popular and powerful but also a Roman vassal, known for his greed in a period when rapacious aristocratic priests were stealing the tithes belonging to the poorer priests. Aware of his abuses, the *Zealot revolutionaries killed him in A.D. 66, perhaps eight years after this hearing. Sadducees were known for their harshness. Slapping one on the cheek was a grievous insult (see comment on Mt 5:39), sometimes experienced by prophets (1 Kings 22:24; 2 Chron 18:23); officials could use it to defend their honor, but it was technically illegal and considered unfair in a court setting.

Jewish *law forbade unjust treatment (e.g., Lev 19:15), including condemnation before the accused was proved guilty. Paul's appeal to Scripture may build rapport with devout Pharisees (cf. Acts 23:6), who were known for careful adherence to Scripture and who were less comfortable with the high priest's abuses of power. Judicial rhetoric often returned charges on the accuser; Paul accuses his abuser of violating the law. He also pronounces judgment like a prophet; Ananias was murdered by revolutionaries in A.D. 66. A "whitewashed wall" was one whose weakness or ugliness might be concealed—but not changed—by a veneer of whitewash: an appropriate condemnation of abusive leaders of Israel (Ezek 13:10-11; 22:28). Walls facing the street in the eastern Mediterranean were often whitewashed. Ancient sources often honor those courageous enough to confront tyrants.

23:4-5. One should not speak abusively of magistrates (Ex 22:28), but Ananias's behavior undermines the integrity of his office. Paul has simply appealed to God's true judgment to reverse the charge and punishment. The *high priest normally sat in a special place and exercised obvious authority (though he would not wear his special, high-priestly robes for this kind of setting). Either he does not do so here because the gathering is informal, or (more likely) Paul answers ironically, because of the official's corruption and improper claim to power. Socrates and others had endeavored to show themselves more pious in the matter concerning which they were accused than their judges were, which naturally led to condemnation by an angry court. Paul is content to show his piety by citing Scripture (which will appeal to the *Pharisees; 23:6).

23:6. "Son of Pharisees" could be a figurative expression for discipleship; if meant literally, it would be likelier that his father joined the sect after moving from Tarsus (we have little evidence for Pharisees in the *Diaspora). Other sharp-witted Jewish strategists of this period, like *Josephus not many years later (*Life* 139, 28), also practiced this method of "divide and conquer." Paul finds supporters to whom he can appeal. The hope of the *resurrection was central to Judaism, and many martyrs had died staking their hope on it. Paul's views did not violate any central tenets of Pharisaism; he was now a "Pharisee plus," who taught that the resurrection had already been inaugurated in Jesus. Pharisees recognized that no true Pharisee would have committed the crime with which Paul had been charged by the original crowd (21:28). Moreover, Paul maneuvers strategically: if the tribune can be persuaded that his opposition's motives are merely theological, this verdict will later help his case before the governor (24:20-21).

23:7. Pharisees and Sadducees were notorious for their disagreements, especially over the doctrine of the resurrection; Pharisees taught that Sadducees had no part in the world to come, because they did not believe in life after death (at least not in a form acceptable to most other Palestinian Jews).

23:8. Some scholars contend that the Sadducees believed only in the five books of Moses; but even if this were the case, they must have believed in the angels that appeared in Genesis. Luke's parenthetical comment here probably refers to the Sadducees' denial of the developed angelology and demonology of the Pharisees (12:15 is not Pharisaic), or maybe ideas about people becoming angels after death or being resurrected in angelic form. "Spirit" may address a different issue: The Sadducees reportedly did not believe in life after death; belief in an afterlife before the resurrection allowed Pharisees to accept that Jesus could have appeared to Paul as a spirit (cf. 22:7-8; 23:9) even if they did not accept his resurrection. Many Jewish people believed that resurrection bodies would be like angelic bodies; some also portrayed the intermediate state in angelic terms.

23:9. From the Pharisaic standpoint, if Paul were being condemned for being consistent with his doctrine of the resurrection, then it is natural that the Sadducees want him convicted and likewise natural that the Pharisees and Sadducees should oppose each other on this matter. Later Pharisaic reports declare that the Sadducees would have no share in the world to come, because they did not believe in it. Pharisees, who believed in angels and afterlife, could allow that Paul had a revelation from some spirit.

23:10. Mobs sometimes tore people apart. Raucous though they were, disputes in courtrooms chaired by high officials rarely came to blows; nevertheless, it sometimes happened, even in elite bodies. For example, Josephus shows that in this period some members of Jerusalem's elite became so hostile toward each other that they threw stones at each other (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.180, 213). Ancient sources do report that the Sanhedrin and even the Roman Senate broke into confusion sometimes.

The site of the council chamber favored by most scholars today (based especially on Josephus) adjoins the temple on the southwest, perhaps a third of a mile (or half a kilometer) from the Fortress Antonia, where the Roman garrison lay. Nevertheless, Lysias probably had soldiers with him (for safety if nothing else; 21:38). Soldiers from the "barracks," the Fortress Antonia, on the northwest of the temple mount, would have approached this hall along the west side of the temple, for a distance of over a thousand feet. Prisoners could be detained in the Fortress Antonia, but it also could be a place of relative comfort; it included a bathhouse and rows of rooms.

23:11-22
The Plot Against Paul

23:11. See comment on 18:9-10.

23:12-13. Vows of abstinence (promises to abstain from something for a designated period of time) were common. One would swear an "oath" by calling a deity to witness, inviting the deity's vengeance if one broke one's word. Revolutionary-minded Jews considered some assassinations pious acts; Herod the Great had once executed ten Pharisees who had formed an association by oath for the purpose of killing him. If Paul's enemies eventually broke their oaths to kill him, Jewish *law would simply require them to bring *atonement offerings to the temple; thus their oath here does not mean they would literally starve.

23:14-15. Ambushes by robbers and terrorists were common (e.g., Josephus, *Jewish War* 4.538), especially at night. During these years shortly before the Jewish war with Rome, the *sicarii* (21:38) regularly assassinated Jews suspected of collaboration with the Romans, and all Palestine was uneasy; this report is thus quite believable. That some aristocratic priests, who in the war of 66–70 turned out to have their own violent agendas, would cooperate in this plot is not surprising. Some of them, and especially some younger members of their families, had revolutionary sympathies, though much of this class remained more loyal to Rome (cf., e.g., Josephus, *War of the Jews* 2.409; 5.6). (These priests would be some high Sadducean members of the council, not Pharisees.) As noted at 23:10, Paul's place of detention was probably not far from the council chamber; soldiers bringing him would have to

march the thousand to fifteen hundred feet between the Antonia and (probable) location of the council chamber (see comment on 23:10), most of it in fairly narrow formation through public space adjoining the temple.

23:16. Ancient writers report a number of plots foiled on account of "leaks." Ancient historians report leaks from the Roman Senate, the Jerusalem Sanhedrin and groups such as this one. If Paul's sister was raised with him in Jerusalem, the whole family had presumably moved there from Tarsus after Paul's birth, rather than only having sent him there to study. If she married into a similar (Roman citizen) family, Paul's nephew would be a Roman citizen, perhaps aiding his access at the Antonia. People could visit prisoners at the guards' discretion (easier for light detentions, but sometimes facilitated with bribes).

23:17-18. In custody, persons of status were sometimes guarded by centurions; on occasion they even became friends (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.230-31). Paul's access to centurions indicates that his custody is a relatively light one at this point; his status as a Roman citizen in the East would have helped him.

23:19-21. Taking one by the hand was often a gesture of peace, welcome or assurance.

23:22. The tribune must act quickly and discreetly or be seen favoring this report over counterclaims by Jerusalem's aristocrats. Assassins also killed collaborators, so discretion would help protect Paul's nephew.

23:23-32
The Commander's Countermeasures

23:23. Somewhere around this period Rome began using units of eight hundred to a thousand soldiers; until this transition, units of 480 soldiers, or (for partly mounted units, as here) 480 infantry and 120 horsemen, were more common. The commander's assignment of two hundred soldiers with the centurions (perhaps a paper strength; two centurions might command only 160 troops in practice) to guard Paul would weaken the garrison in Jerusalem's fortress Antonia significantly; thus they must return quickly (23:32). Some evidence suggests that the two hundred "spearmen" (NASB; NRSV; the term is rare) may be non-Roman light auxiliary infantry. Given the unrest in Palestine and night attacks by robbers, especially prevalent under governor Felix's tenure, a smaller contingent would not be safe in the hills of Judea at night.

The Roman procurator or governor resided in Caesarea, visiting Jerusalem only for the feasts (to insure order). Whether or not Felix came in person for Pentecost (which has just occurred, 20:16; 24:11), he is now in Caesarea; governors usually strengthened the Jerusalem cohort during festivals, so possibly additional troops were stationed in Jerusalem at this time, some of which would be scheduled to return to Caesarea soon. Caesarea was the military headquarters for Judea (the Roman overseer for all Syria-Palestine resided in Syria); a few years after this scene, Syrian residents slaughtered thousands of Jews there.

Leaving at 9 p.m. (the night's "third hour"), might supply sufficient darkness to keep the nature of their activity obscure, while leaving enough of the night to keep them well on their way to Antipatris. Even then, only a protracted march would get them well on their way; Caesarea was sixty miles away.

23:24. Ancient historians do not portray very favorably Tiberius Claudius Felix (*Tacitus said Antonius; Josephus, in a better position to know, said Claudius; an inscription may support Josephus's position but the matter is disputed); he governed from A.D. 52 to probably 59. He married three princesses in his lifetime; most relevant among these, shortly after he became procurator of Palestine, he convinced Drusilla to divorce her husband and marry him (24:24). Although technically unqualified, he secured his position because his brother was Pallas, a powerful freedman of Claudius, emperor from 41 to 54. Tacitus reported that Felix was corrupt, having a king's authority but a slave's mind (from a Roman aristocrat, the latter was hardly a compliment). Josephus likewise condemned him as thoroughly corrupt, accusing him of bloody massacres and repression. He remained procurator until A.D. 59 or 60 (see comment on 24:27).

23:25. The empire (except perhaps for Egypt) had no postal service except for official government business; most people sent letters via persons who were traveling, or (for official imperial business) by the Roman military's

imperial post. The commander sends this letter with the soldiers. Its legal terms confirm that it is a formal referral; as part of Paul's court dossier, it would have been available to both Paul's supporters and accusers.

23:26. This was the standard greeting in letters, and the respectful title was standard for an equestrian official (equestrians were the so-called knight class). Although Felix was not equestrian, his power and status as procurator made that fact irrelevant. Indeed, despite his low birth, his three successive wives (Drusilla probably being the final one) were all from royal households. Lysias is a Greek name; because he achieved citizenship under the emperor Claudius (notorious for selling the privilege indiscreetly), this *patron's name has become part of his own.

23:27-29. Subordinate officials sometimes put their own slant on a story to make themselves sound good to their superiors; this commander, who may have worked his way up through the ranks (22:28), knows how to play the game well. Given ancient Mediterranean emphasis on gratitude obligations, Lysias can trust Paul as an honorable person not to put Lysias in a bad light with Felix, an action also not in Paul's interests.

23:30. Local officials (and as Rome's chief representative in Jerusalem, this military tribune was an official) had to determine which cases should be referred to the procurator. This was obviously such a case. Given the heavy case load in Caesarea, there could be a long delay in Paul's case; Lysias' urgent actions may help move the case up on the docket (though ultimately the status of the official plaintiffs will effect this result in any case; 24:1).

23:31. Troops were able and trained to undertake all-night marches when necessary, as Josephus and other ancient historians testify. When military discipline was properly observed, soldiers exercised daily, and were drilled regularly with forced marches of twenty miles at four miles an hour; sometimes the drills were closer to five miles per hour. Antipatris was less than thirty miles (about forty-five kilometers) south of Caesarea, about a day's march. But by the shortest route Antipatris was at least thirty-five to forty miles (fortunately downhill) from Jerusalem, hence the troops would have to march all night (and into the morning) at a much faster pace than normal travelers. (Such rapid forced marches are reported for soldiers in emergency situations, such as nocturnal surprise attacks.) Antipatris bordered Judea and Samaria, and was a natural stopping place on the inland road between Jerusalem and Caesarea.

23:32. The infantry's return journey need not have been undertaken so rapidly, nor with so much protection, because it would be in daylight and brigands more frequently and dangerously struck at night. It would be unwise, however, to leave the Antonia garrison's force depleted very long (cf. 23:23). The mounted troops continuing to Caesarea could proceed across the mostly *Gentile open plain more quickly without infantry protection, but the infantry had been needed during the night journey in mountainous terrain infested with Judean brigands.

23:33–24:9
The Hearing Before Felix

The technical details of the trials here accord so well with other evidence on Roman legal procedure that some noted Roman historians use them as major source material for understanding Roman provincial judicial proceedings. Ancient writers often highlighted parallels between major characters; Luke's Gospel reports three hearings of Jesus (two before the governor and one before a Herodian ruler), and Acts reports three hearings of Paul once he is in Roman custody (two before governors, one before Herod Agrippa II). Courts kept written summaries of the speeches offered. Courts used the shared language of participants, in this case, Greek.

23:33. Caesarea was divided between Jewish and *Gentile residents, with harsh tension between them. Josephus (admittedly known to inflate figures) claims that, with the outbreak of war a few years later, Gentiles massacred over twenty thousand Jews in Caesarea in a single hour.

23:34. Normally people read aloud, so Paul would hear the letter. It was good protocol to check the jurisdiction to which a person belonged before deciding a case. Officials had the authority to try the accused, wherever he might be from, for crimes committed in their region of jurisdiction; but they could also refer

the case of the accused to the governor of the latter's home province, a procedure less complicated for Felix here. Some ancient writers liked to draw parallels between related historical figures; here, cf. Luke 23:6-9.

Cilicia was an imperial province, the capital of which was Tarsus. But during Paul's period (not, however, Luke's period), Cilicia was governed as part of Syria. The Syrian legate had too much territory to concern himself with a relatively minor case, so Felix assumes jurisdiction rather than troubling his superior.

23:35. Hearings for Roman citizens arraigned on capital charges required painstaking examination, if Felix were to follow the law. Accusers normally initiated proceedings in a Roman court, so Felix awaits their arrival. The procurator's residence in Caesarea was a palace built by Herod the Great; Paul was thus kept elsewhere in Felix's own residence. Officials generally provided better accommodations for prisoners of higher status.

24:1. Given Judea's political situation, Felix would defer to the *high priest and grant an immediate hearing. The status of the forces against Paul is serious; Felix was now governor because Ananias and his associates won a case against Felix's predecessor in office (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.243-47), but Felix's relationship with Ananias may not have been entirely positive. Although Tertullus bears a fairly common Latin name, he could easily be a Jewish Roman citizen like Paul. As noted here, the plaintiffs would summarize the nature of the case before Paul was brought in.

24:2. Although a full speech could last for two hours, abbreviated forms (such as we have here) were recorded and kept as legal documents; Luke could thus cite actual court summaries here. The prosecution would always begin first, both in Roman and in Jewish trials. Tertullus begins his speech with a standard *captatio benevolentiae*—flattery to secure Felix's favor. (*Rhetoric manuals emphasized winning the judge's favor, and speeches before public officials always opened by praising them. "Peace" and "foresight" are common topics of praise for administrators, and also relevant to this case.) Although flattery was sometimes true, this example is blatantly false: revolutionaries had escalated under Felix's corrupt, repressive administration, which brought neither peace nor reforms. Tertullus's speech includes flowery rhetoric (including some alliteration) but is weak on facts.

24:3. "In every way and everywhere" is a good rhetorical flourish (rhetoric valued repetition of sounds).

24:4. Many valued conciseness, and one could offer claims or promises of brevity. As here, speakers could also apologize for wearying the official as if they had not really finished praising him; this was a rhetorical technique for flattering someone even beyond the limits of one's own rhetorical skills or credibility.

24:5-6. Compare the analogously triple charge of Luke 23:2; some historians liked to parallel different historical figures. Paul's accusers make themselves out to be allies of the Romans, who especially in these years were concerned about Jewish unrest throughout the empire. "Pest" (NASB) or "pestilent" (NRSV) and "throughout the world" resemble a charge the emperor Claudius had leveled against Jewish agitators. Profaning the temple was a capital charge, and inciting people to riot against Rome was *maiestas,* treason; Rome treated sedition (stirring unrest) as one of the worst crimes. Tertullus could accuse Paul only of *trying* to desecrate the temple, because no witnesses had apprehended a *Gentile with him in the temple (21:29).

If one's opponent in court were known to be a persuasive speaker, it was also common to warn about his crafty speaking ability; and character defamation (often freely invented) was a major part of winning ancient lawsuits.

"Sect" is not a derogatory term in itself. The term was employed simply to designate various Greek philosophic schools and (by *Josephus) various schools of thought in Judaism (such as *Pharisees or *Sadducees). "Nazarenes" (a term Jewish Christians in time generally applied to themselves) was perhaps originally an insult, calculated against the obscurity of Jesus' hometown (cf. Jn 1:46).

24:7-8. The text of verses 7-8a is questionable (see marginal notes in translations). Invitations for judges to examine matters for themselves (as in 24:8b) were frequent in forensic rhetoric. Of course, judges could investigate and decide with or without the liti-

gants' permission, so the invitation was just another way of *implying* the correctness of one's assertions.

24:9. It was common in forensic rhetoric for accusers to amplify charges with unsupported assertions of guilt; speakers on both sides normally also claimed to present only the facts. Assertions by a number of people of status could carry weight, and Felix had political as well as judicial considerations in this case (members of Jerusalem's aristocracy, some of them Roman citizens, versus a Roman citizen who, according to them, was a leader in a widespread movement). A few years earlier, Judeans protested so severely after a Roman soldier burned a Law scroll that the Roman governor had him executed.

24:10-21
Paul's Defense Before Felix

Paul's *rhetorical skills prove more effective than those of his paid accuser Tertullus.

24:10. The defendant spoke after the accuser in Roman trials, as soon as he was given permission to do so. Paul also includes a *captatio benevolentiae* (see comment on 24:2-3), although a more modest and believable one than that of Tertullus. Felix may have held office since A.D. 52 (i.e., for four to six years) and had been in Judea in another capacity earlier. Proclaiming one's confidence in the judge's fairness was an implicit statement of innocence, and other trained speakers appealed to this in court cases as well.

24:11. Here Paul begins a *narratio,* a stating of the case's facts or of events leading up to the case; a narratio could be brief when necessary. Paul shows himself skilled in the rhetoric of his day. That he came to worship supports his character; the timing presumably coincides with Pentecost (20:16), suggesting that he had come for the festival (cf. 20:16), like many other good Jews. Luke's narrative names some of the many witnesses to the timing of Paul's arrival. Someone who traveled so far to worship is not the sort of person who would try to defile the temple.

24:12. This verse is a *propositio,* the proposition or thesis of Paul's speech; this was a standard part of ancient speeches. Paul begins, as speakers sometimes did, by refuting the opponent's charges.

24:13. Although ancient courts preferred arguments from probability over eyewitness accounts, proof was essential. For example, Herod's son Antipater, after much proof of his guilt, offered only oaths in favor of his innocence, so the Syrian legate Varus had him executed. Speakers often (and fairly often accurately) charged their opponents with lacking proof; in this kind of case, the burden of proof rested with the accusers.

24:14. In 24:14-17, Paul reinforces a positive portrayal of his character, important in defense speeches; he is not the kind of person who would have committed the crime with which he was charged. Roman lawyers also had defenses for those who confessed their guilt, admitting that the deed was wrong (*concessio*); they could claim they meant well (*purgatio*) or simply beseech pardon (*deprecatio*). But while Paul admits a deed, he does not admit that it is wrong or ask pardon for it. Instead, like some other forensic speakers, he confesses a non-crime. This creates a masterful defense: First, this is an issue of internal Jewish *law, not a crime under Roman law, and therefore worthy neither of Roman trial nor of Roman execution at Jewish instigation. Further, the Christian faith springs from the *Old Testament and is thus an ancient religion, which should be protected as a form of Judaism under Roman toleration. Confessing what was not a crime was a strategic rhetorical move; it would heighten one's credibility while doing nothing for the opponents' charge that the defendant had broken the law.

24:15. Sadducees who denied the future *resurrection of the righteous represented a minority position within Judean Judaism; Felix would know that Paul spoke for a majority position on this point. Pharisaism and the rest of Judaism that believed in the resurrection of the righteous were divided on the resurrection of the wicked. Some believed that the wicked would be raised for judgment (either temporary torture followed by annihilation, or eternal torture); others believed that they would not be raised. The early Christians who comment on the matter accept a resurrection of the wicked to judgment (Jn 5:29; Rev 20:5), the most natural way to read Daniel 12:2.

24:16. Establishing one's character was important for the defense. Here Paul means that

one who truly believed the hope stated in verse 15 would be careful to do right before God and people. This is an implied argument from probability, a strongly favored line of argument in ancient law courts. Pharisees and other believers in future judgment often questioned its deniers' basis for morality.

24:17. Almsgiving was highly regarded in Judaism; it demonstrates Paul's solidarity with his people and their ancestral customs. Again on a probability argument (v. 16), this point would make the charge of violating the temple absurd. Also, a defendant sometimes sought to show the ingratitude of plaintiffs prosecuting their benefactor (cf. 4:9). (The offerings refer to Paul's collection, more emphasized in his letters, e.g., Rom 15:26-27.)

24:18-19. Temples were to be places of refuge, yet Paul had been apprehended during worship. It was standard practice in legal rhetoric to reverse the accusers' charges onto them; speakers often could also insinuate someone's guilt. Paul here implies that his accusers rather than himself were responsible for the riot. Moreover, the original accusers have not shown up, and therefore could be charged with abandoning the case, a punishable offense (for frivolous prosecution). The current "plaintiffs" are not eyewitnesses and could not withstand cross-examination, and the original plaintiffs have abandoned the case! By the conventions of Roman law, the case should simply be dismissed at this point; that Felix fails to dismiss it suggests the political dangers of doing so.

24:20-21. Speakers sometimes saved the climactic argument for the end. Paul's concluding, ultimate argument is that his accusers previously disputed only his affirmation of the resurrection, that is, a theological charge (that he had cunningly brought up!), which the tribune had attested (23:29). Roman magistrates would view this as a matter of internal Jewish religious disputes, nothing on which to judge a case of Roman law. Moreover, when plaintiffs changed charges in the midst of the legal process (cf. 23:6, 29; 24:5-6), the case was supposed to be thrown out.

24:22-27
Felix's Procrastination

Paul's case (24:10-21) was legally airtight; Felix should have thrown out the case. Doing so, however, would have alienated members of the Judean elite. Had Paul not been a Roman citizen with a possible supporting constituency, Felix might have even handed him over (cf. Lk 23:23-24).

24:22. Lysias would be considered the independent witness; but Felix already has sufficient facts, and is simply stalling for political reasons, much to the chagrin of Paul's accusers and (still more) Paul himself. By setting no timetable for Lysias's coming, Felix fairly obviously postpones the case; he had authority to defer it as long as he wished.

It would have been difficult for Felix not to have known of the massive Judean Jesus movement (21:20), especially given his Judean wife (24:24), but he and the Romans by this period were treating it as politically innocuous, unlike the many bandits in the countryside.

24:23. Prisoners of status usually received lighter custody, especially if the charges against them were not persuasive. Paul is probably still kept in the procurator's own palace (23:35), making it easy for Felix to visit him. Centurions sometimes oversaw prisoners of status (cf. 23:17). Apart from very meager prison rations, prisoners depended on friends to bring food and other items; guards sometimes charged bribes for access to prisoners, but Felix's instructions here could forestall that.

24:24. Officials who interviewed prisoners privately for their own ends were often considered corrupt.

Drusilla was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I (see comment on 12:1) and sister of Agrippa II and Berenice (see comment on 25:13). She married the king of a small region in Syria, but at the age of sixteen divorced him at Felix's instigation to marry him instead. Although it violated normal Roman policy for a governor to marry a woman from his province, Felix had much power as long as his brother Pallas remained in favor in Rome (cf. comment on 23:24). Drusilla is about twenty years old here.

24:25. Although wealthy households often sponsored philosophers to provide interesting insights at dinners or tutor family members, God's prophets were less pleasant than most philosophers (Jer 38:14-23). Justice and self-control were among the favored topics of

many moralists, but the future judgment was especially Jewish teaching and probably not the side of Jewish teaching the procurator was accustomed to hearing. (Future judgment was not emphasized by most upper-class Jews under Greek influence, such as Sadducees or a handful of aristocratic Pharisees such as *Josephus—who could accommodate Platonic views of the afterlife—or like *Philo, whose views accommodated *Hellenism to the furthest possible extent.)

24:26. Felix was not known to be particularly just; Josephus complained that he sent priests to Caesar on a trifling charge. Josephus also complained that the procurator Albinus, several years after Felix, released anyone—including revolutionaries—from jail whose relatives paid him something. All ancient sources agree that Felix also was corrupt, and this verse should not surprise us. Bribery and corruption were punishable offenses, but very common, including among many governors; Josephus reports this among various governors of Judea. If locals complained, however, a governor could be removed from office for the offense.

24:27. When Felix was being replaced by Porcius Festus (probably July of A.D. 59, though some say 60, or even 55–56), Jewish leaders from Caesarea finally went to Rome and accused him. Roman law had permitted provincials to accuse their governors since 149 B.C., and a number of governors faced prosecution. Fortunately for his sake, his powerful brother Pallas, although no longer in power in Nero's court, retained sufficient influence to protect him from Judean retribution (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.182). "Wishing to do the Jews a favor" (NASB) here may mean that he needs any Jewish mercy he can get, as he is leaving for the hearing in Rome. (At the same time, he would not want to create other enemies or charges by deciding against another interest group.) Governors did not usually try to clear the slate of backlogged cases before leaving office; the new governor might have to start judicial proceedings all over again.

25:1-12
Hearing Before Festus

*Josephus's portrait of Porcius Festus is much more positive than his portrait of Felix or Albinus. Festus was an efficient and mostly just administrator; he also corrected disturbances and caught many of the revolutionaries. Josephus also indicates that Festus died in office (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.197), apparently having served in Judea only a year or two. A Roman administrator might struggle to balance the interests of justice for an individual and political sensitivity to the local elite, especially if there was a potential for unrest. Extensive parallels between Jesus' hearings in Luke 23 and Paul's in Acts 25–26 indicate that Luke wishes to parallel them, as some other historians paralleled figures; Luke's point is that Christians must follow in Jesus' footsteps.

25:1. Festus's residence would be in Caesarea, but it was politically appropriate to visit the local authorities centered in Jerusalem.

25:2. Relations between Felix and the Jewish authorities had been strained; a new governor, however, meant a new chance to introduce agendas previously deferred. Agrippa II appointed a new *high priest, Ishmael son of Phabi, probably shortly before Festus's arrival (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.179, 182). As was customary, the plaintiffs advance the complaint.

25:3-5. They wanted Paul moved; given the frequent assaults by revolutionaries throughout the country, members of the priestly aristocracy would not necessarily appear to have sponsored the violence against Paul (as violent as the agendas of some of them were reported to be, according to Josephus and other early Jewish sources). Festus would be eager to correct the bad relationship of the previous administration, hence to accommodate local politics. He thus moves the issue up on the docket, but does not breach protocol (nor plan to remain long in Jerusalem).

25:6. Sitting on his tribunal (NASB), *pro tribunali,* means that this is an official hearing.

25:7-8. A case could be reopened based on new evidence, but it would be thrown out if no such evidence were presented. Ancients often claimed (often rightly) that their legal opponents offered no proof. A speaker often summarized and then refuted opponents' charges; like court recorders, Luke also summarizes Paul's response here. The accusations against Jewish *law and temple (21:28) would be relevant to a Roman magistrate only if Paul had

violated the sanctity of the temple (see comment on 21:28), a charge that had not been demonstrated. An implication of treason (*seditio*) against Caesar, however, would be fatal. Changing charges in the midst of a case was illegal, but with a new governor Paul's enemies have started the case anew.

25:9. History reports that Festus was a fairer and more cooperative governor than most who ruled Judea; he undoubtedly wishes to engender a good relationship with the provincials here.

25:10-11. Roman citizens had the right to appeal to Caesar's tribunal (*provocatio ad Caesarem*), although the emperor in this period (Nero) normally delegated the hearing and judging of cases to others. Later, the governor Pliny in Bithynia executed many Christians but sent those who were citizens to Rome for trial. Noncitizen provincials had no automatic right to appeal a governor's decision (except to accuse the governor of extortion or on a capital charge). Defendants often expressed willingness to die if found guilty as a way to emphasize their innocence or their indignation at the charge. The current emperor to whom Paul appeals is Nero; still under the more positive influences, he had not yet become notoriously immoral or begun to persecute Christians.

25:12. A Roman judge normally had a *consilium,* or council, with whom to confer; because a governor might not be learned in the law (*iuris prudentes*), it was important for him to have some advisors who were, although he was ultimately free to disregard their counsel. This was an unusual case. A citizen could appeal even to the emperor, especially for a capital sentence (*appelatio*), but appealing before a case had been heard (*provocatio*), as Paul does here, was unusual, because it was not necessarily advantageous. Nevertheless, Festus has reason to comply with Paul's request. Under ordinary circumstances, appeals were granted. Moreover, in any case the political implications of dismissing an appeal to Caesar were unpleasant (a critic could potentially accuse the governor of usurping imperial privileges), whereas the benefits of sending Paul to Rome free Festus from having to disappoint the Jerusalem leaders if his own juridical conclusions differ from theirs. Although many Roman governors of Judea ignored inconvenient rules, Festus is the one governor of Judea in this period whom Josephus presents as most faithful in carrying out Roman policies (*Jewish War* 2.271-72).

25:13-22
Festus and Agrippa II

Some argue that Luke did not necessarily have inside information concerning the conversation, since he could safely infer its substance from the outcome (25:26); ancient historians could make such inferences and shape them as readable *narrative.

25:13-14. When Agrippa I died (12:23), his son, Agrippa II (here), was only seventeen; his daughters were Berenice (sixteen), Mariamne (ten) and Drusilla (six). Agrippa II ruled a small part of Palestine and worked with the Roman administration. He was an advocate for his people but was also loyal to Rome and later struck a coin in A.D. 89 commemorating Rome's triumph over the Jewish rebels. *Josephus's record shows that Agrippa visited Roman officials frequently, especially when they first arrived. Because Agrippa was authorized even to appoint *high priests (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.179, 196), Festus can obtain Judean advice more important than that of Paul's accusers. Festus later took Agrippa's side in a dispute with the priests.

Berenice (which ancient writers sometimes abbreviated as Bernice, as Luke does) was Agrippa's sister. Some ancient writers maligned her close relationship with her brother Agrippa, slandering it as incestuous, but their charge, whether motivated by politics, anti-Judaism or love of gossip, is unlikely. Berenice later became the mistress of the Roman general Titus, who besieged Jerusalem. Though he was fifteen years her junior, he promised to make her empress once he became emperor. Anti-Jewish public opinion, however, ultimately forced him to renege on the promise, so she finally left Rome brokenhearted. Jewish aristocrats who sided with Rome during the war (like Josephus, at least after his capture) portray Agrippa II and his sister very favorably, and they remained alive when Luke was writing.

25:15-16. Roman law required that the accused be permitted to confront his accusers

and defend himself against charges in a public hearing.

25:17-21. "Crimes that I could recognize as such" in 25:18 might reflect a Roman legal formulation. The real issue here is one of Jewish *law—one not tried by Roman courts. Luke again shows the Roman impression that Christianity was part of Judaism and thus should be accorded legal toleration.

25:22. Compare Luke 23:8; historians and biographers often looked for parallels among characters in history. As a newcomer, Festus would naturally want the counsel of Agrippa, who knew Judaism but was more sympathetic to Roman interests than the priestly aristocracy was proving to be. Agrippa had a good Greek education, and Festus might have gravitated to him as one of the few local people with whom he could discuss such matters. If Festus follows Agrippa's advice, he need not worry about Jerusalem aristocrats' complaints against his recommendation being conveyed to Caesar's tribunal (cf. 25:26).

25:23–26:1
The Hearing Before Agrippa Begins

25:23. The pomp Luke mentions here was characteristic of royal families, including Jewish ones (e.g., 1 Maccabees 11:6). The "commanders" (NASB) or "officers" (NIV) are as many as five tribunes, Roman commanders of the five cohorts in Caesarea (cf. the sixth tribune in Jerusalem, 21:31, although given the political mobility of those in this office, Lysias might no longer be there).

25:24-26. "Lord" (v. 26) was a common title for the emperor by this period. Romans, unlike Greeks, would not yet be using it as a divine title. Festus regards particularly Agrippa, as a Romanized Jew, as both unbiased and competent to give Festus advice.

25:27. A governor would not dare to send a case to the emperor's court frivolously; Festus needs to provide a document explaining the prior inquiry (a cover letter, *litterae dimissoriae*). The charge against Paul is political, but all the evidence involves Jewish religion, which would be incomprehensible to Roman procurators. Agrippa II is the first official competent in both Roman and Jewish *law to hear Paul's defense; he will thus supply the evaluation for Festus's letter to Nero. If this Jewish king does not think Paul guilty, Festus has protected himself against complaints from Jerusalem's aristocratic priests.

26:1. On receiving permission from the judge (in this case, unofficially Agrippa), one could speak. Paul's hand is stretched forth in customary *rhetorical style; gestures were an important part of ancient training in public speaking. Studies of ancient gestures suggest that the gesture opening this kind of speech might include pushing together the thumb and middle finger as the outstretched arm moved from right to left.

26:2-11
Paul's Pious Background

Standard defense speeches varied somewhat in form but had general consistency, as exhibited here: the complimentary address to the judge (26:2-3), the *narratio* (narration of events—26:4-18) and finally the *argumentio* (proofs for one's case—26:19-23). Whereas in 24:10-21 Paul sought to show his innocence and seek toleration for his message, here he further argues that his message is true.

26:2-3. Here Paul offers the *exordium* of the speech, in which it was customary to praise the judge (*captatio benevolentiae*). Paul is able to do so honestly; Agrippa's interest in the *law was known (though it did not always satisfy the priests), and his realm became a safe haven for Jewish practice after the Jewish-Roman war of 66–70. Requests to hear the speaker patiently appear frequently in ancient speeches.

26:4. Luke's summary focuses on the speech's *narratio,* or preliminary narration of events leading up to the legal situation; here it stretches from 26:4 to at least 26:18 (and perhaps 26:20). Defendants often challenged charges by appealing to their known character. On Paul's youth in Jerusalem, see 22:3; speeches praising a person often started with the person's honorable upbringing, when possible.

26:5. The appeal to many potential witnesses is not unusual; it occurs even in *Plato's version of Socrates' defense. Also frequent were appeals to common knowledge, often on the part of the audience, and the insistence that one was more upright or pious than one's accusers in the matter on which one was accused. *Pharisees were less strict than *Es-

senes, but most Judeans had significantly less contact with Essenes.

26:6-7. Two of the most basic future hopes of most Judeans were the *resurrection of the bodies of the righteous and the restoration of the twelve tribes at the same time. Although the *Sadducees and many *Diaspora Jews may have doubted future resurrection, it was probably the majority view in Palestinian Judaism.

26:8. Ancient courtrooms often counted arguments from probability more heavily than they counted what we would consider hard evidence (such as reliable witnesses); Paul must thus counter the supposition that a resurrection is improbable by reminding his hearers of God's power and that resurrection is rooted in the most basic Jewish hope.

26:9-10. Favorable testimony from a source expected to be hostile counted more heavily; as a former persecutor Paul has special credibility. Ancient writers sometimes used "casting a vote" figuratively for agreement with decisions; Paul himself had been too young (Acts 7:58; cf. Gal 1:14) to belong to the Sanhedrin. ("Casting a vote," literally, "a pebble," was also likely a pun here, similar to some others in antiquity; while witnesses cast their stones, Paul cast what he could, his pebble, i.e., his consent, since pebbles had long stood for voting.) Roman rule forbade executions without the governor's consent, but they could not prevent lynchings; their Judean forces stayed in Jerusalem and especially Caesarea. Paul's account here thus paints members of the class to which his accusers belonged as complicit in his past crimes.

26:11. Pliny, governor of Bithynia in the second century, noted that former Christians could easily be moved to worship the gods, but complained that genuine Christians could not be forced to do so, even on the pain of death. Pagan rulers who had earlier tried to force Jews to abandon their ancestral customs had encountered the same resistance, which pagan officials generally considered obstinate.

26:12-23
The Risen Christ Calls Paul to the Gentiles

26:12-13. On "midday" or "noon" (NIV), see 22:6. In 26:13 Paul uses clearly Jewish language for a theophany, a revelation of God's glory.

26:14. Falling down was a common response to divine (and sometimes even angelic) revelations in the *Old Testament and Jewish tradition. The "heavenly voice" (which some segments of Judaism thought had replaced *prophecy) was often thought to speak in Hebrew or *Aramaic. "Kicking against the goads" was a Greek proverb about fighting a god; its best known form appears in Euripides' *Bacchae* 794-95, which is also the ultimate source for the term translated "fighting against God" in 5:39. It is not cited in the other accounts of Paul's conversion, but it is appropriate in an address to Agrippa, who had an ample Greek education. Greeks displayed their education by providing classical allusions. A "goad" was a pricked utensil used to get animals to move in the right way; ancient writers often applied it figuratively.

26:15-18. Jesus' words to Paul evoke Old Testament passages about prophets' calls (Jer 1:5-8) and Israel's call to the *Gentiles (Is 42:6-7, 16). "An inheritance among those who have been sanctified" (NASB) or "the set-apart ones" refers to the Jewish hope that they as God's set-apart people would inherit the world to come, just as Israel had "inherited" the Promised Land.

26:19-21. A Roman aristocrat like Festus may dislike Paul's mission to move Gentiles to repent, but he would not understand the Jewish opposition. Agrippa II, who had pagan friends and knew well the mounting animosity of Judean Jewry against Gentiles, would understand Paul all too well, and it is to him that Paul directs these words. One ancient defense was that one acted by necessity; this could take the form of having to obey a god. In 26:21, Paul again reverses charges; see comment on 24:18-19.

26:22-23. Paul begins marshaling evidence at this point (26:8) that the faith he represents is in continuity with the Old Testament religion tolerated by the Romans as an ancient and ethnic religion.

26:24-32
The Court's Evaluation

26:24. Magistrates could interrupt with questions and challenges, as here. Undoubtedly referring to Paul's Jewish learning (26:4-5) and probably also his visionary claims (26:13-19),

Festus gives the usual answer that educated Romans gave to concepts so foreign and barbarian to them as *resurrection. Greeks associated some "madness" with prophetic inspiration; philosophers often considered themselves sober and the masses mad (cf., e.g., Musonius Rufus 20, p. 126.2-3 Lutz), but the masses sometimes considered philosophers mad (possibly relevant to Festus's claim here).

26:25. A term in Paul's reply ("utter"—NASB; "saying"—NIV) may imply that he *is* speaking under inspiration (the same term is used in Acts only at 2:4, 14). But "sober" (or "reasonable"—NIV) speech was a virtue appreciated by Romans, related to the ideas of dignity and respectability; "sober" could contrast with "mad" (26:24), and philosophers, who considered themselves the sanest of all, emphasized their sobriety.

26:26. The charge "speaking in a corner" was an idiom for private speech, and some argue that it was sometimes used to criticize sages who avoided helping the public with their perspectives. Romans mistrusted private meetings as potentially subversive. By the second century Christians were often charged with being secretive (although sometimes they were meeting secretly to avoid being arrested), but Paul argues that Christian claims are public facts, dismissed or ignored by others only because of the others' bias. Speakers often appealed to public knowledge.

26:27. Paul returns to his argument from Scripture, directed toward Agrippa although incomprehensible to Festus (26:22-24).

26:28. Agrippa evades the force of Paul's appeal to the prophets by protesting that Paul would make him play the role of a Christian by answering Yes. The rejoinder may be witty rather than harsh.

26:29. Paul is not embarrassed to admit his desire to convert Agrippa. Mentioning Paul's chains heightens pathos; speakers often emphasized emotional appeal at the conclusion of their speech. Often a prisoner's right hand would be manacled to a guard's left; the iron chains frequently weighed ten to fifteen pounds.

26:30-31. Paul is not guilty before Roman law, and this is the only conclusion that Roman law would care about. Nor is he offensive to Agrippa's more liberal form of Judaism, which abhorred revolutionaries and did not accede to the demands of the Jerusalem aristocracy.

26:32. Agrippa's opinion would have been included in the cover letter for the case. Because Paul had used his Roman right to appeal to Caesar's tribunal, Agrippa and Festus can only refer him there with a letter specifying their own opinion. This necessity was likely political rather than legal, and it extracted Festus from a difficult political situation vis-à-vis Paul's local accusers. This appeal had earlier saved Paul's life (25:3), and now it provides him free passage to Rome (cf. 19:21) and a public forum for the *gospel there.

27:1-8
The Voyage to Rome Begins

Both eyewitness reports and novels included descriptions of storms and shipwrecks; eyewitness reports could tell their story using patterns also found in epic. This *narrative is clearly eyewitness history; the details of the voyage, including the number of days it took to reach particular harbors given the winds mentioned, fit exactly the report of one who had undertaken such a voyage. This point was shown already in the nineteenth century by an experienced Mediterranean mariner.

27:1. Governors at times assigned special duties to centurions and a handful of their soldiers with them. In custody, persons of status were sometimes guarded by centurions; on occasion they even became friends. Given his name, "Julius" may be a Roman citizen, assigned to guard Paul the citizen, though Julius's soldiers may still be noncitizen auxiliaries. "Augustan" (NASB, NRSV) was often an honorary term; multiple legions and presumably cohorts carried this title, and one cohort known in Syria-Palestine from this period bore that name. Centurions could be moved around. The "other prisoners" may include some sent for trial as Roman citizens, but a higher number of those sent normally were convicted criminals to be killed in the games for the entertainment of the Roman public.

27:2. Shippers had low status but often made large profits. Ancient Mediterranean ships were quite small by modern standards; most of them weighed less than 250 tons, although Alexandrian grain ships (27:6) were much heavier (often estimated at eight

hundred tons or more). Caesarea, where they embark, was a major port; its famous and massive artificial harbor was earlier constructed by Herod the Great. Because Adramyttium, southeast of Troas, was the ship's home port, it was apparently returning northward to Asia Minor, where Julius and the prisoners could transfer to a larger vessel. Imperial messengers normally traveled by land, unless a ship were convenient, as this one proved to be. As an agent of Rome, Julius could requisition passage on ships without paying for it. A prisoner's friends or servants would be permitted to accompany him only if the captors allowed this; the nature of Paul's judges' verdict (26:31-32) has clearly given him light treatment, since two companions accompany him.

27:3. Sidon had a double harbor and was some sixty-nine nautical miles (perhaps a day's voyage) north of Caesarea, where they had started; their rapid progress suggests smooth sailing at this point. Loading and unloading cargo could take days (or longer) at a busy port, so passengers often went ashore. Ships' primary purpose was to transport cargo; passengers thus were responsible to bring their own food and other supplies. (At night they slept on deck either in the open or in tents that they brought and erected.) Soldiers normally would need to requisition provisions for themselves and their prisoners from locals, so Paul's friends' voluntary support (cf. 24:23) exempts Julius from this unpleasant task here. Although it could be politically dangerous to display loyalty to a prisoner, ancients valued true friendship that remained loyal no matter what one's circumstances (cf. also 28:13-15).

27:4. The ship is opposed by the usual winds of late sailing season, which blew from the northwest, the direction that they wished to travel. Unable to sail directly northwest toward Myra, they sail on the east of Cyprus, which shields them from westerly winds. Thus, remaining close to the Syrian coast east of Cyprus, and northward to the south of Asia Minor, their voyage is much slower than the reverse voyage across open sea (21:1-3), although aided in their westward movement along the southern coast of Asia Minor by land breezes. Even in better weather, however, ships normally sailed north to Asia Minor before turning west to the south of Crete.

27:5. Myra, a common destination for Alexandrian grain ships, was two miles from its harbor, Andriace. The soldiers and their prisoners could have gone on by land, but the centurion is able to find another ship (27:6).

27:6. Grain ships bound to and from Rome accounted for a vast proportion of Mediterranean trade; ships from Alexandria, Egypt, would travel northward and then westward to bear their cargoes to Rome. This journey took from as little as forty days to over two months (with up to another month to unload the cargo in Italy), although the reverse voyage from Rome to Alexandria could take as little as nine to thirteen days. A particularly large ship could be about 180 feet long, forty-five feet wide and (at their deepest) over forty feet deep; estimates of the amount of grain imported to Rome annually range from two to four hundred thousand tons, probably over a hundred thousand tons of that being imported from Egypt. Because of the fertile Nile valley, Egypt supplied possibly a third of Rome's grain. Egyptian peasants who raised the grain could not always feed their families, but the grain was disbursed free to citizens of Rome to maintain stability in the heart of the empire. Rome provided economic incentives for shipowners, securing as much grain for Rome as possible. Although in this period owned and operated by private merchants, this was the largest mercantile fleet known to Europe before the 1700s. The Alexandrian fleet was the quickest means of transportation from Syria to Rome.

27:7. Cnidus lay partly on a peninsula, partly on an island, and had two harbors. Ships that sailed over against Cnidus were keeping north of Rhodes. Between storms, they could venture the two or three days from Cnidus to Salmone, on Crete's northeastern tip, the easiest place to reach in view of the winds from the northwest. Crete was the largest island of the Aegean Sea. It had few harbors in the north, and the current, seasonal winds from the northwest could wreck a ship against the coast. But the south coast of Crete had more harbors, and the south winds there were more gentle.

27:8. Fair Havens is a bay two kilometers

west of Lasea; sheltered by small islands, it would protect ships from strong winds. Nevertheless, this fishing village was not a pleasant place for the crew and passengers to spend winter. Six miles (ten kilometers) beyond Fair Havens, however, Crete's southern coast veers sharply northward after Cape Matala, exposing a ship to the full harshness of a northwesterly wind blowing across the land. To find the better winter harbor of Phoenix further west, therefore, the ship would likely sail northwest across open sea through the Gulf of Mesara toward their destination, but in so doing would gamble that they would not suddenly face a northwester.

27:9-19
The Crisis at Sea

Danger was so common at sea that some estimate that a fifth of voyagers faced danger on significant voyages; perhaps half of all voyages faced delays. Shipwrecks were so common that archaeologists have identified more than a thousand ancient shipwreck remains. Luke had good reason to supply many details; ancient readers were interested in stories about such experiences.

27:9. Ships usually left Alexandria in the spring, but could be delayed administratively in Italian ports. Those that returned to Alexandria before late August might venture a second trip; later voyages were more risky, but shipowners' profit determined whether such voyages would be undertaken. Owners (often newly wealthy urban merchants) could borrow money to pay for their cargo; the loan would be canceled if the ship were lost, but such loans could run as high as thirty percent of the cargo's cost. Indeed, eager to import more grain, the previous emperor, Claudius, had offered special financial incentives to shippers who would bring grain even in winter (*Suetonius, *Life of Claudius* 18.2-3). If sailing became too dangerous, ships might winter along the way and resume their voyage in the spring. The "fast" here refers to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which occurs in September or October. Sea travel became more dangerous as winter approached (2 Tim 4:21; Tit 3:12). Shipping was completely closed down (except for the brave or foolhardy) from around November 10 to as late as March 10, but September 15–November 10 and March 11–May 26 could be risky periods as well. Given the financial incentives of multiple annual runs for the grain ships, however, some shipowners took the risks.

27:10. Paul's Roman citizenship and perhaps status as leader of a movement or one with an approving letter from Festus keep him in the presence of the centurion. Pagans undertaking sea voyages always sacrificed to the gods and sought their protection. Bad omens, astrological interpretations or dreams sometimes prevented a ship from sailing if they were taken seriously. Before going to war Romans would check the entrails of animals, the flight of birds and other forms of divination; religious advice was always important to those contemplating a potentially risky venture. Paul might sound to them like the kind of seer who could predict the future without divination. (Unlike Greeks, Romans respected divination more than this kind of *prophecy.) His hearers will take Paul more seriously later in the chapter.

27:11. Most of the elite considered shippers of low status, but the latter often did make huge profits. Although Paul's travel experience and spiritual reputation might allow Paul a hearing, the centurion, who must decide whether to leave with the ship, gives greater credence to the nautical knowledge of the captain (and the decision of the "majority," 27:12). Yet such a decision was often made more on economic than nautical grounds. Ships' contents were expensively insured in case of shipwreck. Grain ships sometimes traveled together; this one is making the voyage alone and is probably one of the latest vessels of the shipping season. The captain at best hopes to make it to a better and/or further harbor before the seas close down for the winter (27:12); he cannot hope to reach Italy this late in the year (27:9).

27:12. Most of Crete's southwest coast is steep, but one city with an excellent harbor was Phoenix, on the southern side of a Cretan isthmus. Phoenix was probably a common winter harbor; its site is probably a bay across from Loutro, though the topography has changed since antiquity. The voyage would be more than fifty miles (eighty kilometers). The "majority," presumably of people with rank, come to a consensus.

27:13-14. A south wind would help them stay close to shore and bring them safely to their destination. They would pass Cape Matala four miles to the west, following the coast, but then might try to sail west-northwest in the open across the gulf of Mesará for some thirty-four to thirty-six miles to reach Phoenix. Unfortunately, in this region the south wind often changes suddenly to a dangerous wind from the northeast (a *gregale*); the conflicting air currents increase the danger. Mountains just one or two kilometers north of Fair Havens could have initially obstructed the sailors' view of storms coming from the north. They may have seen them when crossing the bay, but (not being from this region) could not have known that the nearby Platanos Valley could funnel the wind toward them and blast them out to sea. The "Euraquilo" mentioned here (NASB; the term mixes Greek and Latin) may be a wind blowing from the east by northeast—the most dangerous kind of wind.

27:15. With a favorable wind in their mainsail, these ships could cover about fifty nautical miles in daylight, or ninety miles in twenty-four hours. But ancient ships had square mainsails and could face into even a normal headwind only with much effort; this wind was more powerful.

27:16. Cauda's probable location (modern Gavdhos) was over twenty miles southwest of where the storm probably caught them in the bay of Mesará. It offered no place to anchor on the side of the island they were passing; the momentary shelter from the storm's force, however, allowed for some quick maneuvers. The "boat" or "lifeboat" (NIV), a dinghy, was used for landings, to maneuver the ship for tacking and so forth. Often these boats were towed behind, typically with a sailor in it. Here, filled with water or in danger of breaking loose from the ship or being smashed against it, it has to be brought on deck to be rescued.

27:17. The "supporting cables" (NASB) or "ropes" (NIV) were frapping cables used to undergird the hull against the raging sea in times of fierce storms; they may have been slipped around the stern or prow and worked backward to brace the whole hull.

If they continued on their present course too far (four hundred miles) to the southwest, they would eventually be destroyed in Syrtis Major (modern Gulf of Sidra), a dreaded shoal west of Cyrenaica along the African coast. (Syrtis Minor was further west than their path risked carrying them.) Ancient literature is replete with accounts of ships trapped in these shallows, then destroyed when the water levels rose. Even in good weather, Alexandrian grain ships sailed northward to Asia and then westward to Italy, rather than directly northwest, because a sudden change in winds could wreck them on this shoal.

27:18. Other sources illustrate that jettisoning some of the cargo is the natural step at this point; in crises like this one no distinction is made between valuable and cheap cargo (Jon 1:5; also *Josephus, others). They do not discard all the cargo here (27:38); ships carried at least 68 tons, large ones (such as this one) usually carried over 250 tons, and some could carry up to 1200 tons. Unloading such a ship once docked could take twelve days. Hurling merchandise into the sea required less caution, but the crew certainly could not finish the task in one day. The grain was probably stored in sacks piled six feet high, which could be moved manually only with great effort, without the equipment normally available on docks.

27:19. If, as many commentators think, Luke refers to the yard ("tackle"—NIV)—a spar that could be nearly the ship's own length—it would take many of those on deck to lower it down to the deck. One would secure it if possible, but in the severity of this storm, they cannot afford the encumbrance created by retaining it.

27:20-44
The God of Safety on the Sea

27:20. Stars were needed for navigation. Pagans felt that those who died at sea never entered the realm of the dead; instead their souls wandered aimlessly forever above the waters in which they perished.

27:21-22. Paul might speak below deck; in any case, some people were able to project their voices so as to be heard widely, even with competing noise. Ancient people often evaluated the sincerity of philosophers (e.g., Aristippus) according to how calm they stayed under pressure. People believed that a true philosopher consistent with his teachings would remain calm in a dangerous storm at

sea (so Pyrrho the Skeptic), whereas a false prophet such as Peregrinus would not. The others' lack of eating could stem from fear or seasickness. The conventional address "Men" need not imply that all 276 persons aboard are male (see comment on 1:16).

27:23-25. It was not unusual for ancient writers in the middle of a story to report earlier events they had not yet mentioned.

Many believed that ships would be destroyed because of the impious aboard, or spared because one of special piety was aboard. A story is told that even some unreligious men began to supplicate the gods during a raging storm; the philosopher Bias, aboard the same ship, urged them to be quiet, lest the gods recognize they were aboard and sink the ship! Like Jonah's behavior in the *Old Testament (Jon 1:6-16), this attitude contrasts sharply with Paul's concern for all aboard. (A few other people, like Caesar, were said to have claimed that a ship could not sink with them on it, but Paul's claim is because of God's mission and message, not because he is personally indispensable.) Various deities claimed the role of protector at sea, like Isis or the Dioscuri (28:11); but God is the true protector.

27:26-27. Running aground was dangerous, but Paul prepares them for this news. The sea around Malta (28:1) is far south of what is called the "Adriatic Sea" today but was included in the "Sea of Adria" in antiquity. The rate of drift per day and the trajectory they would have followed from Cauda to avoid Syrtis has been calculated; it was exactly fourteen days to reach Malta (28:1). If the wind was below gale strength at this point, a ship heading toward Malta from the east could hear water breaking against land even at a mile and a half from Point Koura.

27:28. Sailors would judge the depth of the water by lowering lead weights smeared with grease on a hollow underside, to pick up samples from the sea floor. The soundings suggest that they were at this point near Koura, east of Malta; they may have passed within a quarter mile of it. Roughly half an hour would pass between twenty and fifteen fathoms, showing that they are approaching grounding dangerously quickly, probably with underwater rocks that would rip open the hull.

27:29. Because they are shoaling quickly with low visibility, they use anchors as brakes. These were normally cast from the bow, but here they are cast from the stern, probably so the stern cannot be blown around into the rocks or because they will advance bow-first in the morning light. The anchors were probably used in succession to prevent the vessel from being smashed against the reefs.

27:30. Other cases are known of crew members' trying to escape a doomed ship in a small boat; these boats were not meant as lifeboats and fitted only a handful of people. Sailors were sometimes slaves; at other times they sailed to make a living; but they had little stake in the ship.

27:31. The sailors' expertise will be needed aboard to ground the ship. The centurion and soldiers, being armed, could take charge.

27:32. On the next day they could have used the small boat to ferry people to land (although it would have taken many trips); without it, they would have to run the whole ship aground. Although the captain might hold more rank on the ship than a passenger centurion (against some earlier views of the Roman grain fleet), in an emergency the soldiers would exercise more authority—if only because they were the ones with the weapons.

27:33-34. "Not a hair of one's head" was a proverbial expression in the Old Testament (1 Sam 14:45; 2 Sam 14:11; 1 Kings 1:52); but it would make sense even to hearers who were not familiar with it.

27:35-36. The meal here is done in the traditional Jewish manner: the head of the household thanked God and distributed the bread. Most passengers would have brought their own food on the ship, probably especially bread (the most fundamental staple of the ancient Mediterranean diet) and other food that did not require cooking. Some of the raw wheat in 27:38 could also be edible in this emergency, though it could be difficult to digest.

27:37. Large ships frequently carried several hundred people; Josephus even claimed that he had traveled aboard a ship with six hundred people. Most ships that hugged the coasts weighed less, but large ones could weigh 250 tons. Alexandrian grain ships (such as in 27:6; 28:11), built for the open sea, were larger, many weighing 340 tons, some

over eight hundred tons, and a few to twelve hundred tons.

27:38. They need to lighten the ship further (27:18), in order to run aground as close to land as possible. Once wet, grain would also pose a hazard to the ship, since the grain could swell to twice its original volume and split the hull. Many suggest that they had so far retained some of the cargo as ballast (heavy material kept in the hold of a ship to steady it); whether or not this is the case, such ships carried hundreds of tons of wheat, so they could not have finished the job in 27:18. An Alexandrian ship's cargo would be wheat.

27:39. Apart from some topographic details that have changed over the centuries, the traditional site of St. Paul's Bay in northeastern Malta fits all the details of the narrative. Ships often stopped at Malta, but normally in better weather and at safe harbors.

27:40. These actions are normal for a disabled ship trying to come near land. A helmsman would pull and push a tiller, or handle, to control two steering paddles (oars) connected as rudders. The sailors had apparently bound the rudders to prevent unwelcome movement, but now needed to steer. Ships normally had a large, square sail and (mentioned here) a smaller, triangular foresail; the latter could be removed when slowing down when coming into a harbor, but here the objective is to reach the beach as quickly as possible.

27:41. Between St. Paul's Bay and the island of Salmonetta on the northwest is a shallow channel about three hundred yards wide. The ship may have wedged on a sandbar there, while waves pound the immobilized rear of the vessel.

27:42-43. Chained prisoners cannot swim; unchained prisoners can escape. Guards were responsible for the prisoners' safe custody. They would be less liable for their charges if the prisoners "died at sea" than if they escaped. In any case, most of these prisoners were likely going to be fed to animals for public entertainment in Rome; out of consistency, Julius might have a hard time later explaining how he spared one prisoner (Paul) and not others, so he spares all.

27:44. The boards might be taken from the grain holds below deck. Papyrus is not waterproof; Luke would have to put any notes in a sealed container and keep it atop a plank. Although some survivors of a shipwreck so close to shore would be likely, the survival of all passengers (likely including the aged, infirm and children), after two weeks without eating and many or most being unable to swim, would be viewed as extraordinary. In Greco-Roman literature, someone's escape from disaster at sea could serve as evidence of that person's religious purity even before a court.

28:1-10
Miracles on Malta

28:1. Malta (ancient Melite), some fifty-eight miles south of Sicily, was on the shipping route from Rome to Egypt, whereby empty ships would sail quickly to Alexandria to load up more cargoes. It was the stop immediately after Syracuse in Sicily (28:12). The alternative proposed site for Luke's island, near Dalmatia (Meleda, modern Mljet, also called Melite in antiquity), is based on a misreading of "Adria" in 27:27 and has no merit; winds from the northeast could not have driven them there, nor would they have sailed from there to Syracuse instead of Italy (28:12).

28:2. Ancients valued hospitality, particularly to survivors of shipwrecks. The Maltese were of Phoenician descent, and most commoners there spoke and read only Punic (the late Phoenician dialect of the Carthaginians). But Roman citizens and retired soldiers also lived there, the elite spoke Latin or Greek, and the island was certainly not considered culturally primitive. The title "barbarians" ("barbarous"—KJV; "natives"—NRSV, NASB; "islanders"—NIV) could apply to all non-Greeks, or, as here, to anyone who did not speak Greek. Greeks did not ordinarily expect kind treatment from them, but Luke's use of the term is not derisive; he indicts Greek ethnic prejudice at the same time that he displays God's providential care through them. The temperature during that season would have been typically below 60 degress fahrenheit when raining, and being wet probably made people feel even cooler.

28:3. In cold weather some snakes can look stiff like twigs until the heat of a fire stirs them. Snakebites were a topic of medical concern in antiquity. Poisonous snakes are now extinct on heavily populated Malta,

probably partly because the forest cover that once existed is now gone.

28:4. Ancients could argue even in courts that their survival of troubles at sea proved their piety and hence innocence; on the importance of arguing Paul's innocence, see the introduction to Acts. In some stories, the impious escaped one form of terrible death (e.g., at sea) only to face something worse (besides Greek stories, see Amos 5:19). "Justice" was a goddess who executed the will of Fortune or the Fates; although both Romans and local Punic tradition had personified Justice as a deity, Luke translates the observers' idea into the idiom of Greek poets. Animals were considered one means of divine punishment. Several groups of Jewish catacombs dating between the second and fifth centuries A.D. have been found on the island; but if Jewish people were on the island in the first century, this *narrative does not mention them.

28:5. For divine protection from or healing of snake bites, see, e.g., Num 21:6-9; for protection more generally, e.g., Ps 91:13; Dan 6:22. (Some Jewish traditions also emphasize Adam's rule over the beasts [Gen 1:26] or its restoration in Is 11:6-9.)

28:6. Whenever similar stories were told, those who survived bites from poisonous snakes or lizards were considered holy men (e.g., the pious Jewish holy man Hanina ben Dosa); Greco-Roman paganism often considered such holy men to be divine or semidivine. The change of mind on the part of Paul's viewers could strike the ancient reader as humorous, as in some similar accounts in antiquity where a human was mistaken for a particular divinity. Ancient writers often paralleled or contrasted figures; cf. here 10:25-26; 12:22-23; 14:11, 15.

28:7. Hospitality was an important virtue, especially toward people who had been shipwrecked and were stranded without possessions. Both Greek and Latin often employ "first" (as here) for leading citizens, and the title is attested on Malta. Publius is a Latin *praenomen,* and as a top official he had probably received a grant of Roman citizenship; the title assigned to him here has been found in Greek and Latin inscriptions as the proper title of the island's governor.

28:8-9. The most common form of fever was malaria (typhoid also occurred); the description here could fit malaria, with intermittent attacks. Fevers could last briefly or for a year, and could be mild or fatal. Some ancient treatments were superstitious, but many physicians treated winter fever by giving fluids. Dysentery most often accompanied fever during summer, but the dysentery may have persisted or exploited the man's weakened condition, or the fever may stem from dysentery. Some commentators also note that in subsequent times the Maltese were affected by a special sickness due to a microbe in the milk of the goats there; although such organisms would have mutated over the centuries, perhaps a similar illness is in view here.

28:10. People typically were expected to respond to benefactions with other gifts or honors.

28:11-16
Journey to Rome

28:11. As an agent of Rome, Julius could requisition passage on ships without paying for it. The seas opened as early as February 7–8 or as late as March 10, depending on the weather; in the year in view here they seem to open toward the earlier date. On Alexandrian ships, see comment on 27:6; like most ships wintering on the island, this one would have left Alexandria too late in the season and spent the winter in a Maltese harbor rather than risking the voyage on to Rome at that time. Ships were named for their patron deity (e.g., "the Isis") in whose protection they trusted and whose image was used as the ship's figurehead. The Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux, twin heroes; Pollux, a son of Zeus, shared his immortality with his brother during half the year) were considered special protectors of ships, on whom one might call in a storm. They were also popular deities in Rome and in this region.

28:12. Well-fortified Syracuse was the chief city of Sicily, on its southeast, with a rich Greek and Roman heritage and renowned for its beauty; it boasted two harbors and was perhaps a quarter the size of Rome itself. The voyage there was roughly a hundred miles.

28:13. Rhegium was the Italian harbor closest to Sicily, with a long history as a Greek settlement but also Roman citizenship. In the first century, mercantile vessels, including the Alexandrian grain fleet, put in at Puteoli some

twenty miles west of Naples (although the harbor Claudius had improved at Ostia eventually surpassed it). To have reached Puteoli in two days meant that they had made optimum time (about ninety miles a day). Yet from Puteoli they still had far more than a hundred miles left to Rome.

28:14. The Jewish community in Puteoli had been there a long time, as had Egyptian and Phoenician cults. As a regular port receiving visitors from the East, it naturally received foreign religions as well as goods. Thus it is not surprising to find Christians there; but readers of Luke's day might be more surprised that these Christians offer such extensive hospitality to Paul's captors, who (probably in view of Paul's role during the storm) accept it from them. The journey from here to Rome would be perhaps 120 to 130 miles, some of it through hill country; it might take up to a week. On the journey they would proceed first to Capua (some twenty miles on the Via Campana) and from there follow the Via Appia (the "Appian Way").

28:15. Honorary delegations would come from cities to meet a visiting dignitary; local Christians, probably familiar with Paul's letter to the Romans and some Christian leaders in Rome who know him, honor Paul in this way, coming even much further than ordinary delegations. (For information about some of the Roman believers, esp. their leaders, see Rom 16.) In older times, isolated inns had grown into larger settlements that retained the names of the inns. One of these was the Tres Tabernae, or Three Inns, 33 Roman miles from Rome on the ancient and famous Appian Way. (A Roman mile was a thousand average-sized paces for a Roman soldier, eventually standardized as about 4,851 feet, about 92 percent of the English mile of 5,280 feet [i.e., about 1479 meters].) The "Market of Appius," or Appii Forum, was about 43 Roman miles (39.5 miles; 63.5 kilometers) from Rome on the same paved road. Jewish communities had existed in Italy for a long time and may have formed the basis for the first Christian groups there (cf. 2:10).

28:16. Rome had as many as a million residents, though not all fit within its traditional walls. Along the Appian Way, Paul and the others would enter Rome's Porta Capena, through an area with many poor immigrants. Paul was loosely chained by the wrist to a soldier (28:20), presumably a member of the Praetorian Guard, Caesar's elite personal guard in Rome, which consisted of nine or twelve cohorts. The relatively light confinement reported here was used only for prisoners of status who posed no threat (officials would know of the opinion in 26:31), though he did not receive the lightest custody (i.e., without chains). Paul would have considerable freedom within the home, which may have been an apartment in one of Rome's many blocks of tenements; he could have met with visitors in the building's courtyard, if available.

Two soldiers normally guarded dangerous prisoners; the single soldier (cf. also the single chain of 28:20) suggests that Paul was considered a minimal security threat. The guard likely belonged to the Praetorian Guard, the elite part of the Roman army used in Italy itself. The Praetorian Guard was commanded by the Praetorian prefect, one of the most powerful men in Rome, who was at this time Afranius Burrus. Burrus was officially responsible for all prisoners from the provinces to be tried by Caesar's court, although the task itself was probably delegated to a lower officer.

28:17-31
Paul, Jews and Gentiles in Rome

28:17. Rome had a significant Jewish community (a common guess is forty to fifty thousand) organized in numerous *synagogues. Many lived in the impoverished area across the Tiber; the majority spoke predominantly Greek. The "local Jewish leaders" (NIV) are leaders (apparently bearing titles such as "rulers of synagogues," "gerousiarchs," and "rulers") of different synagogue communities; in contrast to Alexandria's Jewish community, no single leader or body ruled over the whole Jewish community in Rome. The Jewish congregations in Rome were all autonomous, and Christians could spread their views among the various synagogues with relative freedom. The Jewish community there had also made many Roman converts and sympathizers (to the chagrin of many male Roman aristocrats). Many of these sympathizers would be happy to embrace a version of the Jewish faith that accepted them fully without circumcision. Many

Jewish believers may have been expelled a decade or so earlier due to tensions over Jesus' identity (see comment on 18:2), however, and though many would have returned on Claudius's death, it is not clear that they returned to the synagogues.

28:18-20. In terms of ancient logic and *rhetoric, that Paul was "forced" to appeal is an argument from "necessity," often used to show that a particular behavior was not wrong in a given case. Paul is not, he says, out to bring a countercharge (see comment on 24:19) or embarrass his people, already a sometimes marginal minority in Rome. Paul must also explain his chain, normally a mark of dishonor. Paul continues to emphasize the continuity between the *Old Testament message and his own; this point would be important to Jewish leaders and also to Roman officials, who needed to understand that the Jesus movement was rooted in an ancient religion worthy of toleration (even if, after 70, Judaism was unpopular in some circles).

28:21-22. Paul's accusers may not yet have arrived (cf. 28:11), but they may also have abandoned the case. Unable to win their case in Judea, Paul's accusers would have even less chance in Rome; if accusers did not eventually come, a case was to be decided in favor of the defendant. Those who failed to prosecute a charge could also be accused of having fabricated it. By A.D. 62, the Jewish community in Rome had an advocate with the emperor in his wife (and former mistress) Poppaea Sabina—until Nero kicked her to death while she was pregnant. The Roman Jewish community may have had conflicts over the identity of Jesus a decade earlier (see comment on 18:2). These leaders could not but know about this large movement (a few years later Nero killed hundreds of Christians), but they may have lacked an educated Jewish Christian leader who could dialogue with them about it. It is by no means clear that the Roman Jewish community was uniformly hostile to the Christian movement (28:24), but they naturally had questions, especially if their previous (probably partial) expulsion in 18:2 was related to Christian teachings.

28:23-28. Paul's citation of Isaiah 6 climaxes a theme throughout Acts: that most of God's own chosen people reject their *Messiah while *Gentiles accept him is not amazing but the fulfillment of Scripture. Toward the end of their work, writers often recapitulated major themes that came up earlier in their book.

28:30. At the end of two years, if no accusers had arrived and no charges had been sent against him (28:21), the case against him might be closed by default. Careful records were kept, so the system would not simply lose track of its prisoners, especially in Rome itself. Paul was later arrested again and beheaded (according to strong tradition, in Nero's persecution, which began in A.D. 64), but Luke wishes to end on a note of positive legal precedent, before the corruptions introduced by Nero's tyranny. A number of ancient works had sudden endings; and following the pattern of other Jewish and Christian works (but in contrast to many Greek works), Luke wishes to end happily. Open endings sometimes look beyond the narrative's closing to the promised or foreshadowed future (here, the completion of Acts 1:8).

28:31. That Paul could preach under the very nose of the Praetorian Guard suggests that, before Nero instituted his persecution against Christians for political reasons, they were tolerated under Roman law. Luke's defense of Christianity on legal and philosophical grounds paved the way for second-century defenders of Christianity and points the way for Christian lawyers, statespersons and others to work in society today.

New Testament Letters

Letters. The vast majority of ancient letters were short—an estimated average is eighty-seven words. Most of the *New Testament letters (except Philemon, 2–3 John and Jude) are long even by the standards of literary letters; some, like Romans, are extremely long (about seventy-one hundred words compared to an average of about three hundred in *Cicero and about one thousand in *Seneca). Given the costs of papyrus and labor, a letter such as Romans could have cost more than twenty denarii—perhaps some two thousand dollars in earnings equivalent in the recent U.S. Lacking access to shorthand, Paul may have dictated Romans (Rom 16:22) painstakingly over the course of eleven hours. Such letters were more literary undertakings than most other ancient letters.

Later rhetoricians followed the typical Greek penchant for categorization and provided guidelines for the educated to write different types of letters: letters of rebuke (e.g., Galatians), letters of friendship or family, aesthetic letters (read among the elite for enjoyment), official letters and letter essays. These categories offered samples for the practice of writing letters, but genuine first-century letters were not confined to airtight categories.

Rhetoric. Many scholars have associated Paul's letters with *rhetoric, the study and use of proper forms for public speaking, so we introduce the character of ancient rhetoric here. (Some *church fathers and Renaissance and Reformation interpreters also read Paul in light of Greco-Roman rhetoric.) Certainly at least one church cared about rhetoric and apparently judged Paul's letters (which exhibit his argumentation) stronger than his speaking (which would also include accent, gestures and the like), to Paul's dismay (1 Cor 1:17, 20; 2:1-5, 13; 4:19-20; 2 Cor 10:10-11; 11:6). Paul studied in Jerusalem not as a rhetoric or philosophy major but as a Bible major (cf. Acts 22:3)—whereas orators flaunted their cultural literacy by lavish quotations from Greek literature, Paul expounds Scripture. Perhaps his training in rhetoric amounted to what today might be a couple of homiletics courses, augmented through his argumentative dialogues with others in subsequent years. Nevertheless, he not only spoke Greek but he spoke and wrote good Greek that

reflects his sensitivity to cultural idioms. In the Greco-Roman world, it was impossible for him not to dialogue and communicate with people influenced to one degree or another by rhetoric.

Greek higher education usually concentrated on rhetoric, although some students specialized in philosophy instead. Those who could afford it learned basic reading and writing under a *grammaticus,* often beginning around age ten or twelve, and the fewer who could afford the next stage proceeded to the *sophistes* or rhetorician, often around the age of fifteen or sixteen. Most who had advanced education completed it by around age eighteen.

Rhetoric was the indispensable tool of politicians, lawyers and other public figures, an essential focus of upper-class education. Its training included speech imitation and composition, oratory, practice in extemporary exposition on diverse topics, gestures, grammar, proper citation technique and so forth. The majority of urban people not specifically trained in rhetoric picked up its basic outlines from listening to public speeches, which pervaded urban public life.

Types of Rhetoric. Those who wrote rhetorical handbooks divided rhetoric into three main categories, although these overlapped in practice: epideictic (or encomiastic), praising or blaming someone in the present; deliberative, convincing someone to act in a particular way (directed toward the future); and judicial (or forensic), the rhetoric of law courts (dealing with actions of the past). Attempts to strictly classify Paul's letters according to any one of these forms usually fails because in practice speeches mixed the forms.

Rhetoric in New Testament Letters. Most ancient letters were simply business documents or personal notes; such letters averaged eighty-seven words. Even most letters from orators (such as *Cicero, Pliny the Younger or Fronto) contain few rhetorical devices; certainly one could not outline them as speeches. Many of Paul's letters, however, contain significant argumentation, which was especially the domain of rhetoric. For this reason it is helpful to note Paul's use of rhetorical devices and conventional forms of argument. More debatably and controversially, some scholars find larger patterns of argumentation matching the typical outlines of speeches. It should be noted, however, that actual speeches did not always conform to the outlines proposed in handbooks; and even the most didactic of letters from members of the rhetorically trained elite do not normally fit such outlines.

Because certain rhetorical conventions were simply part of formal speaking in their day, many writers like Paul may not have been conscious of their own rhetorical artistry. It is nevertheless helpful for the modern reader, accustomed to different forms of public speaking and argumentation, to understand the rhetorical techniques that ancient writers often used. Paul was undoubtedly more conscious of and concerned for his culturally relevant communication technique in his most formal letters (e.g., Romans) or when challenged by upper-class readers (e.g., in

1 and 2 Corinthians), and my treatment of the rhetoric in these letters is accordingly more detailed than that of his other letters. Some objected to Paul's delivery (cf. 1 Cor 2:3; 2 Cor 10:10; 11:6), but Paul fills some of his letters with more rhetorical devices than some orators would have deemed suitable for mere letters.

Purpose of Letters. Although most brief papyrus letters were merely personal or business communications, some wrote letters with a long-term purpose, intending publication and ideally wide circulation even if addressed to an individual. The prophetic letters in the *Old Testament (2 Chron 21:12-15; Jer 29; 36; cf. also Rev 2–3) show that in Jewish circles letters could be viewed as inspired if dictated by a prophet (1 Cor 7:40; 14:37).

Letter essays were general treatises that depended more on the author's context than on the situation of the readers. Most letters, however, were addressed to the audience's situation; later epistolary theorists stressed adapting letters to the situation of the readers. James might be a letter essay; probably all of Paul's extant epistles (including Romans) are addressed to specific situations.

Stereotypical Forms in Letters. Different kinds of letters sometimes addressed different standard themes (now loosely called *topoi*). For instance, ancient letters of consolation repeated some basic themes, just as modern sympathy cards, epitaphs or eulogies do. The use of conventional themes does not mean insincerity, however; for example, rhetoricians like *Cicero emphasized that one should *feel* what one was preaching, rather than merely reproduce stereotypical forms emotionlessly. For information on introductions and conclusions of letters, see comments on Romans 1:1-7; 16:21-24 and 25-27.

Reception of Letters. According to some estimates, literacy in the Roman world was around ten percent (much higher for elite urban males, lower for others); although reading was more common than writing, and urban areas had more education than rural areas, many persons in the congregation would be unable to read. Reading was usually done aloud even in private; churches receiving Paul's letters would have them read publicly in the congregation's services, probably often by those who normally read Scripture in the meetings (for those who had Scripture scrolls available). Readers might try to help communicate the thought with appropriate intonation and gestures.

How to Understand Letters. Letters had no chapter or verse breaks when they were first written (these were added later); thus one should read the whole letter to catch the flow of thought and never extract verses from their context. Ancient readers recognized that one should try to understand the author's purpose in writing, and they already knew their own cultural situation. When we read the letters, we should try to assume the original situation and then catch the writer's flow of thought by reading through the whole context. We may put ourselves, as best as possible, in their situation and consider how the principles apply in our situations today.

Collections of Letters. Sometimes the letters of a famous person would be collected for publication. Paul's letters were collected some time after his death, but possibly as early as the end of the first century as local churches shared their own treasures and memories of a key leader in the *Diaspora mission.

Tensions Among Letters. Because most letters addressed specific situations, similar phrases could be used to address very different problems. Most writers were eclectic philosophically, drawing from a variety of different sources; even the *Dead Sea Scrolls testify that the same audience could accept different kinds of religious language (*law, ritual, *apocalyptic, hymns, *narrative). It is therefore difficult to determine differences of authorship, or to argue for the presence of apparent theological contradictions, based exclusively on differences among Paul's or other early Christian letters.

Works on Ancient Letter Writing. The most readable and helpful introductions to the *genre include Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity,* LEC 5 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986); David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment,* LEC 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), pp. 158-225; and E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004). For rhetoric, see, e.g., S. E. Porter, ed., *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 B.C.–A.D. 400* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); R. D. Anderson Jr., *Glossary of Greek Rhetorical Terms Connected to Methods of Argumentation, Figures and Tropes from Anaximenes to Quintilian* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000); D. E. Aune, *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament & Early Christian Literature & Rhetoric* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003); and J. D. Harvey, *Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). For background to Paul and his thought, see, e.g., A. J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); many articles in J. P. Sampley, ed., *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003); on Paul more generally, see, e.g., Stephen Westerholm, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Paul* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011). For specialized studies, see, e.g., Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Techniques in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature,* SNTSMS 69 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Romans

Introduction

Authorship. All *New Testament scholars accept this as a genuine letter of Paul. Churches naturally preserved letters of Paul; it would have been unnatural for anyone to have forged letters in his name during his lifetime or until long after his genuine letters had become widely known and circulated as authoritative. On the basis of letters clearly written by Paul to address specific situations of his day (e.g., 1 Corinthians) and other letters that share a common style with them, even the most critical New Testament scholars rarely dispute the Pauline authorship of particular letters (including Romans, Galatians, 1–2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon).

Rome's Jewish Community. Rome may have had a million inhabitants; supported by its empire, it imported at least two hundred thousand tons of grain annually. Estimates of the Jewish community in this period range between roughly twenty thousand and fifty thousand, thus (by the usual educated guesses) perhaps five percent of the population. Rome's Jewish community was predominantly poor, although some groups of Jewish people there were wealthier than others and better educated. Different groups lived in different parts of the city (mostly in ethnically segregated communities) and had their own leaders. It is thought that many of the predominantly Jewish house *churches existed in the Jewish ghetto across the Tiber, many Jewish residents working on the docks there. Rome included a community of Jewish Roman citizens, mostly descended from Judeans enslaved by Pompey and then freed by other Jews in Rome (*Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 155). More than half of the Jewish residents of Rome had Latin names.

The primary language of the Jewish community in Rome, however, was not Latin but Greek, the language in which Paul writes (seventy-six percent of their burial inscriptions are in Greek, twenty-three percent in Latin and one percent in Hebrew or *Aramaic). Many Roman conversions to Judaism created resentment among other aristocratic Romans and led to tension between the Jewish and *Gentile elements in the city. Relevant to this letter, ancient literature suggests that many Romans looked down on Jewish people especially for circumcision (cf. Rom 2:25-29;

4:9-12), Sabbath-keeping (cf. 14:5-6) and food customs (cf. 14:2-23).

Jewish soteriology. Jewish beliefs in the empire in Paul's day were diverse on many points, but most agreed on central issues such as the value of circumcision, Torah, and the temple for Jewish identity. E. P. Sanders challenged many earlier readings of Paul that assumed pervasive Jewish legalism, but the emerging "new perspective" has yielded a conglomeration of different solutions rather than a unified understanding of Paul. Sanders persuasively made the case for *grace in ancient Judaism, but other scholars note that Judaism was diverse, and even a religion insistent on grace (such as Christianity) has its share of legalists. (Merely emphasizing reward or punishment for deeds, however, is not necessarily legalistic, also appearing in Paul, e.g., 2 Cor 5:10.)

Paul's depiction of opposing positions follows standard *rhetorical conventions for polemic in his day, caricaturizing his opponents for the purpose of *reductio ad absurdum*. His argument is rhetorically designed to persuade a first-century audience, even though today he might need to argue differently for a different audience. (For example, Rom 2:17-24, condemning an extreme Jewish teacher, and more general Psalms verses cited in 3:10-20, would not technically make all Jewish individuals sinful. Paul does believe that all people have sinned, but his supporting arguments use the rhetoric that was effective in his setting.)

Paul thus challenges not Jewish people or Jewish views as a whole but some Jewish attitudes and practices. He does this most often in letters such as Romans and Galatians where he addresses the relationship of Gentile believers to Israel's heritage. For the Jewish people, observance of the *law was a matter of culture regardless of views about salvation. For Gentile converts, however, imposing observance of the law's Israel-specific markers as a condition of belonging to Christ's community raised starkly the question of what believers rely on for salvation. Paul recognized Christ as the way of salvation and dependence on him as its necessary condition. For Paul, the *Spirit provides the inward circumcision and law that meets what outward circumcision and observance of ancient regulations could only symbolize or approximate (cf. Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-27).

Situation. Although Jesus's movement in Rome started among Jewish believers (cf. Acts 2:10), most of the believers in Rome by the time Paul writes were probably Gentiles (cf. Rom 1:5; 11:13; 16:4; esp. 1:13), possibly because many of the Jewish Christian leaders had been temporarily expelled for half a decade (see comment on Acts 18:2). Sometime in the 40s A.D., probably in 49, the emperor Claudius expelled some or much of the Jewish community from Rome, apparently over debates about the *Christ (cf. Suetonius, *Life of Claudius* 25.4). The Roman church was thus composed largely of Gentiles until Claudius's death in A.D. 54, when his edict was automatically repealed, and a number of Jewish Christians returned to Rome (Rom 16:3). Jewish and Gentile Christians (as well as Gentiles influenced by

Jews, and lax Jews less observant of the law) had different cultural ways of expressing their faith in Jesus (cf. Rom 14); Paul thus uses the *gospel to address, among other matters, a church experiencing tension between two valid cultural expressions of the Christian faith.

Paul probably wrote Romans around 55–58 (I tend to favor closer to 58), shortly after Claudius's death. A decade after Claudius's death and perhaps six years (give or take two) after Paul wrote this letter, Christians of all ethnic backgrounds would suffer together in Rome (*Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44). That the church remained strong after Nero killed hundreds testifies to how much the movement had grown.

Theme. Paul's gospel, or good news, was the message about Jesus that could save Jew and Gentile alike (Rom 1:16-17). Given the situation noted above, what the Roman Christians needed was what we could call ethnic reconciliation and cross-cultural sensitivity in Christ. Paul reminds Jewish hearers that they are as damned without *Christ as Gentiles (chaps. 1–3); that spiritual, not ethnic, descent from Abraham is what matters with respect to personal salvation (chaps. 4, 9); that all people (including Abraham's ethnic descendants) are also descended from the sinner Adam (5:12-21); and that the law does not justify Israel (chaps. 7, 10). He reminds Gentiles that they were grafted into Judaism and therefore dare not be anti-Jewish (chap. 11) and that they must respect the practices of their Jewish siblings (chap. 14). Christ (15:1-13) and Paul (15:14-33) are agents of ethnic reconciliation, and unity (16:17-20) is the paramount issue. Paul wants them to accept each other and glorify God together (15:5-12; in 15:9-12 he offers his strongest and climactic texts supporting Gentile salvation).

Paul also explains in this letter that he has not yet visited them because his mission to the unreached is urgent (Rom 15:20-22); the same mission will require him to move beyond them to reach Spain (Rom 15:23-24; cf. 1:13-14). Both of these missions, however, are also part of Paul's vision of reaching all peoples for Christ.

Genre. Some scholars have argued that Paul's letter to the Romans is a letter-essay, explaining his gospel without relating to the specific needs of the Roman church. In view of the previous discussion of situation and theme, however, it seems that Paul lays out the facts of the gospel in chapters 1–11 and then summons his readers to reconciliation and mutual service in chapters 12–15; thus the letter functions more like "deliberative" rhetoric, an argument intended to persuade the readers to change their behavior.

Subsequent History. Protestants have traditionally stressed justification by faith, a doctrine emphasized in Romans and Galatians, because Luther found this doctrine helpful in addressing indulgences and other ecclesiastical corruptions in his day. But it is important to understand not only this doctrine but also why Paul needs to stress it. Most Jews already believed that the Jewish people as a whole were saved by God's grace, and most Jewish *Christians* recognized that this grace was available

only through Christ; the issue was on what terms *Gentiles* could become part of God's people. Did they need to become ethnically Jewish (adopting circumcision and Israel-specific laws) to become spiritual children of Abraham? In arguing for the ethnic unity of the body of Christ, Paul argues that all people come to God on the same terms, no matter what their background. Not even outward observance of God's law can make one right before God's justice; only through Jesus can people be righted. Paul may stress justification by faith, a truth most of his readers would know, in part so he can emphasize reconciliation with one another, a reality they still need to learn.

Commentaries. Detailed commentaries providing significant background include Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary,* with Roy D. Kotansky, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); James D. G. Dunn, *Romans,* WBC 38A and B, 2 vols. (Dallas: Word, 1988); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* AB 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993); Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans,* BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). Works on a mid-level range include Brendan Byrne, *Romans,* SP 6 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996); Charles H. Talbert, *Romans,* SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002); and Thomas H. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts: The Argument of Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004). A helpful shorter commentary with background is Craig S. Keener, *Romans* NCC 6 (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009); for an introduction to issues in the book, see, e.g., Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). For views on the background, see especially Karl P. Donfried, ed., *The Romans Debate,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991); Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976). E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), provides a helpful corrective to earlier criticisms of Jewish views on the law, although some details of his approach are now much debated; for Paul's view on the law in Romans, see, e.g., C. Thomas Rhyne, *Faith Establishes the Law,* SBLDS 55 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1981).

1:1-7
Introduction

Letters customarily opened with the name of the sender, the sender's titles (if any were necessary), the name of the addressees and a greeting. For example: "Paul . . . to the church at . . . greetings." Persuasive speeches often began by establishing the speaker's credibility, what the Greeks called *ethos.* This beginning did not prove the speaker's point but disposed the audience to hear him respectfully.

1:1. Paul's name was normally a cognomen held by Roman citizens, rarely if ever used by Jews who were not Roman citizens, so his citizenship would likely be assumed (cf. Acts 16:37). A slave of someone in high position had more status, authority and freedom than a free commoner; the emperor's slaves were some of the highest-ranking people in the empire, as the Roman Christians would know. In the *Old Testament, prophets from Moses on were generally called "servants" or "slaves" of God.

The ideas of being "called" and "set apart" go back to Old Testament language for Israel and, more important here, Israel's prophets; for "*apostle," see the glossary.

1:2-3. When Israel's prophets proclaimed "good news," they could associate it with the restoration of God's people (Is 52:7), which the prophets elsewhere associated with the ultimate Davidic ruler and the *resurrection (Ezek 37:1-14). "Through his prophets" concurs with the Jewish doctrine of the Old Testament's inspiration and final authority; "according to the flesh" (NASB) means simply that Jesus was physically descended from David.

1:4. "Spirit of holiness" was a common Jewish name for the *Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. A regular *synagogue prayer regarded the future resurrection of the dead as the ultimate demonstration of God's power. Although Romans could hear the phrase "*Son of God" as portraying Jesus as a rival to the emperor, this letter is full of quotations from the Old Testament, where it referred to the Davidic line, thus ultimately to the promised Jewish king (see 1:3; cf. 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; 89:27). Paul here regards Jesus' resurrection as the Spirit's coronation of him as the *Messiah and as humanity's first taste of the future resurrection and *kingdom.

1:5-6. The prophets promised that a representative remnant from among the nations would turn to God (Is 2:2; 11:10; 19:23-25; 42:1, 6; 49:6; Zech 2:11). Paul applies to these believers biblical language for God's people, such as "called" (1:6-7) and "consecrated ones" (1:7).

1:7. "*Saints" or "those who have been set apart" or "consecrated" goes back to the Old Testament image of God's people as set apart for himself. Like Paul (see comment on 1:1), they too are "called" (1:6-7); Paul embraces them as fellow heirs in the mission, not as inferiors.

The standard Greek greeting was "greetings" (*chairein*—Jas 1:1), a term related to "*grace" (*charis*); Jewish people greeted one another with "peace," and Jewish letters sometimes began, "Greetings and peace" (2 Maccabees 1:1; for "mercy and peace," see **2 *Baruch* 78:2-3*). Paul adapts this standard greeting, a well-wishing, into a Christian prayer: "The grace and peace of God and Jesus be with you." (On "wish-prayers," see comment on 1 Thess 3:11.) Placing the Father and Jesus on equal footing as providers of grace and peace elevated Jesus above the role given to any mere human in most of Judaism. "Father" was also a title for God in Judaism (usually "our Father").

1:8-17
Paul's Thanksgiving

Although less pervasive than prayers and reports of prayers, thanksgivings sometimes appeared in the openings of the bodies of ancient letters; when Paul omits one (Galatians) it is conspicuous.

1:8. "All roads lead to Rome"; due to the connections of the whole empire with Rome, Christians everywhere knew about the faith of believers in the capital.

1:9. Letters commonly included an opening prayer (cf. 1:7) or the report of prayer. For "in my spirit" (NASB; NIV) the modern idiom would be "from the bottom of my heart," "with all my heart" (GNT; NLT). It was common to call as witness the one who knew one's heart—God. Recurrent prayer was sometimes described as "remembering," "reminding" or making mention to God.

1:10. On "by God's will" or "if God wills," see comment on Acts 18:20; on Paul's plans to go to Rome, see Acts 19:21 (the following

chapters of Acts relate how he finally got there).

1:11-12. Longing to see a friend was a conventional matter to mention in ancient letters, which were used to convey a sense of one's presence when the writer and reader were (as often) far apart.

1:13. Addresses such as "beloved" or "brothers and sisters" were common in letters. On "*Gentiles," see comment on 1:5-6, although in 1:13-15 one should keep in mind Paul's special call to the Gentiles (11:13). Earlier the banning of Jews or at least prominent Jewish Christians from Rome (Acts 18:2) could have delayed Paul's coming, but ultimately the delay stems from his mission (Rom 15:20-22).

1:14-15. Gentiles (1:13) included two categories, by the Greek division: Greeks considered everyone else in the world "barbarians" (cf. "non-Greeks"—NIV); they also often considered themselves wise and others foolish. Some educated Jewish people classed themselves as Greeks, but Greeks considered them barbarians. Paul will introduce the Jewish division of humanity in verse 16, but here he uses the Greek one; in both cases, he affirms that God is for all peoples.

1:16. Verses 16-17 seem to be the *propositio,* or thesis statement, which begins Paul's argument. Paul stresses that the good news of salvation (especially Israel's deliverace in Is 52:7) is for all peoples (see discussion of the situation in the introduction to Romans); if to both Jews and Greeks (Greeks were often the most anti-Jewish), then to all peoples between Jews and Greeks.

1:17. In Greek the term translated "righteousness" often means "justice." With reference to God, in the *Old Testament and in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, "God's righteousness" includes that aspect of his character on account of which he vindicates his people and shows their faithfulness to him to be right; sometimes it also expresses his mercy (e.g., Dan 9:16). Thus it relates to "justification," or legal acquittal and vindication. (In Romans, many English versions translate the same Greek word as both "righteousness" and "justification.") Because God's creative word brings into being, his verdict in practice is also transformative.

The Hebrew and Greek versions of Habakkuk 2:4 differ on a pronoun, which Paul thus omits (since the disputed detail is irrelevant to his argument anyway). In the context of Habakkuk 2:4, the righteous are those who will survive the judgment because they have faith (i.e., are faithful to God). (Biblical saving faith was not passive assent but actively staking one's life on the claims of God. It was a certainty sufficient to affect one's lifestyle; cf. Rom 1:5.) Paul apparently applies this text to those who trust in *Christ and so are saved from the final judgment. That his contemporary readers would understand his application is made clear by the similar application of Habakkuk 2:4 in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

1:18-23
Willful Idolaters

Paul's argument is similar to one in the Wisdom of Solomon, a popular Jewish work widely circulated by this period. His arguments would thus have been easy for his readers to follow. Jewish people viewed idolatry (1:18-23) and sexual misconduct (1:24-27), particularly homosexual intercourse (1:26-27), as sins committed by *Gentiles; Paul sets them up for condemnation of vices they too may have shared in 1:28-32.

1:18. "Heaven" was a Jewish circumlocution for God, and the phrase here is a typically Jewish way of saying "God is angry." (That wrath is "revealed" parallels the revealing of God's merciful righteousness in the *gospel in v. 17.) The truth that the wicked suppress is the truth of God's character (1:19-20), which they distort by idolatry (1:23).

1:19-22. *Stoic philosophers argued that the nature of God was evident in creation; most Gentile intellectuals affirmed divine design in nature. *Cicero at that time could even assert that no race of humanity was so uncivilized as to deny the existence of the gods, and along with others he argued that the human mind points to what God is like. Jewish people scattered throughout the Greco-Roman world used this sort of argument to persuade pagans to recognize the true God. Even later *rabbis tell delightful stories about how Abraham reasoned back to the first cause and showed his fellow Gentiles that there was really only one true God. According to Jewish tradition, God had given seven laws to Noah, for which all humanity was responsible (in-

cluding the prohibition of idolatry). But unlike Israel, who had to keep all 613 commandments in the *law (according to later rabbinic count), most Gentiles disobeyed even the laws of Noah. In a social world built around benefaction and honor, ingratitude (1:21) was one of the worst offenses, and grateful expressions of honor the one obligation expected of recipients of gifts.

1:23. Even Greeks disdained animal images of deities (practiced by the Egyptians), but Greeks worshiped deities in human form. In later Jewish tradition, idolatry was the final stage of sin to which the evil impulse (see comment on 7:10-11) would reduce a person; it was one of the worst sins. Yet the language Paul uses to describe *pagan* idolatry is drawn from *Old Testament passages about *Israel's* idolatry (Deut 4:16-20; Ps 106:20; Jer 2:11); this is a setup for his argument for Jewish readers in chapter 2.

1:24-32
Other Pagan Deeds

Pagan gods acted immorally in the popular myths; one who worshiped them (1:23) would end up acting the same way. Having distorted God's image (1:23), which was originally in male and female humans (Gen 1:26-27), humanity now distorted its own sexuality (Rom 1:24-27). Ancient Jewish people recognized that both idolatry and sexual immorality characterized *Gentiles.

1:24-25. The refrain "God gave them over" (1:24, 26, 28) suggests how God's wrath (1:18) works: he lets people damn themselves as they warp their own humanity. As in the *Old Testament, God can turn people over to their own hardness of heart (e.g., Is 6:9-11; 29:9-12; Jer 44:25-27; some writers have called this "penal blindness"); cf. Psalm 81:12 (about Israel).

1:26-27. Greek men were often bisexual; not only was homosexual behavior approved (some writers, like speakers in *Plato's *Symposium,* preferred it to heterosexual behavior), but elements of the culture socialized boys in this direction. Probably due to a deficiency in the number of women (which many attribute to female infanticide), marriages were often made between thirty-year-old men and women who were eighteen or even younger; husbands usually did not respect them. Men had access to only three forms of sexual release until such late marriages: slaves, prostitutes and other males. Men often preferred boys on the edge of puberty or adolescents. Lesbianism, though less widely reported, is also attested.

Although many upper-class Romans were affected by Greek ideals, some other Romans, including a number of Roman philosophers, disliked homosexual practice. Greco-Roman moralists sometimes opposed gender reversal as "against nature," which would resemble the Jewish argument from God's original purposes in creation (Gen 2:18). This argument appealed to the procreative function of intercourse in nature and the way that male and female organs fit together. Jewish people, whose Scriptures already condemned homosexual acts wherever they were mentioned (including Lev 18:22; 20:13), also borrowed the argument that homosexual acts were "against nature" (cf., e.g., *Philo, *Life of Abraham* 135-37; *Special Laws* 3.37-39; *Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.273-75; *Pseudo-Phocylides 190-92). Although Jewish texts speak of Jewish adulterers and thieves, they nearly always treat homosexual behavior as a Gentile practice. (Socialization affected sexual development.)

Paul did not choose this example of sin to be controversial with his readers; his Jewish and Roman Christian readers alike would have agreed with him that both idolatry and homosexual behavior are sinful. But this example is a setup for his critique of sins less often denounced (Rom 1:28-32).

1:28-32. Ancient writers (Greek, Roman, Jewish; cf. also Lev 18) sometimes employed "vice lists," as here. Like skillful ancient speakers, Paul drives home the point with both repetition and variation: "filled with" four fundamental evils; "full of" five kinds of sin; listing eight samples of sinners; and noting that they lack four crucial virtues. But unlike idolatry and homosexuality (Rom 1:18-27), sins like greed, jealousy, slander, arrogance and ignorance also occur in Jewish lists as sins some Jewish people committed. Like Amos (see Amos 1–2), Paul here sets up his readers for chapter 2: Gentiles are not the only ones who are damned.

2:1-11
No Partiality

Not only *Gentiles (1:18-32) but also Jewish people (2:1-29) sinned. Paul engages in a lively *diatribe style (a common ancient teaching style), by using rhetorical questions and especially by challenging an imaginary opponent. Paul thus demolishes possible objections to his position in a vivid manner.

2:1-3. Speakers often argued on the basis of syllogisms, which consisted of a major premise (here, 2:1), a minor premise (2:2) and a conclusion (2:3). Both philosophers and Jewish teachers accepted that people should live what they preach, hence few could dispute Paul's point. Philosophers saw sin as a moral folly, and Jewish teachers saw it as an affront to God but as universal. Paul demands that people be consistent with their denunciations, which meant taking sin more seriously than most people did. Skilled speakers would sometimes single out a hearer (2:1, 3); cf. Isaiah 22:17; Micah 6:8.

2:4. The *Old Testament and Judaism agreed that only God's *grace made *repentance possible (e.g., Deut 30:6). This principle never denied a person's responsibility to respond to that grace once it was offered (e.g., Deut 5:29; 10:16).

2:5. The Old Testament prophets often referred to "the day of wrath" (the "day of the Lord"), when God sat as judge in his court and judged the world by his justice (e.g., Is 2:11-12; 13:6, 9, 13; Ezek 7:19; 30:2-3; Joel 1:15; 2:1-2, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18-20; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7; 1:14–2:2; Mal 3:2; 4:5). Some Jewish traditions speak of treasuring up good works for the future, but the *rhetorical opponent Paul addresses here has stored up the opposite (cf. Deut 32:34-35; Hos 13:12).

2:6-11. On verse 6, cf. Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12. The structure of this passage is chiastic (i.e., inverted parallelism, an ancient literary form): God's impartiality (vv. 6, 11); to doers of good (vv. 7a, 10b), future rewards (vv. 7b, 10a); to the wicked (vv. 8a, 9b), punishment (vv. 8b, 9a).

Justice in judging was widely emphasized, and Judaism commonly stressed God's impartiality (although Israel's preferential treatment at the day of judgment was also explained as righteous); cf. Deuteronomy 10:17. Judaism also acknowledged that the wise person worked for long-range rewards (Rom 2:7; cf. Prov 21:21; 22:4).

2:12-16
Stricter Judgment

Paul's point is that everyone should know better than to sin, but those with more access to the truth will be judged far more strictly than those without. Woe to those who thought themselves righteous by comparing themselves with others! Judaism was right that most pagans did evil; but Jewish people knew God's standard better than the pagans and still did evil. This point underlines Paul's argument of the common predicament of Jews and Gentiles under sin.

2:12. Paul is stricter than most of Judaism here. Most Jews acknowledged that Gentiles could be saved simply by keeping the most crucial commandments (what some traditions called the Noahide commandments; see comment on 1:19-20), because they did not have the whole *law. Paul argues that anyone who has sinned with or without the law will be strictly judged (unless *atonement for the sin is accepted in Christ, as he argues in 3:24-26).

2:13. Jewish teachers agreed that hearing the law was not enough; one must also obey it. Few would challenge Paul's argument on this point.

2:14-16. Paul plays on the Greco-Roman philosophical view of the law of nature written in people's hearts, according to which all people had some measure of innate knowledge of right and wrong, although it was less explicit than the written law. (Greek moralists and especially *Stoic thinkers heavily emphasized the knowledge of the "conscience.") That they could know enough to do right some of the time renders them without excuse for ever doing wrong. Only when God's law is fully written on the heart in *Christ (8:2; Jer 31:33) will it be internalized enough for people to live out God's righteousness.

2:17-24
Disobeying the Law

This *diatribe style often used by philosophers was meant to teach and exhort rather than to attack; the imaginary opponent represents an

idealized wrong position, which the speaker or writer destroys *reductio ad absurdum* (by reducing it to its absurd logical conclusion). The opponent of 2:17-29 is the idealized hypocrite but points out the evils of any measure of hypocrisy. (Similar attacks were made on "pretentious philosophers" in Greco-Roman diatribes.)

2:17-18. Jewish sages often warned that sages should be humble and not boast in their knowledge. But Israel could boast in their sole possession of the *law, because they alone worshiped the one true God. Ancient communication valued repetition to drive home a point; in 2:17-20 Paul offers eleven claims for the interlocutor.

2:19-20. Some of Paul's language here comes from the *Old Testament (Is 42:6-7; cf. 42:18-20).

2:21-23. Appealing to ancient *rhetoric and communication ideals, Paul in 2:21-23 drives home his point with antithesis (contrasting points) and the technique of starting and ending with parallel language (x . . . y/x . . . y). Diatribe often used brief, pointed rhetorical questions. Philosophers typically reviled the inconsistency of their hearers' lifestyles. Temple robbery was considered one of the most impious crimes, and even though Jewish teachers warned against disturbing pagan temples, pagans sometimes thought Jews inclined toward such crimes (Acts 19:37). But those who would rob temples would have to value their contents.

2:24. In the context of Isaiah 52:5, *Gentiles blasphemed God because of Israel's suffering; here they do so because of Israel's sin (cf. Ezek 36:20-23). Jewish teachers complained that public sin profaned God's name among the Gentiles; misbehaving Jews could bring reproach on the whole Jewish community. (A case in point, possibly known to much of Paul's audience, was a charlatan in Rome a generation earlier whose behavior had led to the expulsion of Jews from Rome under Tiberius; *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.81-84.)

2:25-29
True Judaism

Moses had complained that Israel was uncircumcised in heart (Lev 26:41), and the prophets had reinforced this conviction (Jer 4:4; 9:25-26; cf. Is 51:7). God's people were responsible to circumcise their hearts (Deut 10:16), and someday God would circumcise their hearts (Deut 30:6). Later *rabbis commented little on this issue; Paul makes it central and defines religious Judaism in terms of possession of the *Spirit (Rom 2:29; an internalized law—8:2; cf. Ezek 36:27), the heart of God's covenant to which outward circumcision could merely point as an external symbol. Both Jewish and Greco-Roman writers emphasized caring what the deity thinks, not what other people think (Rom 2:29). In verse 29, Paul might play on the meaning of "Judah" ("praise"), from which the title translated "Jew" comes.

3:1-8
God's Justice: Why Then Israel?

Jewishness was special—but not for salvation. Some might object that Paul thinks God had been unfaithful to his covenant, in which case God would be unjust; but Paul argues that Israel, not God, had been unfaithful to the covenant.

3:1. These are the objections of the imaginary interlocutor, a common device for furthering one's argument in a *diatribe (see comment on 2:1-11). The objections are reasonable: was not Israel a special, chosen people? Determining "profit" (KJV) or "benefit" (NASB) was a common device among philosophers for evaluating the worth of a behavior or idea.

3:2. *Digression, even long digression, was a normal part of Greco-Roman writing; Paul develops and completes this "first of all" only in chapter 9. Judaism often emphasized that God entrusted his *law to Israel, and Paul here agrees.

3:3. "What then?" (NASB) was a common *rhetorical question used to further the argument of a diatribe. God's faithfulness to his covenant was good long-term news for Israel as a whole; as in the *Old Testament (e.g., in Moses' generation, contrary to some Jewish tradition); however, it did not save individual Israelites who broke covenant with him.

3:4. "May it never be!" (NASB) or "Not at all!" (NIV) was also a common rhetorical retort to the rhetorical questions of imaginary opponents (especially in some philosophers like *Epictetus). It was used to show the absurdity of the opposing objection. Paul declares that

God's justice is ultimately unassailable, as wrongdoers must confess (quoting Ps 51:4). "Everyone is a liar" comes from Psalm 116:11; as part of the familiar Hallel psalms, it may have been recognized by his audience.

3:5-6. God's "righteousness" here is his "justice" (NRSV), as defined in terms of his faithfulness to his covenant word to Israel (3:3).

3:7. "Sinner" was an awful insult in Jewish circles; for Paul to call *everyone* sinners (Rom 1–2) would be shocking. God could be glorified and his justice vindicated even by its contrast with human rebellion, but this point in no way vindicated the rebellion.

3:8. Philosophers also often had to clear up misrepresentations of their teaching. Cf. Acts 21:21.

3:9-18
Proof from Scripture

Some would string together texts ("pearl stringing") with common elements at the opening of *synagogue homilies and in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, though rarely at such length as here. Paul draws especially passages from the Psalms, most linked by the common element of body parts mentioned, and some mentioning death. The Psalms passages apply mostly to enemies; only the quotation from Isaiah 59:7-8 (in Rom 3:15-17) contextually applied to all of Israel. Linking the texts *midrashically, however, allows Paul to draw on the language of all of them.

3:9. Another objection from the imaginary protester allows Paul to return to his argument that Jew and *Gentile are equally in need of salvation. To be "under" sin was idiomatic for being subject to its rule.

3:10-12. Here Paul quotes Psalm 14:1-3 (= 53:1-3; cf. 1 Kings 8:46; Ps 130:3; 143:2; Prov 20:9; Eccles 7:20). Because the psalm repeats twice the line "no one does kindness," Paul changes one to "no one righteous" to connect with his larger argument; Jewish teachers commonly adapted the language of texts accordingly.

3:13-18. The principle for attaching these proof texts to one another is similar to the rabbinic principle of *gezerah shavah* (which linked Old Testament texts by a key word). All these verses mention body parts: throat, tongue, lips, mouth (3:13-14; respectively, Ps 5:9; 10:7; 140:3), feet (Rom 3:15-17; Is 59:7-8) and eyes (Rom 3:18; Ps 36:1). Jewish teachers emphasized that the evil impulse (see comment on 7:10-11) ruled all the parts of the body (by later enumeration, 248 parts). The preponderance of mouth-related sins here may be intentional, especially if Roman Christians are complaining about each other (see chap. 14).

3:19-31
The Law and Righteousness

3:19. Paul's use of Scripture shows that Jews as well as *Gentiles are sinful. The Jewish people were those "under" (see comment on v. 9) the *law; "the law" could loosely include the Psalms and the Prophets (the rest of the *Old Testament), as in 3:10-18. People were "silenced" in a law court when they could raise no objections in their own defense (cf. Ps 107:42; Job 40:4-5; 42:6).

3:20. Most of Judaism also agreed that all people sinned sometimes and that they needed God's *grace; although some Jews suggested exceptions, they considered them extremely rare. Paul here forces his readers to be consistent and to recognize that Gentiles would thus be saved on the same terms as Jews. This verse echoes Psalm 143:2, which pleads for God's mercy based on his righteousness and faithfulness (143:1). The Greek text has literally "all flesh will not be justified" (for which most translations use some variant of the less awkward English "no flesh will be justified"—NASB); "all flesh" is a standard Hebrew expression for all humanity (or, in some contexts, for all creatures). The sense of "works of the law" is debated here, as in a *Qumran text (4QMMT); probably it evokes biblical language about "doing" the law, hence remains general, though Jewish distinctives would reinforce Paul's point the most.

3:21. "The Law and the Prophets" was one way to speak of the whole Old Testament; in chapter 4 Paul will argue how these texts teach righteousness by faith (v. 22). But God's justice is not dependent on human performance of the law and thus not based on an advantage available only to Israel (3:2). Jewish teachers believed that Israel was special with regard to salvation and that their reception of the law at Sinai vindicated God's choice of them.

3:22. "No distinction" (NASB, NRSV) among sinners refers to Jew and Gentile; both must approach God on the same terms, through Jesus Christ. This statement challenges the values behind the tensions in the Roman *church (see discussion of the situation in the introduction to Romans).

3:23. Judaism viewed "sin" as a moral offense against God (in contrast to the less dramatic usual Greek sense of the term). Jewish sources agreed that everyone sinned (with rare exceptions, like a young child); Greek moralists said that some faults were inevitable. Although the matter may be debated, "falling short of God's glory" here might allude to the Jewish idea that humanity lost God's glory when Adam sinned (cf. 5:12-21).

3:24. "Redemption" (freeing a slave) was a standard Old Testament concept; the Old Testament terms often involve the paying of a price. God "redeemed" Israel, making them his people by grace and by paying a price for their freedom (the Passover lamb and the firstborn of Egypt), before he gave them his commandments (cf. Ex 20:2). In Paul's day, the Jewish people were looking forward to the messianic redemption, when they would be delivered from earthly rulers; but the malevolent ruler here is sin (3:9).

3:25. The term here translated "propitiation" (NASB) or "sacrifice of *atonement" (NRSV) refers to the mercy seat, the cover of the ark of the covenant (in the *Septuagint). This site was consecrated to God by blood each year on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:14-15); "blood" here therefore presumably interprets Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice. Some other early Jewish sources used the image for a person's death that turned away God's wrath from Israel (*4 Maccabees 17:22). Although in Jewish tradition prayers, alms and other good deeds could turn away wrath (Sirach 3:3, 20; 32:1-3; Wisdom of Solomon 18:20-21), the law also required bloodshed: something had to die to appease the wrath properly due a person's sin. God mercifully "passed over" (Ex 12:13) sins before the cross, in anticipation of the sacrifice that would take place there. (One might compare the rabbinic view that *repentance defers judgment until the Day of Atonement atones for sin, although nothing in the text suggests that Paul has this idea in mind here.)

3:26. To the Greek mind, justice meant "fair [but not necessarily equal] distribution" (the inequality of justice may be illustrated in that Roman justice assigned higher penalties to lower social classes); it was nevertheless agreed that magistrates should rule according to "justice." Judaism emphasized God's justice and recognized that he, like a just judge, could not simply acquit the guilty. Later rabbis in time developed a rift in God's character: his attribute of mercy pleaded before him on Israel's behalf, triumphing over the accusations of his attribute of justice.

Paul allows no such rift; he says that God could be just and simultaneously vindicate as just those who depend on Jesus, only because the sentence of wrath was executed on Jesus in their place (3:25). The rest of Judaism believed in God's grace; the differences between Paul and his Jewish contemporaries here are that Paul insists that this grace came at such a great price to God, and that Gentiles can receive it on the same terms as Jewish people.

3:27-28. "Principle" (in an older version of the NIV) read a particular theological position into the translation in spite of the context. Instead, Paul probably poses two ways of approaching the "law" (NASB; current NIV): by human effort or by faith (cf. 7:6; 8:2; 9:31-32). Faith is the right way, which the law itself teaches (3:21, 31).

3:29-30. The basic confession of Judaism was God's oneness (Deut 6:4). Paul thus argues: if there is only one God, he must also be God of the Gentiles (see Is 45:21-25).

3:31. Jewish teaching contrasted "annulling" and "establishing" the law. Ancient writers often used transitions between preceding and following points. Because the law teaches righteousness by faith (as Paul goes on to argue in chap. 4), anyone who teaches this idea upholds the law.

4:1-22
Abraham Made Righteous by Faith

As Israel's ancestor, Abraham was regarded as the model for their faith; later *rabbis also regarded him as the model *proselyte (convert to Judaism), because he was considered a *Gentile before his circumcision. Jewish readers believed that they had been chosen in Abraham and that virtually every Israelite

would be saved by God's *grace if they maintained the covenant. Gentiles who wished to become part of the chosen community, however, had to be circumcised and join Israel in doing the righteous deeds of the *law, as Abraham did.

This section is a good Jewish *midrash, or commentary, on Genesis 15:6. Jewish and Greco-Roman debaters often proved their cases by examples, and this text was a favorite example used by ancient Jewish teachers.

4:1. *Diatribes typically used *rhetorical questions such as "What shall we say then?" as transitions to the next point. Jewish tradition spoke repeatedly of "our father Abraham."

4:2. If anyone was righteous in Jewish tradition, it was surely Abraham. The model *Pharisee, he served God from love; the model proselyte, he brought many other Gentiles to faith in the one true God. He destroyed idols and stood for God's truth. These extrabiblical Jewish traditions often declared that Abraham's merit sustained or rescued Israel in subsequent generations.

4:3. Rabbis regularly offered biblical citations, sometimes prefacing them with, "What does Scripture say?" Jewish teachers often commented on Abraham's faith as reflected in Genesis 15:6, which they read as "faithfulness," one of his works. Paul reads it contextually as dependence on God's promise and stresses the word "reckon" (NASB) or "credit" (NIV), a bookkeeping term used in ancient business documents for crediting payment to one's account.

4:4-5. Still expounding Genesis 15:6, Paul refers here to Abraham. As just judge, God was not believed to acquit the guilty (Ex 23:7), so Paul's declaration is rhetorically provocative, calling attention to transformed status in Christ. When God the just judge "reckons righteousness" to someone, he acquits them as not guilty. But this idea is not merely legal: when God speaks, he creates a new reality (Gen 1:3); see Romans 6:1-11.

4:6-8. Using the Jewish interpretive principle *gezerah shavah,* which links different texts containing the same key word or phrase, Paul introduces Psalm 32:1-2, which he uses to explain what "reckons" means. Omitting the next line on moral righteousness (not yet relevant to his point), Paul recognizes that the "reckoning" of the psalm is based on God's grace rather than on the psalmist's perfection (Ps 32:5). Psalm 32 was ascribed to David; Paul now has both Abraham and David as witnesses to his case.

4:9. The "blessedness" (NIV) or "blessing" (NASB) here is that of which 4:7-8 spoke; in standard Jewish fashion, Paul expounds the details of the text he has cited.

4:10. Here Paul appeals to another Jewish interpretive rule (one we also value today)—context. Abraham was made righteous by faith over thirteen years before he was circumcised (Gen 15:6; 16:3-4, 16; 17:24-25; some Jewish interpreters made this even longer—twenty-nine years). This fact challenged the great significance Judaism gave to circumcision, although Jewish teachers were correct that the *Old Testament had used it as the mark of the covenant. Abraham's faith was surely greater years later when he offered up Isaac, and presumably also at the circumcision, but he already had justifying faith before God in Genesis 15:6.

4:11-12. Circumcision was the "sign" of the covenant (Gen 17:11; **Jubilees* 15:26); but Paul interprets it also as a sign of Abraham's *prior* righteousness according to Genesis 15:6. It was a sign of the covenant and not the covenant relationship itself. Many Jewish ears would recoil at Paul's argument, which makes Gentile Christians full heirs of Abraham without either circumcision or ethnic descent from Abraham. It is one thing to say that uncircumcised Gentiles could be saved if they kept basic Noahide laws, as many Jews believed (especially avoiding idolatry and immorality); it is quite another to put them on the same level as the Jewish people—apparently treating them as proselytes without circumcision. People often spoke of those whose ways one imitated as one's figurative ancestors.

4:13. Abraham was told that he would inherit the "land"; but in Hebrew the word for "the land" also means "the earth," and Jewish interpreters had long been declaring that Abraham and his descendants would "inherit" the whole world to come.

4:14-16. Paul forces the reader to choose between completed righteousness by faith (based on God's grace; Judaism acknowledged grace) and completed righteousness by a knowledge of the law, which would have made

Israel more righteous than the Gentiles, regardless of faith.

4:17. Judaism agreed that God could speak things into being (e.g., Gen 1:3). Paul says that God's promise to Abraham was thus enough to transform Gentiles into his children (especially because God decreed Abraham father of many nations just before telling him to be circumcised—Gen 17:5).

4:18-22. Faith as defined in Abraham's experience is not passive assent to what God says; it is an enduring dependence on God's promise, on which one stakes one's life and lives accordingly. On the level of meaning, Paul and James (Jas 2:14-26) would agree. Faith stronger than death (4:19) prepares for the application in 4:24.

4:23–5:11
The Believer Declared Righteous

No one could boast before God (2:17; 3:27; 4:2), but there is cause for a different kind of boast in hope of restored glory (5:2; cf. 3:23), in tribulation (5:3) and in God through *Christ (5:11).

4:23-25. Paul begins to apply his exposition about Abraham to his readers (the application carries through 5:11). Ancient teachers (Jewish and Greco-Roman) often used examples to exhort their hearers or readers to think and act differently. Paul might allude here to language from Isaiah 53:5-12. The two clauses of 4:25 are rhetorically balanced, but they address different kinds of causes (the second being a goal, what some ancients considered a teleological cause).

5:1. "Peace" meant a relationship of concord between two persons much more often than it meant individual tranquility; thus here Paul means that the believer is always on God's side.

5:2. "Hope of God's glory" might imply the restoration of Adam's "glory" (3:23; 5:12-21); it probably also evokes the *Old Testament prophecies that God would be glorified among his people (e.g., Is 40:3; 60:19; 61:3; 62:2).

5:3-4. Progressions like this one (tribulations, endurance, character, hope) represent a special literary and rhetorical form called concatenation (or climax, or sorites), also found in other texts. Again Paul demonstrates his skill in making his point in culturally relevant ways. Philosophers emphasized that hardships proved the quality of the wise person, who knew better than to be moved by them; the truly wise person should be tranquil in hardships. The Old Testament and Jewish tradition show men and women of God tested and matured by trials; nevertheless, the Old Testament also includes the internal struggles of its heroes, like Abraham, Sarah, David, Elijah and Jeremiah, rather than their continual tranquility.

5:5. Jewish people viewed the *Holy Spirit especially as the Spirit who had enabled the prophets to hear and speak for God. In this context, Paul means that the Spirit points to the cross (5:6-8) and so enables Christians to hear God's love for them. In many Jewish traditions, the Spirit was available only to those most worthy; here the Spirit is bestowed as a gift (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 9:17). On the Spirit being "poured out," see Joel 2:28; on not being ashamed of hope, cf. perhaps Psalm 119:116.

5:6-9. Well-educated Greco-Roman readers were aware of the Greek tradition in which "the good man" was extremely rare. Greeks considered laying down one's life for someone else (especially a friend) heroic, but such sacrifice was not common; among Jewish people it was not particularly praised. Blood was not a dominant part of death by crucifixion, so its mention probably evokes sacrifice; blood propitiating a deity (to turn away wrath, 5:9) was intelligible in ancient Israel, among Jews, Greeks and others.

5:10-11. Greeks spoke of people in opposition to one another being "reconciled," being made friends again, but did not speak of people being reconciled to *God*. The Jewish members of the Roman *church could be more familiar with this sort of language (from some early Jewish texts like 2 Maccabees 8:29). Sometimes *Gentiles sought to be "reconciled" to a deity by payments or reparations, but for the offended party, especially the all-powerful deity, to initiate reconciliation was highly unusual. Jewish teachers often used the "how much more" (5:10) form of argument.

5:12-21
A Common Heritage in Sin and Righteousness

Paul's Jewish readers might have argued for their unique descent from Abraham the

righteous (4:1–5:11), but Paul points them instead to their common descent with the *Gentiles from the line of Adam the sinner. His argument would have greater force to his Jewish readers than Genesis alone might imply, because their traditions had made Adam much more prominent than he had been in the *Old Testament (where he is rarely mentioned outside Genesis).

Jewish people in this period believed that Adam's sin introduced sin and thus death into the world, and most believed that all his descendants replicated his rebellion by sinning (**4 Ezra* 3:21; **2 Baruch* 18:1-2; 54:15, 19). Jewish interpreters generally believed that Adam's glory, lost at the Fall, would be restored to the righteous in the world to come. Later *rabbis expounded on Adam's immense size (some even claimed that he filled the whole earth!). (The structure of Genesis, from Adam to Noah [5:29; 9:1-2, 7] to Abraham [12:1-3] and so on, suggests that God was working to restore humanity, and from Abraham's line the deliverer of Gen 3:15 would finally come.)

5:12-14. "All sinned" (v. 12), even those who, unlike Adam (v. 14), had no direct law to disobey (v. 13). Paul is not, however, denying personal responsibility for sin on the part of Adam's descendants. Jewish writers claimed that Adam brought sin and death into the world (*4 Ezra* 7:118; *2 Baruch* 54:15), but they also believed that each of his descendants made his or her own choice to follow in Adam's footsteps (*4 Ezra* 3:21; 7:118-26; *2 Baruch* 18:1-2; 54:15), becoming each "our own Adam" (*2 Baruch* 54:19). Personification was a frequent literary technique, possibly applied here to Sin and Death.

5:15. Comparison of characters (not always of equal weight) and paired antitheses were familiar in ancient *rhetoric; as the letter was read allowed, this section would build to a rhetorical crescendo. The fivefold repetition of the term translated "transgression" or "trespass" in 5:15-20 would rhetorically reinforce the point. Biblical tradition sometimes viewed people in terms of corporate personality, one standing for many. All who were in Adam by birth became sinners; all who were in *Christ by true *baptism (6:4) became righteous.

5:16-21. On comparisons here, see comment on 5:15; comparisons were not, however, always between equals. Much of the argument of 5:15-21 is a standard Jewish argument, *qal vahomer,* an argument from lesser to greater ("how much more"). Greco-Roman logic also used this interpretive technique; many Jewish ways of arguing from Scripture were part of the general interpretive methodology of antiquity.

Jewish people believed that Israel would reign in the life of the world to come (cf. 5:17; Dan 7:22), as Adam and Eve reigned before the Fall (Gen 1:26-27).

6:1-11
Dead to Sin

6:1-5. This passage develops the implications of corporate personality in 5:15-21. For Jewish people, *baptism was the act by which non-Jews converted to Judaism, the final removal of *Gentile impurity; by it one turned one's back on life in paganism and sin, vowed to follow God's commandments, and became a new person with regard to Jewish *law. A person who became a follower of Jesus likewise gave up his or her old life; through participation with Christ's death, Paul says, their death to the old life in sin, which was crucified in Christ, is an accomplished fact.

6:6-7. The "old man" ("old self" in many translations) is life in Adam versus life in *Christ (5:12-21). Ancient sages often warned against slavery to passions, false ideas and the like. Manumission, or freeing slaves, was a very common practice in antiquity; death, of course, ended all obligations (as in 7:2-3). (Some note later rabbinic teaching that conversion to Judaism ended a Gentile's previous relationships, so that Jewish owners had to allow slaves' conversion only under special circumstances.)

6:8-10. Paul applies the implications of corporate union with Christ in 5:15-21. He might also think of the *eschatological character of faith in Christ (cf. 6:5); the end time would overthrow sin. (Later teachers believed that the "evil impulse" [see comment on 7:14-25] would trouble even the most pious until the time of the *Messiah, when the evil impulse would be slain.) For Paul, the Messiah has come, and sin's power has been killed.

6:11. The finished work of Christ means that the believer has already died to sin and

now needs to acknowledge this—to "reckon" it done in faith (6:11; this is the same term for God's reckoning righteousness in chap. 4). Ancient philosophers often believed that the most fundamental issue was reason, knowledge or understanding. They urged people to embrace the truthful view of reality, accepting wisdom. For Paul, this true wisdom is in Christ, and efficacious not by virtue of preconversion human character but because of what Christ has accomplished. One should embrace one's identity in terms of one's destiny with Christ, not one's past in Adam.

6:12-23
Free from Sin, Servants of Righteousness

As noted above, ancient sages often warned against slavery to passions, false ideas and the like.

6:12-13. In some contexts, "instruments" (NASB, NIV) could be translated "weapons," as in 13:12 (the sense here is debated).

6:14-21. Some scholars have seen here the idea of "sacral manumission": a slave could be freed from the service of one master by officially becoming the property of a god and the god's temple. What is much more clear is that many philosophers regularly used "slavery" and "freedom" in the sense of slavery to false ideas and pleasure, and freedom from such ideas and pleasure as well as from their consequences, like anxiety. Philosophers often emphasized being one's own master.

Judaism could speak of being free from sin. Later Jewish teachers believed that because Israel had the *law, the evil impulse that made the Gentiles sinful could not enslave them. They also taught that Israel had become God's slaves when they were freed from slavery in Egypt.

6:22. In the *Old Testament, Israel was "sanctified" (NASB, NRSV) or set apart as special for God; in standard Jewish teaching, *eternal life was the life of the world to come, inaugurated at the *resurrection from the dead.

6:23. Slaves could and often did receive some "wages." Although the slave's owner legally owned the slave's possessions, the slave could use this property or money (called a *peculium*), sometimes even to purchase freedom. That such wages were normally a positive symbol makes Paul's words here all the more striking. The "free gift" contrasts with such wages.

7:1-6
Dead to and Freed from the Law

The Jewish people believed that they were saved by God's gracious choosing, not by meticulous observation of the commandments. Nevertheless, most sought to keep the commandments as best they knew how, as part of their culture, and this set them apart from *Gentiles. Paul here addresses another major divider between Jew and Gentile in his effort to bring the two together (see the introduction to Romans), because even a Gentile who converted to Judaism would take years to know the *law as well as a Jewish person who had been raised in it did.

7:1. Some later Jewish teachers argued that one who converted to Judaism was a new person—to such an extent that one's former relatives no longer counted as relatives. Paul can use this line of reasoning differently: just as a person became dead to his or her old master (here, sin) at conversion (see comment on 6:1-5), that person became dead to the old law in which he or she was held.

7:2-4. According to biblical law, both death and divorce severed previous relationships; Paul emphasizes the one that fits his analogy in the context. (Because one never spoke of a woman's former husband as her "husband" after the divorce, no one would have understood Paul's words here as annulling certain kinds of divorce; cf. 1 Cor 7:15.) If Paul knew that some Jewish teachers envisioned the law as God's daughter, he shifts the image here; moreover, it is the believer, not the law, who has died (6:2-5). United with Christ's *resurrection and probably envisioned as now the bride of Christ, believers bear not physical offspring but "fruit."

7:5. Philosophers often contrasted reason (which was good) with the passions (which were bad); Jewish teachers came to speak of these in terms of the good and evil impulse. See comment on 7:15-25.

7:6. Most Jewish people felt that the full power of the *Spirit had departed from Israel with the prophets and would only return with the *Messiah's coming; here Paul contrasts the

new act of God in the coming of the Spirit with the old instructions only written on tablets (see Ezek 36:26-27; cf. Jer 31:31-34). Greek interpreters had traditionally distinguished between interpreting laws according to principles and according to exact wording; Palestinian Jewish interpretation was very interested in the exact wording (sometimes even literally to "letters" and spellings of words).

7:7-13
Sin Unfairly Exploited the Law

Scholars dispute whether Paul here refers literally to his own past life or uses "I" generically for sinners (or *Gentiles, or perhaps more likely, Israel) under the *law. Because there is more precedent for teachers using themselves in illustrations (e.g., Phil 3:4-8) than for them using "I" (as opposed to a *rhetorical "you" or "one") generically (but cf. 1 Cor 13:1), it is possible that Paul uses his own previous experience under law, viewed in retrospect, to illustrate life under law in general. What is clear is that Paul regards the law as good; the problem is human sin, and trying to make the law an instrument of self-improvement or salvation rather than a teacher of righteousness.

7:7-8. The opening rhetorical question is the natural one after the parallelism of 6:1-23 with 7:1-6. "You must not covet" is the tenth of the Ten Commandments, the only one that goes directly beyond one's actions to the state of one's heart. The point is that one might not regard coveting as transgressing God's law if one were not so informed by the law.

7:9. When a Jewish boy came of age around thirteen (as in the later *bar mitzvah,* similar to Roman coming-of-age rituals), he became officially responsible for keeping the commandments. Paul may refer to something even earlier in his life, because consciousness of violation would have preceded this; for example, many Jewish boys in financially secure Judean homes began to be schooled in the law at age five.

7:10-11. Jewish teachers recognized the power of human sin (the evil impulse), but said that study of the law enabled one to overcome it and (following, e.g., Deut 4:40; 8:1; Baruch 3:9; 4:1-2) that the law brings life. Paul says that the law became instead the vehicle of his death. (Some scholars think that "deceived" alludes to Eve in Gen 3:13. If Adam were speaking in the verse, it would fit Rom 5:12-21 better. Although "sinned and died" alludes back to 5:12-21, it is less clear that Paul alludes to Adam here. The verb for Eve's deception is common and differs from here.)

7:12-13. Paul argues in Romans that Jew and Gentile come to God on the same terms (see the introduction to Romans), and that the law is not a direct advantage for salvation (2:12-15), although it is valuable for knowing more *about* salvation (3:2, 31). His whole purpose in this section is to explain that the problem is not the law; it is human sinfulness that leads people to disobey the law in their hearts.

7:14-25
The Struggle of Human Effort Under the Law

Many commentators have thought that 7:14-25 describes Paul's struggle with sin at the time he was writing the passage, because he uses present-tense verbs; a majority of scholars, however, currently demur. *Diatribe style, which Paul uses in much of Romans, was graphic, and its historical presents create vividness and Paul has been describing his past life under *law (7:7-13). A number of scholars today also argue that this passage is *prosopopoiia,* in which one rhetorically speaks with the voice of another character, "impersonating" a person or thing, in this case Adamic humanity or (perhaps more likely) Israel under the law. (For a rhetorical use of "I," cf. 1 Cor 8:13; 10:29-30; 13:1-3, 11-12; perhaps Gal 2:18-21; "we" in Rom 6:1.) On this view, Paul could contrast the spiritual worthlessness of self-centered religious introspection (count the "I's" and "me's") in Romans 7 with the life of the Spirit by *grace in Romans 6 and 8.

Many philosophers (particularly *Stoics) portrayed a conflict between one's reason and one's bodily passions; they believed that proper knowledge produced change. Many *Diaspora Jews believed that learning the law helped them subdue passions. Jewish people spoke of an evil impulse, and later teachers of the law insisted that learning the law enabled one to overcome the evil impulse. In contrast to all such proposed solutions, Paul replies that

knowing moral truth had not freed him from sin. But Jewish people also expected sin to be eradicated in the day of judgment. As some *rabbis later put it, "God will take the evil impulse out in the sight of the nations and slay it"; or as Paul put it, Christians are dead to sin and freed from its power (chap. 6). Paul's point in the context is that one must receive righteousness (including the power to live rightly) as a gift of God's grace, not as an achievement by human effort (cf. 1:17; 8:4). (This reading of the passage accords with most Greek, as against most Latin, church fathers.)

7:14. On "flesh" (NASB, NRSV) in the sense of human sinfulness, see comment on 8:1-11. The *Old Testament spoke of God's selling his people into bondage to their enemies, and of God's redeeming his people from slavery to their enemies. Selling into bondage is the opposite of redemption, of freedom from sin in 6:18, 20 and 22. That the law is "spiritual" means that it is inspired by the *Spirit (see comment on Spirit in 8:1-11).

7:15-22. Philosophers spoke of an internal conflict between the reason and the passions; Jewish teachers spoke of a conflict between the good and evil impulse. Either could identify with Paul's contrast between his mind or reason—knowing what was right—and his members in which passions or the evil impulse worked. The language of moral helplessness here resembles some tragic depictions of passion overpowering reason (e.g., in dramas about Medea, who wickedly killed her children). See further comment in the introduction to 7:14-23.

7:23. Other moral teachers also described the struggle between reason and passions (or against the evil impulse) in military terms and spoke of waging war against the passions; see comment on 13:12 (cf. also 7:8, 11: "opportunity" was sometimes used in terms of military strategy).

7:24. "Wretched person that I am!" was a standard cry of despair, mourning or self-reproach; it often appears in tragic laments. Some philosophers complained that this was their state, imprisoned in a mortal body. When they spoke of being freed from their mortal bodies, however, they meant that they would be freed simply by death; Paul's freedom came by death with *Christ (6:1-11).

7:25. Paul probably summarizes 7:7-24 here: the dual allegiance of the person trying to achieve righteousness only by human effort, without becoming a new creation in Christ.

8:1-11
People of the Spirit Versus People of the Flesh

In the *Old Testament "flesh" (e.g., NRSV, NASB) could designate any mortal creature but especially designated human beings. It connoted weakness and mortality, especially when contrasted with God and his *Spirit (Gen 6:3; Is 31:3; cf. Ps 78:39). By the *New Testament period, this connotation of weakness was extended to moral weakness, as in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, and could involve "human susceptibility to sin," or "self-centeredness" as opposed to "God-centeredness." A life ruled by the flesh is a life dependent on finite human effort and resources, a selfish life as opposed to one directed by God's Spirit. Paul's use of "flesh" and "Spirit" refers to two spheres of existence—in Adam or in Christ—not to two natures in a person.

"Flesh" per se is not evil in the New Testament writings; *Christ "became flesh" (Jn 1:14), though not "sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3), and we live "in the flesh" in the sense of "in the body" (Gal 2:20). (The earlier NIV translation "sinful nature," usually corrected in the current version, was potentially misleading, because some people today think of spirit and flesh as two natures within a person, whereas "Spirit" here is *God's* Spirit—it is not a special part of a person but the power of God's presence. Romans 7:15-25 describes a struggle of two aspects of human personality—reason and passions—trying to fulfill divine morality by human effort; but this struggle is not in view here, where people either live that struggle by the flesh or accept God's gift of righteousness by the Spirit. Although "flesh" may be connected with bodily existence, the radical bifurcation of a human being into a morally upright "spiritual" part versus an immoral "bodily" part is a Neo-Platonic or *Gnostic idea foreign to Paul.)

But flesh, mere bodily existence and human strength, is mortal and inadequate to stand against sin (which abuses bodily members that could have been harnessed instead by the Spirit). Although the term is

used flexibly in the Bible, in one sense we *are* flesh (especially in the Old Testament use of the term); the problem is not that people are flesh but that they live life their own way instead of by God's power and *grace. Flesh is an arena of existence, but life there should be led not by bodily passions, like animals, but by God's Spirit.

The Spirit especially anointed God's people to prophesy in the Old Testament but also endowed them with power to do other things. Here, as in the Dead Sea Scrolls and occasionally in the Old Testament, the Spirit enables a person to live rightly (see especially Ezek 36:27). In Judaism, the Spirit indicated God's presence; here the Spirit communicates the very presence, power and character of Christ.

8:1-4. Whether the *law brings life or death depends on whether it is written in one's heart by the Spirit (Ezek 36:27) or practiced as an external standard of righteousness, which is unattainable by human effort (cf. 3:27; 9:31-32; 10:6-8). The expression "to deal with sin" (8:3 NRSV) probably evokes a *Septuagint phrase for "an offering for sin" (NASB), fitting the images of *atonement (cf. 3:25; 5:9) and sacrifice (cf. 1 Cor 5:7).

8:5-8. Philosophers often urged people to set their minds on eternal, heavenly or divine things rather than on the passions and transitory affairs of this world. *Philo condemned those whose minds were taken up with the matters of the body and its pleasures. Some philosophers urged their adherents to neglect bodily matters anchored in mortality, meditating on heavenly matters; for Paul, however, it is God's Spirit that enables this new framework. Philosophers valued tranquility, but Paul's wording follows Isaiah 26:3: it is the mind that trusts God that has peace (cf. also *resurrection life in Is 26:19).

Philosophers divided humanity into the enlightened and the foolish; Jewish wisdom literature and the *Qumran scrolls divided humanity into righteous and wicked. In articulating such different ideal types, the writers did not normally claim that anyone, including themselves, was *perfectly* wise or perfectly righteous. Paul here divides humanity into two classes: those who have the Spirit (Christians) and those left to their own devices. As with other such divisions of humanity, Paul is not claiming that people of the Spirit act perfectly, but rather that they belong to a different sphere than those who lack the Spirit.

The "frame-of-mind of (dominated by) the flesh" in 8:5 probably summarizes the state of the person in Rom 7:22-23. Some people believed that inspiration came only when the human mind was emptied, as in some Eastern mysticism. But Paul speaks of the "mind of the Spirit" as well as the "mind of the flesh." Instead of opposing reason and inspiration, he contrasts a frame of mind that is merely human (and thus susceptible to sin) with a frame of mind that is directed by God's inspiration.

8:9. Most Jewish people did not claim to have the Spirit; they believed that the Spirit would be made available fully only in the time of the end. After the *Messiah had come, all those who were truly God's people would have the Spirit working in them (cf. Is 44:3; 59:21; Ezek 39:29).

8:10. Jewish people in this period often distinguished soul and body, just as the Greeks did, although for Jews the division usually functioned only at death. (Some Jewish writers were more influenced by Greek categories than others.) But Paul does not say here that the (human) "spirit is alive" (NASB); literally, he claims that the "Spirit is life" (KJV, NRSV, GNT). Thus he means that the body was still under death's sentence, but the Spirit who indwells believers would ultimately resurrect their bodies (8:11). God's Spirit would raise the dead (Ezek 37:14).

8:11. Jewish people believed that God would raise the dead at the end of the age. Paul modifies this teaching by only one step: God has already raised Jesus, and this event is a sure sign that the rest of the resurrection will happen someday.

8:12-17
Led by the Spirit

The Jewish people looked back to their deliverance from Egypt as their first redemption and some looked forward to the *Messiah's coming as a new exodus, God's ultimate act of salvation. In this hope they were prefigured by the prophets, who sometimes portrayed the future deliverance in terms of the exodus from Egypt (e.g., Hos 11:1, 5, 11).

8:12-13. Those who lived according to the flesh (as bodily creatures in their own strength) would die, but those who lived by the *eschatological Spirit (who in most Jewish thought and often in the *Old Testament prophets characterizes the life of the *age to come; Ezek 36:27, 37) would be resurrected by him; see introduction to 8:1-11 and comment on 8:10-11.

8:14. The Old Testament often comments that God "led" Israel through the wilderness (Ex 15:13; Deut 3:2; Ps 77:20; 78:52; 106:9; 136:16; Jer 2:6, 17; Hos 11:4; Amos 2:10; for the new exodus, see Is 48:20-21; Jer 23:7-8) and called Israel his "sons" or "children" when he redeemed them from Egypt (Ex 4:22; Deut 14:1; 32:5, 18-20; Ps 29:1; Is 1:2, 4; 43:6; 45:11; 63:8; Jer 3:19, 22; Hos 1:10; 11:1, 10). In both devotional and historical language, God's leading was sometimes associated with his Spirit (Neh 9:20; Ps 143:10; Is 63:14).

8:15. Here Paul again plays on the idea of the exodus from Egypt; God's glory led his people forward, not back toward slavery (cf. Ex 13:21; Neh 9:12; Ps 78:14; for new exodus, Is 58:8; Zech 2:5). He adopted them as his children (cf. 9:4). Here the Spirit, often associated with inspiration in ancient Jewish sources, inspires the believer to experience their intimate relationship with God. On "Abba," see comment on Mark 14:36; although only a few Roman Jews spoke *Aramaic, they probably knew Jesus' special address for his Father as "Papa" in his time of suffering (Mk 14:36; cf. Gal 4:6). Roman adoption—which could take place at any age—canceled all previous debts and relationships, defining the new son wholly in terms of his new relationship to his father, whose heir he thus became.

8:16. Philosophers spoke of conscience testifying (cf. 2:15; 9:1); Jewish people believed that the Spirit had testified to God's truth against Israel and the nations by the prophets. But here the Spirit's prophetic message is good news to the believer's heart. As a legal act, Roman adoption (cf. 8:15) had to be attested by witnesses; the Spirit is here the attesting witness that God adopts believers in Jesus as his own children.

8:17. God had promised Israel an "inheritance" in the Promised Land, and Jewish people spoke of "inheriting the world to come"; on inheritance and adoption, see comment on 8:15. Many Jewish people believed that a period of suffering would precede God's revelation of glory at the end.

8:18-27
Birth Pangs of a New World

8:18. Many Jewish people contrasted the present age with the *age to come, when God would reign unchallenged. Paul's Jewish contemporaries would agree with him that the righteous would be greatly rewarded for any sufferings in this world.

8:19. Following *Old Testament tradition (Is 65:17-18), Jewish people generally believed that the whole world order would be transformed at the time of the end (although not all believed that it would be cosmic in scope or that the present order would perish in a cataclysmic manner). In Greek, Paul's repetition of three words beginning with *apok-* or *apek-* would be *rhetorically appealing.

8:20. Greek tradition declared that the world had been declining from its past Golden Age to the present. Jewish tradition debated whether it was good that humanity had been created and suggested that Adam's sin had brought harm and the domination of evil powers to all creation. *Stoic philosophers believed that the elements would come unraveled and nothing but the primeval fire was really eternal. Cosmic pessimism was rampant in the first few centuries A.D.; many people believed that decay and Fate reigned supreme.

8:21. The Greco-Roman world dreaded "corruption" (NASB) or "decay" (NIV); only the eternal, unchanging things in the heavens would last—the human body and everything else on earth would decompose. The language of "being set free from slavery" (NASB, GNT), "God's children" and probably "glory" may allude to the Old Testament exodus *narrative, which prefigures the future salvation (see comment on 8:12-17).

8:22. In Exodus, God's people "sighed" or "groaned," and their groaning under hardship was an unintended prayer that hastened God's redemption of them (Ex 2:23). Paul also connects "groaning" (Rom 8:22, 23, 26) with birth pangs here. Some Jewish traditions portrayed the time just before the end as birth pangs (see comment on Mt 24:6-8), the great suffering that would bring forth the *Messiah

and the messianic era. For Paul, the sufferings of the whole present time are birth pangs, meaningful sufferings that promise a new world to come.

8:23-25. "Firstfruits" was the actual beginning, the first installment, of the Judean harvest (Lev 23:10); the presence of the Spirit in believers is thus the actual beginning of the future world. Believers had experienced redemption (Rom 3:24) and adoption (8:15) but still awaited the fullness of that experience at the *resurrection of their bodies by the Spirit (8:11).

The Israelites were redeemed from Egypt, but the consummation of their salvation was delayed a generation by their disobedience in the wilderness; it was nearly forty years before they entered the Promised Land. Paul can explain Christ's salvation in the same way, because it is a new exodus (see comment on 8:12-17): the beginning and completion of salvation are separated by the period of God's leading through the tests of the present age (8:14, 18).

8:26. Judaism usually viewed the Spirit as an expression of God's power rather than as a personal being; like John (chaps. 14–16), Paul views the Spirit as a personal being (cf. 2 Cor 13:14). Jewish teachers portrayed God's personified mercy or angels like Michael as intercessors for God's people before his throne; Paul assigns this role to Christ in heaven (Rom 8:34) and to his Spirit in his people (8:26). The Spirit joins here in the birth pangs, no less eager for the new creation than God's children are (see comment on 8:22-23).

8:27. All Jews agreed that God searches hearts (1 Kings 8:39; 1 Chron 28:9), an idea that occurs often in the New Testament, and in some later rabbinic texts even appears as a title for God ("searcher of hearts").

8:28-30
God's Eternal Purpose

8:28. *Stoic philosophers believed that everything would work out for the best—from the vantage point of God, although no other individual being (including lesser gods) would continue. Judaism believed that God was sovereign and that he was bringing history to a climax, when he would vindicate his people and turn their past sufferings to their advantage as he rewarded them (see comment on 8:18). For Paul, the ultimate good of these hardships is their work in conforming believers to Christ's image in the end (8:29).

8:29. Some Greek thinkers emphasized becoming like the deity, but the "image" ("likeness") idea is most prominent in Jewish sources. In Jewish thinking, Wisdom was God's purest image (see, e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 7:26; comment on Col 1:15), but Jewish texts often also speak of Adam or humanity in general as made in God's image (following Gen 1:26-27; for the sense in Genesis, cf. Gen 5:3). God's children will all be conformed to the image of the firstborn of the new creation, the new Adam (Rom 5:12-21).

8:30. On predestination, see chapter 9. The predication of predestination on foreknowledge (8:29) need not cancel all free will; most of Judaism accepted both God's sovereignty and human responsibility. (The idea that one has to choose between them is a post-New Testament idea.)

8:31-39
God's Triumphant Love

Many believers in Rome had probably experienced expulsion less than a decade earlier (A.D. 49; see Acts 18:2), perhaps returning only around 54; presumably unknown to them and to Paul, many would have to give their lives in Nero's persecution less than a decade later (A.D. 64). Before elaborating the point in 8:29-30, Paul offers an emotionally rousing climax to chapter 8. Ancient speakers could stir audiences with *rhetorical questions (8:31-35), lists of sufferings (8:35, 38-39) and repetition (in this case, an inverted parallel structure, or chiasm, in 8:35-39).

8:31. The *Old Testament often speaks of God being "with" or "for" his people (Ps 56:9; Is 33:21; Ezek 34:30; 36:9); therefore, the psalmist asks, what could anyone do to him (Ps 118:6)? Anyone who challenged them challenged him (see Is 50:8; cf. 54:17).

8:32. On the idea of inheriting all things in the world to come, see comment on 4:13; cf. comment on 5:17.

8:33-34. These verses echo Isaiah 50:8: because God vindicates the psalmist, who dares bring a case against him? Jewish texts express confidence that God would ultimately vin-

dicate Israel, as he did each year on the Day of Atonement; Paul bases his confidence of believers' vindication on the advocacy of Christ (see comment on 8:26). Jesus being at God's right hand echoes Psalm 110:1.

8:35-36. Verses 35-39 form a *chiasmus (an ancient literary structure based on inverted parallelism): nothing can separate us from Christ's love (8:35a, 39b), no matter what it is (8:35b-36, 38-39a), which makes believers more than overcome their opposition (8:37). Lists of hardships were common in Greco-Roman literature (especially used to show that the wise person had passed all tests and lived what he believed). "Nakedness" was applied to insufficient dress, not only to complete exposure. "Sword" was the standard mode of citizen execution in this period, and the citation from Psalm 44:22 (applied by second-century *rabbis to martyrdom) reinforces the certainty that martyrdom is in view here (8:36).

8:37. *Stoics valued remaining unbowed in suffering; Jewish people praised this fortitude in their tales of martyrs. Israel believed they would triumph in the day of judgment because God was for them; Paul assures believers that they triumph in their present tests because of what God has already done on their behalf (8:31-34).

8:38. Given the context of cosmic opposition here, we should probably take "principalities" and "powers" (KJV, NASB) here with "angels" as referring to the spiritual forces ruling the nations and bringing opposition against God's people. Many ancient Jewish writers used these terms in this way.

8:39. "Height" and "depth" may well simply personify the heavens above and Hades (the realm of death) below (cf. Ps 139:8); taken together, this was a good Jewish way to encompass all creation (cf. Is 7:11). Some scholars have suggested that they are astrological terms; the spiritual forces who ruled the nations were often believed to do so through the stars, and many people in the Mediterranean world of the first few centuries A.D. feared the inevitable power of Fate working through the stars. For Paul, it is not Fate, the stars, angelic powers, or heaven or hell that determines the lives of believers; rather, the faithfulness of Jesus (8:31-34) does.

9:1-5
Israel's Rightful Place

Romans 9–11 climaxes Paul's argument so far that individual Jews and *Gentiles must come to God on the same terms (see the introduction).

9:1-3. Paul's love and willingness to sacrifice himself for his people would remind his biblically informed hearers of Moses (Ex 32:32), although God did not permit Moses to sacrifice himself either (Ex 32:33-34; cf. Rom 8:39). A speaker's or writer's tears or sorrow was also ideally expected to move the audience or reader.

9:4-5. "Covenants" may be plural to include an allusion to God's covenants with the patriarchs, or to his frequent renewing of his covenant with his people in the *Old Testament, also recognized in later Jewish texts.

The blessings Paul had assigned to believers in Jesus (8:2, 15, 18, 29) historically have belonged to Israel, according to the Old Testament. By recognizing *Christ as God (NIV and other translations of 9:5; cf. 1:25 for the same construction), Paul makes the point even more emphatically: God himself came to humanity through Israel. Paul's list would please *rhetorically sensitive ancient hearers; in Greek, the pattern of feminine nouns in 9:4 end in *-thesia, -a, -ai, -thesia, -a, -ai*.

9:6-13
Not Saved by Ethnic Descent

It was not God's promises (9:4-5) but the faithfulness of his people (9:1-3) that failed. Jewish people often believed that their people as a whole was saved, in contrast to the *Gentiles. Israel's salvation began with God choosing Abraham (chap. 4). Paul argues here that ethnicity is insufficient grounds for salvation, as the *Old Testament also taught (e.g., Num 14:22-23; Deut 1:34-35; Ps 78:21-22; 95:8-11; 106:26-27); God can save on whatever terms he wishes.

9:6-9. Abraham had two sons while Sarah was alive, but only one received the promise (Gen 17:18-21), though both were blessed.

9:10-13. Isaac had two sons, but only one received the promise. This was determined before their birth (Gen 25:23; cf. Mal 1:1-3). Although God may have chosen Jacob because he foreknew Jacob's heart (Rom 8:29), the point here is that God has the right to choose

among the chosen line. Paul reminds his contemporaries that not all Abraham's descendants received the promise, and he could have elaborated further had he so needed; the rest of the Old Testament was clear that many Israelites broke the covenant (Ex 32:33-35; Num 11:1; 14:37; 16:32-35; 25:4-5; Deut 1:35).

9:14-18
God's Choice in Moses' Time

9:14-15. In Exodus 33:19, God has the right to choose whom he wills. In the context, he has forgiven Israel as a whole because Moses has found favor in his sight (33:12-17), and God would show Moses his glory (33:18-23) because Moses is his friend (33:11). God's choice of individuals, however, was not arbitrary but took into account people's response to God (32:32-34), although God had initially called both Israel and Moses unconditionally.

9:16. Paul may echo biblical warnings that escape belongs not to the swift but depends on God's favor (Eccles 9:11; Jer 46:6; Amos 2:14-15).

9:17-18. God showed mercy by not destroying Egypt (Ex 9:15-16), allowing Pharaoh to remain so God could further display his power. Paul makes the wording even more emphatic: God raised up or stirred this particular Pharaoh for the purpose of showing his power, that "the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord," as Exodus repeatedly says (e.g., 9:16). God clearly hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex 9:12, 35; 10:27; 11:10), but not until Pharaoh had hardened his own several times (Ex 7:22; 8:15, 32). In other words, God elevated a particular person to fight against him; but that person also made his own choice, which God foreknew, before God punished him with a continuously hard heart (cf. Rom 1:24-25; 2 Thess 2:10-12). The *Old Testament affirms both God's sovereignty (e.g., Deut 29:4) and human responsibility (e.g., Deut 5:29), assuming that God is sovereign enough to ensure both (although human choice could not nullify God's word; cf., e.g., 1 Kings 22:26-30, 34-35).

9:19-29
God Chooses Gentiles

Jewish hearers might celebrate God's right to harden Pharaoh (9:17), but Paul will shockingly exploit the principle to a different end: God can harden and show mercy as he wills, whether people are Jewish or *Gentile (9:24-33).

9:19-21. Paul here uses the language of Isaiah 29:16, 45:9 and 64:8, which the *Dead Sea Scrolls often used in prayers. The point is that God made people, and God can therefore do with them as he wills. In the context the application is especially that he can choose either Jews or Gentiles, not that his predestination is arbitrary.

Most Jewish people believed that their people as a whole had been chosen for salvation; they viewed predestination in corporate, *ethnic* terms. Paul here discusses predestination in the context of the salvation of Israel (9:1-13) and the Gentiles (9:23-29), emphasizing that because God can sovereignly choose to *elect whom he wills, that need not be on the basis of descent from Abraham. God's sovereignty means that he is free to choose on another basis than his covenant with ethnic Israel (3:1-8); on some readings of this context, he can choose on the basis of (foreknown) faith in Christ (4:11-13; 8:29-30). Most ancient Jewish thinkers did accept both God's sovereignty and human responsibility to choose rightly without viewing these as contradictory.

9:22-23. God endured vessels like Pharaoh for the sake of those who would receive mercy; honoring his name throughout the earth (Ex 9:16 in Rom 9:17), he could also save Gentiles.

9:24-26. In context, Hosea 2:23 and 1:10, which Paul cites here, refer to God's restoring Israel, despite his temporary abandonment of them (1:9). If God could abandon but then restore Israel, he could also graft Gentiles into Israel if this were his will (cf. Rom 11:30-32).

9:27-28. Jewish teachers often linked texts based on a common key phrase; both Hosea 1:10 and the Isaiah quotation here note that Israel was "like the sand of the sea." Here Paul quotes Isaiah 10:22-23: the prophet warned that only a remnant would survive and return to the land after judgment. If God saved only a remnant in the *Old Testament and promised that only a remnant would survive judgment, Paul questions why Jewish people of his own day would feel secure that their Jewishness would save them. (Paul adds "children of Israel" from Hos 1:10; blending texts was common in ancient citations.)

9:29. Now Paul cites Isaiah 1:9, which makes the same point as Isaiah 10:22-23 (which he just quoted). In the context in Isaiah, Israel has acted like Sodom, the epitome of sin (1:10); they are fortunate to have any survivors (1:7-9), because God demands justice (1:16-17), not mere sacrifices (1:11-15).

9:30–10:4
Israel's Wrong Righteousness

Of the two approaches to righteousness and the *law in 9:30–10:10, only the way of faith saves sinful people. Why had Israel so often failed God in the *Old Testament, with only a remnant surviving? Because they pursued the law in terms of human effort (see comment on 9:29) instead of depending on God, who transforms the heart. Although the term "faith" is rare in translations of the Old Testament (Paul already used most of the references in 1:17 and 4:3), Paul believes that the idea permeates the Old Testament, where God's people must respond to his *grace from their hearts.

9:30-31. Israel rightly sought the law but missed its point by stressing works rather than faith (see comment on 9:29)—faith was the law's point (3:21, 31). The two approaches to the law (one right and the other wrong) are essential to Paul's argument (3:27; 8:2; 10:5-8).

9:32-33. Here Paul follows a common Jewish interpretive practice of blending texts together (Is 8:14; 28:16), arguing that Israel failed because they did not follow the way of faith. Because Isaiah 28:16 probably alludes back to Isaiah 8:14, Paul's blending of the two is especially reasonable, although perhaps only his more biblically literate hearers caught what he was doing. The point is that the same stone that caused Israel to stumble (Is 8:14, which also speaks of the stone as a sanctuary) would save those who believed (Is 28:16). Paul returns to not being ashamed in 10:11.

10:1-2. Jewish literature from this period often praises zeal for the law, even to the point of violently resisting those who wished to repress Jewish practice of the law.

10:3-4. On God's righteousness, see comment on 1:17. "End of the law" can mean the "goal" or "climax" to which the law points, or that people should stop using the law in the wrong way.

10:5-10
Two Approaches to Righteousness

Educated Greeks and Romans often cited classical sources to support their arguments; like other Jewish teachers, Paul cites the Jewish and Christian canonical source, the Scriptures.

10:5. One approach is based on a particular Jewish interpretation of Leviticus 18:5: those who keep the commandments merit *eternal life. (Texts such as these—cf. also Deut 4:1, 26, 40; 5:33; 8:1; 16:20; 30:16, 20—originally promised long life on the land. But by Paul's era Jewish interpreters understood these texts as promising eternal life, apparently holding this view alongside the view that God *elects Israel as a whole to be saved.) This kind of righteousness would prove difficult for *Gentiles without years of enculturation or study of the *law. Paul also established in Romans 1–3 and chapter 7 that this kind of righteousness does not work (see comment on 9:30-32).

10:6-7. Paul here does *midrash, expounding a text in good Jewish fashion. In context, "Who will ascend?" in Deuteronomy 30:12 means, "Who will ascend again, to bring the law down again?" (Moses ascended only to Sinai, but in Jewish tradition he ascended all the way to heaven to receive the law; in Deuteronomy, God provided the law from heaven.) "Who will descend?" in Deuteronomy 30:13 means "Who will descend into the Red Sea to cross it again?" (Although not in this text, the *Septuagint often translates "sea" as "abyss," as Paul does here.) God had redeemed his people at the Sea, according to the *Old Testament and Jewish tradition; now, God has consummated his saving acts in Christ, and the same principle applies to him. (Paul adapts the opening wording slightly to work in a midrashic allusion to Deut 9:4, which, with Deut 9:5-6, reminds Israel that they are not righteous.)

10:8. Deuteronomy 30:14 refers to the law; as long as it is written in the heart (cf. 30:6; Ps 37:31; Is 51:7), God's people could live out its righteousness (cf. Deut 30:11; Jer 31:31-34). Paul says that this principle applies all the more to the message of faith that the law teaches (3:31); *grace, not human effort, leads to righteousness (8:2-4).

10:9-10. Paul emphasizes "mouth" and "heart" here because he is expounding Deuter-

Table 6. Paul's Use of Deuteronomy 30:12-14 in Romans 10:6-10

Deut 30:12-14	Paul's application of the principles in Rom 10:6-10
Do not say, "Who will ascend to heaven?" (to bring down God's gift of the law; 30:12)	Do not say, "Who will ascend to heaven?" (to bring down God's gift of Christ; 10:6)
Do not say, "Who will descend into the sea?" (for salvation; 30:13)	Do not say, "Who will descend into the abyss?" (for salvation; 10:7)
The word (the law) is near you (30:14)	The word (the gospel) is near you (10:8)
In your mouth and in your heart (30:14; probably recitation of the law, cf. Deut 6:6-7)	Confess with the *mouth* that Jesus is Lord; believe with the *heart* that God raised him from the dead (10:9-10)

onomy 30:14 (cited in the previous verse), which speaks of the message of faith in one's mouth and heart.

10:11-21
Salvation for All Peoples

10:11-12. Paul again cites Isaiah 28:16 (see Rom 9:33), which he is still explaining. His emphasis is on the "whoever" (NASB, GNT), by which he argues that the text must apply literally to *Gentiles as well as Jews.

10:13. Jewish teachers commonly expounded a text by citing other texts that shared the same key word; hence Paul ties in another verse (Joel 2:32) that has the word "whoever" to explain that in Isaiah 28:16 "not be disappointed" (NASB) or "not be put to shame" (NIV) means "be saved."

10:14. Paul provides a *rhetorical chain in 10:14-15 that would have appealed to ancient hearers. He expounds the implications of Joel 2:32: salvation is meant for whoever will seek it, Jew or Gentile, but this availability of salvation presupposes that they must have the opportunity to hear the message.

10:15. Paul also has Scripture to verify that bearers of the good news must be "sent" (this term is the verb form of the noun translated "*apostle," hence "apostled"); people are not saved without the opportunity to hear. Isaiah 52:7 announced that there was good news, but heralds still had to bring it to the people.

10:16. Several verses after Isaiah 52:7, Isaiah reports the response to the good news the heralds bring (53:1), and Paul's readers probably know how this text continues: Israel rejected the good news (53:2-3) about one who would die on their behalf (53:4-12; cf. Rom 4:24-25).

10:17. Paul confirms his earlier interpretation of Deuteronomy 30:14 (in Rom 10:8): the saving message is none other than the proclaimed message of Christ.

10:18. Psalm 19:4 refers in context to the testimony of creation. If Paul refers to the context and is not simply making an analogy, it may be relevant that Jewish teachers often grappled with the question of whether Gentiles who had not heard the truth could be held responsible for it. They concluded that Gentiles could at least infer the oneness of God from creation and thus should avoid idolatry (see comment on 1:19-20). Even Gentiles may not have heard all of Christ's message (10:17), but creation itself made them hear enough to be responsible for doing right. The Jewish *Diaspora had more knowledge than the Gentiles had; having the *law, they had every reason to believe, and word about *Christ had already begun to penetrate most Jewish centers of the ancient world.

10:19. God had promised in the law to provoke Israel to jealousy by another nation. Israel had rejected him for that which was not a god; God would reject them for that which would not be a people—to provoke them to jealousy (Deut 32:21; cf. Rom 11:11, 14).

10:20-21. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 65:1-2, which occurs in the context of God's judgment on Israel (64:8-12), of Gentiles being accepted into God's household (56:3-8; cf. 19:24-25) and of God restoring the remnant of Israel to himself (65:8-9).

11:1-10
Always a Remnant

"Remnant" does not presuppose any particular percentage; it is simply the current state of "some" Jewish people following Jesus, rather

than "all Israel" (11:26). A few other groups of Jewish people, as represented in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, also felt that they alone were serving God and the rest of Israel was in apostasy. Because the early Christians believed that Jesus was the *Messiah, they believed that rejecting him was like rejecting the *law or the prophets, and like the prophets they accused their people of apostasy from Israel's true faith.

11:1. Ancient writers often adduced examples for their arguments, sometimes using themselves. But Paul turns quickly to an example from Scripture (11:2-4).

11:2-4. The Elijah *narrative in 1 Kings 19:10, 14 and 18 indicates that at the time of Israel's deepest apostasy, a remnant had still avoided idolatry. It might be relevant that some Jewish traditions presented Elijah as zealous for God but not patriotic enough for Israel.

11:5-7. Paul now expounds on 11:2-4: if there was a remnant even in Elijah's day, there will always be a remnant (i.e., "how much more" now, a common form of argument in ancient times). That God chooses the remnant follows directly from 9:19-29 and from the other texts Paul will marshal in 11:8-10.

11:8. Here Paul blends Isaiah 29:10 ("spirit of deep sleep") with the similar message of Deut 29:4 ("to this day . . . ears to hear"). In Isaiah, God silenced the prophets (Is 29:10) because Israel refused to hear them (30:10-11); thus God would make his message plain through the Assyrian invasion (28:9-13). Israel had become blind and deaf to God's word (29:9-10), having excuses (29:11-12) and a pretense of righteousness (29:13-14); but someday they would see and hear again (29:18, 24). In Deuteronomy, Israel failed to learn from all God's acts on their behalf.

11:9-10. Early Christians often applied Psalm 69, a psalm of a righteous sufferer, to Jesus, the righteous sufferer *par excellence*. In Psalm 69:22-23, the psalmist prays for the judgment of blindness on his persecutors, implying that God was sovereign over blindness—spiritual (Rom 11:8) as well as physical. Paul may also incorporate one "bonus" term from Psalm 35:8.

11:11-14
Provoking Israel to Jealousy

Jewish people sometimes used "stumble" for apostasy or sin. Paul here begins to expound Deuteronomy 32:21, which he cited in Romans 10:19. Some Jewish people expected *Gentiles to recognize Israel's God at the time of the end (cf., e.g., Is 19:24-25; 60:3-12); Paul wants his people to recognize that it is through *Christ that this promise to Israel is being fulfilled. Turning Israel back to God is not the only purpose for the salvation of the Gentiles (cf. the missionary purpose of *Israel* in Gen 12:2-3), but it is one purpose in relation to Israel. Paul's argument in Romans places Jew and Gentile on the same level with regard to salvation (see the introduction); but now he reminds the Gentiles to remember whose faith they have adopted. Ethnocentrism of any sort, Jewish or Gentile, opposes the message of the *gospel. Ancient *rhetoricians considered it acceptable to explicitly praise oneself only if one could justify it as stirring others to emulation (as here) or as defending oneself.

11:15-24
The Jewishness of the Christian Faith

Many Gentiles despised Jewish people for what they considered separatism and strange customs (see comment at Rom 14); Gentile converts to Jesus's movement needed to avoid importing these prejudices into their new faith. Gentile Christians must remember that they are grafted into a Jewish faith, and that when they are grafted into the *Old Testament people of God, they accept not only Israel's spiritual history as their own but also Jews as in some sense their siblings, even if those who do not follow Jesus are fallen siblings. Earlier in Romans Paul had opposed Jewish arrogance against Gentiles; here he opposes Gentile arrogance against Jewish people.

11:15. In the biblical prophets, the turning of the Jewish people back to God's ways coincided with Israel's restoration and the end time (which included the *resurrection of the dead).

11:16. The mention of "dough" alludes to the firstfruits of the dough offering in Numbers 15:20-21, which consecrates the whole batch; Israel's beginnings were holy (Jer 2:3), and God had not forgotten his plans for them. Paul's second illustration (root and branches), however, is the focus of 11:17-24. (Mixed metaphors were common in antiquity.)

11:17-24. Gentiles could and did become part of the people of God in the Old Testament (e.g., Ruth, Rahab, David's Cherethite guards, etc.); but they were clearly a small minority. Now that Gentile Christians in Rome have begun to outnumber Jewish Christians, it is easier for them to forget their heritage in Israel's history.

Jewish sources often described Israel as a plant or a tree, whose roots were the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). (Sometimes they even used the image of an olive tree; indeed, at some point a *synagogue in Rome was apparently named the "olive tree.") Contrary to standard Jewish teaching, Paul had argued that uncircumcised Gentiles could become part of that people of God through faith in the Jewish *Messiah (chap. 4)—like *proselytes, but without physical circumcision. Now he reminds Gentiles to respect the Jewish people, who had brought them their faith. It was easier for Jewish branches to be grafted back into the true form of their own faith than for polytheists who had worshiped idols before their conversion to understand the faith they were now accepting. Like other Jewish teachers of his day, Paul does not regard any particular person's salvation as guaranteed from the human perspective till they have persevered to the end.

Grafting of trees (adding a shoot of one tree to another tree) is reported in both Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. Sometimes shoots from a wild olive tree would be grafted onto a domestic olive tree that was bearing little fruit in an attempt to strengthen or save the life of the tree. The unproductive original branches would be pruned off, and the new graft was considered "contrary to nature" (as in 11:24—NASB).

11:25-32
The Coming Salvation of Israel

God had promised that Israel as a whole (the surviving remnant after great afflictions) would someday turn to him (Deut 4:25-31; 30:1-6); at this time God would bring about the end (e.g., Hos 14:1-7; Joel 2:12-3:2). Paul's view of the end time here presupposes this return.

11:25. Sometimes "mysteries" were previously hidden truths about the end time revealed to God's servants (e.g., Dan 2:28-30; cf. Rom 16:25-26). Some *Old Testament prophets had predicted God's witness spreading among the *Gentiles; because the final *repentance of Israel would usher in the end, God had delayed Israel's final repentance until the fullness of the Gentile remnant could be gathered in (cf. Mt 24:14; 28:19-20; 2 Pet 3:9).

11:26-27. The future salvation of Israel is repeated throughout the Old Testament prophets. Jewish teachers commonly believed that "all Israel will be saved," but at the same time could list which Israelites would *not* be saved (e.g., Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 10:1): the phrase thus means "Israel as a whole (but not necessarily including every individual) will be saved." In other words, the great majority of the surviving Jewish remnant will turn to faith in Christ. Paul proves this point from Isaiah 59:20-21: the remnant of Jacob who turn from sin will be saved by the coming of the new redeemer, when he puts his *Spirit on them (Paul paraphrases, as was common in ancient citations; he may blend the Greek version of the passage with Ps 14:7, and may add, "when I take away their sins" based on the Greek version of Is 27:9 or Ezek 36:26).

11:28-29. Paul does not regard God's promises to ethnic Israel as canceled—only deferred (cf. Deut 4:25-31); God still had a covenant with the ancestors (Deut 7:8). The grafting in of Gentiles (Rom 11:17) does not mean that they supplant the Jewish people (11:18), as if God has no further interest in the latter. The return of ethnic Israel as a whole to the covenant in the end time would join the grafted-in Gentiles and Jewish remnant that already participate in the covenant.

11:30-32. Ancient writers or speakers often summarized some themes of a section at its close. Gentiles and Israel exchanging roles of disobedience may allude back to 9:25-26 (cf. 10:21); mercy to 9:15-23. Paul's point here is that all peoples have sinned and all peoples must come to God through his mercy in Christ, a point the Roman *church needed to hear (see the introduction to Romans).

11:33-36
Praising God's Wisdom

Sometimes one would conclude a section with rousing *rhetoric; discussion of deity might especially invite exalted, almost poetic, rhetoric. Like the writers of some *Hellenistic

Jewish documents, Paul concludes this section of his letter with a doxology, or praise to God. Using the language of Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11 (which refer to God's sovereignty in and over creation), Paul praises God's wisdom in designing history as he has so that salvation would be available to all peoples (chaps. 9–11).

*Stoic philosophers believed that God controlled all things and that all things would ultimately be resolved back into him. In this context Paul's words in 11:36 mean instead what Jewish people normally meant by such words: God is the source and director of human history, and all things—even the evil choices of sinful humans—would in the end glorify him and the rightness of his wisdom. Philosophers distinguished various levels of causation with terms such as "from," "through" and "for"; all the levels are applicable here.

12:1-8
Serve One Another

Having laid the theological groundwork for reconciliation in the Roman *church (chaps. 1–11), Paul now turns to practical counsel. (Some other ancient letters of exhortation followed this pattern.) He emphasizes that God's will is for believers to think rightly: to recognize the equal value of all members of the body and to use all of one's gifts to build up the body.

12:1. Ancient Judaism and some philosophical schools often used "sacrifice" figuratively for praise or for a lifestyle of worship; hence it would be hard for Paul's readers to miss his point here. When he speaks of "your rational [cf. KJV 'reasonable'; more to the point than 'spiritual'—NASB, NRSV] service," his word for "service" alludes to the work of priests in the temple, and "rational" to the proper way to think (as in 12:2-3). The *Old Testament called sacrifices that God accepted "pleasing" (NIV, GNT) or "acceptable" (Ezra 6:10; Ps 20:3; Is 56:7; Jer 6:20; Mal 3:4); people also spoke of sacrifices being "holy" (e.g., Lev 6:17, 25); but "living" sacrifices strains the metaphor in order to present the sacrificial lifestyle as a continual experience.

12:2. Judaism generally believed that evil powers dominated this age but that all peoples would acknowledge God's rule in the *age to come. Here Paul says literally, "Do not be conformed to this *age*." The "renewed" mind considers matters from the perspective of the coming era. Philosophers lacked this *eschatological perspective, but did emphasize making all decisions based on reason. Paul here emphasizes the proper use of the mind: those who discern what is good, acceptable (v. 1) and perfect will know God's will, which also (in 12:3) provides self-understanding.

12:3. Philosophers emphasized proper self-understanding in the context of the rest of the cosmos; Paul emphasizes it in the context of Christ's body (12:4-5). By affirming (in 12:3) that each member has "a measure of faith" (NASB; probably not "*the* measure of faith"—KJV, NRSV) apportioned for different functions (12:6-8), Paul affirms diversity within unity. He will apply this principle to the ethnic conflict in the church (see the introduction) in chapter 14.

12:4-5. That each class in society had a special function, like members of a body, had long been argued by thinkers defending the status quo of the state (often in support of hierarchy); *Stoic philosophers had also applied the image of head and body to God and the universe. But Paul applies the image in a fresh way, in which each member of the religious community has a special function within the one body, abolishing the priesthood-laity distinction of most ancient religions.

12:6. Most of ancient Judaism regarded *prophecy as supernatural in a way different from the other gifts Paul lists here. God could use the other gifts here, but most of ancient Judaism saw them as activities one did *for* God, whereas they thought of prophecy as a divine "possession" that was very rare in their own day. That Paul regards all these gifts as divine empowerments and prophecy as one among many suggests how thoroughly he expects the God who worked miracles in the *Old Testament to continue to work regularly in the life of the church.

12:7-8. Although "serving" may have a broad meaning (cf. 15:25), its position between prophecy and teaching might suggest that it refers to an office in the church (*diakonos;* see comment on 16:1). "Showing mercy" probably refers to charity—caring for the sick and the poor, and so forth; although all Christians did this work to some extent, some had a special gift for it.

12:9-21
General Parenesis

One of the styles ancient moralists used is called *parenesis,* which strings together various moral exhortations that have little connection among them. Paul uses parenesis here but has a general theme that applies to most of his exhortations: Get along with one another. This theme fits the situation of Romans (see the introduction). Many ancient moralists would have agreed with most of the exhortations Paul offers here. Ancients sometimes framed a section with parallel ideas; Paul emphasizes good versus evil in 12:9 and 21.

12:9-10. Ancient hearers would have appreciated Paul's *rhetorical repetition in Greek here: *–oi* concludes three clauses in 12:10-11; *–ontes* or *–ountes* conclude seven clauses in 12:11-13. Ancient Mediterranean men often sought their own honor, competing with others for it. Soldiers swore never to "give preference to another" in honor above Caesar. Some philosophers recommended that "inferior" people prefer "superior" people above themselves. Paul's admonition sounds more like that of Jewish teachers, who emphasized that each of their *disciples should look out for the others' honor as much as for the disciple's own.

12:11-13. Jewish people believed in taking care of needs in their community, and the Christians of Paul's day no doubt agree (v. 13). In antiquity "hospitality" especially meant putting up travelers (without charge) in one's home while they were in town; they would normally carry letters from those trusted by their hosts, attesting that they were to be accepted as guests.

12:14. Like some other exhortations in the context, this one may well echo Jesus' teaching (Lk 6:28); it was common to repeat the sayings of famous teachers, and Jewish teachers often cited their own teachers and the *law. In a *Cynic or Stoic context, the exhortation would sound like a call to ignore suffering; but although Cynic philosophers disregarded reputation, they were adept at returning wisecracks. The counsel of Jesus and Paul has more to do with the Jewish conviction that God would judge justly and that believers could let matters rest with him (12:17-21).

12:15. Weeping with those who mourned was a proper expression of sympathy in most of ancient culture. Although philosophers and moralists often warned against weeping too much, because it "does no good," Jewish weddings and mourning ceremonies (including funeral processions, in which the public joined) presupposed the principle Paul states here.

12:16. Humility was more a Jewish virtue than a Greek one, but even Greeks valued people of status showing compassion and mercy. Whereas many writers emphasized knowing one's proper place, Christian literature goes beyond other ancient literature in suggesting that believers go out of their way to associate with the lowly.

12:17-18. Not repaying evil for evil may come from Jesus' teaching (Mt 5:39), although some other Jewish teachers had also recommended nonretaliation (as early as Prov 20:22). Doing what is respectable in the opinions of other people was a virtue not only to aspiring Greco-Roman politicians but also to Jewish people in their dealings with *Gentiles. But while Jewish people adopted stricter guidelines than the surrounding culture for the sake of witness, they never compromised their own beliefs; the point of the admonition is to protect their witness and prevent unnecessary opposition.

12:19. Stoic philosophers opposed seeking revenge; they believed that Fate was sovereign, and one's best resistance to Fate was to cooperate with it and refuse to let one's will be manipulated by circumstances. Jewish pietists likewise condemned vengeance; they trusted God to vindicate them. The practice was, however, more difficult than the principle; thus, for example, the later Gentile massacres of Jews in Palestine invited bloody reprisals. Paul cites Deuteronomy 32:35 (from the same context cited in Rom 10:19 and 15:10), but the concept appears elsewhere in the *Old Testament as well (2 Sam 22:48; Prov 20:22; Jer 51:56).

12:20. Here Paul quotes Proverbs 25:21-22; although Solomon might have meant "heap burning coals upon his head" as the enemy's emotional misery, in Paul's context of vengeance (Rom 12:19) this expression may mean that one's enemy will be punished all the more severely in the day of judgment. This is also

the sense in which the *Dead Sea Scrolls viewed nonretaliation.

12:21. Some Greek and Jewish thinkers suggested that one should turn an enemy into a friend instead of retaliating. Sometimes, however, the one who does good to the evildoer will be vindicated only in the future day (12:20).

13:1-7
Submission to Civil Authorities

Loyalty to the state was a standard literary topic among ancient writers (e.g., the *Stoic writer Hierocles, *How to Behave Toward One's Fatherland*); it appears in lists and discussions alongside proper treatment of parents, elders and friends. Philosophers and moralists commonly wrote on how government officials should act but also wrote on how citizens should behave toward the government. According to *Plato, Socrates even refused to escape execution lest he undermine the state with its good laws as well as its bad laws.

When Jewish people felt repressed for their ethnic and religious practices, submission to civil authorities was the ultimate example of nonresistance (12:17-21), an attitude that they did not always achieve. Writing this one letter to the empire's capital, Paul may be concerned for Christians' witness to their community. He is well aware that only roughly a decade before his letter some of the Jewish community had been expelled from Rome—possibly in debates over the identity of the *Messiah that Jewish Christians provoked (see comment on Acts 18:2). Paul had reason for concern; probably six to eight years after Paul wrote the letter, Nero began slaughtering Christians in Rome. Meanwhile, tensions in Judea were growing and within about a decade would erupt into a tragic war.

Jewish people had to be concerned about public opinion, especially in Rome, where their maintenance of economic ties with Palestine was viewed with suspicion. Because many people viewed Christianity as a minority sect within Judaism, Christians had even more reason to be cautious. Jews and Christians publicly stressed their good citizenship, against the popular slander that they were subversive. This emphasis does not mean, however, that they would avoid denouncing injustice (cf. 2 Thess 2; Jas 5; Jewish *apocalyptic). Stoics stressed submission to the state and other authorities, but no one understood such submission as absolute (that is, one should not submit to demands to do evil; e.g., Christians would not worship Caesar).

13:1-2. Nero was emperor at this time, but he had not yet begun persecuting Christians or repressing other groups; he was still under the benevolent influences of *Seneca and Burrus, rather than the reprobate Tigellinus. Nero was always popular in Greece, from which Paul was writing.

Although some Palestinian Jews already advocated the revolt against Rome that would take place in little more than a decade, other Palestinian Jews reportedly swore to nonresistance, believing that God had ordained all civil authorities (in the *Old Testament, cf. Is 45:1; Jer 25:9; Dan 4:32). Most Jews in Rome upheld this position and would have been embarrassed by any other. The Old Testament clearly taught God's sovereignty over earthly rulers (Prov 16:10; 21:1).

13:3-5. Here Paul offers standard ancient moral exhortation. The Roman state did many evil things; even its court decisions were based on social class. But the Romans generally advocated justice and toleration, and at this point the Christians have nothing to fear from them. Paul thus does not need to qualify the general principle he is articulating at this time. "The sword" refers to the standard method of execution in this period (beheading); in earlier times the ax had been used. Swords were carried in front of Roman officials to indicate their authority over life and death.

13:6-7. The empire as a whole levied a property tax (often about one percent) and a head tax; local provinces or kingdoms added further taxes; there were also customs duties. Taxes were used to finance roads and run the government but also to support Roman armies and temples devoted to the worship of the emperor. Particular taxes became controversial in Rome perhaps just months before Paul wrote this letter; noncitizen Jews who returned to Rome in or after A.D. 54 may have also been subject to special taxes from which Roman citizens were exempt. Officials expected and received honor by virtue of their position.

13:8-10
Fulfilling the Law

Paul reminds any Jewish hearers concerned about *Gentiles' lax observance of the *law that the best way for them to fulfill the law is to get along with each other (see the discussion of situation in the introduction to Romans).

13:8. Moralists often emphasized not being in debt (cf. Prov 22:7; Publilius Syrus 11); sometimes even whole essays were written on the subject (e.g., by *Plutarch, *One Ought Not to Borrow*). Judaism always stressed love of one's neighbor and sometimes recognized it as a commandment that summarized God's law.

13:9-10. No hearers, whether Greek, Roman or Jewish, would disagree with the commandments Paul cites here, except for some Gentiles who might disagree about coveting. Many Jewish people highlighted the Ten Commandments as particularly significant. Treating one's neighbor as oneself is a recurrent admonition of ancient ethics, although ancient moralists found many different ways to summarize ethics; Paul follows the specific summary advocated by Jesus (Mk 12:31).

13:11-14
Waking for the Dawn

13:11. Philosophers sometimes spoke of a soul inattentive to spiritual matters as being asleep. Paul's image of sleeping in the light of Christ's impending return probably harks back to Jesus' own teaching (Mt 24:43; Mk 13:36). Most Greeks expected history to continue as normal or believed that the universe moved in cycles; but most Judeans, like Paul, were anticipating its climax in the imminent future.

13:12. Many Palestinian Jews were expecting an end-time battle that would include the overthrow of the Gentiles, but Paul here intends this image much more in the sense that Jews outside Palestine would have used it. Philosophers often described their battle with the passions in athletic and military images. This imagery also influenced non-Palestinian Jewish writers; for instance, one document portrays Moses' armor or weapons as prayer and incense (Wisdom of Solomon 18:21). Some of these documents also use the image of clothing oneself spiritually, and Judaism could speak of persons' being "clothed" with God's *Spirit (the *Septuagint version of Judg 6:34; 2 Chron 24:20; *Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 27:9-10; cf. also *Old Testament images listed in comment on Eph 4:20-24).

13:13-14. Jews often characterized Gentile behavior in terms of wild drinking parties and premarital sex, and in general they were not far off the mark. These activities were done at night (drunken parties often lasted well into the night), like sleeping (v. 11) and burglaries. (Nero's own nocturnal revels were widely known; *Tacitus, *Annals* 16.20.) Rome's streets were not very safe at night if one traveled alone, but parties still could last late into the night.

14:1-23
Don't Be Divided over Foods or Holy Days

The issue of "pure" and "unclean" foods (14:14) prepares for the issue of Jews and *Gentiles accepting one another (15:7-12). Paul's exhortation to unity between the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome (see the introduction) now reveals some of the cultural divisions being experienced there. Jewish people did not expect most Gentiles to observe their food laws or holy days but did expect Gentile converts to Judaism to do so, perhaps including Gentile Christians. (Lev 11:44-45 deals with holiness as separation and may suggest that God gave special food laws to Israel particularly to keep it separate from other nations, because most cultures had their own special dietary practices. For Jesus's followers called to reach the world, however, its principle of moral separation could be retained without cultural separation.)

Gentiles, particularly in Rome, had long ridiculed Jewish people for their peculiarities on especially these two issues (plus circumcision, addressed in 2:25-29; 4:9-12). Paul emphasizes primarily eating practices. (Although he addresses a different kind of division over foods in 1 Cor 8, he applies similar principles.)

14:1-4. Most distinct cultures in the ancient world had their own food customs; some philosophical schools also had their own food rules. But few cultures were as insistent as the Jewish people that a deity had assigned their food laws; in the two centuries before Paul many Jews had died for refusing to eat pork, a meat most Greeks thought delicious. (Others

who abstained from pork included Phoenicians, some Syrians, Egyptian priests and the philosophic sect of *Pythagoreans, who were vegetarian; Greeks looked down on some of these groups also.) Although we know that some *Hellenistically educated Jews in Egypt took the food laws symbolically, most Jews continued to keep these laws regardless of where in the Roman Empire they went. Many Gentiles ridiculed these distinctive food customs as being separatist and complained that Jews refused to dine with other peoples. Jews were not total "vegetarians" (14:2), but could resort to that when kosher meat was not available (e.g., 2 Maccabees 5:27; *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 10.190; *Life* 13-14).

14:5-6. The precise time for festivals was such an important issue in Judaism that different Jewish groups broke fellowship with each other over the issue. (Not much later in history, different Christian groups followed suit.) Pagans had their own festivals, with different nations having their own ancestral customs and calendars; Romans also had market days every eight or nine days. But Gentile writers often reviled the Jewish sabbath. Romans reasoned that Jews were just lazy and wanted a day off from work. (This was not the first time in history that someone viewed Jewish worship in such terms—Ex 5:17.) God provided the sabbath before the *law (Gen 2:2-3), but outside Jewish enclaves many Gentiles (especially slaves and employees) would lack the option of observing it. Paul also alludes to the Jewish custom of giving thanks over food.

14:7-9. Like their separate food laws, their sabbath regulations forced Jews to form their own moderately self-sufficient communities in the Greco-Roman world, and Gentiles often regarded Jews as separatistic and unsociable. This situation increased the social distance between most Jews and Gentiles.

14:10-12. "Judgment seats" were common in the Greco-Roman world; officials like *Pilate or Gallio would make their judgments from such a *bema* or rostrum (Acts 18:12). God judging all people before his throne was a common image in Jewish portrayals of the end. It is natural for Paul to apply Isaiah 45:23 to the final judgment, because the chapters around it speak of God delivering Israel in the end and calling the nations to account before him so that they acknowledge that he is God.

14:13. Other ancient texts also used the "stumbling block" as a metaphor. Jews called one another "brothers," as did members of Greek religious clubs. Christians regarded one another as spiritual siblings, and Paul reinforces the conviction that Jewish and Gentile Christians must regard one another in these terms.

14:14. Jews classified foods as "clean" or "unclean," based on the Bible (Lev 11). For Paul to say that this classification is no longer literally relevant would put him in agreement with some philosophically minded Jews in the Greco-Roman world (most of whom nevertheless kept the food laws), but it would shock the vast majority of ancient Jews.

14:15-16. Precisely because foods do not matter, one should be willing to forgo eating them for the sake of what does matter: preserving the unity of the body of Christ. Paul is not telling Gentiles to keep kosher; but he is telling them not to try to talk Jewish Christians out of doing so.

14:17-19. Jewish people often spoke of the perfect future time of God's *kingdom (see 1 Cor 6:9), when the *Spirit would be made available and all people would be at peace with one another (Rom 14:17). For Paul, the coming of the *Messiah and the coming of the Spirit have also inaugurated the working of the kingdom, hence believers should be at peace with one another (14:19).

14:20-21. Gentile meat (suspected of having been offered to idols or not having the blood properly drained) and Gentile drink (some of it possibly used for libations to gods) were suspect to Jews. Jews could usually obtain Kosher food, but like a good *rhetorician, Paul calls his readers to concede his point even in the most extreme case (eg., Josephus, *Life* 14), requiring abstinence from all meat or wine (and if it applies to the extreme, "how much more"—following a standard style of argument—to all lesser cases). (Although some Jewish groups abstained from wine for periods of time—Num 6:3; cf. Jer 35:5-6—diluted wine was a normal part of meals; thus the language here is probably hyperbolic; see comment on Jn 2:9-10.)

14:22-23. Jewish teachers erected a "fence around the law" to keep people from areas of

"doubt," areas that were unclear and where they *might* be sinning. Paul's point is that one should not wound the faith of those avoiding what they think could be wrong; ideally, however, one should discern what is right.

15:1-13
Christ as a Minister of Ethnic Reconciliation

Ancient writers commonly used examples to argue their points. Opponents were more hesitant to challenge the example of a virtuous teacher. Continuing his argument from chapter 14, Paul begins with the ultimate and indisputable example for Christians: Christ.

15:1-3. Psalm 69:9 makes good sense in this context—Psalm 69 is a psalm of the righteous sufferer; thus early Christians often applied it appropriately to *Christ (the ultimate righteous sufferer; Mt 27:34; Jn 2:17).

15:4. Paul can say that Scripture (including the one cited in 15:3) "was written for our instruction" (NASB) because he believes, like his Jewish contemporaries, that it is God's Word and remains relevant. This statement does not mean that he thought it was intended only for his own generation, as some commentators have suggested on an analogy with their views of scriptural commentary in the *Dead Sea Scrolls; indeed, "for our instruction" could easily refer directly to Moses' words in Exodus 24:12. The Jewish people found comfort in the teaching of the Scriptures (2 Maccabees 15:9).

15:5. Because divisiveness was rife in ancient urban Mediterranean culture, many speakers offered exhortations to unity, as here (see our introduction to Romans). Being of "one mind" means thinking in unity (1 Chron 12:38)—in this case a unity of love, not of complete agreement (chap. 14).

15:6. Praising God "with one voice" means in unanimity; cf. Exodus 24:3 (this chapter could be fresh in Paul's mind; cf. Rom 15:4) and 2 Chronicles 5:13 (also elsewhere, e.g., *4 Maccabees 8:29).

15:7-12. Speakers could save a climactic, clinching argument for near the end of their speech; Paul here provides some of his strongest biblical argument for the unity of Jewish and *Gentile believers. That Christ accepted not only Jews but Gentiles Paul demonstrates from Scripture (Ps 18:49 = 2 Sam 22:50; Deut 32:43 [cf. Rom 12:19]; Ps 117:1; Is 11:10). Paul provides citations from different parts of the *Old Testament (Writings, Law and Prophets) and could have provided others to make his case that God seeks the praise of the Gentiles as well as that of the Jewish people (e.g., 1 Chron 16:31; Ps 22:27; 96:10; 102:22; Is 49:23; 60:3, 9-14). Deut 32:43 (cited in Rom 15:10) recalls a context Paul mined also in Romans 10:19 and 12:19. His last citation (in 15:12), Isaiah 11:10, was accepted as messianic. It was also a clear *prophecy of Gentiles turning to the *Messiah and being saved in the end time; Isaiah also has other prophecies about Gentiles being incorporated into God's people (19:23-25; 56:3-8).

15:13. Letters often included a prayer or well-wishing for someone's health, especially in the opening; Paul's letters, which focus on spiritual issues, naturally include more prayers than most ancient letters (15:5-6, 33, etc.). Jewish people customarily used wish-prayers or blessings like this one in the same way that they used direct intercession, and Paul no doubt means for God as well as his Roman audience to hear this prayer.

15:14-33
Paul as a Minister of Ethnic Reconciliation

Often a speech's epilogue would repeat points made in the proem (opening); Paul employs such repetition in this letter (cf. 15:14-33 with 1:8-15) but in a more personal tone characteristic of especially affectionate letters or speeches. The end of a speech was often the place to stress what the Greeks called *pathos,* or emotional appeals.

15:14. Greek writers often expressed their confidence in their addressees; this expression helped the readers to listen more favorably to the rest of the letter and sometimes served as a polite way to make a request. Although it was customary in letters of advice, it was less appropriate in letters of reproof (cf. Galatians). "Admonition" (KJV, NASB) was the gentlest form of correction offered by public speakers and by skilled writers in "letters of blame," and Paul here notes that they can supply this instruction to one another.

15:15. Bold speech could be respected if it was understood as for the hearers' good.

Noting that one was merely "reminding" one's hearers was a common feature of ancient moral exhortation.

15:16. Paul employs a priestly metaphor (cf. 12:1). One popular Jewish expectation of the end time was that Israel would rule over the *Gentiles, who would finally acknowledge the one true God, and the Gentiles would send tribute to Jerusalem (e.g., Is 60:11-14). Jerusalem Christians may have viewed Paul's collection for the *saints there (15:25-27) as a fulfillment of this vindication of Israel's faith.

15:17-18. People disrespected boasting unless it could be justified as for the common good. Philosophers used their lifestyle as well as their teaching to demonstrate their principles and could call attention to it as an example. Paul limits his credentials to what has been demonstrated in his life and ministry.

15:19. Illyricum was north of Macedonia, across from Italy on the eastern Adriatic coast, on the west of the Yugoslav/Serbo-Croation region. The Roman province was called Illyricum; Greeks included this region and some more territory farther south (including Dyrrhachium on the Via Egnatia in Macedonia) in what they called Illyria. Biblically literate hearers understood that "signs and wonders" occurred during the exodus (Ex 7:3; 11:9-10; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 11:3; 26:8; 34:11; Jer 32:20-21; Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-16; Baruch 2:11); the proliferation of the *gospel is no less a divine work, often accompanied with demonstrations.

15:20. Illyricum (15:19) may have been one of these previously unevangelized areas; Spain would be another (see comment on 15:24, 28).

15:21. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15, which in its context clearly refers to Gentiles ("kings"), who contrast with the suffering servant's own people, Israel, who would not recognize him (53:1-4).

15:22-23. Ancient letters often dealt with business, including planned visits. Affectionate letters often explained why the writer had not yet been able to visit (here, because evangelizing unreached peoples had kept Paul busy, 15:19-21).

15:24. Persons of honor often avoided direct requests, but Paul indirectly suggests one here. "Assist" (NIV) or "help" (NASB) implies that they would cover his expenses for the trip. This would be a great expression of hospitality, but one which the Roman *church would probably consider an honor if they could afford it. There is little evidence of any major Jewish settlement in Roman Spain before the third century A.D.; Paul's missionary work there would probably be among those who knew nothing of the Bible. Paul also would need to speak Latin there (in the Roman colonies) or use interpreters; most would not understand Greek. At the farthest western end of the Mediterranean, Spain was counted by geographers such as Strabo as at the end of the earth (with China and India on the opposite, eastern side of the world); cf. Acts 1:8.

15:25-26. "The poor" became a title for the pious of Judea in some circles (especially members of the *Qumran community)—perhaps mainly because most of them were poor. Some Jewish teachers considered the laws requiring care for the poor to be a major test of whether a Gentile convert had genuinely accepted God's *law. Sending money to Jerusalem was a common Jewish practice in the Mediterranean, especially with regard to the annual temple tax. Jewish men throughout the world expressed their solidarity with Jerusalem and the homeland through the temple tax; here the Gentile Christian offering for Jerusalem expresses solidarity between Gentile and Jewish Christianity (for the centrality of this issue in Romans, see the introduction).

Paul's letters more frequently identify churches by cities in which they are located than by provinces. The churches probably viewed themselves in these terms because inhabitants of large urban areas identified themselves more by the cities in which they lived than by the political boundaries of Roman provinces. Regional cultural ties existed, however, and this passage may indicate regional cooperation among churches.

15:27. Some believers in Jerusalem may have envisioned the gift as the firstfruits of the prophetic promise that the nations would bring tribute to Israel (Is 45:14; 60:6-10; 66:20); Paul may think more broadly of unity in Christ. In any case, Jewish readers steeped in the *Old Testament had a much better sense of corporate responsibility from members of one people to another than is common in indi-

vidualistic Western society (Deut 23:3-4; 2 Sam 21:1-9). The Roman government collected tribute from the rest of the world, but in the second century the church in Rome was known for sending funds to needy churches elsewhere in the empire, to free Christian slaves from the mines and so forth.

15:28. Ancient letters often anticipated personal visits. It was impossible for any traveler to find a direct route from Syria or the East to Spain; eastern vessels would go to Rome, from which a traveler would have to transship to Spain. A seafarer would voyage to Tarraco there; one could also travel overland by roads to southern Gaul and across the Pyrenees to Tarraco. It was a trip of more than a thousand miles; overland from Rome to Cordova was about seventeen hundred miles. "Put my seal on this fruit" (NASB) refers to the seal used in commercial documents, guaranteeing the correct contents of merchandise (hence "made sure"—NIV); Paul would inspect and oversee the offering's delivery.

15:29-31. That Paul's journey to Jerusalem could involve some danger is attested by the account in Acts 21–22; see comment on that passage. Against some, it is very unlikely that the Jerusalem church rejected the gift (15:31); they had desired help (cf. Gal 2:10), and in that culture, rejecting a gift effectively declared enmity.

15:32. For the expectation of hospitality here, see comment on 15:24.

15:33. On wish-prayers, see comment on 15:13; a standard Jewish blessing was "peace," and "peace" is relevant to a divided congregation (see introduction to Romans).

16:1-2
Letter of Recommendation for a Minister

People often wrote letters of recommendation to their peers or others who respected them, introducing or recommending someone, often the bearer of the letter, usually with reasons why the person should be helped. Jewish travelers often carried letters of recommendation attesting that they should be received by Jewish communities along the way; they were generally bearers of such letters themselves. (The only mail service was by imperial couriers for the government; Paul thus had to send the letter by a traveler.) Paul no doubt emphasizes Phoebe's spiritual qualifications for two reasons: Jewish and Greco-Roman circles did not usually have high regard for women's religious wisdom; and, as the letter's bearer, she will need to explain to them by word of mouth anything in Paul's letter that the hearers would not understand.

16:1. "Servant" (KJV, NASB) is the Greek *diakonos,* which is sometimes translated "deacon" (e.g., NRSV, NIV), perhaps the owner of a home in which *churches met. But Paul usually applies the term *diakonos* to "ministers" of God's word, like Paul and his colleagues; Paul could have this meaning in view here (although ancient Judaism barely ever allowed women to teach the *law publicly to men).

Cenchrea was the eastern port city of Corinth, to its southeast. It had naturally come to host a variety of foreign religions.

16:2. "Helper" (NASB) or "help" translates a Greek term applied especially to *patrons (with NIV, NRSV, "benefactor"). A patron of a religious association was normally a well-to-do person who allowed members of a religious group to meet in his or her home. The patron was generally a prominent and honored member of the group and could exercise significant influence over it. Although most patrons of religious associations were men, a minority were women.

16:3-16
Greetings to Friends in Rome

"All roads led to Rome," and many people in the ancient Mediterranean migrated there; this would be especially true of Jewish Christians who had returned after Claudius's death annulled his expulsion order, such as Aquila and Priscilla (16:3; cf. Acts 18:2). Many ancient letters closed with greetings to friends, often by name, but this letter makes it clear how many friends Paul had, even in a city he had not yet visited.

Many of the names are Greek or Jewish, but this is not unusual; some even suggest that as many as eighty percent of the inhabitants of imperial Rome were descendants of freed slaves from the East. One could bear a Latin name without being a Roman citizen, although the list probably includes several indigenous Romans. Jews could also bear traditional Greek names (even named for deities).

A few years after this letter, Nero began killing hundreds of Christians in Rome, yet the church remained strong; there were thus many believers in Rome, and Paul probably lists primarily house church leaders here. It is noteworthy that although Paul greets roughly twenty-eight individuals and only about eleven are women (nearly forty percent), he specifically commends the work of six (over half) of the women and six (about one-third) of the men. This disproportion may be because, in that culture, the women needed more affirmation in their ministry (see comment on 16:1-2). Some evidence suggests that men outnumbered women in Rome.

16:3. Husbands were normally mentioned first unless the wife was of higher status, which may suggest Priscilla's superior status in society (by birth) or (given Paul's concerns about overemphasizing social status) in the church. "Prisca" is a Latin name, the more formal version of the informal "Priscilla" (her name in Acts), just as Paul elsewhere uses the formal "Silvanus" whereas Luke prefers the informal "Silas."

16:4. "Laying down one's neck" (KJV) was a figure of speech for risking one's life on someone else's behalf, probably derived from the Roman method of execution by beheading.

16:5. Small *synagogues sometimes had to meet in homes before they could purchase buildings; many Greek religious associations did the same; churches did so for the first three centuries, using their income to buy slaves' freedom, feed the poor and so forth, rather than to build edifices. In Rome, many mezzanine apartments existed above ground-floor shops in multistory tenement buildings; Aquila and Priscilla may have lived above their artisan shop. Upper-story apartments were cheaper, tinier and flimsier, with room only to sleep; tall buildings periodically collapsed. Apartment churches could have met in the long hallway connecting small apartments, or on the somewhat more spacious lower floors. The Roman house churches might especially be threatened with disunity among themselves, because Rome (unlike the cities of the East) did not allow Jews to assemble on any level larger than local synagogues, and Christians were regarded as Jews. "Epenetus" was a common name among slaves and freedmen, though not limited to their ranks.

16:6. "Maria" could be a Latinized form of the Jewish "Miriam" (normally translated "Mary" in the *New Testament), or possibly a Latin *nomen,* which could indicate citizenship.

16:7. "Andronicus" is elsewhere attested as a *Hellenistic Jewish name. "Junia" is a Latin *nomen* that should indicate her Roman citizenship. Against attempts to make "Junia" a contraction of the masculine "Junianus," this contraction of Junianus is not attested, because that is a Greek form of contraction and Junianus and Junia are Latin names. Ancient Christian readers recognized that Junia was a woman. Because she and Andronicus traveled together without scandal, and singleness was unusual, they were undoubtedly a husband-wife team; husband-wife teams were known in some professions, like doctors and lower-class merchants. The majority of scholars read the Greek phrase as indicating that both were *apostles. "Kinsmen" (KJV, NASB) can mean countrymen (cf. 9:3; 16:11).

16:8-9. "Ampliatus" and "Urbanus" were common slave names in Rome; they might be freedmen.

16:10. "The household of Aristobulus" may refer to slaves (if Aristobulus remained alive) and *freedpersons of Aristobulus, Herod the Great's grandson, who spent his life in Rome. ("Aristobulus" is, however, a common Greek name, so the phrase could refer to a house church or family headed by a different Aristobulus.) Some slaves in elite households were well-educated and exercised power and influence over even free persons.

16:11. "Herodion" could be so named because he was a slave or freedperson from a Herodian family (see comment on 16:10). "Household of Narcissus" may mean the freedpersons formerly belonging to Narcissus, himself a freedman who was one of the empire's most powerful people under Claudius.

16:12. "Tryphaena" and "Tryphosa" are Greek names sometimes used by Jewish as well as Greek women. "Persis" is attested as a slave name, especially for slaves imported from Persia, but was also used by free persons.

16:13. "Rufus" was a common slave name. It is a Roman name, sometimes born by Jews; because Paul knows his mother, presumably from the East, some commentators think this is the Rufus of Mark 15:21. Greetings at the

close of letters could include affectionate terms of intimacy such as "father" or "mother" (e.g., one ancient letter addresses two older men as "fathers").

16:14. Like Greeks, Jewish people in the ancient Mediterranean often used Greek names compounded from the names of pagan gods, like Hermes or Apollo. "Patrobus" is short for the rare name "Patrobius"; some scholars have linked this name with the household of one of Nero's wealthy freedmen. "Phlegon" was also a common slave name.

16:15. "Julia" and "Nereus" appear most frequently for persons with slave backgrounds.

16:16. Kisses were a common form of affectionate greeting for family members, intimate friends or those who were objects of respect (e.g., Gen 33:4; 45:15; 1 Sam 20:41). The kiss was normally a light kiss on the mouth, readily distinguishable from lovers' passionate kisses. Nevertheless, due to abuses, in subsequent centuries the church limited the practice of the liturgical kiss of fellowship to men kissing men and women kissing women, although this was not the initial practice. Some second-century letters of Fronto suggest that a letter writer could want a reader to pass on a kiss to another person.

16:17-20
Concluding Exhortation

That the letter's concluding exhortation warns against division makes sense of the setting.

16:17. In keeping with the point of the letter (see the discussion of the situation in the introduction), those who cause schisms and divisions are Paul's main object of warning.

16:18. Moralists used "bellies" (often translated "appetites") to refer to self-indulgence. Philosophers ridiculed those who were "slaves" to their passions; on Paul's phrase here, see comment on Philippians 3:19. Philosophers and moralists also distanced themselves from populist public speakers who sought to flatter their audiences; but they emphasized that they themselves told people what they needed to hear rather than what they wanted to hear.

16:19. Paul might allude here to Adam and Eve seeking fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:9; 3:6); see comment on 16:20. He may also intend a contrast with Jeremiah 4:22: "wise to do evil, but ignorant of how to do good" (cf. Mt 10:16).

16:20. Genesis 3:15 promised that the serpent who deceived Adam and Eve to partake of the fruit (cf. Rom 5:12-21) would ultimately be crushed beneath the feet of Eve's seed. In many Jewish traditions the serpent represented *Satan or his instrument. Some texts seem to have understood Eve's "seed" as Israel, others as the *Messiah; but here Paul applies it more broadly to the Messiah's followers as well. His point is that they should persevere to the end, and God will bring triumph.

16:21-24
Greetings to the Church in Rome

It was not uncommon to attach supplemental greetings from others in one's location.

16:21. "Lucius" was a Greco-Roman name sometimes used by Jews; its shortened Greek form is "Lucas" (i.e., Luke; if this is the author of Acts, however, he soon traveled on ahead back to Philippi; see Acts 20:5-6). For the names "Jason" and "Sosipater" (probably the same people), see Acts 17:6, 9 and 20:4 ("Sopater" was another form of "Sosipater"); Macedonian delegates had accompanied Paul to Corinth (Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:3; 2 Cor 9:4).

16:22. "Tertius" was a Roman name (often used for a third boy), sometimes used by Jews. Most of the ancient world was too illiterate to write letters, certainly letters as sophisticated as this one; they depended instead on *scribes. Those who were highly literate were also wealthy enough that they could dictate letters to scribes as well, sometimes their own secretaries, who were usually literate slaves. Paul's host may have lent him his scribe, or Tertius may have been a professional scribe; in any case, Tertius seems to be a believer, because scribes did not normally add their own greetings. That Paul followed the common practice of signing dictated letters (1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17) indicates that he used scribes regularly.

16:23. If Gaius's house accommodated "the whole church," it must have been larger than most of the house churches; but Paul could simply be emphasizing Gaius's great hospitality or that his had been the initial house church (some think that Gaius could be the praenomen for Titius Justus; cf. Acts 18:7).

"City treasurers" (NASB) were sometimes public slaves or freedmen, but they were generally wealthy. In other cases public jobs were assigned to well-to-do persons as part of their civic responsibilities. If this is the same "Erastus" who is attested in a Corinthian inscription as an *aedile* in this general period (and this is likely), he must have been a wealthy benefactor of the city, part of the municipal aristocracy. Candidates for *aedile* had to promise significant donations to the city to gain election. *Synagogues and other associations could have *patrons who were not members; whether this is the Christian Erastus of Acts 19:22 is debated, but cf. 2 Timothy 4:20.

16:25-27
Closing Benediction

The conclusions of Greco-Roman letters varied considerably but often ended with a wish for the recipient's health and then "Farewell." Synagogues, however, closed prayers, readings and services with benedictions, and Paul anticipates that his letter would be publicly read in house churches' worship services. To repeat in one's conclusion themes stated early in one's speech or work, as Paul does here (cf. 1:2-5, esp. 1:5; also 1:11, 17; 2:16; 3:21; 11:25, 33, 36), was good *rhetoric.

16:25-26. Some ancient Jewish texts like Daniel and the *Dead Sea Scrolls spoke of God revealing what were once mysteries, special knowledge previously unavailable except by divine revelation. For Paul, this mystery of *Gentile ingathering was already taught in the Scriptures (Paul cites many of them in his argument in Romans, esp. in 15:9-12; cf. also, e.g., Is 19:18-25; 56:3-8; Zech 2:11) and is finally being understood.

16:27. Here Paul offers the sort of standard Jewish doxology used to close *Hellenistic Jewish religious works (except, of course, for "through Jesus Christ"). "Amen" was the standard closing at the end of prayers and a number of Jewish books.

1 Corinthians

Introduction

Authorship. All scholars accept 1 Corinthians as Pauline.

Corinth. Corinth was one of the major urban centers of the ancient Mediterranean and one of the most culturally diverse cities in the empire. A Greek city by location, the capital of Achaia (which made up most of ancient Greece), Corinth had been a Roman *colony for nearly a century, officially resettled by Romans long after its destruction, and Greek and Latin cultures coexisted. Its citizen class, however, viewed itself as Roman and was proud of its Roman identity. Its location on the isthmus of Corinth, a short land route across Greece that spared seafarers the more treacherous voyage around the south of Greece, made it a prosperous mercantile community. Although a wide disparity between rich and poor characterized the Roman empire more generally, this problem was particularly acute in Corinth. Its mercantile character contributed to the presence of foreign religions and may have accelerated the level of sexual promiscuity, although some promiscuity was characteristic of ancient Greek urban male culture in general. Corinth was known for its prosperity, and the proverbial sexual looseness of ancient Greek Corinth seems to have continued in Roman Corinth as well.

Language. Although Latin was used for official business in Corinth, most people could speak Greek, and this was especially true of settlers from elsewhere in Greece and further east, including most Jewish immigrants. (Some Greeks had continued to live onsite after the city's destruction, but it was the Roman settlers who became the founding citizens of New Corinth in 44 B.C.) Clearly the Corinthian *church, to whom Paul wrote his letters in Greek, understood him. Later in the first century, Clement of Rome also wrote to this church in Greek, which became Corinth's official language again in the early second century.

Situation. Roles were determined by social status in antiquity, and those with wealth and power preferred religious, philosophical and political ideologies that supported their base of power. Reading 1 Corinthians in light of ancient culture generally, including conflicting status ideals, cuts through much of the speculation of earlier commentaries; although theological errors were involved, a central issue

was that people were not getting along. Once we get past the cultural and language differences, the Corinthian Christians' values were very much like those of most Christians today. They had their own social interests, which seemed natural from their own perspective, but Paul summoned them to think instead as servants.

Thus higher-status members of the community seem to have preferred a more *rhetorically skilled speaker like Apollos; and, sharing the values of their peers they hoped to reach with the *gospel, they rejected manual labor as a suitable occupation for a moral teacher. Manual laborers in the church, however, appreciated a voluntarily lower-status, working teacher like Paul, even if his personal delivery in speeches left something to be desired (chaps. 1–4). Philosophical ideals held by some higher-status members may have been used to justify sexual offenses (chaps. 5–7); status issues likely factor into the minor division over head coverings (11:2-16) and possibly the approaches concerning meat and communal meals (chaps. 8–11). Philosophic views, often linked to status or at least the economic access to some kinds of education, probably also inform issues regarding the body and immortality (chap. 15) and, less likely but not impossibly, some philosophical mystical currents (chaps. 12–14). Most Greeks did not envision an end of the age in the sense in which Paul emphasizes future eschatology in his letter. In other words, the conflicting values of diverse groups in the broader society had been carried over into the church as divisive issues, and on other matters as well the values of society had obscured Paul's biblical message.

Commentaries. Helpful commentaries with a focus on background include Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Craig S. Keener, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); on a less technical level, C. H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987). Also helpful are general works on social relations in antiquity, such as Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); for such relations in the New Testament, see Wayne E. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983); Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity,* 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); and other works in the LEC series cited in the bibliography in the introduction to this volume. On Corinth specifically, one may sample Pausanias, *Description of Greece* Book 2; Donald W. Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2002); Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand

Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). On the unity theme, see Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); on 1 Corinthians 7, see chapters five and six in my earlier book . . . *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991); Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); for 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 14:34-36 see my *Paul, Women and Wives* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), pp. 19-100; for 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, see Wendell L. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10,* SBLDS 68 (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985).

1:1-9
Opening Greetings

These verses follow a standard ancient way to open letters; see the introduction to *New Testament letters and comments on Romans 1:1 and 7.

1:1. Letters in antiquity were not usually coauthored; thus Paul may have authored the letter and Sosthenes (cf. perhaps Acts 18:17) served as *scribe, writing it down (cf. 1 Cor 16:21); or Sosthenes may have contributed to the letter's contents or (more likely) merely concurred with Paul's message. Sometimes composite authorship claims in (normally much shorter) ancient letters simply provided greetings (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 16.1.title).

1:2. "*Saints" means "set-apart ones," and "sanctified" means "set apart," "holy, consecrated or separated for God." This language was applied to Israel in the *Old Testament; it meant that God had set apart Israel to himself when he redeemed them, and they were therefore to live for God, not like the nations around them.

1:3. "*Grace" adapts a standard Greek greeting, and "peace" a Jewish one. By invoking Jesus alongside the Father as the source of grace and peace in a blessing or wish-prayer (wish-prayers for the hearers were common in letter openings), Paul presupposes Jesus' divinity.

1:4. Thanksgivings sometimes appear in ancient letters (e.g., 2 Maccabees 1:11). As in speeches, official letters might open with a proem praising the reader, which was designed to secure the reader's favor for the rest of the letter. Moralists who gave rebuking speeches or wrote rebuking letters also usually mixed in praise to make their advice easier to accept.

1:5. Opening sections of speeches or literary works commonly introduced some of the themes that would recur throughout the letter. "Speech" and "knowledge" were important to the Corinthians. In fact, the nearby Isthmian Games (see comment on 9:24-25) included speech contests, and knowledge was associated with philosophical wisdom or the ability to speak extemporaneously on any topic (a skill in which *rhetoricians, or public speakers, were trained). Here Paul means spiritual, not merely natural, gifts, but the Corinthians had learned to excel in these particular gifts precisely because these mattered most to them in their culture.

1:6-8. "The day of our Lord Jesus Christ" here fulfills the role assigned to "the day of *God*" in standard Jewish tradition (cf., e.g., Is 13:6, 9; Joel 2:1, 11, 31; Amos 5:18, 20; Zeph 1:7-8, 14; 2:2-3). Some elements of Judaism, especially in the *Diaspora, played down the future aspects of biblical hope; Paul wants to reverse this tendency among the Corinthian Christians.

1:9. Ancient philosophers often spoke of human "fellowship" or "communion" with other people. Paul could mean fellowship with others in Christ, or intimacy with the Lord himself, or both.

1:10-17
Christ Not Divided

Later *rhetoricians would have classified at least 1 Corinthians 1:10–4:21 (addressing unity), and perhaps the whole letter, as a letter of admonition. Paul is not defending himself against opponents (as in 2 Corinthians) but addressing the misbehavior of the Corinthians. The context shows that they are favoring specific teachers (Paul and Apollos) on the basis of their respective rhetorical or philosophical skills (1:18–4:21).

1:10. For the first three centuries of its existence, the *church met mainly in homes; those belonging to more well-to-do members of the congregation could naturally hold the most people (see comment on 11:17-34). Because the size of these homes limited the size of congregations and forced Christians to meet in different house churches, divisions could easily arise among them. A *major* basis for the Corinthian Christians' division, however, derives from differences in social status and perspectives within the congregations. One type of ancient speech (known as a *homonoia* speech) lamented divisions and called for unity; Paul's readers would immediately recognize the nature of his argument. Paul states a thesis in 1:10 and then (following the custom in ancient works) outlines the events leading up to the present situation (1:11-12).

1:11. Rivalry and enmity pervaded society, even in sports but especially in politics and public speech. Ancient urban culture, epitomized in Corinth, evaluated and compared

speakers. One normally specified the source for one's information unless it could harm the source. These informants may have been agents of Chloe, a wealthy businesswoman in Corinth or Ephesus (16:8), traveling between the two cities on business. As such, they may have been high-status slaves or *freedpersons belonging to her household. Members of a Corinthian church, they brought Paul the news; news and letters were most often carried by people traveling on other business. (Had they been her children rather than servants, they would have been named by their *father's* household, even were he deceased.)

1:12. People often gravitated toward particular teachers and defended their schools' interests. Occasionally students of competing teachers even came to blows, including in Corinth. Philosophers encouraged emotional attachment to themselves as a necessary part of developing morally and intellectually. Rabbis had their own schools, and disciples normally propagated their teacher's views. Political parties sometimes took the slogans, "I am of so-and-so." Using rhetorical repetition (here *anaphora*, which takes the form x . . . / x . . .), Paul neatly caricatures the Corinthians' divisions into four groups (though "Cephas" and "Christ" might be only hypothetical; cf. 3:5-6).

1:13. Paul here uses a common technique in argument: *reductio ad absurdum,* reducing an opponent's position to its natural but absurd conclusion. Speakers sometimes piled up rhetorical questions (here, three) to drive home their point.

1:14-15. Corinth had many famous fountains and bath houses—no shortage of potential sites for public *baptisms. In some Greek *mystery cults an initiate would reportedly call the one who had introduced him to the cult "father"; probably here Paul is simply still reducing their position to the absurd (cf. 1:13). "Crispus" (cf. Acts 18:8) and "Gaius" (a common name, but cf. Rom 16:23) are Latin names and may reflect persons of high status in the congregation.

1:16. Paul may have recalled Stephanas separately because he may have met and baptized him elsewhere (16:15). One could add an afterthought in casual or informal letters (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 8.14.4) or use it as a deliberate rhetorical correction (in this case, perhaps to underline the secondary nature of the question). A "household" normally followed the religion of the head of the household; 16:15 implies that Stephanas was a believer and a person of some means.

1:17. Judaism used "baptism" as the final act of conversion for *Gentiles; early Christians followed this pattern. But Paul refuses to emphasize the act itself; his emphasis is on the message to whose reception baptism merely bears witness. Though using rhetoric to communicate, moralists commonly denied that they used skilled rhetoric to persuade their hearers, and they pointed out that they appealed only to the truth.

1:18-25
God's Wisdom in the Cross

Judaism stressed the importance of divine Wisdom, which God revealed in his Word; Wisdom was sometimes personified (1:30). Given popular Greek respect for philosophy and *rhetoric (the primary two disciplines in which advanced studies were possible for those with funds), it is probable that some educated members of the church are especially interested in "wise speech." Paul mistrusts such rhetoric (cf. 1:17, 20; 2:1, 4-5) and presumably worldly philosophy as well (cf. 1:21; 2:7-8; cf. Col 2:8). Apollos may have fit their preferred speaking style better than Paul did (1:12; see comment on Acts 18:24). Though minimizing rhetoric, Paul in this section employs rhetorical devices that his critics might recognize, including antithesis (1:18); four rhetorical questions with the triple repetition of "where is . . . ?" (1:20); and shockingly paradoxical oxymorons (1:25, also using antithesis).

1:18. Romans regarded crucifixion as a death appropriate for slaves; Jews also saw it as shameful (Deut 21:23). Those viewed as "*saviors" were normally gods, kings, wealthy benefactors or miracle workers. Roman society was built around power and status; power was concentrated in the male head of the household, in wealthy and aristocratic families, and so forth. Associating power with a crucified man—the epitome of dishonor and weakness—thus made no more sense to ancients than it does to modern people outside Christ.

1:19. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 to show

that the wisdom of those living by human tradition (including Jewish tradition, Is 29:13-14) instead of by God's revelation (Is 29:9-12) would perish; cf. similarly Jeremiah 8:9.

1:20. Commentators rightly find models for Paul's wording in texts like Isaiah 19:12; 33:18 and Job 12:17 (cf. further the principle in Prov 21:30; Is 29:14; 44:25; 47:10; Jer 8:8-9; 9:12, 23). The "debater [or reasoner] of this age" might refer to a trained rhetorician, whom philosophers sometimes despised as devoid of genuine content. But Paul challenges the philosophers ("wise men") as well.

1:21. In Greek comedy the hero pretended to be stupid, but he proved to be wise in the end; in contrast to this hero was the fool who claimed to be wise and wanted credit for the wise man's triumph but was rebuffed. *Plato said that human wisdom was worthless, and people should seek God's wisdom instead.

1:22-23. Greeks were known for their love of learning. Greeks and Jews alike might desire attesting miracles, but Paul keeps Jews and Greeks distinct here for rhetorical effect. On the foolishness of the cross to both, see comment on 1:18.

1:24-25. In antiquity, divine power was typically associated with wonderworkers (1:22); the Corinthian culture, like Roman culture in general, valued social power (1:26). Paul uses "the foolishness of God" and "the weakness of God" ironically: the least of God's wisdom is superior to the best of human wisdom. Irony was a common rhetorical device.

1:26-31
Inversion of Status

Paul again uses limited *rhetorical devices to communicate a wisdom that transcended rhetoric: repeating "not many" three times in 1:26 is *anaphora* (x . . . /x . . .); repeating "God chose" three times in 1:27-28 is *antistrophe* (. . . x/. . . x—it appears at the end of the lines in Greek). Paul introduces three elements in 1:26 and then develops them in 1:27-28.

1:26-29. Roman social class was based on birth ("nobility") rather than on wealth; but by either criterion, most of the Corinthian Christians derived from the lower ranks of society, which made up the vast majority of ancient society. Paul's guarded language here ("not many"—NIV) suggests that some, however, were of higher status, no doubt including the owners of many of the homes in which the churches met (cf. perhaps especially Rom 16:23). (Many of the recently wealthy in Corinth came from lower social ranks but achieved prestige through wealth.) This passage reflects Jeremiah 9:23, paving the way for Paul's explicit quotation of Jeremiah 9:24 in 1 Corinthians 1:31. For God inverting human status, see also Isaiah 2:11, 17.

1:30. Both Jewish and Greek literature sometimes personified wisdom. *Christ as divine Wisdom (8:6; cf. Jn 1:1-18) functions as righteousness, sanctification and redemption, changing the person completely for God. The *law was considered both wisdom (Deut 4:6) and righteousness (Deut 6:25).

1:31. Here Paul paraphrases Jeremiah 9:24: one should boast in knowing and understanding God rather than in human wisdom.

2:1-5
Saved by the Cross, Not by Rhetoric

Paul here appeals to the Corinthians' own conversion (cf. Gal 3:2). It was the powerful preaching of the weakness of the cross, not humanly powerful *rhetoric, that had saved them (1 Cor 1:18).

Even most defenders of rhetoric, or skilled speech, admitted that it was sometimes abused. But they argued that it was necessary, because having truth but being unable to persuade others of it was not helpful. Philosophers traditionally criticized rhetoric, claiming that truth, not skillful speech, should be the emphasis; but these same philosophers used forms of argument developed by rhetoricians. By this period, most had surmounted the traditional opposition between philosophy and rhetoric, allowing for the use of both. Paul here disapproves of *mere* rhetoric, but his own writing, including 1 Corinthians, displays extensive knowledge and use of rhetorical forms. Although Paul may not have matched the rhetorical prowess of Apollos or the standards of Corinthian leaders, he was a skillful writer (2 Cor 10:10) in his own right.

2:1-2. Normally a new speaker in a city would announce an event where he would offer an oration; if enough people were impressed and he drew students, he would stay in that city.

Paul, by contrast, did not tell people what they wanted to hear to make himself popular. Because Paul in the context is boasting in his weakness, he does not praise his speaking or philosophical ability (cf. Ex 4:10; Jer 1:6). But this reserve need not mean—and the skillfulness of his argumentation shows that it cannot mean—that his argumentation style was weak, even if his delivery (voice quality and gestures) were inadequate (which is likely—2 Cor 10:10; possibly Paul also spoke Greek with an accent, though cf. Acts 21:37). Even the most renowned speakers (e.g., Dio Chrysostom) often disavowed their own speaking abilities in order to lower audience expectations; then they spoke brilliantly. Rhetoricians recommended this technique.

2:3. "Fear and trembling" occur together as an expression in the *Old Testament and Jewish literature; although the expression was formulaic, it was used in a variety of different ways. In this context, this expression suggests that Paul's weakness was in his delivery, not in his awareness of contemporary rhetorical style. Apart from *Stoics, most speakers approved of stirring emotions in speeches, but trembling would normally put off audiences accustomed to skilled speakers.

2:4-5. In rhetoric, "demonstration" was a form of argument proved from certain and undisputed premises; Paul does not offer a mere syllogism (a form that was logical but might be based on inadequate premises) or dialectic (which *Plato treated as defining and classifying data) or rhetorical tricks.

One could also speak of rhetorical "power," but Paul's power is from a different source: God's power resident in the preaching of the weakness of the cross (1:18, 24). This power might imply miraculous attestation (1:22, 24; 2 Cor 12:12; 13:4; Rom 15:19).

2:6-16
Genuine Wisdom Through the Spirit

Paul hastens to explain that he does not oppose genuine wisdom; but this wisdom is beyond human understanding and can be accepted only by those who know God's heart through the *Spirit. The Corinthian believers' wrong focus shows that they are missing this fundamental wisdom (3:1-4; cf. 1:18-31).

2:6. Philosophers used the term for "mature" or "perfect" (KJV) here for those who had progressed to an advanced stage in wisdom; contrast 3:1! (Its use for full initiates to the *mystery cults is less relevant here.) The contrast in 2:6-9 is between temporal wisdom of those great in this age and God's eternal wisdom. Cf. Wisdom of Solomon 9:6: "Even one who is perfect among people will be deemed nothing without the wisdom that comes from you."

2:7. Judaism believed that God's wisdom existed before the world and that God had created the world through this wisdom.

2:8. Some scholars suggest that "rulers of the age" here refers to angelic powers in the heavens (cf. 15:24; Rom 8:38; Eph 1:21). In the context, earthly rulers (cf. Rom 13:1) are more likely, however; these are the powerful people of this age, by the Corinthians' standards (1 Cor 1:26-28). Yet the truly powerful one was "the glorious Lord"!

2:9. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 64:4, which was part of a prayer for God to intervene in history again on behalf of the remnant who hoped in him; Paul adapts the wording of the quotation slightly, as was common in ancient citations. (He may also slightly conflate this text with the *LXX of Is 65:17, which speaks of the present being forgotten in the world to come.) The point is that the things of the eternal God are inaccessible to mortals except by the means Paul articulates in verse 10.

2:10-13. Only God's *Spirit knows what is in his heart, but because believers have God's Spirit, they can know his heart too. In light of the possible allusion to Wisdom of Solomon 9 in 1 Corinthians 2:6, cf. here Wisdom of Solomon 9:17: Who has known God's plans unless God has given them wisdom and sent his Spirit from above? (For God "revealing" wisdom, cf. Sirach 1:6; "those who love him" could echo the recipients of God's wisdom in Sirach 1:10.) "Spirit" had a broad variety of meanings, including "attitude," "disposition"; hence "spirit of the world" need not refer to any particular spiritual being (unlike God's Spirit).

2:14-15. The spiritual person can evaluate all things, but the "natural" (KJV, NASB; "unspiritual," NRSV; literally, something like "soulish") person cannot evaluate the things or people of the Spirit. God's breath made

humans living "souls" (Gen 2:7), but they still needed God's Spirit to experience him. Paul's use of "natural" may be based on a particular interpretation of Genesis 2:7 current in *Hellenistic Jewish circles; see comment on 15:45-46. (This Hellenistic Jewish use may borrow the language of some Greek philosophers, who contrasted the "natural," or earthbound, part of the soul with the mind. Paul's distinction is between those ruled by their own earthly soul and those ruled by the Spirit of God. *Gnostics in the second century wrongly used 1 Cor 2:14-15 as a proof text to distinguish the human soul and spirit and to argue that they were an elite group who followed the incorruptible, immortal spirit.)

2:16. As in 2:9-10, Paul follows a text underlining the ignorance of humans apart from God with the recognition that those who receive his Spirit can understand his heart. Paul turns the rhetorical question of Isaiah 40:13 (cf. Rom 11:34) around in the light of the coming of the Spirit; he quotes "mind of the Lord" from the Greek version, but undoubtedly knows that the Hebrew has "Spirit of the Lord." Many philosophers sought to know God's mind by wisdom; for Paul, this wisdom comes only through the experience of God's Spirit.

3:1-9
Do Not Follow Servants

With their partisan celebrity cults the Corinthian Christians are acting like "natural," "fleshly" people rather than people of the *Spirit. Paul and Apollos are mere servants; God is the one the Corinthians ought to follow.

3:1-2. Ancient writers often compared the unskilled in knowledge to babes who had to start out with the basics, with milk (Philo, *Epictetus, etc.). If Paul intends the image to evoke all that it can, he portrays himself as mother or wet nurse (cf. 4:15; 1 Thess 2:7). Teachers always expected students to start with basics but also expected them to progress past basics.

3:3. "Fleshly" (not "worldly"—NIV) is slightly different from "as fleshly" (again, not "worldly"— NIV) of verse 1: it means that they were *acting* fleshly, not that they were fleshly by nature. On "flesh" and Spirit, see comment on Romans 8:1-11.

3:4. Greek culture sometimes divinized heroes into gods. Later traditions divinized philosophers, and philosophers often claimed that people could be divinized by virtue, because they considered the soul a divine part within each person. Although some Jewish writers in the Greek world adopted the language of deification, the principle of one God generally kept Jews and Christians from following this concept that far (Gen 3:5). Here Paul says: If you follow humans, then you are not only not divine; you are not even following the Spirit of God (2:14–3:3).

3:5-9. Paul uses the familiar image of sowing; at the end of verse 9 he introduces the familiar image of building, which will dominate his exposition through 3:17. Other writers like *Philo also described God as planter or builder; in the *Old Testament, most often for God planting, building or uprooting his people (cf. Ruth 4:11; Ps 28:5; 51:18; 69:35; 147:2; Jer 1:10; 18:7; 24:6; 31:4, 28; 45:4).

3:10-20
The Real Test of God's Servants

The Corinthians should follow God, not his ministers (3:1-9), because only the day of judgment would show the genuine character of ministers (3:10-15). The building on which God's servants are working is God's temple, representing God's people (3:16-17).

3:10-11. A "master builder" directed the construction; thus Paul designed strategies as well as labored.

3:12-15. A few other ancient stories highlighted the competition among substances like those Paul mentions here; further, everyone knew which substances would endure testing by fire (cf., e.g., Num 31:23). Ancient sources sometimes employed the metaphor of testing by fire; in the *Old Testament, see Proverbs 27:21; Isaiah 47:14; Zechariah 13:9. Ancient Jewish writers sometimes compared the wicked to straw that would be consumed at the judgment (in the Old Testament, cf., e.g., Is 33:11). Only the judgment would test the ultimate value of each servant's work.

3:16-17. Some ancient writers thought of spiritual temples. Some Jewish people, as attested in the *Dead Sea Scrolls (cf., e.g., 1QS 8.5-9; 9.6), portrayed God's people as a building, the temple, so the image could have been familiar to Jesus' first followers. Nearly

everyone in the ancient world believed that desecrating temples warranted judgment.

3:18-20. Paul cites Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11. The former is a wise principle, even though Eliphaz, who first articulated it, used it in an evil way against Job (Job 4–5). Psalm 94:11 in context stresses that God alone teaches people rightly; human wisdom is at best folly. Paul thus continues his proof from Scripture of human folly (e.g., 1 Cor 1:19).

3:21-23
All Things Are the Corinthians' Anyway

This passage would make good sense to ancient readers. Even Paul and Apollos are given to them by God; why follow just Paul or Apollos, when they should follow the God who gives everything? God's people would take possession of the world to come (see comment on Rom 4:13; cf. Zech 8:12); at present they are heirs of the world and children of the God who rules it.

*Stoic and *Cynic philosophers often praised "having nothing" (see comment on 2 Cor 6:10) while emphasizing that the whole world belonged to them, so they could take whatever they needed. They often cited the proverb "Friends share all property in common" and claimed that because they were friends of the gods, who owned everything, everything was theirs.

4:1-5
Do Not Evaluate Before the Real Test

A sinful lifestyle always indicated sinful motives, but a godly lifestyle could sometimes mask selfish motives. Only God knows hearts, and Christian celebrities could be accurately evaluated only in the light of the final judgment (3:5-15). Paul adapts the language of philosophers respected by the Corinthian Christians.

4:1. "Stewards" or "managers" ("those entrusted"—NIV) were often servants, as here, or freedmen. These servants and freedmen were trusted to manage the master's estate, especially his financial affairs, and had great authority and prestige. Some philosophers saw themselves as stewards or managers of divine truths.

4:2. Because stewards were trusted to handle their masters' finances, purchasing slaves and goods and making wise investments, it was crucial that they be "trustworthy" or "faithful."

4:3-4. The *Old Testament speaks of the day of God's judgment tribunal as "the day of God." "Day" sometimes meant "court," as Paul uses it and many translations render it here. Paul uses several legal expressions in these verses. Most philosophers, especially *Cynics, expressed disdain for what anyone else thought about them.

4:5. Jesus and other Jewish teachers spoke of God bringing secret thoughts to light at his judgment (cf. Is 29:15; **1 Enoch* 38:3; 49:4). Ancient *rhetoric was concerned with "praise" for those to be honored; Paul says that the only honor that counts is what God will assign at the final judgment.

4:6-13
Apostles Last of All

In Jesus' *kingdom, where the greatest is the least and the King died for his people, no one is more important than anyone else. Indeed, true *apostles take the lowest role, not the greatest; they should not be objects of a celebrity cult.

4:6. Some commentators argue that speakers advocating harmony sometimes warned people not to "go beyond what is written" but to comply with a prior agreement; Paul may thus summon them to unity, reminding them of a contract implied in their acceptance of Christ. Some commentators have suggested that "not beyond what is written" refers to the learning of schoolchildren, who learned how to write by imitating what was written. Others think Paul refers to Scripture, perhaps texts he has cited so far in 1 Corinthians on the worthlessness of human folly. Whatever the case, Paul may warn against boasting beyond one's proper station.

4:7. Everything they have, God has given to them; they have earned none of it. Philosophers often liked to make this point to keep people from boasting.

4:8. Irony was a frequent rhetorical and literary device. Philosophers often claimed to be the only true kings, asserting that only they had character noble enough to rule rightly.

They also claimed to possess the only genuine wealth and wisdom. Paul ironically concedes the claims of his most educated readers: "You are true philosophers; I, your teacher in Christ, am foolish."

4:9. Sages often listed their sufferings that verified their commitment to living according to their teaching. Stoic philosophers sometimes claimed that they evoked the admiration of gods and mortals as they persevered through suffering; but Paul declares that the suffering *apostles became a "spectacle," objects of scorn in the theater of the world. The person in charge of games in amphitheaters would exhibit the gladiators who would battle wild beasts there; here God himself exhibits the sufferings of the apostles. "Last of all" could mean captives led in triumphal procession before execution (2 Cor 2:14), or, with likelier reference to the arena (1 Cor 15:32), that they were the final show for the day—normally reserved for the most wretched criminal condemned to die in the arena. Corinth's theater seated eighteen thousand.

4:10. Philosophers claimed to be wise, powerful and truly honorable, as opposed to the foolish masses. They meant that their conduct was wise, they were morally strong, and they were honorable in virtue. But much of society thought the opposite, especially of the homeless *Cynics: they were foolish, weak beggars. Paul's detractors think his behavior unbecoming of true wisdom; Paul uses irony to suggest that the true wisdom is on his side.

4:11. Greek moralists sometimes presented themselves as models for others to imitate; a few philosophers, especially the Cynics, wandered around homeless and dependent on charity. Paul presents his own sufferings and sacrifices for the *gospel as a model for the Corinthians to imitate (4:9-16). Everything Paul describes in 4:11 could fit the typical ancient depiction of the wandering Cynic philosopher.

4:12. Stoics tried to show themselves unaffected by criticism; the most fundamental background for blessing those who insulted one, however, is Jesus's teaching (cf. Lk 6:22). Here Paul distinguishes himself from most kinds of philosophers and from the more aristocratic ideals of the higher-status faction within the Corinthian *church. Philosophers might beg, charge tuition or be supported by a *patron; to many of them, manual labor was the least honorable option. Because wealthy landowners also considered manual labor undignified, well-to-do people in the church might be embarrassed to invite friends of their own social circle to hear the teachings of Paul, who worked as an artisan (skilled laborer). The majority of people in the congregation, however, would not be well-to-do; artisans were often proud of their labor.

4:13. Some commentators note that Paul's words translated "rubbish" and "dregs" (NRSV) could apply to criminals or others killed as offerings to gods. The terms had wider use, however, and philosophers sometimes thought of the masses as "garbage" (GNT) and "refuse" (NIV); more often, the masses may have thought of wandering Cynic philosophers in these same terms. It was a universally disgusting image for something worthless and rejected (Lam 3:45). Following Jesus, Paul goes beyond Cynics in answering slander gently (cf. Prov 15:1; 29:8); many Cynics were happy to revile their audiences, even without provocation, to prove their independence. Stoic and Cynic philosophers believed that their perseverance in suffering authenticated them as genuine philosophers, and Paul wants the philosophically informed members of his audience to recognize that on their own terms he can compete with the best of them.

4:14-21
A Father's Threat

4:14. Except in the most extreme circumstances, philosophers preferred to admonish rather than to rebuke and thereby humiliate. Moralists generally emphasized that they admonished people only because they cared for them, sometimes describing their concern in parental terms. For Paul as a parent, cf. already 3:1-2; fathers were responsible for their sons' education.

4:15. "Guardian" (NIV, NRSV; better than "tutor"—NASB—or "instructor"—KJV) refers to a slave who would accompany a child on his way to school; although respected by the child and responsible to teach him manners, this guardian was not a teacher per se. Students could affectionately call and treat special teachers as "fathers"; but slave aides were nothing like fathers.

4:16. Philosophers, *rabbis and teachers in general were considered models to imitate as well as to listen to. Most directly here, "imitate" fits the image of children and fathers (4:15).

4:17. A *disciple of a teacher could be affectionately called his "child" (4:15); Timothy as an imitator of Paul can become a model for Paul's "children" in Corinth. Paul's "ways" (NASB) or "way of life" (NIV) may allude to the Jewish use of "ways" to mean divine laws or proper behavior.

4:18-21. Paul continues in the role of "father" (4:14-17) in this passage. Fathers were sometimes portrayed as gentler than mothers, but they also used the rod for discipline, and in Roman political rhetoric, the proper patriarchal figure was stern and uncompromising. Others in antiquity also qualified some statements with "if God wills" (4:19; see comment on 16:7).

5:1-5
Discipline for Sexual Immorality

Paul now turns from issues of *church unity (chaps. 1–4) to sexual issues (chaps. 5–7). Although most incestuous relationships today have innocent victims (molestation is never the victim's fault; cf. Deut 22:26), in chapter 5 Paul addresses the sin of two consenting adults.

5:1. The marriage of full brothers and sisters was considered immoral throughout the Roman Empire except in Egypt; parent-child incest was universally abhorred throughout the Roman world (Greeks viewed Persians and Nabateans as exceptions, but this was probably slander). From the revulsion against the idea exhibited in the Greek Oedipus stories to slander leveled against emperors, it was one of those few crimes that virtually all cultures agreed was terrible. Its Roman legal punishment was banishment to an island. Relations with stepmothers were treated like relations with mothers—as incestuous. Here Paul uses the language of Leviticus 18:6-8. Relations between sons and stepmothers were often strained, but because Greek and Roman fathers often remarried much younger wives, a stepmother could be within the age range of an older son.

5:2. These people may have been boasting in their spiritual freedom. Committing a crime was considered bad in antiquity, but boasting about it in addition to committing it was considered even worse (including in Scripture: Is 3:9; Jer 6:15; 8:12). Some suggest that the Christians here boast not in the sin but in the sinner—that he was a person of status belonging to their congregation. If he was of high status, even social peers who criticized him could risk enmity, and the church could also suffer if it alienated him.

Communities of resident aliens could discipline members according to their laws, so long as the disciplines did not violate Roman law and the members remained part of these communities. Synagogues, which functioned as social centers for their communities, disciplined their members, especially those whose immorality threatened to bring *Gentile reproach on the whole Jewish community. Discipline could include corporal punishment (beatings), but the ultimate punishment was exclusion from the Jewish community—spiritual banishment. This expulsion could be deemed the spiritual equivalent of a death sentence, executed only by God; but it was reversible if the banned person repented.

5:3. Letter writers sometimes expressed their intimate concern for the readers by saying that, although they were "absent in body," they were with them "in spirit" or in mind (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 3.11.2; *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 67.2; Oxyrhynchus papyri 32). In some cases, the letter itself communicated the effect of the writer's presence. But this expression was meant as a statement of intimacy, not of metaphysical presence.

5:4. Some Jewish sources averred that judges in Jewish courts judged cases on the authority of the heavenly court (see comment on Mt 5:22). Jewish communities seem to have used excommunication, or official exclusion from the community (attested in both temporary and permanent forms, along with other levels of possible discipline, in the *Dead Sea Scrolls and in later *rabbinic literature), to replace the *Old Testament death penalty; Christians adopted the practice from Judaism.

5:5. Some compare the long-standing pagan custom of magical execration by devoting a person to the gods of the underworld or other avenging deities; curse tablets used for this purpose were widespread. In the Old Testament, God's servants were to place idola-

trous items under the ban, devoting them to destruction; here Paul instructs the Corinthians to deliver this man to *Satan, the agent of destruction. Paul may hope that the resultant suffering (11:30) will lead to *repentance and thus salvation. Jewish teachers often felt that suffering plus repentance would expiate sin, or that (as here) suffering could lead to repentance.

5:6-13
Removing Immorality in the Church

Immorality inside and apparently sanctioned by the church was far more likely to lead Christians astray than the immorality of nonbelievers would.

5:6. The most obvious characteristic of leaven, or yeast, is that it permeates the dough, making the whole batch of dough rise when baked. Paul uses leaven here as a symbol for sin.

5:7-8. Paul argues that the Corinthians should remain unleavened, just as bread does during the Passover season. (The Jewish people left Egypt in such haste after the first Passover that they did not have time to leaven their bread, and subsequent generations were commanded to celebrate the feast with unleavened bread in commemoration of the event.) Paul writes some time before Pentecost (16:8), fifty days after Passover, so Passover could well be fresh on his mind. Jewish people understood the Passover lamb as a sacrifice in this period (cf. *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2.312). The Jewish people were expecting a new redemption, like their first exodus from Egypt, when the *Messiah came; Paul believes that the Messiah has come, and that this Messiah was himself the new paschal lamb.

5:9-10. Jewish people typically considered Gentiles sexually "immoral" and were probably correct about most Gentile men. Both Jewish and Gentile moralists often included lists of vices (as in 5:10, 11; 6:9-10).

5:11. Jewish excommunication (5:3-5) also excluded people from communal meals, as in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

5:12. Rome allowed local Jewish communities to judge Jewish offenders of Jewish laws. This judgment and the discipline were carried out in the *synagogues, the community centers for local Jewish groups (cf. comment on 2 Cor 11:24). Paul expects the Christians of his day to follow the same model, correcting the behavior of erring fellow Christians.

5:13. The *Old Testament often commanded God's people to purge evildoers from among their ranks, normally by execution (Deut 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 24:7); the offenses listed include sexual sins (22:21, 24). Otherwise, the unrepentant offender could remove God's blessing from the whole community and bring about the death of others (Josh 7:5, 12-13, 25). Here the evildoer is purged from the community by being banished; banishment was a common punishment in the Roman period. In Judaism, exclusion from the community was a spiritual equivalent of execution, applied in the *New Testament period to capital crimes of the Old Testament (see comment on 1 Cor 5:2; actual capital sentences of Jewish courts could not be legally carried out without Roman permission).

6:1-11
Christians in Secular Courts

Having advocated that the *church act as a court with regard to sexual offenses (chap. 5), Paul now argues for the necessity of church courts in his society (6:1-8) and then returns to sexual offenses (6:9, 12-20). Some think that the litigants of 6:1-8 are the father and son of 5:1 (cf. "defraud" in 6:7-8; 1 Thess 4:4-6); but it is likelier simply a *digression related to the issue of courts (cf. "why not be wronged?"—6:7).

Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean world had their own courts in their *synagogues. Bringing internal disputes of the Jewish or Christian communities before secular magistrates was a luxury these minority religions could ill afford; there was already too much slander against them in the broader society. See comment on Acts 18:12-17.

6:1. Like modern North American society, Roman society was extremely litigious. Cases began to be heard at dawn and sometimes could be argued as late as sunset. Judges were always chosen from among the well-to-do, and most legal disputes revolved around money or property. Some lawsuits were simply designed to disturb enemies.

6:2. Members of the upper class received better treatment in the law courts, sometimes generating complaints of unfairness even in

antiquity; indeed, this preference was eventually written into penalties prescribed in the laws. Further, social inferiors could rarely gain a hearing trying to sue those of higher status. But for Paul, even the lowliest believers are equipped to judge cases.

6:3. In many Jewish traditions, the righteous would judge the nations (Dan 7:22; Wisdom of Solomon 3:8; *I Enoch* 95:3; *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QpHab 5.4); this judging could also imply judging the angels who were believed to rule the nations.

6:4. In ancient society, both judges and arbiters normally were of high status. This verse could be read as a command (KJV) rather than a question (so most current translations): "appoint the lowliest," in contrast to the world (see comment on 6:2); whatever the case, the context suggests that the least of Christians *should* be more competent in justice than the wisest of pagans (cf. 2:14-15).

6:5. Family disputes such as inheritances could be settled by private arbitration, although the arbitrators were usually socially prominent landowners. A magistrate would decide whether cases should be heard by a judge or jury. Juries often judged criminal cases like adultery, murder and treason. This case may have gone before a secular jury court.

6:6. Suing literal brothers was scandalous behavior, though unfortunately quite frequent in ancient property disputes. *Stoics taught that possessions were worthless and consequently rejected legal remedies to defend them (Musonius Rufus 10, p. 76.16-17); some other philosophers also disdained submitting to courts they considered less wise than themselves. The Jewish communities outside Judea were very conscious of their minority status and did not wish to reinforce negative pagan conceptions of their morality. Consequently, they usually dealt with Jewish problems within their own community. Christians were an even smaller minority at this time and also had Jesus's teaching on the topic (Mt 5:39-40; Lk 6:29-30).

6:7-8. Many philosophers who believed that property did not matter could advocate ignoring offenses rather than going to court. Paul prefers the Jewish method of settling disputes within the community, which serves both justice and the community's witness to the outside world.

6:9-10. That the unrighteous would not "inherit God's *kingdom," that is, would not have a share in it, was standard Jewish and Christian teaching. Both Jewish and pagan "vice lists" often defined or exemplified the "unrighteous"; Paul follows this practice. "Do not be deceived" appears in ancient moral exhortation and is common in the *New Testament. Scholars have disputed the meaning of the term sometimes translated "homosexuals" (NASB), but it seems to be coined from Leviticus 20:13 and to mean those who engage in homosexual acts. These were a common feature of Greek male life in antiquity; this was one form of behavior that Jewish people regarded as virtually exclusively a *Gentile vice (e.g., *Philo, *Special Laws* 3.37-39; *Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.215; **Sibylline Oracles* 5.387).

Like the *rabbis, Paul engages in *rhetorical damnation: even though in practice he has expelled from fellowship only the most extreme offender (5:1-5), those who continue in the lifestyles he mentions here will not make it into the kingdom.

6:11. Some philosophers reasoned from indicative to imperative: those who have accepted philosophy cannot (by which philosophers often meant "must not") live by the world's folly; Jewish teachers also called Israel to live holy because God had consecrated them to himself (cf. Lev 20:26). Still, most ancient moralists primarily simply exhorted people to behave in particular ways. Paul reasons from what the Corinthians are in *Christ (by God's action) to how they should live, rather than the reverse.

6:12-20
The Body Is for God, Not for Immorality

Biblical *law forbade sex between people who were not married; the penalty for having sex with one person and then marrying another was the same as the penalty for adultery while married—death. Although this penalty was no longer strictly enforced by Paul's day (if it ever regularly had been), it underlined the seriousness of the offense; premarital sexual immorality was adultery against one's future spouse (Deut 22:13-29).

Many Greek thinkers, however, reasoned that sex without marriage ("fornication"—KJV,

NRSV) was fine as long as it did not control a person; the more vulgar *Cynics even relieved their sexual passions publicly. Much more commonly, for most Greek men under the age of thirty, heterosexual intercourse was most available with slaves or with prostitutes. Roman law permitted (and reaped tax profits from) prostitution, and it forbade fornication only if both parties were of aristocratic birth. Paul's response shows his mastery of his readers' culture and his ability to communicate biblical truth relevantly.

6:12. Philosophers used various tests for whether one should do an act, such as whether it was "lawful" or "permissible" and, more important, whether it was "profitable" (NASB) or "expedient" (KJV). Some philosophers excused relieving their sexual appetites with prostitutes or by publicly stimulating themselves, explaining that they were in complete control of their own emotions!

As is common in *diatribe (an ancient teaching form), Paul cites the opinion of an imaginary opponent similar to (or an absurd reduction of) that of his hearers, and then refutes or qualifies it: "'I can get away with anything.' Maybe so, but 'anything' is not good for you." Sometimes writers explicitly mention the interlocutor (as in 15:12; Rom 9:19); at other times, as here, they just spoke for and then responded to the interlocutor (e.g., Rom 3:1-9; *Cicero, *For Scaurus* 9.18). Philosophers frequently warned against being "enslaved" (6:12d) or dominated by pleasures, false ideas and the like.

6:13-14. Moralists often used the "belly" to represent pleasures (cf. comment on Phil 3:19). Wealthy banquets could cater to both gluttony and sexual desire. "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food" was an acceptable Greek way of arguing by analogy that the body was for sex and sex for the body. That God would do away with both reflected the typical Greek disdain for the doctrine of the *resurrection (chap. 15), because Greeks believed that one was done with one's body at death. Paul responds to this Greek position with the *Old Testament/Jewish perspective that the body is for God and he will resurrect it (cf. also 6:20). Critics of those skeptical of the resurrection (*Sadducees) or of life after death (*Epicureans) emphasized that belief in the future provided a deterrent to immorality.

6:15-16. Here Paul argues from Genesis 2:24. Jewish interpreters normally applied this text to marriage, but because in Jewish law intercourse sealed a marriage union or betrayed it, Paul's argument from Genesis 2:24 could make sense to Jewish hearers or to *Gentiles conversant with the Old Testament.

Prostitution was considered a business like any other, disreputable as the occupation was thought to be (for prostitutes, not for the men who had sex with them). It was readily available in inns and taverns, and the ranks of prostitutes were especially stocked with slave girls raised from the vast number of abandoned babies. Jews strongly opposed prostitution (although a few engaged in it), and *Philo said that it was a capital offense in God's sight; but this Jewish view was hardly the pagan position. Some pagans even considered prostitution a useful deterrent to adultery. Corinth had an ancient reputation (focused on the earlier Greek city but persisting in Paul's day) for prostitution and promiscuity, although such behavior was by no means exclusive to Corinth.

6:17. The Old Testament speaks of people being "joined" to God (Jer 50:5; Zech 2:11; cf. Num 25:3; Hos 4:17). Paul works here especially with the Old Testament doctrine that God is married to his covenant people (e.g., Is 54:5-6; Jer 3:1; Hos 2:20). Applying the analogy from Genesis 2:24, Paul cannot say that God is "one flesh" with them (the Old Testament and Judaism did not believe God had flesh), but he can say they are "one spirit," united in an intimate, covenant relationship like husband and wife. Thus Christians uniting themselves with prostitutes would defile the sanctity of their relationship with God, as in the religious prostitution reported in pre-Roman Corinth.

6:18. Moralists often exhorted people to flee from vices (also in 10:14; cf. Sirach 21:2; Wisdom of Solomon 1:5), including sexual immorality (*Testament of Reuben* 5:5) such as prostitution (Cato, *Collection of Distichs* 25); a *narrative example in this case would be Joseph (Gen 39:12). "Every sin [KJV, NRSV; not 'other' sins, against NASB, NIV] . . . is outside the body" may represent the opposing position (6:12-14), to which Paul responds, "The sexually immoral person sins against their own body."

6:19. Compare comment on 3:16-17; but here the application to the individual Christian (and hence his or her sexual sanctity) is Paul's own.

6:20. Glorifying God with the body ran against the Greek thinking of many of Paul's hearers; see comment on 6:12-14. "Bought" refers to redemption from slavery (7:23; cf. 1:30); here it is possible that Paul makes a wordplay on the price of freeing a slave prostitute.

7:1-7
Fulfilling Conjugal Rights

Different views on celibacy existed in the ancient world. Most ancient writers condemned failure to marry; Augustus's laws penalized it; and many Jewish teachers even considered it sinful, because reproduction was essential and marriage was the proper deterrent from sexual offenses and distractions. ("Replenishing the earth" was considered a biblical commandment for all Jews. Abortion and child abandonment were widely practiced in antiquity; but ancient Jews and Christians—as well as some pagan moralists—unanimously condemned both as the taking of human life. Jews and Egyptians reared all their children.)

A number of groups of philosophers and minor religious sects, however, as well as many *Essenes among the Jews, advocated celibacy or the rejection of marriage. Some philosophers rejected marriage but thought that sexual release with prostitutes was acceptable since it would not tie a person down (cf. comment on 6:12-20). Some Essenes, a Jewish sect, and members of another reported group called Therapeutae, apparently eschewed marriage; maintaining biblical morality, however, they rejected all intercourse outside marriage.

One may divide some of the ancient opinions roughly as follows: (1) Marriage and procreation are vital for all who are physically capable of it (the majority view). (2) Marriage is a distraction and should never be undertaken by the wise man except in the rare instances where one might find a spouse equally devoted to the philosophic lifestyle (the *Cynic position; cf. *Epictetus, *Diatribes* 3.22.69-76); or some could volunteer for an end-time celibate lifestyle (some Essenes). (3) Marriage is good for most people, but one must make exceptions for those too committed to other spiritual pursuits to take time for it (an early-second-century *rabbi reported in Babylonian Talmud *Yebamot* 63b). Paul's advice combines elements of the second and third approaches.

7:1. "Now concerning" sometimes offered a transition to a new point (e.g., Coptic text *P. Lond.* 1912.52). Now Paul responds to the position in their letter to him: "It is good not to touch [not 'marry,' GNT] a woman" (contrast Gen 2:18). For quoting (or paraphrasing, or caricaturing) an opposing position (7:1) and then refuting it (7:2-5), see comment on 1 Corinthians 6:12. "Touch" was a common ancient idiom for intercourse. Some members of the *church may be following an idea common among many Greek thinkers: sex was fine as long as one did not get tied down with marriage (cf. 6:12-20). Others, whom Paul addresses here, are already married (7:2-5) and abstain from relations with their spouses. Paul says that it is too late to choose celibacy once one is married (cf. v. 5).

7:2. "Let each have" reflects a Greek idiom for "Let them have sexual relations." Jewish people (and some *Gentiles) saw married sexual intimacy as the best deterrent to sexual immorality, and Paul here agrees (see also Prov 5:19-20).

7:3. Jewish marriage contracts stipulated a number of duties for the husband and a number for the wife; one major duty required of the husband was intercourse. Paul views intercourse as a mutual obligation; the meaning of "marital duty" (NIV) here is clear (cf. "conjugal rights"—NRSV).

7:4. Greek writers sometimes portrayed submitting to sexual relations or passion as bringing oneself under someone else's control (cf. 6:12d). Many Gentiles demanded only the husband's fidelity, but Paul expects it for both genders.

7:5. *Pharisees who were trying to formulate laws in this period differed on how long a man could vow to abstain from intercourse with his wife; one school said two weeks, and the other school said one week (Mishnah *Ketubbot* 5:6-7; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 213.2.1). Although Paul would not make longer abstinence grounds for divorce, as they did (7:10-13), he clearly wishes to limit even abstinence by mutual consent, leaving the specifics to the couple. For "temptation" here, see comment on 7:2, 9.

7:6. Jewish *law permitted concessions for human weakness; here Paul permits but does not require periods of abstinence, implying that it is those who wish to abstain (rather than those who do not) who are weak. Abstinence within marriage is their idea (7:1), not his.

7:7. Paul recognizes that not all are called to singleness and equipped for it.

7:8-16
Getting Married Versus Staying Married

Verses 8-9 are a *digression Paul uses to establish a contrast between single persons concerned to stay single (7:8-9) and married persons wishing to become single (7:10-16). Digressions were a standard feature of ancient writing.

7:8. Singleness has advantages; see comment on 7:32-34. But not everyone is equipped for this lifestyle; others should pursue marriage (7:9).

7:9. "Burn" (NIV, NRSV and GNT interpret correctly by adding "with passion") was used throughout ancient romances and other sources to describe the arousal of passion, often (metaphorically) through Cupid's fiery darts. Whereas Greco-Roman literature in general saw nothing wrong with passion, Paul believes that its proper place is only in marriage, and he advocates two alternatives: either self-control or marriage.

7:10-11. Many church members were likely remarried even before conversion; divorce was very common in Corinth. Here Paul addresses current choices, not their past. This divorce prohibition—virtually unique in antiquity—is "from the Lord," from a saying of Jesus (Mk 10:11-12). (The terms translated "leave" and "send away"—NASB—or "separate" and "divorce"—NIV and NRSV—were often synonyms for divorce and probably function as such in this context. In 7:10-11, however, where Paul refers to Jesus' teaching, it may be significant that a wife in Jewish Palestine could only "leave," not "divorce"; in Roman society, either partner could divorce the other by a unilateral decision or abandonment.)

7:12-13. In 7:12-16, Paul must address how Jesus' teaching relates to a specific situation; general statements of principle were regularly qualified for specific situations (cf. analogous qualifications in Mt 5:32; 19:9). What about the party divorced against his or her will? (Under Palestinian Jewish law, women could be divorced by a unilateral act of the husband; under Roman law, either party could unilaterally divorce the other.) Because most first-generation Christians were converted after marriage (which was generally arranged by parents), this text is no indication that Christians knowingly chose marriages with nonbelievers.

7:14. Both Greco-Roman and Jewish law debated the status of children of socially mixed unions (e.g., Gaius, *Institutes* 1.66-92); Jewish law also debated the status of children of religiously mixed unions (Tosefta *Demai* 3:9). Here Paul argues that children of religiously mixed unions are within the sphere of *gospel influence and cannot be used as an excuse for divorce. In Roman society, the children normally went to the father in the event of a divorce; a Christian wife involved in a divorce would lose her opportunity to influence her children for God.

7:15. Paul addresses the specific situation not addressed in Jesus' general principle that he has just cited (7:10-11): the innocent party is free to remarry (see comment on 7:12-13). "Not under bondage" or "not bound" alludes to the wording of Jewish divorce documents, which told the woman, "You are free," or, when stated more fully, "You are free to remarry any man," and further applied to divorce the precise language of freedom from slavery (e.g., Mishnah *Gittin* 9:3; *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* 2:10-12, §144). Being "bound" would mean that she was still married in God's sight; not being "bound," or being "free," meant that she was free to remarry.

7:16. Although the *Old Testament stressed God's faithfulness to the families of his servants, it is also clear that godly parents could have ungodly children, and ungodly parents could have godly children (e.g., throughout 2 Chron 23–36). Paul here agrees that the conversion of the spouse is not guaranteed.

7:17-24
Be Content with Present Circumstances

Whether persons are married or single, they should accept their present lot, although this acceptance does not mean that one can never change one's lot (7:21). Paul's argument here is

so similar to *Cynic-*Stoic teaching that his educated, philosophically inclined hearers would probably concede his point respectfully.

7:17. Greek philosophers, especially Stoics, emphasized accepting one's situation (although one was welcome to change it if possible if this was more useful, 7:21-24). But whereas Stoics identified the God who directed their lives with Fate, Paul trusts God as a loving Father.

7:18-20. Greeks exercised in the nude, and both Greeks and Romans regarded circumcision as a mutilation. For two centuries some Jews, ashamed of their circumcision in the predominantly Greek culture, had opted for a minor surgical operation that could pull the remains of their foreskin forward and make them appear uncircumcised. Other Jews regarded this as an act of apostasy (1 Maccabees 1:14-15).

7:21. Slavery in the mines or gladiatorial combat constituted a virtual death sentence; work in the fields was difficult for both slaves and peasants; urban slavery, however, included a range of occupations, status and even income (cf. introduction to Philemon). With respect to the highest-status slaves, on occasion aristocratic women even married into slavery to improve their own status! Some ancient philosophers believed that slaves and masters could be moral and spiritual equals, but the philosophers also had to address the situation in which slaves lived. Even when such philosophers came to power (such as Marcus Aurelius, an emperor in the second century), they did not force their Stoic morality on society. Every attempted slave revolt had been brutally repressed, so Paul's advice is the most practical he can give. For the relevance of the slavery analogy to the present discussion, see comment on 7:15.

Some, however, were able to gain freedom, which was a better situation when possible. Slaves could save money on the side and buy their own freedom. Also, masters often rewarded slaves with freedom (or forcibly retired them from slavery when older so as to avoid the cost of supporting them; in these cases, freedom was the master's and not the slave's choice).

7:22. A *freedperson owed some continuing duties to his or her former master but was legally free. The former master remained a *patron, who would help the freedperson out financially and politically; the freedperson remained a *client, who would also look out for the former master's interests and reputation. Freedpersons were still considered part of their former master's household. Many citizens of Corinth were descended from freedpersons.

7:23-24. Slaves were expensive. They could be bought to be turned over to a temple ("freed" for service to a god) or, more often, to a new human owner.

7:25-38
Advice Especially to Virgins

Although this section addresses mainly virgins, Paul digresses here as elsewhere (7:8-9; 11:2-16), in this case to relate the virgins to groups he has just discussed (7:27-28, alluding back to 7:12-16).

7:25. The term translated "virgin" here was most often used for women, who were also normally the only ones expected to avoid premarital sex in Greco-Roman culture (outside Judaism).

7:26. Many Jewish people expected a time of great suffering just before the end of the age; in that time, marriage and procreation would be of little value (cf. **2 Baruch* 10:13-15; Mishnah *Sotah* 9:15; Mk 13:17). In other periods of great suffering, when one was liable to be bereaved of spouse and children, the same principle applied (e.g., Jer 16:2; this was not the norm—cf. Jer 29:6).

7:27-28. In the language of ancient divorce contracts, "do not seek to be released" (NASB) means "do not seek a divorce." "Released from a wife" (NASB; not simply "free from such a commitment"—NIV) can mean "divorced" or "widowed," and in the immediate passage must at least include the former (its meaning in the preceding line). Paul discourages both remarriages (v. 27) and first marriages of virgins for reasons given in the context, but he permits both (v. 28).

7:29-31. The dangerous time that was upon them would affect all normal human relations; see comment on 7:26.

7:32-35. As a matter of principle, *Cynic philosophers eschewed marriage (though not intercourse) to avoid "distraction"; one could

make an exception, however, if one found a wife who shared these convictions and who would thus not distract one from the Cynic lifestyle (the only recorded exception is Hipparchia, wife of Crates). The context indicates that Paul is making a general statement here, not a rule without exceptions; see comment on 9:5. Paul allows that some would be distracted more by being unmarried (7:2, 5, 9), but reiterates the value of singleness for those who can live by it.

7:36-38. Scholars debate whether this passage addresses the fathers of virgins (see NASB) or their fiancés (see NIV, NRSV, GNT); some evidence within the text can be read either way, with probably more scholars taking the latter view. Parents arranged their children's marriages, usually with some input from the children; the father had the greatest measure of authority in the matter (cf. Sirach 7:24-25; Mishnah *Qiddushin* 2:1). "Full age" (7:36—NASB) could mean midteens (parental arrangement of marriages allowed couples to wed at a younger age than in our culture); but the term normally means "beyond youth" and hence probably refers to a virgin older than usual. There is no evidence in this period for unconsummated "spiritual engagements," which became common in later Christianity, perhaps through the "fiancé" reading of this passage.

7:39-40
Widows and Remarriage

7:39. On "bound" and "free," see 7:15, 27; in discussions of divorce and widowhood, "free" always meant "free to remarry." (Different Greek words are used for "bound" in 7:15 and for "free" in 7:27, but these are synonyms; variation was a standard *rhetorical technique and appears throughout the *New Testament.) Those who argue that the first line of this verse excludes remarriage of all divorced persons ignore not only 7:15, 27-28, but also the language of antiquity: no one considered her former spouse "her husband" after a legitimate divorce had taken place. That a widower is to marry only "in the Lord" means that Paul is against Christians' marrying non-Christians (cf. Deut 7:3; Judg 3:6; Ezra 9:2); widows and divorcées, unlike virgins (whose parents arranged their marriages), had a great deal of say about whom they would marry.

7:40. Some people in antiquity valued a widow remaining loyal to the memory of her husband by singleness; more often, they encouraged remarriage, especially if the widow remained young enough to bear children (cf. even Roman tax legislation under Augustus). Although Paul states his "opinion" (NASB, GNT) much less strongly than he proclaims the words of Jesus (7:10-12), he does not for this reason think it lacking value. The *Spirit was normally associated with the prophets of the past, and Paul here claims that he believes he writes under inspiration as a prophet would (cf. 14:37).

8:1-13
Food Offered to Idols

Meat was offered to idols before being served in temples' dining halls (often as part of worship); much of the meat served at the marketplace had been offered to idols. One who ate in a temple would know the source of the meat; one who ate at a pagan friend's home could rarely be certain. Even regular banquets including pouring a libation to a deity, but meat was most obviously consecrated to a deity when it was sacrificed at festivals before being doled out to the people. In pagan cities with large Jewish populations, Jews normally had their own markets.

Most Jews were at pains to avoid food consecrated to idols. Palestinian Jewish teachers debated what to do in many cases of uncertainty (such as untithed food), but would never have taken a chance on food that might have been offered to an idol. They believed that Jews outside Palestine unwittingly compromised with idolatry when invited to pagans' banquets for their sons, even if they brought their own food. Following such teachings strictly (as some did) would have greatly circumscribed *Gentile believers' relationships with pagan colleagues. The matter was more troubling for Christians converted from pagan backgrounds: e.g., could they meet over lunch with business associates or fellow members of their trade guild, or attend a reception in a temple for a relative's wedding?

Although Paul is theologically opposed to food known to be offered to idols (10:1-22), he frames that argument with a social one based on loving fellow believers (8:1–9:27; 10:23-33).

The more educated and socially elite group, who unlike the poor ate meat regularly and not especially when it was doled out at pagan festivals, had well-to-do friends who would serve meat. They probably represent the liberal faction, who consider themselves "strong" and the socially lower group "weak."

8:1-3. For "now concerning," see comment on 7:1. Paul probably opens with the issue of knowledge bringing freedom because the Corinthians' letter to him had raised it (cf. 7:1); they claimed that superior "knowledge" about idols not being real enabled them to eat. Paul disagrees with their application.

8:4-5. Verses 4-6 constitute a good monotheistic statement that the "strong" are using to claim that idol food does not matter, hence they can eat it. Paul affirms the content of these verses but not the application of the content that these Corinthians make (8:7-13).

8:6. *Stoics and others used formulas similar to this one (many gods, but one true or supreme God), which Jewish apologists (defenders) for monotheism naturally exploited. But Paul's position differs from both the Stoic and the conventional Jewish position. The basic confession of Judaism was that there was one God, who was also the one Lord (Deut 6:4); Paul portrays both Father and Son as deity here. Some Jewish texts said that God created the world through personified Wisdom; here Paul assigns this same role to *Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1:30). Using different prepositions, ancient intellectuals often distinguished kinds of causation, including material ("from"), instrumental ("through"), modal ("in" or "by") and purpose ("for").

8:7. Meat was usually difficult to obtain for most Corinthians who were not well-to-do, except at the pagan festivals, when what was cooked and remained from sacrifices was doled out to the masses. Many of the socially powerless (the "weak") thus associated meat with idolatry.

8:8. Here Paul probably states the view of the "strong," some members of the Corinthian elite, with which he concurs except for his response in 8:9.

8:9. Philosophers generally believed that "all things" were theirs and that they had liberty and authority to do as they pleased. Some, like the *Cynics, paid no attention to social customs. But not everyone felt this way. For example, ancient Jewish *rabbis who felt certain that they were right nevertheless circumscribed their own rights and submitted to the majority opinion of their colleagues, for the sake of peace. Jewish teachers considered causing someone to "stumble" from the way of God (i.e., causing them to turn from and reject the faith) worse than killing that person, because it deprived the person of the life of the world to come.

8:10-13. The person who associates meat with idols might think that eating it was all right even if it meant participating in idolatry, misunderstanding the "strong" person's convictions. (Some Jewish people had scruples similar to Paul's. For example, *Pharisees said that if one saw a Pharisee accepting food from an unreligious person, that did not mean one could assume that the food had been tithed; the Pharisee might have simply committed himself in his heart to tithe on it when he got home.) Giving up "meat" (8:13) would be more difficult for the elite, who had more access to it.

9:1-14
Worthy of Support

Having called on the more well-to-do Corinthian Christians to give up their rights (chap. 8), Paul illustrates this principle by how he had given up his own rights (chap. 9), then continues the discussion of meat offered to idols (chap. 10). Ancient moral teachers commonly used examples to make moral points, and their followers observed their lives as well as their teachings to learn how to live. Jewish teachers' lives were sometimes even used as legal precedent by later *rabbis.

9:1-2. By "free" (cf. 9:19; 10:29), philosophers normally meant free from false values or free from property concerns and thus self-sufficient; they were also free from concern about others' opinions of them. The idea of freedom was often bound up with "authority" or "rights" (cf. 8:9); Paul, who calls on his readers to circumscribe their "freedom" (8:9), also sacrifices his own rights (9:4-6, 12, 18).

9:3. Paul's primary purpose here is to provide an example that will support his exhortations in chapter 8; but for this purpose also offers an "apologetic" (defense) argument. Some well-to-do members of the congregation

may have been complaining about Paul's simple artisan lifestyle, which distinguished him from most traveling teachers and would have put off their social peers (see comment on 9:6). What is a peripheral issue here later becomes central when this group's dissatisfaction is exploited by other traveling teachers (see comment on 2 Cor 12:13-18).

9:4. Here Paul states a simple right to sustenance; see comment on 9:1-2, 6.

9:5. Jewish *disciples who went away to study under a distant teacher would not bring their wives along (*Sifre Deuteronomy* 48.2.4-6; but they were rarely gone more than a month, Mishnah *Ketubbot* 5:6); this was also true of the disciples in the Gospels (though they would rarely need to be away more than a few days at a time before visiting). But just as the rare *Cynic who found a wife willing to share his lifestyle would take her with him (see comment on 7:32-35), so the *apostles eventually took their wives as colaborers. Paul presents himself and Barnabas as exceptions to the general rule that apostles were married.

Although ancient Egyptian and Hebrew (Song of Songs 4:9-12; 5:1) love songs called wives "sisters" as a term of endearment (also Tobit 8:4, 7), the term here simply means a sister in *Christ (i.e., a fellow Christian; thus some translations have "a believing wife," e.g., NASB, NRSV, KJV).

9:6. Philosophers supported themselves in one of several ways: by attaching themselves to a wealthy *patron, who used them for ostentatious dinner lectures; by charging fees for instruction; by begging (generally despised, but practiced by the Cynics); or, for some least desirable of all, by working as manual laborers. Some philosophers and many Jewish sages valued manual labor. Although artisans normally prided themselves on their own work, aristocrats and those who shared their values despised manual labor. The socially "strong" faction in the *church undoubtedly wish that their founder-teacher did not work.

9:7. The army paid its soldiers. If laborers in secular occupations are paid, why not apostles?

9:8-10. Deuteronomy 25:4 may have communicated a principle that the laborer should be fed; others recognized that such laws related to more general principles of kindness (e.g., *Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.213; *Philo, *Virtues* 140, 145). Here Paul may argue in the sense of the common Jewish *qal vahomer* argument: if for an ox, how much more for a person. Some Jewish teachers felt that God's teachings about animals were only to teach people principles (cf. **Letter of Aristeas* 144).

9:11-12. Paul refuses to use the right to material support lest anyone be offended by the *gospel. Many traveling teachers depended on others for support, and if hearers thought that Paul was such a teacher, they might challenge his motives for preaching the gospel or view him as a *client of the church's higher-status faction. Philosophers debated among themselves whether they should be concerned about public opinion. Some *Stoics and most Cynics lived as they pleased, arguing that it mattered not what anyone thought; other philosophers felt that they should give no unnecessary cause of offense, because they wanted to draw others to the wisdom of philosophy.

9:13. Priests and Levites were supported by the tithes of the people (cf., e.g., 2 Chron 31:4) but were also entitled to certain portions of the sacrificial food offered on the altar (like priests in many ancient pagan temples).

9:14. Here Paul alludes to a saying of Jesus (Mt 10:10; Lk 10:7; cf. 1 Tim 5:18).

9:15-27
Paul Sacrifices His Rights

Far from pleasing all his hearers (9:19; cf. 10:33) here, Paul's tactic of identifying with the working-class majority (9:12-15) would offend some aristocratic-minded landowners who, like most of their peers, despised manual labor. His use of populist political imagery in 9:19-23 would further alienate this part of his constituency, which is the financial backbone of the church. Unlike some teachers who were *clients of the wealthy, Paul's priorities are reaching all people with the gospel, not catering to the elite.

9:15. Self-reliance was a basic characteristic highly extolled among philosophers. *Cynics claimed that their lack of dependence on others made them free (e.g., Crates, *Epistles* 7; 8; 29); Socrates felt that refusing to charge fees kept him free (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.2.6). No one could charge them with accommodating their views to maintain financial support. Both Jews and *Gentiles sometimes

spoke of death as preferable to some extreme situation (e.g., Jon 4:8; *Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 11.9; *Letters to Friends* 9.11.1; 9.18.2).

9:16. "Woe is me" was a common *Old Testament and Greek phrase uttered by one confronted with terrible news.

9:17-18. Stoic philosophers said that Fate imposed its will whether one accepted it or not; hence one might as well accept it. The Old Testament taught that one must submit to God's call, even if (as in the case of Moses, Gideon, Isaiah and Jeremiah) one felt unprepared or inadequate for it. The "reward" (9:18) can be translated "wage"; by serving people freely Paul has better payment from God. His "gain" (often translated "win") would be especially people brought to Christ (9:19-21).

9:19-23. *Rhetoric valued adapting to one's audience, but the elite disdained those who were too flexible as fickle demagogues who tried to please the masses; they considered such demagogues "slaves." Still, some valued being "slaves" or "pleasing" others if it kept civil stability. Paul borrows the language of populist politics, undoubtedly offending defenders of the aristocratic element in Corinth. Some Jewish teachers, like (reportedly) *Hillel, similarly accommodated their hearers wherever possible, to win as many as possible to the truth (cf. also the figure in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.41).

9:24-25. Philosophers (followed by *Diaspora Jewish sources like *Philo and *4 Maccabees) commonly used athletic illustrations to describe their striving for truth and wise living. Paul portrays the discipline and self-sacrifice necessary to live the Christian life through the analogy of races (9:24-26a) and boxing (9:26b-27). (The footrace preceded the other four athletic contests of the pentathlon in the Panhellenic Games.) The clause "but only one receives the prize" (a head wreath, which would eventually rot) emphasizes how hard one had to work to win the race. (A long period of intense discipline was mandatory for any who planned to participate in the events. For instance, participants for the Olympic games had to swear by Zeus to follow ten months of strict training beforehand.)

Corinth itself hosted major games for all Greece every two years on the isthmus; these were the best-attended Greek festivals next to the Olympic games, which were held every four years. The withered celery or pine garland was awarded at these Isthmian games (wild olive at the Olympic, parsley at the Nemean, etc.). Some others already used "crowns" (garlands) figuratively.

9:26-27. Boxing was one of the major competitions at Greek games (but not part of the pentathlon, mentioned above); boxers wore leather gloves covering most of the forearm except the fingers, and boxing was a violent sport. The pankration further mixed boxing with wrestling, forbidding only gouging and biting. Shadowboxing or "beating the air" was insufficient preparation for a real boxing competition; a boxer had to discipline his body better than that to win. In the same way, Paul had to discipline his life to sacrifice what he needed to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel, lest he himself be disqualified from the race and fall short of the wreath of *eternal life (9:25).

10:1-13
Israel's History as a Warning

Having established that those who eat idol meat ought to lay down their rights, Paul now proceeds to an argument from Scripture: the Corinthian Christians' sexual immorality and associations with idolatry were no different from those of ancient Israel and in the same way invited the judgment of God. Paul's conclusions might surprise his readers, but his style of argument would not: ancient teachers relied heavily on past examples, especially from sacred books; Judaism naturally drew its examples from the Scriptures.

10:1-2. Some later Jewish teachers also drew parallels between the Red Sea and Jewish *proselyte *baptism. Paul parallels the experience of salvation in the first exodus and salvation in Jesus to show that salvation does not render one invulnerable to falling (10:6-12). (Jewish people were awaiting a new exodus, promised by the prophets for the time of the *Messiah.) For the comparison, he employs Christian language: baptism "into Moses" recalls baptism "into Christ" (12:13).

10:3-4. Again, the Israelites in the wilderness had sacred food and drink, as the Corinthians do (10:16), but that did not save them (10:6-12). Because the rock sustained Israel in

multiple locations (Ex 17:6; Num 20:8), in some Jewish traditions the well followed the Israelites in the wilderness (*Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 11:15; some *rabbis). In Paul's *midrashic application, what the rock did for Israel corresponds to what *Christ did for the Corinthians; Paul undoubtedly connects the life-giving rock with God as Israel's rock in Deuteronomy 32:13 (a context still fresh in his mind in 1 Cor 10:20, 22). Other Jewish teachers compared the rock with Wisdom (*Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 2.86).

10:5. Jewish teachers generally regarded early deaths as signs of God's judgment (in their view scholars of the *law, for whom God had a higher standard, could be so judged even for failing to study the law diligently enough).

10:6. The events recorded in the law were meant as a sign or warning to others (Num 26:10). The Israelites' evil desires consisted in desiring "better" food than the manna, the spiritual food God had provided (Num 11:4-6, 20, 33); they wanted meat (Num 11:18; cf. comment on 8:7).

10:7. See Exodus 32:4, 6. Just as Israel had once eaten in God's presence (Ex 24:11), so in Exodus 32:6 they ate and drank before an idol whom they called God. Later rabbis considered this the most embarrassing episode in Israel's history (eventually some even found ways to blame it on the *Gentiles traveling with the Israelites); *Josephus omits it in his account. Jewish interpreters rightly took "play" in this text to mean idolatry.

10:8. The Israelite men had unmarried sex with Midianite women, who were acting as cultic prostitutes (Num 25:1-8; 31:16), and God sent a plague in judgment (Num 25:9). Jewish traditions unanimously report that twenty-four thousand died, as does the *Old Testament text; perhaps Paul midrashically mixes this number with an allusion to the three thousand killed in an earlier judgment (Ex 32:28, the judgment for the sin in 1 Cor 10:7). But ancient writers would not have lingered or expressed concern over this sort of detail, although it has exercised modern readers (who usually suggest either a major mistake or that the other thousand died the next day).

10:9-11. Relevant to 10:3-4, Israel "tested" God by complaining about the water (Ex 17:2, 7; Deut 6:16) and food (Ps 78:18) he provided. Israel complained against God and his agent Moses (Ex 16:7-12; 17:3; Num 11:1; 14:27-29; 16:41). Jewish traditions lament Israel's complaining in the wilderness. God did not "destroy" his people during these initial tests, but after they continued to test him he pronounced judgment (Num 14:22-23), striking more directly when they complained in Numbers 21:5-6. The "destroyer" was the one who also destroyed the firstborn of Egypt (the wording in Ex 12:23; cf. Wisdom of Solomon 18:25; Heb 11:28). Philosophers also warned against grumbling, noting that one ought to accept whatever the gods and Fate would send.

10:12-13. Ancient teachers often pointed out that adversities come to everyone and that one should not be proud but submit to what comes one's way. Ancient writers often exhorted those who suffered that this experience was common to people in general. But whereas pagan writers emphasized human will, Paul emphasizes God's faithfulness.

10:14-23
Idol Meat Supports Demons

Here Paul gives a religious argument against eating meat offered to idols. As God's temple was diametrically opposed to prostitution (6:15, 19), Christ's table was diametrically opposed to the table of idols (10:14-22).

10:14. "Fleeing" vices was a fairly frequent moral exhortation in antiquity (cf. 6:18).

10:15. Ancient speeches and letters of admonition often opened with a compliment designed to secure the favor of the audience (although Paul could be ironic here); they also sometimes appealed to hearers to judge for themselves.

10:16-17. To honor pagan gods in Greek religious ceremonies, small libations of wine would be poured out of cups before people drank from them. But here "cup" and "bread" allude to the Passover meal, which was celebrated in the Lord's Supper (11:23-26). Not only at the Passover meal but at meals in general the head of the Jewish household would say a blessing (thanks) over a cup of wine. Some commentators report that the last cup at the end of the meal was called the "cup of blessing." On the "body," see comment on 12:12-26.

10:18. The priests ate some parts of the of-

ferings in the temple; other kinds of offerings (such as the Passover lamb, which Paul also considers a sacrifice—5:7) were eaten by the rest of the people. One must not share in offerings to the true God while also sharing in offerings to false ones.

10:19-20. Like Isaiah, Paul says that physical idols are nothing (cf. Is 44:12-20; 45:20-25; 46:1-11). But like most of the *Old Testament passages that mention *demons (at least in their Greek rendering—Lev 17:7; Deut 32:17, 37-39; Ps 106:28, 37) and most subsequent Jewish and Christian literature apart from most later rabbis, Paul believes that false gods seeking human worship are demons (e.g., **Jubilees* 1:11; 22:16-17; **1 Enoch* 19:1; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 318.2.1-2). Paul quotes a line from Deuteronomy 32:17.

10:21. Pagans spoke of the offering tables of their gods (e.g., the table of Serapis); most ancient Near Eastern temples had been equipped with such tables. The Old Testament uses the expression "table of the Lord" for the place of offerings (e.g., Mal 1:7, 12; in Ex 25:30, the bread eaten by priests was there; cf. 1 Cor 9:13). Table fellowship connoted intimate relations. By repeating the form, "you cannot . . . and . . . ," Paul reiterates his point in a way that *rhetorically sensitive ancient audiences appreciated.

10:22. Paul again provides a rhetorical objection against his own position, but his readers who are familiar with the Old Testament know that the Lord is a jealous God who allows the worship of no other gods (e.g., Deut 32:17, 21; see comment on 10:19-20). "Provoking" probably alludes to Deuteronomy 32:21 (cf. Baruch 4:7, also echoing Deut 32:17, 21).

10:23. Greek teachers used criteria like "usefulness" to determine whether to undertake actions. Paul raises a rhetorical objection ("Everything is allowed") and then answers it ("But not everything is helpful"), as was common in ancient moral teaching.

10:24–11:1
Instructions for the Sake of Others

10:24. Not only Jesus' early followers but also many other ancient moralists would have agreed with this exhortation.

10:25. Whatever meat was left over from sacrifices was taken to the meat market in the large agora in Corinth (not far from where Paul had once worked—Acts 18:3). Not all meat in this market had been offered to idols, but some of it had. In comparatively large cities, Jewish people were often allowed to have their own markets so they could avoid such food (some scholars speculate that a recent wave of anti-Jewish prejudice could have recently closed the one in Corinth). In other cities, they would ask about the source of the meat.

Jewish teachers considered inadvertent sins "light," though the scrupulous might not have been satisfied with Paul's "What you don't know won't hurt you" here. Because most people could not afford to buy meat very often, subsisting instead on fish and grain, Paul here addresses especially the more well-to-do in the congregation.

10:26. Here Paul quotes Psalm 24:1, which extolled the majesty and greatness of God; he was the only true and living God, and everything belonged to him, not to idols or *demons. Jewish teachers, possibly as early as Paul, used this text to prove the need to give thanks at meals.

10:27-29. Most temples had their own dining halls, and people were invited to meals "at the table of Serapis" and other pagan gods. The meat at these meals would obviously have been offered to idols. But people were also invited to banquets in wealthy homes, where they could not be certain of the meat's source. Jewish people who avoided impure foods (like pork) were virtually excluded from such banquets, but they did not look down on *Gentiles who ate pork as long as they abstained from idols. Jewish people had sometimes faced martyrdom to avoid eating impure foods, and they would expect Gentiles who claimed to believe in God at least to avoid food that had certainly been offered to idols.

10:30. Paul cites another possible objection (see comment on 10:22). Like Jewish people, Christians always offered thanks over their food before the meal (at least later, pious Palestinian Jewish homes also offered thanks after the meal).

10:31. For a believer, personal "rights" (10:23, 29) are not the highest value. Some Jewish teachers emphasized that everything should be done for the sake of God, as Paul does here; some philosophers argued that one

should invest one's life only in that which is of eternal significance. In the *Old Testament, God clearly desired his people to live wholly for him (Deut 6:4-5; Ps 63:1). Paul regards such convictions as appropriate and applies them to the credibility of the *gospel (1 Cor 10:32-33).

10:32-33. Speakers and writers often recapitulated their message at the end of a section. See comment on 9:19-23. Jews and some Christians were offended by eating idol food; Gentiles would likely see the act as tolerating their gods. For seeking the welfare of the many, cf. also 2 Maccabees 4:5.

11:1. Paul had already presented himself (chap. 9) as an example of this principle, which he articulates in 10:32-33 and exemplifies in 10:33–11:1; people often cited the lifestyles of philosophers or other sages as models.

11:2-16
Head Coverings and Sexual Modesty

Paul returns to the topic of food and a deity in 11:17-34 (cf. chaps. 8–10), but here he digresses briefly to address another issue of decorum in the Corinthian *church in which the free should surrender their rights (11:10). *Digressions were standard in ancient literature.

Earlier Athenians tended to segregate women in the home; current Corinthian culture would include more contemporary Roman influence, where wives sometimes even attended banquets with their husbands. Nevertheless, in general public activity was a predominantly male sphere and homes a predominantly female sphere; house churches intersected these boundaries, creating more ambiguous social space. Women's hair was a common object of lust in antiquity (e.g., *Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.8; *Sifre Numbers* 11.2.1-3), and in much of the eastern Mediterranean married women were expected to cover their hair (for Jewish women, see *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.270; *Philo, *Special Laws* 3.56; Mishnah *Bava Qamma* 8:6; Mishnah *Ketubbot* 7:6). To fail to cover their hair was thought to provoke male lust as a bathing suit is thought to provoke it in some cultures today. Head covering prevailed in Judea (where in conservative homes it extended even to a face veil) and elsewhere, but upper-class Roman women eager to show off their fashionable hairstyles did not practice it. Thus Paul must address a clash of culture in the Corinthian church between upper-class fashion and lower-class concern that sexual propriety is being violated.

Thus Paul provides a series of brief arguments, each of which relates directly to the culture he addresses. Some of his arguments do not work well in every culture (he himself seems eager to guard against them being misapplied—11:11-12), but it is the Corinthian women, not modern women, whom he wishes to persuade to cover their heads.

11:2. Letters were often written to "praise" or "blame" the recipients; sometimes these points characterized the entire letter in which they occurred. "Traditions" (NASB, NRSV) were accounts or regulations passed on orally; for instance, *Pharisees in Palestine transmitted their special traditions in this way.

11:3-4. Ancient writers often based arguments on wordplays. Paul uses "head" literally (for the part of the body to be covered, on top the neck) and figuratively (possibly for the authority figure in the ancient household). (Some commentators have argued that "head" means not "authority" but "source"—see 11:12—or most honored part—see 11:4-7—but these questions are vigorously debated and cannot be decided here.) On head coverings for women, see the introduction to this section. Women did not lead prayers in most *synagogues, and Jewish tradition tended to play down *Old Testament prophetesses; Paul's churches allow considerably more freedom for women's speaking. This may be partly because of early Christians' distinctive emphasis on current and pervasive prophetic inspiration; even Greeks, who often demanded women's silence, made exceptions for women speaking by inspiration, but Christians expected such inspiration regularly in their gatherings. The preference for men uncovering their heads may reflect regional culture: Greeks (the dominant custom in the eastern Mediterranean) bared their heads for worship, although Romans (the official culture in this Roman *colony) covered them. (This custom was not divided along gender lines.)

11:5-6. Paul uses the ancient debate principle of *reductio ad absurdum:* If they are so concerned to bare their heads, why not also remove

the natural covering, their hair? Paul thereby reduces their insistence to what his contemporaries would consider absurd: the greatest physical shame for a woman was to be shaved or have her hair cut like a man's. This appearance would also serve the opposite purpose of uncovered hair: it was not deemed attractive.

11:7. Paul here begins an argument from the order of creation. He cannot be denying that women are also the image of God (Gen 1:27 and 5:1-2 plainly state that both male and female were created in God's image; cf. 1 Cor 15:49; Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). But because woman was taken from man (Gen 2:21-22), he may argue that woman reflects the image via the first man (but see comment on 11:11-12). Perhaps he means that women's uncovered heads are drawing men's attention to humanity instead of to God.

11:8-9. According to Genesis 2:18 God created woman distinct from man partly so that man would no longer be alone; the phrase there translated "helper suitable" praises woman's strength rather than subordinates her. ("Helper" is used more often of God than of anyone else in the Old Testament; "suitable" means "corresponding" or "appropriate to," as an equal in contrast to the animals.) Woman was thus created because man needed her strength, not (as some have wrongly interpreted this verse) to be his servant.

11:10. Here Paul says literally, "she ought to have authority on/over her own head because of the angels"; some think Paul could mean that she should exercise wisely her right to decide whether to cover her head in a way that will honor her husband (11:8-9), given the situation with "the angels." In any case, the "angels" have been interpreted as (1) the angels who (according to ancient Jewish interpretations of Gen 6:1-3) lusted after women and so fell (see comment on 2 Pet 2:4; but they produced giants, not the likely threat here); (2) the angels present in divine worship, who would be offended by a breach of propriety or affront to the husbands (cf. *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QSa 2.3-9; 1QM 7.5-6); and (3) the angels who rule the nations but who will ultimately be subordinate to all believers, including these women (1 Cor 6:3; i.e., as a future ruler a Christian woman or man should exercise wise choices in the present, even regarding apparel).

11:11-12. Paul qualifies his preceding argument from creation (11:7-10); he wants to prove his case about head coverings, but recognizes that women and men are mutually interdependent (cf. also 7:2-5). For men coming from women, see 1 Esdras 4:15-17 (cf. 4:14, 22). Such expressions of mutuality tend to appear among the more progressive of ancient writers on the topic of gender (e.g., Musonius Rufus 12, p. 86.33-38; 14, p. 92.38–94.1).

11:13-15. Ancient writers, especially *Stoic philosophers, liked to make arguments from nature. Nature taught them, they said, that only men could grow beards; women's hair naturally seemed to grow longer than men's. Like all urban dwellers, Paul is well aware of exceptions to the rule (barbarians, statues of philosophers and heroes of the epic past, and Paul would also know of biblical Nazirites); but the "nature" argument could appeal to the general order of creation as it was experienced by his readers.

11:16. Paul reserves one final argument for those unpersuaded by his former points. One philosophical group called the Skeptics rejected all arguments except an almost universally accepted one: the argument from custom—"that's just not the way it's done."

11:17-34
Factionalized Fellowship

Despite Greek ideals of equality, even for banquets, ancient seating at public events was arranged according to rank, usually including at banquets. The churches in Corinth met especially in well-to-do *patrons' homes (see comment on Acts 18:6-7). In Greco-Roman society, patrons often seated members of their own high social class in the special *triclinium* (the best room), ideally reclining about nine diners, but more would be possible depending on the room's size and the seating arrangements. If more space were needed, others could be served in the larger *atrium* (which might comfortably seat an estimated forty persons, again depending on the size of the room and seating arrangements). Guests further from the host received (or brought) inferior food and inferior wine, and *clients often complained about where their patrons had seated them (cf. *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 4; *Juvenal, *Satire* 4.15-18, 24-25, 37-79,

146-58; Martial 3.49; 4.85; 12.28; Lk 14:8-10). (Common meals even at *Qumran included seating by rank; 1Q28a 2.21.) This societal problem spilled over into the church.

The background for the meal itself is the Jewish Passover meal, a sacred meal and celebration commemorating redemption; see comment on Matthew 26:17-30. But most Corinthian believers seem to have lost sight of this background; they treat the meal as a festal banquet such as they knew from Greek festivals or meetings of Greek religious associations.

11:17-19. Paul could praise the Corinthians on some points (see comment on 11:2) but not on this one; like division by ethnic or cultural bias (see introduction to Romans), division by social class is contrary to the *gospel. Some scholars argue that 11:18 resembles *rhetorical *dissimulatio,* that is, mock disbelief meant to shame the hearers into recognizing how terrible their behavior is.

11:20. On the "Lord's Supper," see the "Lord's table" in 10:21. Paul ironically contrasts the *Lord's* Supper (11:20) and their own (11:21).

11:21-22. Some are treated more honorably than others at the meal, and this treatment reflects the status values of the world. See the introduction to this section. Some scholars suggest that some taking their meal before others (11:21) refers to slaves and other workers who could not come as early as the more well-to-do with more leisure.

11:23. "Received" and "delivered" (KJV, NASB) were used together especially for passing on traditions (11:2; 15:3; cf., e.g., Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13.297, 408). Some later *rabbis spoke of traditions received "from Sinai" or "from Moses"; although they believed they received them by means of their own predecessors, they meant that the tradition ultimately went back to Moses (e.g., Mishnah *Pe'ah* 2:6; *Eduyyot* 8:7; *Yadayim* 4:3). Paul probably means that earlier *disciples told him about the Last Supper. It took place at "night," as the Passover meal always did.

11:24-25. Covenants were usually ratified by blood (cf. "the blood of the covenant," Ex 24:8); God had promised a "new covenant" (Jer 31:31; cf. Lk 22:20). The unleavened Passover bread was normally interpreted figuratively as "the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate" in Moses' time; Jesus had applied it to himself (see comment on Mk 14:22-24). Pagans sometimes ate funerary meals "in remembrance of" a dead person, but the sense here is as in the *Old Testament, where the Passover commemorated God's redemptive acts in history (e.g., Ex 12:14; 13:3; Deut 16:2-3; **Jubilees* 49:15). As in the Passover ritual (cf. the principle in Deut 26:5), the "you" applied to all future generations; Jewish people believed that their commemoration/partial reenactment allowed them to share the experience of their ancestors. Greek banquets included a drinking party after the primary meal, also with entertainment, which could include music, lectures, readings or conversation; Paul speaks of the cup "after supper" and may also expect study of Scripture at that time.

11:26. "Until he comes" is the temporal limitation on the Lord's Supper that goes back to Jesus as well (Mk 14:25). Passover celebrations looked forward to the future redemption of Israel (Tosefta *Berakhot* 1:10-11) as well as backward to how God had redeemed them in the exodus of Moses' day. Jewish people expected an *eschatological banquet when God would reward his people (cf. Is 25:6, 8; **2 Baruch* 29:4).

11:27-29. Associations normally had rules to prevent and discipline abuses such as drunken quarrels, but here God is the avenger. "Eating in an unworthy manner" here refers to the status-conscious eating that is dividing the church (11:21-22). By rejecting or looking down on other members of Christ's body, the church (10:17), they also reject the saving gift of his body represented by the bread (11:24).

11:30-34. Jewish teachers stressed that in this world God punished the righteous for their few sins, but in the world to come he would punish the wicked for their many sins; thus Jewish teachers believed that suffering could free one from later punishment. Paul agrees at least that suffering *can* be the Lord's discipline; the idea here might be that when the church does not embrace all its members, gifts of healings are inhibited (12:9). Paul distinguishes between meetings of the house congregations and, in 11:34, personal use of the home, where believers might have more freedom to follow their cultures' traditions.

12:1-3
Qualifying the Gifts

Because Christian gifts like *prophecy are given by God's *Spirit (in both the *Old Testament and the *New Testament), cultural background is less important here than in some parts of 1 Corinthians (e.g., on head coverings or holy kisses). But it can help the modern reader appreciate how the first readers might have viewed the functioning of some of the gifts in their culture.

For "now concerning," see comment on 7:1. Paul indicates that prophesying is not necessarily a sign of godliness; pagans prophesied too, and at Greek oracular shrines possessed persons prophesied ecstatically, inspired by gods other than the Christian God. Although some reported that interest in oracles had declined in this period, oracles and other forms of divination remained a strong influence on pagan culture. Paul can thus point to some of his hearers' former behavior in paganism as a warning that ecstatic activity *by itself* cannot constitute proof that they are obeying God. (Verse 3 probably hypothetically contrasts two extreme examples of evil and true utterances.)

12:4-11
Diverse Gifts

12:4-6. Paul's (here proto-trinitarian) triple repetition of the same thought in three ways ("there are varieties of . . . but the same . . . ") reinforces his point in a way that rhetorically sensitive ancient audiences would have appreciated (in *rhetoric, *anaphora* began successive clauses the same way). Paul emphasizes that all the gifts are different but all are useful; hence a Christian with one gift is not more or less important than another Christian with a different gift.

12:7-11. In ancient rhetoric, writers sometimes framed an important point by repeating a thought before and after it; here, 12:7 and 11 frame the list in 12:8-10, emphasizing that it is the Spirit that enables these ministries. Ancient audiences valued repetition, and often (as here) offered random lists. Given the use of "word," "wisdom" and "knowledge" (12:8) earlier in 1 Corinthians, here these terms surely refer to God's providing speaking ability and teaching (see comment on 1:5). (Some modern readers have taken these terms to refer to supernaturally revealed knowledge. Although supernaturally revealed knowledge is often illustrated by prophets in the *Old Testament and may be considered a form of the gift of prophecy, it is not likely Paul's point in mentioning "knowledge" here; cf. 8:1; 13:8-9, 12.)

Some magicians sought to perform healings and other extraordinary acts (12:9-10) and more often people sought cures at shrines of Asclepius (including at Epidauros near Corinth) or sometimes Serapis (with two shrines in Corinth). Outside the early *churches, however, there are no ancient parallels to these events as a regular occurrence within a local congregation. The gift of "discerning spirits" was particularly useful for judging prophecy (cf. 14:29; 1 Jn 4:1). Although ecstatic babbling occurs in some pagan cultures today, the ancient Mediterranean has little evidence of this phenomenon and no useful parallel to "tongues" (inspired worship in a language one does not know—14:2) or inspired "interpretation" of tongues (the term can mean either translation or communication of the general sense).

12:12-26
All Members of the Body Are Necessary

12:12. Paul adapts an image commonly used for the Roman state or for the universe and applies it to the church (as in Rom 12:3-5). When the plebeians (the lower class in earlier Rome) had proposed revolt, the aristocrat Menenius Agrippa convinced them that although they were less noticeable members (like the stomach), they were necessary; the upper and lower classes had different roles but equal importance (e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquities of Rome* 6.86.1-5; *Livy, *History of Rome* 2.32.9-12). This argument was mere aristocratic sophistry to keep the masses down; but after him other writers, especially *Stoic philosophers, borrowed the image. Many continued to apply it to the state (cf., e.g., *Cicero, *On the Republic* 3.25.37; *Orationes philippicae* 8.5.15). Stoics even said that the universe was like a body, and God's *logos,* or reason, was the mind or head that directed it (cf., e.g., *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 95.52; *Epictetus, *Diatribes* 1.12.26). Paul here refers to

the unity of the body not to keep one group down but to tell all the Christians in Corinth to respect and appreciate one another. Just as a solitary eye or foot is useless, so is any member of the church apart from other Christians. Identifying the body with *Christ in 12:12 fits ancient figures of speech such as metonymy or synecdoche; it emphasizes the close connection (but does not deify the church).

12:13. Although the drinking here probably alludes to the rock of Christ in 10:4, ancient hearers might also think of drinking from Wisdom (Sirach 24:21; cf. Jn 4:14).

12:14-21. In a way pleasing for rhetorically sensitive ancient hearers, Paul reinforces his point through repetition (12:14, 18-20). In 12:15-16 and 21 he uses the graphic rhetorical device *prosopopoiia*, in which inanimate objects (here, parts of the body) speak. In some other ancient analogies, "eyes" fill a prominent role.

12:22-24. Men did not usually cover their prominent parts, such as their heads, but their private parts and perhaps (as in Menenius's fable above) their stomachs. One could argue that these covered parts receive special treatment.

12:25-26. Ancient moralists emphasized that true friends would share the other's sorrows and joys.

12:27-31
Different Gifts Again

12:27-28. Ancient speakers liked lists (cf. 12:8-10), which drove home a point by repeated examples. "First . . . second . . . third" was normally a designation of rank; most of the gifts after the first three could be listed randomly (although perhaps placing tongues last because of the abuse of them in Corinth; cf. 1 Cor 14).

12:29-30. For lists, see comment on 12:27-28. Ancient hearers outside the church would consider it extraordinary that any person in a given congregation has some of these gifts, such as *prophecy or miracles, which were considered rare. The term translated "*apostles" probably means "commissioned messengers," backed by the full authority of the sender so long as they represented his message properly; although some philosophers considered themselves messengers of the gods and Jewish people often viewed the *Old Testament prophets in this light, early Christians respected this position as a present role in the church. See comment on Eph 4:11.

12:31. Ancient writers sometimes digressed (as in chap. 13) and sometimes framed special material by returning to a point (12:31; 14:1). The greatest gifts (also 14:1) are defined by the need of the rest of the body (chap. 13). Most Jewish people believed that only a very small number of the very pious could do miracles; the idea that any believer could seek God for whatever gifts are most useful for his people was extraordinary. Early Christians democratized the supernatural—they believed God could work actively in each believer's daily life.

13:1-3
Nothing Without Love

Some regard this chapter as poetic; it does not have the meter of Greek poetry, but does fit a form of exalted prose (grand or sublime *rhetoric). This chapter resembles praises of various virtues elsewhere in Greco-Roman literature; one of three kinds of epideictic (praise) rhetoric was an encomium praising a person or subject, with some virtue being a common topic (cf. similarly Heb 11:3-31). That Paul chooses this particular virtue above all others is not dependent on his culture—many ancients valued love, but it is specifically in early Christian literature that it appears regularly as the supreme virtue (given Jesus' teaching, Mk 12:30-31; Jn 13:34-35). As a brief *digression between 12:31 and 14:1 (digressions were common in ancient literature), this chapter explains the way to evaluate which gifts are "greater."

13:1. The varied but threefold repetition of, "If I . . . but do not have love" is rhetorical *anaphora,* reinforcing the point; the similar endings of the claims are also rhetorical reinforcement. In some Jewish traditions, angels preferred to speak Hebrew, but most Jewish people would have agreed that angels understood human languages, especially since angels were appointed over various nations. Paul could believe that there are angelic languages in addition to human ones, in which case he would be saying, "Though I be so fluent in tongues that I could speak every conceivable language . . . " (Job's daughters at the end of the *Testament of Job* spoke ecstatically in angelic tongues as they were inspired to think heavenly

things; but it is not clear whether this text is pre-Pauline or was added by a tongues-speaking Christian in the second century.) But this could also simply be *hyperbole.

Although cymbals were used in some pagan worship (as well as in Jewish worship), the point of Paul's comparison is undoubtedly simply that, though loud, by themselves they communicate nothing (like some rhetoricians in his day). Corinth was famous for its expensive gold- or silver-colored "bronze"; bronze vases (the Greek does not specify "gongs," as in most translations) were often used for amplifiers in the outdoor theaters of this period, though the term could apply to any bronze object that could produce loud noise.

13:2-3. "Moving mountains" seems to have been a figure of speech for doing the impossible (cf. comment on Mk 11:23; cf. Zech 4:7). Jesus spoke of moving mountains, giving up possessions and even one's life (Mk 11:23; 8:34-38; 10:21-31); without love, however, these are nothing. The earliest manuscripts read, "that I may boast," but the other reading, "to be burned" could allude to some Jewish traditions of martyrs (cf. 2 Maccabees 7:5; *4 Maccabees 6:26-27; 7:12; 10:14).

13:4-13
What Love Is

13:4-7. A rhetorically sensitive ancient audience would appreciate the repetition and fleshing out with examples. In Greek, many of the words (*all* of them in 13:4) end with vowels (most often *ei* or *ai*); in 13:6, "unrighteousness" and "truth" each begin and end with *a*. Most forceful is the fourfold anaphoric repetition of "all" (first in the Greek) and then a verb ending in *ei* in 13:7. The point of Paul's rhetorically polished description of love is its contrast to what he has earlier said about the attitudes of the Corinthians. See comment on 13:1-3.

13:8-13. Writers sometimes framed sections with a special point, here that love lasts forever (13:8, which is transitional, and 13:13). Greek thinkers valued especially what was eternal. As in verses 1-3, Paul demonstrates here that love is a greater virtue than the gifts; in this case it is because love is eternal, whereas the gifts are temporary. In 13:8, Paul's rhetorically sensitive hearers would appreciate the threefold anaphoric repetition of "if there are" (NRSV: "as for") and similar closings.

In contrast to most Greeks, Jewish people envisioned a decisive, future climax to history. Some *Old Testament prophets predicted the outpouring of the *Spirit in the final time, accompanied by ability to speak under the Spirit's inspiration (Joel 2:28); but other prophecies noted that all of God's people in the world to come would know God, hence there would be no reason for exhortation (Jer 31:33-34). Paul believes that the time of the Spirit's gifts, including limited human knowledge, is the current time, between Jesus' first and second comings (cf. 13:10, 12).

Around age thirteen (at least in later Jewish tradition) or around sixteen (more often for Romans), boys would enter manhood; at that time a Roman boy would replace his childhood toga with an all-white adult toga. Mirrors (13:12) were often made of bronze, and given the worldwide renown of Corinthian bronze (e.g., Pausanias 2.3.3), would perhaps strike the Corinthians as a locally prominent product (also 2 Cor 3:18). But even the best mirrors reflected images imperfectly (some philosophers thus used mirrors as an analogy to describe mortals' searching for the deity). Other prophets saw God enigmatically, but Moses saw him face to face (Num 12:6-8; cf. Ex 33:11; Deut 34:10); the future revelation will be complete.

14:1-20
Intelligible Versus Unintelligible Speech

Because Christian gifts like *prophecy are given by God's *Spirit, cultural background is less important here than on some parts of 1 Corinthians (e.g., on women's head coverings in 11:2-16). But it can help the modern reader appreciate how the first readers might have viewed the functioning of some of the gifts in their culture.

Although Paul is clearly not against speaking in tongues (14:5, 18), he emphasizes that the value of gifts must be judged by their utility in any given setting; intelligible speech profits others in public worship, whereas unintelligible speech, no matter how inspired, is profitable only privately or if interpreted. Many believed that divine inspiration displaced rational thought (see e.g., Lucan, *Civil*

War 5.97-193; throughout *Philo, *Drunkenness*), but Paul allows for inspiration to work with reason in prophecy and not necessarily to displace it in tongues. The term for "tongues" normally means simply "languages" (as in 13:1), but it is clear here (14:2, 14) that the person inspired to pray in these other languages does not know the languages; as in Acts, this gift presupposes a supernatural enabling.

14:1-3. In the *Old Testament, prophecy also served the functions Paul lists here: "edification" or building up (and tearing down, e.g., Jer 1:10, where God's word overthrows and restores nations); "exhortation" (KJV, NASB; cf. "encouragement"—NIV, NRSV, GNT), which can include reproof; and nearly all Old Testament prophets, no matter how focused on judgment, included a message of "consolation" (NASB, NRSV) or "comfort" (NIV, KJV, GNT) and hope.

14:4-5. Paul's wish that all could prophesy (cf. Num 11:29) is probably realistic, at least potentially; God had promised to enable all his people to prophesy once the time of the end (inaugurated by Jesus, according to the *New Testament) had come (Joel 2:28). If tongues were interpreted, they could also serve as a form of inspired speech useful to the *church.

14:6-7. Intelligibility is the key to edifying others (14:6-12). Paul mentions here the two primary musical instruments of antiquity: the "pipe" (KJV; most translations render this "flute"), a wind instrument that sounded like an oboe and often had two pipes from the mouthpiece and was common in religious and emotional music; the "harp," a stringed instrument, was considered more harmonious and often accompanied singing. Although such instruments as in 14:7-8 did not have language, they could communicate meaning; for example, flute melodies could give instructions to flocks, and trumpets regularly signaled armies.

14:8-9. "Trumpets" or "bugles" were used to call armies to battle, to march and so forth; an uncertain trumpeting would confuse the soldiers (14:8).

14:10-12. Greeks traditionally looked down on non-Greeks as "barbarians" or "foreigners," calling them "barbarians" because they spoke "strange" (i.e., non-Greek) languages, but even those who did not believe in the superiority of Greeks divided the world into "Greeks and barbarians" (e.g., Rom 1:14), often on the basis of ethnicity but sometimes on the basis of language. (Sometimes even slips in speaking Greek or different accents were called "barbaric.") Paul simply observes that those who cannot communicate intelligibly may each view the other as an alien (14:11).

14:13-14. The Jewish philosopher Philo described divine inspiration as God possessing his prophets and completely overwhelming their rational faculties during the period of inspiration (e.g., *Who Is the Heir?* 264-65), a view often held by *Gentiles (e.g., Euripides, *Bacchae* 298-99; Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.77-102). By contrast, Paul believes that prophetic inspiration relates to the rational faculties (as does interpretation); even with regard to glossolalia or inspired tongues, which are the prayers of a different, nonrational component of human nature, Paul does not indicate that the mind is forced to be inactive. Paul values both kinds of worship and both components of human nature. (In modern terms, these components of human nature are perhaps similar to the affective and cognitive components.)

14:15. "Charismatic" worship—that is, worship inspired by the *Spirit—was also practiced by the schools of the prophets in the Old Testament (1 Sam 10:5; cf. 2 Kings 3:15); transferred to worship in what became the temple (1 Chron 25:1-5), it generated many of the psalms in the book of Psalms (cf. 2 Chron 29:30). Although worship in tongues had not been practiced in the Old Testament, inspired worship in a more general sense had been.

14:16-17. Roman officials followed standard prayers exactly; Jewish services allowed more freedom. Paul here anticipates spontaneity in prayer and does not even object to public prayer in tongues ("by one's spirit"), provided that it is interpreted. "Amen" was the standard Jewish response to an agreeable benediction.

14:18-19. In *synagogues, those who prayed could not always do publicly as they did in private; Paul likewise distinguishes between private and public practice of tongues (ten thousand is the largest number in Greek and commonly used as *hyperbole for large numbers). Even so, he clearly does not forbid it in public (14:39), as long as there is an interpreter (14:28).

14:20. See comments on 3:1-2 and 14:21.

14:21-25
Effects on Visitors of Intelligible and Unintelligible Speech

14:21. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11, which in context refers to a sign of judgment; because his people could hear nothing else, God would speak to them through judgment by the Assyrians (cf. Is 33:19; Deut 28:49). The preceding context of this quotation is Israel acting like infants (Is 28:9-10), relevant in view of 14:20. (Many Jewish teachers used "*law" loosely to refer to anything in the *Old Testament; later it was even applied to earlier Jewish traditions.)

14:22. On one view, Paul here refers to tongues as a sign of judgment that causes nonbelievers to stumble (cf. 14:21); on another, Paul quotes the Corinthians in 14:22 and refutes them in 14:23-25 (cf. 6:12-14).

14:23-25. *Prophecy was a known phenomenon in the ancient world, whereas the gift of tongues was not (or at least, any parallels to it were extremely rare); ancients respected prophecy, but if they did not know beforehand to expect speaking in tongues, they would not know what was happening (cf. Acts 2:13). Perhaps Paul would not object to a whole group simultaneously worshiping charismatically under other circumstances (e.g., Acts 2:4-21; cf. 1 Sam 10:5; 19:20); but not in the Corinthian house churches where unbelievers could be alienated. Outsiders bowing and acknowledging God probably recalls Isaiah 45:14.

14:26-33
Regulations to Keep Order

That Paul had spent over a year and a half with them (Acts 18:11, 18) and had apparently not told them these rules before suggests that these rules are directed toward the specific situation in Corinth. The *rules* necessary to keep worship edifying to everyone might vary from one culture and setting to another, but the *principle* of keeping it edifying to everyone is much more universal. Some ancients acted in ecstatic frenzy when they claimed to be inspired; Paul believes that inspiration can be channeled in disciplined ways.

14:26. Although prayer in the synagogues may have been more spontaneous in Paul's day than later, he advocates more individual participation here than would have been natural in other worship settings of his day. We should keep in mind, however, that the house churches in Corinth probably each comprised at the most only fifty members. Psalms were used regularly in Jewish worship (here Paul may mean either biblical psalms or newly composed ones; some postbiblical ones appear at *Qumran), as was teaching; but the revelations, tongues and interpretations are distinctly Christian features of worship.

14:27. Order was very important in lecture settings and public assemblies in antiquity, as is clear from the frequent practice of seating according to rank. In *Essene assemblies, one had to have permission to speak, and one spoke in order according to rank (*Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 6.10-13; *Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.132). Paul is not so strict here, but he wishes to balance spontaneity with order; not everything that was inherently good was necessarily good for the gathered assembly. In the *Old Testament, charismatic worship was not incompatible with order (1 Chron 25:1-5; cf. also Philo's description of an Egyptian Jewish sect of worshipers called the Therapeutae).

14:28. "Speak to himself and to God" probably means "so that only he and God can hear it." It is also possible, however, that this expression implies that tongues could be used not only as prayer but also as a vehicle of God's *Spirit speaking to an individual's spirit (cf. *prophecy coming thus in 2 Sam 23:2-3; Jer 27:2; Hos 1:2; cf. Ps 46:10; 91:14), although perhaps this speaking is mainly in the form of inspired prayer.

14:29. Most Old Testament prophets were apparently trained in groups of prophets, with more experienced prophets like Samuel presiding over them (1 Sam 19:20; cf. 2 Kings 2:3-7, 15; 6:1-7). The young churches of Paul's day had few prophets as experienced or trusted as Samuel, so the experience and testing has to be "peer reviewed," carried out in the public service by all those prophetically endowed. Testing, examining and interpreting prophecies was not necessarily viewed as incompatible with their general inspiration (cf. *Plato on inspired poets, and Jewish sages answering Scripture with Scripture).

14:30. Ancient teachers practiced various customs with regard to sitting and standing; at least in later times, *rabbis would sit and

*disciples stand to teach; those who read Scripture would stand. Among the Essenes, each would speak in turn; often the person speaking to an assembly would stand, while others would be seated. In general, standing to speak was customary in assemblies (e.g., Homer, *Iliad* 1.68-69).

14:31. On "all prophesying," see comment on 14:4-5; Paul here adds "teaching" to possible functions of prophecy (i.e., hearers could learn from it).

14:32. In most contemporary Jewish teaching, prophecy involved complete possession by the Spirit; one dare not seek to control one's utterance. For Paul, however, inspiration can be regulated, and regulating the timing and manner of one's utterance is not the same as quenching it altogether. On regulating one's spirit, cf. Proverbs 16:32; 25:28.

14:33. For an appeal to the conduct of the churches, see comment on 11:16.

14:34-35
Interruptions at Lectures

Because the topic changes so abruptly and some manuscripts relocate 14:34-35, many scholars see these verses as an interpolation by a later *scribe. They can also be read, however (with many other scholars), as a *digression; these were common in ancient literature. While addressing the topic of church order, Paul briefly digresses from his contrast of *prophecy and tongues and regulations concerning them to address the interruptions of some women occurring during the teaching period of the church service. Unless Paul changes the subject from women's universal silence (v. 34) to asking questions (v. 35a) and back to universal silence again (v. 35b), his general statement about women's silence in church addresses only the specific issue of their challenges in verse 34a. Paul has already noted that, under normal conditions, women may pray and prophesy in church (11:5). The issue here could be their inadequate acquaintance with Scripture rather than a transcultural statement about gender.

14:34. Although more progressive views existed, many traditionally held that women should not speak in public in mixed-gender company (*Plutarch, *Advice to the Bride* 32; *Morals* 142D; Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 1.21; Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 3.8.6); some would have deemed even the house-churches such a setting. (Even very traditional Greek men sometimes made exceptions for specifically *inspired* speech; cf. 11:5.) Biblical *law includes no specific text that enjoins silence or submission on women, although Paul could refer back to his creation argument in 11:8-9, to the effects of the curse in Genesis 3:16, or to the example of the matriarchs (1 Pet 3:5). But he can also use "law" generally (1 Cor 14:21), so he could refer to the generally subordinate position of women in *Old Testament times to show that it is not wrong for them to be submissive in some cultural settings. (Josephus also claims that the "law" supports wives' submission, without citing a specific passage; *Against Apion* 2.200-201.) Some also suggest that Paul cites the Corinthians' view in 14:34-35 and refutes it in 14:36 (cf. comment on 14:22); but 14:36 seems too weak to supply a refutation for 14:34-35.

14:35. Informed listeners customarily asked questions during lectures (Aulus Gellius, *Noctes atticae* 1.26.2; 12.5.4; Tosefta *Sanhedrin* 7:10), but it was considered rude for the ignorant to do so (cf. Plutarch, *Lectures* 4, *Moralia* 39CD; 11, *Moralia* 43BC; 18, *Moralia* 48AB). Although by modern standards literacy was generally low in antiquity (less so in the cities), women were far less often trained in the Scriptures and public reasoning than men were. In general, they achieved a given level of education only perhaps ten percent as often as men of the same social class. Disciples of rabbis were always men (though cf. Lk 10:38-42, which is exceptional). Although Jewish women could hear Torah teaching in the synagogue, girls were generally not taught to recite it as boys were (for the boys, cf., e.g., Mishnah *Avot* 5:21).

Paul does not expect these uneducated women to refrain from learning (indeed, that most of their culture had kept them from learning was the *problem*). Instead he provides the most progressive model of his day: their husbands are to respect their intellectual capabilities and give them private instruction. (Plutarch, one of the minority "progressive" voices of the era, advises a husband to concern himself with his wife's learning—but unlike Paul attributes the need for this to the wife's

irrational passion; *Advice to the Bride* 48; *Moralia* 145BE. Roman marriage taxation policy and, more importantly, the shortage of marriageable Greek women assured that the strong majority of adult women, at least in cities such as Corinth, were married.) He wants them to stop interrupting the teaching period of the church service, however, because at least until they know more, they are distracting everyone and disrupting church order.

14:36-40
Final Exhortations on Gifts

14:36-38. Some prophets in the *Old Testament stood out as stronger spokespersons for God than their peers—Elijah, Elisha, Samuel and so forth. Most prophets in the early church were not comparable in authority to New Testament prophets like Agabus and *apostles like Paul; if some prophets at Corinth appeal to their prophetic capabilities to advance their views, Paul can do so even more to *refute* their views—he claims to speak for God.

14:39-40. Here Paul summarizes the rest of the chapter; concluding summaries for sections were fairly common, though they were not always used.

15:1-11
Jesus Was Raised

Many, probably most, Judeans affirmed an end-time *resurrection of the righteous (2 Maccabees 7:9, 14, 23, 29; 14:46; **Psalms of Solomon* 3:12; **1 Enoch* 22:13), as taught in Scripture (Dan 12:2). By contrast, this conception was difficult for Greeks to envision. Many *Gentile intellectuals affirmed the soul's immortality without a future for the body (e.g., *Plato, *Phaedo* 64CE, 67C; *Seneca, *Dialogues* 11.9.3; 12.11.7); some (such as *Epicureans; Lucretius 3.417-977) denied any afterlife at all.

Like other skilled speakers and writers of his day, Paul starts by looking for common ground with his audience. Some of the Corinthians dispute the future resurrection of believers. They cannot, however, dispute the past resurrection of Jesus, because this is an established fact and the very foundation of their faith. Yet Paul points out that this fact is simply the first installment of the future resurrection of believers, hence cannot be separated from it (15:12-14, 23).

15:1-2. Paul follows the standard argument technique of beginning with an agreed-on premise; the Corinthians must agree with the very *gospel by which they were converted (see also 2:1-5; Gal 3:2-5).

15:3. "Handed on to you . . . what I had received" (NRSV) is the language of what scholars call "traditioning": Jewish teachers would pass on their teachings to their students, who would in turn pass them on to their own students. The students could take notes, but they delighted especially in oral memorization and became quite skilled at it; memorization was a central feature of ancient education. In the first generation, the tradition would be very accurate; some even believe that this tradition in 15:3-5 or 15:3-7 may be a verbatim citation. That Jesus died for our sins "according to the Scriptures" may refer especially to Isaiah 53:4-6, 8, 11-12 as well as the biblical pattern of the righteous suffering before exaltation.

15:4. The mention of the burial presupposes an empty tomb after the resurrection, because by definition "resurrection" meant a new body that did not leave a corpse behind; Paul's Palestinian Jewish sources could have meant the expression no other way. Unlike the Gospels, Paul does not mention the empty tomb, because the witnesses provide stronger proof of what happened to Jesus (15:5-8). "The Scriptures" probably refers to an assortment of texts, such as Psalm 16 and Isaiah 53:12. If the "third day" is also in view in "according to the Scriptures," perhaps it alludes to Hosea 6:2, Jonah 1:17 or other texts, although Paul may include the phrase simply to say, according to Jewish custom, that Jesus was raised before he could "see corruption" (Ps 16:10).

15:5. Although arguments from probability counted best in ancient law courts, eyewitness accounts were also highly valued. The ancient epiphanies (revelations) of gods or spirits were normally said to have been attested by eyewitnesses, but except for dreams and deliverances, these reports rarely stem from the era that records them. (The mystery initiation at Eleusis may have climaxed with some sort of ecstatic encounter with the deity, but this event again differs significantly from the sort of concrete, unsolicited, mass revelation Paul describes here.) Multiple revelations like this one, and mass revelations as in 15:6, especially in a sect,

that risked persecution to claim them are virtually unparalleled. Because by definition resurrection meant a new body, and Christians would not have been persecuted for claiming that they saw a mere spirit (most ancient people believed in ghosts), they are making a claim no one else made. "Appeared" was used in antiquity both for visions and for actual appearances (often of God or angels); but by all Jewish definitions of resurrection, especially in a Palestinian tradition such as Paul cites here, Paul must mean a literal appearance.

"Cephas" is *Aramaic for "Peter"; for the "Twelve" and its special significance for Israel, see comment on Acts 1:13 and the introduction to Acts 1:15-26. Groups often retained titles based on the original number of members even when the number changed (e.g., the "thirty" in Athens and the "hundred" in Rome), so some would call this group the "Twelve" even after Judas's death.

15:6. Paul's purpose in appealing to witnesses still alive may be to invite his readers to check his facts if they doubt his words. We may safely rule out the suggestion that the resurrection appearances were mass hallucinations, because such a mass hallucination of a demonstrably physical person is virtually unparalleled in history. (Were this evidence being cited for a war, about which we often take the word of a single ancient author, or any other event in history, few today would think to deny it.)

15:7. "The *apostles" clearly includes a larger group than the "Twelve" (15:5); see comment on 12:29-30.

15:8. "One untimely born" (NASB, NRSV) or "one abnormally born" (NIV) usually meant a dead fetus, by either abortion or miscarriage. Paul may be calling himself a freak compared to the other apostles (15:9); he is probably deprecating himself in some manner. This expression could refer to his being born at the wrong time (here, *postmaturely* rather than prematurely), after Jesus' initial resurrection appearances were complete; other commentators have suggested that Paul was chosen from the womb, but his persecution of the *church had been annulling that purpose, making him like an aborted person till his conversion.

15:9-11. Greeks did not mind boasting, provided that it was not too conspicuous; Jewish piety emphasized the need to thank God for one's goodness or status. Judaism and most ancient religion believed in retribution for sin; Paul believes that God exalted him despite his sin simply because of God's loving heart.

15:12-19
Resurrection of Christ and of Believers

15:12-17. Paul again reduces the opposing position to the absurd (a common *rhetorical technique): if there is no *resurrection, then Jesus did not rise (against their own beliefs and the evidence in 15:1-11) and other logical consequences that the Corinthians reject would also follow. Speakers would sometimes "dwell on a point," as Paul does here, using rhetorical repetition to underline his point with seven "if . . . then" statements in 15:12-19. With the exception of the *Sadducees and some Jews greatly influenced by Greek conceptions, most Judeans believed in the future resurrection of the body (Dan 12:2). Jesus's resurrection was not intelligible or fully meaningful apart from that teaching. As here, Jewish teachers also often used the particular to prove the general principle that it presupposed.

15:18-19. These verses suggest that Paul rejects the Greek idea of an immortality of the soul without a bodily resurrection; if there is no resurrection, the *Epicurean denial of an afterlife also follows (15:32). (Despite a view of judgment, the common Greek view of most people's afterlife as shades below the earth was dreary and unhappy to begin with, providing little of the incentive Paul found in the resurrection. Some other Greeks in this period believed in a heavenly destiny for the soul, and yet others would have agreed with the Epicureans that there was no afterlife.) Paul could believe in the resurrection *and* in an intermediate existence for the soul, as many *Pharisees did. But if God had not provided future hope for the whole person, Jewish people like Paul, who acknowledged the bodily nature of human existence, would have doubted that he had provided any future hope at all (cf. *2 *Baruch* 21:12-13).

15:20-28
God's Plan for History

15:20. The firstfruits were the beginning of the Palestinian harvest (Ex 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26; Lev 23:10, 17), guaranteeing the imminent ingathering of the remainder of the harvest.

15:21-22. See especially comment on Romans 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:44-48. Paul may here play on or respond to a *Diaspora Jewish tradition (attested in Philo), possibly adopted by some of the Corinthian Christians, that the ideal, spiritual man formed in Genesis 1:26-27 differed from the natural man Adam formed in Genesis 2:7.

15:23-24. Some find here belief in an intermediate messianic era between the present age and the *age to come, a view held (in various forms) by many Jewish writers of his day; see comment on Revelation 20. But the intermediate kingdom here may refer to the present era (1 Cor 15:25-27). On "firstfruits," see comment on 1 Corinthians 15:20.

15:25. Paul begins expounding Psalm 110:1, which he will link with a more explicit passage in 15:27; Jewish teachers often connected texts based on key terms or concepts common to both ("feet" and probably the idea of reigning).

15:26. Many philosophers refused to grieve or to view death as an enemy (cf. *Epictetus, *Diatribes* 1.27.7). Jewish writers generally portrayed death as an enemy, sometimes as an angel sent by God, but never pleasant. Paul sees death as the final enemy to be subdued; the *resurrection of believers would thus be the final event preceding Christ's *kingdom.

15:27-28. Paul quotes the Greek version of Psalm 8:6 (for the connection with his argument, see comment on 15:25). The context of the verse identifies the ruler as the "son of man" who is "a little lower than God" (Ps 8:4-5, though the Greek version differs); thus the Son will reign over all else as God's viceroy but remain subordinate in role to the Father (cf. Ps 110:1; Is 9:6-7; Dan 7:14). This psalm probably alludes to God granting authority to the first human (Gen 1:26-28); Paul undoubtedly is thinking of restoration in the new Adam, which he addresses in this context (1 Cor 15:22, 45-49). Were Paul a *Stoic, God's being "all in all" (which is rhetorically emphatic) could mean that all things would be absorbed back into the primeval fire, being part of his being; but when Jewish writers like Paul used such language, they meant merely that God is creator and ruler of all (Sirach 43:27).

15:29-34
Suffering in Hope of Resurrection

The early Christian witnesses of the *resurrection were so convinced of the truth of their own claims to have seen Jesus alive from the dead that they were not afraid to seal their witness with martyrdom.

15:29. Paul appeals to a practice, which the Corinthians affirmed, as inconsistent without belief in resurrection (cf. 2 Maccabees 12:43-45). Here "baptized for the dead" may mean that a Christian friend was baptized for symbolic effect on behalf of a new convert who had died before being able to be baptized. (Although there is no evidence of vicarious *baptism in ancient Judaism, posthumous symbols could be employed. For instance, if someone was to be executed, Jewish teachers said that his death could *atone for his sins; if he died before he could be executed, however, the people placed a stone on the coffin, symbolically enacting his stoning so that his execution would still count with God; cf. Mishnah *Eduyyot* 5:6.) Or this expression may refer to washings of the dead before burial, a standard Jewish custom; religious groups in the ancient Mediterranean supervised the burials of their own members. It could also be a roundabout way of saying "baptized so as to be able to participate in *eternal life with Christians who have already died," hence baptized in the light of their own mortality as well. Or people may be baptized for the sake of their own future resurrection, in view of the sentence of death already in their mortal bodies (cf. Rom 8:10). To whatever practice Paul alludes, it is not clear whether he agrees with the Corinthian practice; even if he does not, however, he can use it to make his point.

15:30. For the language of continual opposition, cf. Psalm 44:22 and 119:109 (cf. danger every hour in **4 Ezra* 7:89).

15:31. In this context, "die daily" (KJV, NASB) is *hyperbole for Paul's proleptic experience of martyrdom in his repeated sufferings for the gospel.

15:32. Romans were often entertained by

watching criminals, prisoners of war or slaves mauled by wild beasts in the arena (*Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 14.210; *Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 10.29), much as many Westerners today enjoy the violence of the entertainment media (although ancient Christians refused to attend such events except when they themselves were forced to be the victims). Roman gladiatorial shows were also held in the theater at Ephesus during many festivals (as well as in Corinth). It is unlikely, however, that Paul was *literally* cast to beasts in that arena. The victims were not supposed to survive the maulings, and as a Roman citizen Paul would have been exempt from this punishment. Philosophers employed the image of battling such beasts (usually irrational people), and Paul here probably describes his opposition in similarly graphic terms (cf. similarly Ps 22:6, 12-13, 16, 20-21; 74:19). "In human terms" in verse 32 may mean "figuratively" (contrary to most translations; cf. 9:8; Rom 6:19; Gal 3:15).

But if Paul had no future hope, instead of facing affliction, he may as well have simply indulged his passions, a sentiment often attributed (with some distortion) to *Epicurean philosophers but lived out by many Greek and Roman men at wild parties. The same perspective was attributed to others who denied an afterlife (Wisdom of Solomon 2:1-20; **1 Enoch* 102:6-8). He quotes Isaiah 22:13 (with its context about judgment on the wicked); cf. Sirach 14:16; Luke 12:19. (The *Old Testament often uses the language of eating and drinking in a neutral way—Eccles 2:24; 5:18-19; cf. 3:12—but without God it is never enough for life—Is 22:12-14; Eccles 11:7-12:14; cf. 7:2, 14.)

15:33-34. Here Paul cites a popular proverb, first attributed to the comic playwright Menander but in common circulation by Paul's day. It was the common advice of Greco-Roman moralists and Jewish wisdom teachers to avoid morally inferior company (e.g., Sirach 13:1; in the Old Testament, Ps 119:63; Prov 13:20; 14:7; 28:7). Paul perhaps refers here to those who do not believe in the future resurrection and hence do not have the basis for morals that those who believe in a final judgment of God do; other Jewish teachers who believed in the resurrection associated disbelief in that doctrine with immorality.

15:35-49
The Nature of the Resurrection Body

Ancient Judaism taught the *resurrection of the body, not just the immortality of the soul; Paul agrees but defines the nature of the new body differently from many of his contemporaries.

15:35-38. Ancient writers often raised *rhetorical objections from imaginary opponents; Jewish teachers presented questions like the one Paul raises here as the standard objections nonbelievers raised against the doctrine of the resurrection. (For imaginary interlocutors, see comment on 6:12.) For instance, what happened if someone died at sea, or the body was completely destroyed by fire? Later *rabbis decided that the body would be resurrected from a particular bone in the neck which they held to be indestructible. Paul more reasonably argues that, regardless of what physical material remains, at least the pattern of the old body will always remain as the seed for the new body. His argument from analogy, a standard argument, is effective, and later rabbis also used the "seed" analogy. "Fool!" (15:36) was a standard rhetorical insult, Jewish as well as Greek, for someone who raised an ignorant or immoral objection.

15:39-41. Paul's argument here appeals not to modern astronomy but to ancient cosmology. Even in the present, not all bodies were made of flesh; some were made of glory. Heavenly bodies, which *Gentiles often viewed as divine and Jewish people often identified with angels, were thought to be made of fire. Many Gentiles believed that immortal souls ascended into the heavens like stars; many Jewish people compared the resurrection body to angels (**2 Baruch* 51:10) or stars (Dan 12:2-3; cf. *1 Enoch* 43). Paul describes the different kinds of glory that various earthly and heavenly bodies have to explain how the resurrected body will come in glory, yet each person will remain distinct from other people. Thus there is continuity between the old and new bodies as well as discontinuity. *Midrashically, cf. also *eschatological "glory" for God's people in Isaiah 60:1-2, 19; 61:3; 62:2.

15:42-43. Paul's rhythm in 15:42-44 would stir rhetorically sensitive ancient hearers: he combines antithesis (contrasts) with fourfold

anaphora (x . . . x . . . ; here: "it is sown . . . it is raised). Some Jewish teachers believed that the body would be raised in exactly the form in which it had died, even if maimed, and only then be healed; this belief was meant to prove the continuity between the old and new body (*2 Baruch* 49:2–50:4; *Genesis Rabbah* 95:1; 100:2). But Paul clearly sees the resurrection body in different terms. Present "dishonor" and "weakness" in 15:43 challenge the status-conscious Corinthian believers (cf. 2 Cor 12:5, 9; 13:4).

15:44-45. Both Paul's "natural" and "spiritual" bodies might shock ancient hearers. A "natural" or "physical" body is literally a "soulish" body, in contrast to a "spiritual" body. Paul does not teach a future body made out of "spirit" (although the *Stoics taught that spirit was a material substance), any more than a present body made out of "soul." Rather, the present body is adapted for current natural existence, and the future body for the life even now ruled by God's *Spirit. In verse 45 Paul cites Genesis 2:7, where God made Adam a soul, a natural man; but many Diaspora Jews thought that Genesis 1:26-27 referred to a different, ideal man, the pure form and model for humanity, and Paul may play on this tradition here. The two kinds of body belong to the contrast between humanity's legacy in Adam and believers' destiny in Christ.

15:46-48. Some ancient thinkers viewed the body as earthly but the soul as heavenly. The Diaspora Jewish philosopher *Philo contrasted the incorruptible "heavenly man" of Genesis 1 with the later "living soul"/"earthly man" of Genesis 2; the former represented the ideal spiritual state of the mind seeking heavenly things, the latter the carnal person devoted to temporal things (*Allegorical Interpretation* 1.31-32; 2.4-5). Paul reapplies the language of this view, which the Corinthians had probably adopted, to the resurrection body, switching the order (natural then spiritual). In Jewish thought, both the full experience of the Spirit and the resurrection were eschatological expectations.

Jewish teachers often explained that Adam's sin brought sin and death into the world for everyone (**4 Ezra* 4:30; 7:118; *2 Baruch* 23:4; 48:42-43), and his descendants reenacted his sin in their own sins (*4 Ezra* 3:21, 26; 7:119; *2 Baruch* 54:15, 19; see comment on Rom 5:12-21).

15:49. Jewish teachers often taught that Adam had incomparable glory and power before his sin, and that this glory and power would be restored in the world to come. God created humanity in his image (Gen 1:26-27; cf. 1 Cor 11:7). For Philo, it is the first, heavenly man, not the soulish physical man, that bears God's image (*Allegorical Interpretation* 2.4; cf. 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15); for Paul, God's image is restored in *Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10).

15:50-58
The Resurrection Hope

To inherit the *kingdom, people must share the image of the heavenly person (15:45-49).

15:50. "Flesh and blood" was a common figure of speech for mortals.

15:51. Some Jewish people considered end-time "mysteries" (Dan 2:28-30, 47; *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 3.23). "Sleep" was a common euphemism for death.

15:52. *Old Testament prophets often employed the image of the trumpet, which was used to assemble people for convocation or war; here, as in a daily Jewish prayer of the period, it refers to the final gathering of God's people at the end (cf. similarly Is 27:13). Paul undoubtedly takes the image from Jesus (Mt 24:31).

15:53-54. Paul continues using rhetorical antithesis (e.g., perishable, imperishable). Here Paul quotes Isaiah 25:8, which refers to God's triumph over death at the time of the end, at Israel's final restoration; the context fits *resurrection in Isaiah 26:19. For "put on," see comment on 2 Cor 5:4.

15:55. Jewish interpreters often linked different texts together on the basis of a common key word; "death" occurs in Isaiah 25:8 and also in Hosea 13:14, which Paul may therefore apply to the resurrection as well. Although the latter passage is in the context of judgment, it may imply the same thing as Isaiah 25:8 (unless read as a question); cf. restoration imagery in Hosea 14:4-7. "Victory" also occurs in one Greek version of Isaiah (though not the *Septuagint); Jewish expositors normally selected whatever translation best suited their needs, which here allows Paul to make a good

*midrashic wordplay with Hosea 13:14: Paul changes the Greek version's "punishment" (*dike*) to "victory" (*nike*).

15:56. Jewish teachers typically expounded points of a text once they had cited it. Paul explains the meaning of "sting" and "victory" ("power") in Hosea 13:14 here (cf. comment on 15:55).

15:57-58. In 15:42-56, Paul has accumulated stirring rhetorical devices that reach their emotional peak in 15:57. As in 14:39-40, Paul concludes with a sort of summary; here it is a closing exhortation. Just as Judaism often linked failure to believe in the future world with immoral living, and faith in future judgment with perseverance, Paul encourages believers to hold to the truth of the resurrection and so to right living.

16:1-4
Paul's Collection

Many ancient letters involved business, a topic to which Paul turns in his closing comments. Most ancient associations had membership dues, but gifts among believers were voluntary.

16:1-2. That one should give "as the Lord has blessed" (lit., "as one may prosper") indicates that Paul is applying the teaching on serving the poor in Deuteronomy 15:14 (cf. also 16:10, 17). Setting aside resources on the week's "first day" may signify giving to God first (cf. Ex 23:16; Lev 27:26), though most wage-earners were paid daily or by the job. On possible meetings on the "first day" of the week, see comment on Acts 20:7.

16:3-4. When Jewish people from around the world were ready to send the required annual temple tax to Jerusalem, they would choose respected and trustworthy members of their own communities as representatives to take the money to Jerusalem (for guarding against accusations, see comment on 2 Cor 8:17-23). Jewish travelers often bore letters indicating their authorization, which would allow them to receive hospitality wherever they went; Christians seem to have continued this practice.

16:5-9
Paul's Travel Plans

16:5. The easiest way to travel to Corinth from Ephesus was to cross over by boat from Troas in Asia Minor to Philippi in Macedonia, then to take the westward road and turn south into Greece (as in Paul's second missionary journey in Acts; see Acts 16:7-9). Paul later delayed this planned visit partly to avoid having to confront them forcefully (2 Cor 1:15-23).

16:6. The seas were closed for travel in the winter; if Paul were in Corinth once the seas closed, he would stay there until they opened in the spring (cf. later Acts 20:2-3). Paul is writing in the spring (16:8), many months before the next winter. Warm letters between friends often discussed plans to spend time together (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 1.9.1; 7.15.1; 8.15.2). Hospitality was important in antiquity, and the Corinthians would feel honored to be able to provide hospitality to a prominent teacher (especially the founder of their *church). "Send me on my way" (NASB, NRSV) means that the church will provide for Paul's travel.

16:7-8. Others also offered the necessary caveat, "If God wills" (e.g., Homer, *Iliad* 8.142; *Epictetus, *Diatribes* 1.1.17). On Pentecost, see comment on Acts 2:1; perhaps Paul plans to observe the festival.

16:9. An "open door" (or "wide door"—NASB, NRSV) was sometimes used figuratively for freedom of movement or choice; here Paul refers to his ministry.

16:10-18
Recommendations and Exhortations

16:10-11. Persons of high status often wrote letters of recommendation, using their status to advocate the needs of those for whom they wrote. See comment on 2 Corinthians 3:1. One should receive a person's agent the way one would receive the person himself (Mishnah *Berakhot* 5:5); sending one "in peace" means that the host has received him well.

16:12. Even when others viewed them as rivals (3:4), leaders were sometimes friends (e.g., *Cicero, *Brutus* 1.2-3).

16:13. Some of Paul's exhortation here would be suitable in a military setting. "Act like men" (NASB) usually meant "be courageous" (NRSV); the expression did not necessarily connote masculinity, although it was used for courage because most people in antiquity associated courage with masculinity.

16:14. Skilled speakers often summarized toward the end of a work. Although ancient writers often stressed virtues, the supreme place of love (chap. 13), emphasized repeatedly throughout early Christian literature, is unusual in antiquity and especially characterized Christianity.

16:15-18. Here Paul makes another recommendation (cf. 16:10-12). "Firstfruits" (literally, in 16:15) was the beginning of a larger harvest; Achaia was the province that made up much of Greece, and of which Corinth was the chief city. (As a free city, Athens was technically excluded from the province in this period; cf. Acts 17:34.) Because mail in antiquity had to be carried by travelers, and these people are returning to Corinth from Paul, we may safely assume that they brought the letter we know as 1 Corinthians back to Corinth.

16:19-24
Closing Greetings

16:19. The Corinthians knew Aquila and Priscilla and that they had moved to Ephesus (Acts 18:2-3, 18, 24-27). Churches met in homes, as many pagan religious associations did; this was a matter of convenience, economy and eventually of safety.

16:20. Letters often closed with greetings (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 5.9), because travelers visited relatively infrequently and greetings had to be included whenever a letter was being sent out. Family members and close friends used light kisses, usually on the lips, as signs of affection (e.g., 1 Sam 20:41); see comment on Romans 16:16.

16:21. Most letters were written down by amanuenses, or *scribes, and usually signed by the author. Writing something in one's own hand could communicate affection. A signature authorized the letter, as it does today.

16:22. Ancient people, including Jewish people, used curse invocations (here the *Aramaic *anathema*) as the opposite of blessings. "Marana tha" (GNT) is an Aramaic prayer, "Come, our Lord." That the Corinthians would understand it means that it is part of common tradition carried over from the early Palestinian-Syrian church, which already recognized Jesus as "Lord" and as the one who would come (cf. Rev 22:20). (Thus Christians described his coming in the way that Jewish tradition expected God's coming for judgment.)

16:23-24. Greek letters often included the greeting *chairein,* "greetings"; Paul consistently transforms this to *charis,* "*grace." This is a blessing, an implicit prayer for them.

2 Corinthians

Introduction

Authorship and Unity. Although virtually all scholars agree that Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, scholars differ over whether it is one letter or a composite of several. Some of the proposed partitions in the book have more in their favor than others; the most obvious break in tone is between chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–13, the latter chapters shifting to an outright heated defense. But although ancient letter collections often removed openings and closings of letters, such collections generally retained the distinction between one letter and the next (e.g., *Cicero, *Seneca). Dividing 2 Corinthians into two letters is a possible way to read the evidence, but the burden of proof should remain on those who wish to divide it rather than on those who argue for its unity. As in speeches, Paul may save the most controversial material for the final section (cf. also, e.g., Oxyrhynchus papyri 1837); one could also save an emotional climax for the end (Demosthenes, *Epistles* 2). The eloquent could vary their tone within a single work (e.g., Pliny, *Epistles* 2.5.7-8). Most elements from earlier in the letter appear at least sometimes later, and vice versa. (I discuss this question much more fully in my Cambridge commentary. See below under "Commentaries.")

Situation. Scholars vigorously debate the precise setting of some books in the *New Testament, including 2 Corinthians. Reconstructing the exact problem depends somewhat on the issue of the book's unity. Virtually everyone agrees that Paul addresses tensions caused by opponents, at least in chapters 10–13, but views on the nature of the opponents vary. Paul's reference to their descent from Abraham in 11:22 at least makes clear that they are Jewish, but this need not make the division a particularly Jewish issue. That is, their being Jewish does not require us to identify them with Paul's opponents in Galatia; Paul himself was Jewish. Part of the division here is apparently over views of ministry: Paul came as a servant and labored among them, whereas his accusers have a high view of themselves more appropriate to upper-class ideals of leadership in antiquity than Paul's was. They also claim to be more *rhetorically skilled than Paul (11:5-6).

Purpose. Paul wishes to reestablish his converts' trust in him and their role of

intimate friendship. He thus writes a letter of self-commendation, a particular form of letter of recommendation especially necessary if one were defending oneself against charges. Chapters 10–13 are an ironic self-defense to the Corinthian Christians. The letter includes elements of various ancient letter styles: reproof, comfort and especially friendship. Another concern is also at issue: for the sake of the poor in Jerusalem, Paul needs the Corinthians Christians' money (chaps. 8–9). Unlike the opposing missionaries who have sought to replace him, Paul has never asked the Corinthians for money for *himself*. This practice has disturbed higher-status members of the congregation; their peers would expect the community to pay its teachers, who should not be self-supporting artisans (the well-to-do typically despised ordinary artisans).

Commentaries. Helpful commentaries with a focus on background include Frederick W. Danker, *II Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989); Craig S. Keener, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995); in heavier detail, see Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians,* AB 32 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984); and especially Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994–2000). Of more technical and specialized works, see, e.g., John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel,* SBLDS 99 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988); Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians* (Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987).

1:1-7
Opening Greetings

1:1-2. Paul opens following standard letter-writing conventions; see the introduction to *New Testament letters and comment on Romans 1:1-7. Corinth was the chief city of Achaia, and about forty settlements (such as Cenchrea) existed on Corinth's own outskirts.

1:3. It was customary in the ancient world to include a prayer or offering of thanks to a deity in letters of substantial length (as most of Paul's extant letters are). One of the most common forms of Jewish prayer was a benediction or praise that began, "Blessed [praised] be God, who . . . "; this was a way of glorifying God for his works. A regular *synagogue prayer addressed God as the "merciful Father" (so GNT here), which is what "Father of mercies" (cf. "Father of compassion"—NIV) means.

1:4. God would bring his final comfort to his people with the *Messiah's coming (e.g., Is 40:1; 49:13), but he also comforted them in their hardships during the present (e.g., Ps 94:19). The principle that suffering teaches one how to treat others is rooted in the *Old Testament (Ex 23:9). Paul's comfort in this verse is especially that he found Titus well and with good news about the Corinthians (2 Cor 7:4, 6-7, 13; cf. 2:2-3).

1:5. Some Jewish people spoke of the "pangs of the Messiah" as a period of tribulation for God's people before the end, and some commentators have naturally read "we have a share in Christ's many sufferings" (GNT) in these terms (Paul seems to have meant this also in Rom 8:22-23). Other commentators emphasize corporate personality; Jewish people also believed that they corporately shared the experience of those who had gone before them. They were chosen in Abraham, redeemed with their ancestors in the exodus from Egypt and so on. Paul believed that Jesus' followers became sharers in his cross in an even more intimate way by his *Spirit who lived in them.

1:6-7. In Greco-Roman tradition, the way a sage endured the sufferings sent by God helped others by setting an example of virtuous conduct. Through prayer, the Corinthians are also involved in Christ's mission being carried on by Paul and Christ's other witnesses (1:11). Such an expression of solidarity may have parallels, but they are rare—and in practice the Corinthians may not have been as supportive of his mission as Paul was wishing (chaps. 10–13). One conventional type of letter in later handbooks was the "letter of consolation"; Paul may hope to communicate comfort in this letter (2:7), after having written the sorrowful one (2:4; 7:7-13).

1:8-11
Paul's Sufferings

Speeches and substantive letters often included a brief *narrative section (1:8–2:13), usually following the introduction, that explained the circumstances necessitating the speech or letter.

1:8. "Asia" is the Roman province by that name, in what is now western Turkey. Its most prominent city was Ephesus, Paul's missionary headquarters during this period in his life (1 Cor 16:8). Some scholars have argued that Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus during this period, but it is more likely that he simply refers to chronic opposition later climaxing in the riot of Acts 19:23-41.

1:9-10. "We had the sentence of death within ourselves" (NASB) is presumably figurative (see comment on 1 Cor 15:32); psalms depicted deliverance from death graphically (e.g., Ps 30:3). Jewish daily prayers celebrated God's power by noting that he was "mighty to raise the dead." Paul can view his escapes from death as a proleptic experience of the power of *resurrection as well as of martyrdom; proleptic thinking was natural for early Christian readers of the *Old Testament who saw God's previous redemptive acts as a history of salvation that climaxed in Jesus.

1:11. The ancient world emphasized gratitude for benefaction. Many ancient pagans tried to barter with the gods through sacrifices and offerings; Paul instead trusts God.

1:12-22
Paul Had a Reason for Not Coming

Various *genres in antiquity prefaced their argument or teaching by narrating the events that had led to the present situation. Hospitality was important in antiquity, and it was an honor to host a prominent guest. For Paul not to have come could have seemed like both a

breach of his word—and thus of his honor and integrity—and an insult to their hospitality. Correspondents sometimes affectionately protested failure to come or write more often (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 1.9; *Letters to Friends* 2.10.1), but the Corinthians seem more genuinely offended. *Rhetoricians (trained public speakers) recommended that one defending himself defuse the audience's negative attitudes before addressing the more serious charges (chaps. 10–13).

1:12-14. Some ancient letters focused on praise or blame; many moralists both chided and encouraged their pupils. It was also normal to open a speech or letter with compliments, which helped the hearers to be more open to the point of the speech or letter. Ancient writers sometimes praised themselves discreetly (thus essays like *Plutarch's *Praising Oneself Inoffensively*), which was acceptable in a situation such as self-defense (like here). Paul's boast (1:12a—NIV), however, is in his *hearers.* By this period moralists customarily defended their motives whether they had been attacked or not, because so many charlatans existed; but if chapters 10–13 are part of 2 Corinthians (see the introduction), Paul is already defending himself against real opposition here.

1:15. Well-to-do benefactors were greatly extolled for bestowing gifts on persons of less means, but unlike worldly benefactors (or the opponents of chaps. 10–13), Paul asks for no status in return (1:24).

1:16. From Troas in Asia (1:8), one could sail to Macedonia, and come overland down to Corinth, as Paul had done before (Acts 16:11-12) and planned to do again (1 Cor 16:5), and finally did later (Acts 20:1-3).

1:17. Ancient sources frequently praise people who kept their word despite hardship; these sources also frequently condemn fickleness, especially in leaders. When someone had to change already noted plans, they had to (and sometimes did) supply good reasons and show that they were not fickle. Paul's flexibility may have drawn criticism earlier (cf. 1 Cor 9:19-23), but now he had been unable to fulfill his stated intention. As he says in 1:23, his decision not to stop at Corinth was to "spare" them; instead he sent Titus ahead with a harsh letter (1:23–2:11; 7:7-12). When Titus did not return to the appointed meeting place in Troas, Paul feared for him (given the dangers of traveling in antiquity) and went on into Macedonia (2:12-13). There Paul met up with Titus again, who gave him good news about them (7:5-16).

1:18-20. *Digressions were standard in ancient writing, and Paul here digresses (1:18-22) to assure them that he indeed had a good reason for not coming. Far from being unreliable (as some apparently insinuated), he remained a representative of the God who always kept his word, and he proclaimed a faithful *gospel. "Amen" functioned as a positive affirmation at the end of a prayer, and *Christ became the amen and yes to all the biblical promises of a truly faithful God.

1:21. In the *Old Testament "anointing," pouring olive oil over someone's head, attested that God had set that person apart for ministry (royal, priestly, etc.); Paul adopts that image here. Business documents used the term translated "stand firm" (NIV) or "establish" (NASB, NRSV) or "confirm" for confirming a sale; if such a nuance is present here (it is not in most other uses of the term by Paul), it could connect with "down payment" ("deposit"—NIV) in verse 22. In any case, both 1:21 and 1:22 signify that God attests to Paul's integrity.

1:22. Documents and jars of merchandise could be sealed with the owner's identity marker, or to certify that no one had tampered with their contents. The stamp of the owner or the person witnessing a document would be pressed into the hot wax, which then dried over the string tied around the rolled-up document. (Perhaps one might also figuratively "seal" a pledge; Xenophon, *Anabasis* 2.2.9.) Paul means that God attested the contents of the ministry of himself and his colleagues (cf. 3:2-3). Judaism generally associated the *Spirit with the end of the age (e.g., Ezek 39:28-29; Joel 2:28); Paul says that believers had the Spirit in the present as a "down payment" ("pledge"—NASB; "deposit"—NIV; "first installment"—NRSV), the first taste of the life of the world to come.

1:23–2:13
Paul Delayed Coming in Order to Spare Them

One could explain that one's reason for not writing or visiting was consideration for the

other person (e.g., Fronto, *Ad M. Caesarem* 3.13.3). Paul's reason for changing his mind about coming and for only sending Titus with a letter was to spare them his harshness (1 Cor 4:21; though he will still come harshly if they force him to do so; 2 Cor 13:2, 10).

1:23-24. If his hearers refused to accept Paul's "Yes, yes" (1:17; cf. Mt 5:37), Paul would invoke the most dependable witness. Social superiors often acted arrogantly toward their inferiors and expected praise or even groveling. Unlike the world's authority models (and those of his opponents in chaps. 10–13), Paul counts his converts as coworkers.

2:1-3. Affectionate letters sometimes spoke of sharing the reader's emotions, including sorrow (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 13.1.1). Any ambiguity, at least in the beginning, may be diplomatic, especially about the chief conflict addressed later in chapters 10–13; because of honor concerns, conciliatory communications sometimes avoided the primary point that had caused conflict (cf., e.g., Pliny, *Epistles* 1.5.11).

2:4. Even orators often showed affection with tears during speeches, and letters of friendship often emphasized deep love (e.g., Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 2.4.2). Paul's letter suggested severe discipline of the offender (2:5-10). Scholars dispute whether this offender is the same as the one in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, as most church fathers believed; but whether or not it is, Paul had written a letter after 1 Corinthians to tell the Corinthians to discipline him (this one sent with Titus). This letter has probably been lost. (Some scholars think this harsh letter between 1 and 2 Corinthians is 2 Cor 10–13, which they believe was originally a separate letter. This passage mentions nothing about a particular offender, however, and it is therefore more likely that the intervening letter was simply lost. One might not blame the Corinthians for misplacing this one.)

2:5-7. On the analogy of similar wording in the *Dead Sea Scrolls and some Greek texts, many commentators argue that "the majority" refers to the community of believers as a whole. Pharisaic Judaism also stressed receiving back repentant offenders. Groups like the one reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls, however, required a time of punishment to elapse before the repentant could be fully restored to the community, and Roman and Greek law assumed the carrying out of a sentence. The Corinthian Christians may thus wonder what to do with the man now that he has repented.

2:8. "Confirm" (KJV; "reaffirm"—NASB, NIV, NRSV) was often used in legal settings with reference to confirming the verdict; here the Corinthians are to confirm their love instead.

2:9-11. One of Judaism's most basic convictions about *Satan was that he was a deceiver and could come in various disguises.

2:12. From Titus, Paul received good news about their compliance and the man's *repentance (2:12-13; 7:5-16). Troas is Alexandria Troas, a significant and sizeable Roman *colony, the port in Asia from which one sailed across to Macedonia, and thence walked or sailed to Corinth. The "opened door" means freedom to minister (see comment on 1 Cor 16:9); at some point Paul stayed in Troas long enough to leave some possessions there (2 Tim 4:13).

2:13. Both travel and communication were difficult to coordinate in antiquity, so that people sometimes ended up waiting for each other in different locations (e.g., Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 3.8). Paul and Titus would be able to check for each other at any of the *churches along the way, just as Jewish people knew how to find fellow Jews through the local Jewish communities when they traveled.

2:14-17
Witnesses to Christ's Triumph

*Digressions were common in ancient letter writing and elsewhere. For example, at one point Homer digresses for seventy-five lines, just repeating a verb to summon his audience back to the previous point. Paul has also used this pattern to frame some sections in 1 Corinthians (6:1-8; chap. 9; chap. 13). Paul begins a digression here defending the sincerity of his ministry—a common topic of Greco-Roman moralists—that lasts through 7:4. The Corinthians should receive Paul as an ambassador of Christ's new covenant, a revelation fuller than the one given to Moses.

The view that 2:14–7:4 is not a digression but a separate letter accidentally inserted into the middle of another Pauline letter has little to commend it, because the first copies were on scrolls (codices were later), which preclude

accidental insertions of this sort. This section makes more sense as a natural digression than as a separate letter.

2:14-16. Roman conquerors would lead their shamed captives in a "triumphal procession"; in this period, only the emperor was allowed to lead triumphs. *Christ had triumphed and now led believers in him as his captives (the image is similar to that of being Christ's servants); cf. Psalm 68:18, used in Ephesians 4:8. The Roman senate normally decreed public thanksgivings before the triumphal processions, so they were great celebrations for the victors and great humiliations for the defeated. Most of the captives were executed after the triumph. But Paul glories in the image of Christians as peoples taken captive by Christ (cf. 1 Cor 4:9, etc.), and this prisoner of war himself, who identifies with Christ's death in the following chapters, offers the thanksgiving!

When sacrifices were offered in the *Old Testament and elsewhere in the ancient world, incense was burned to offset the stench of burning flesh (cf. Ps 141:2), and the same would have been true at Roman triumphal celebrations. (Sirach 24:15 described Wisdom as having a pleasant "aroma"; Paul and his fellow witnesses for Jesus Christ fulfill here the role which that book ascribed to Wisdom, but it is unlikely that he intends an allusion to that book here; the image was a natural one.) The Old Testament has precedent for acknowledging one's own inadequacy (Ex 3:11) but God's adequacy (Ex 3:14; cf. 2 Cor 3:5).

2:17. Professional speakers had long been accused of changing truth into error for gain (like a merchant providing impure products to save money). Philosophers had come under the same charge in some circles, because most made their living by their teaching or, in the case of the *Cynics, by public begging. The public often perceived wandering teachers and holy men as charlatans, no doubt because many of them were (in Scripture, cf. Jer 6:13-14; 8:10-11; Micah 3:5, 11). (Critics sometimes declined to name their opponents, thus refusing to grant them even explicit notice, but Paul may have his opponents in mind; cf. 2 Cor 11:4-5, 22.) Thus many philosophers and moralists felt the need to repudiate the charge, as Paul does here.

3:1-6
Adequacy from God

3:1. Self-commendation was considered inappropriate unless justifiable, but acceptable when necessary to defend oneself or to make a point (see comment on 5:12). Jewish travelers often carried letters of recommendation indicating that Jewish householders could trust them and give them lodging on their journey. In Greco-Roman society, higher-class *patrons would write letters recommending their subordinates; such recommendations naturally carried more weight than the person's own claims. Anyone who was trusted could write letters on someone else's behalf (Acts 15:25-27; 18:27; 1 Cor 16:3), and by such letters a sender could also authorize a messenger (Acts 9:2). Many philosophers disdained others' recommendations, both because they despised human opinion and because character was directly evident without letters (e.g., *Epictetus, *Diatribes* 1.9.27, 33-34; 2.3.1-2).

3:2-3. Others also understood the concept of matters written on human hearts, but Paul evokes Scripture here. The first *law was written by God's fingers on tablets of stone (Ex 31:18; Deut 5:22), but the prophets had promised a new giving of the law (Is 2:3) to be written on the heart (Jer 31:31-34), as it had always been meant to be (Deut 30:6, 11-14). Ezekiel had prophesied that God would remove his people's hard heart, a heart of stone, and write his word on soft hearts of flesh, by the *Spirit (Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-27). *Old Testament prophets appealed to their divine calls, and some Greek philosophers, eager to distinguish themselves from charlatans (2:17), also claimed divine rather than merely human ordination.

3:4-5. Jews outside Palestine sometimes spoke of God as "the Sufficient One" (v. 5 KJV; cf. 2:16).

3:6. Greco-Roman legal scholars distinguished between the letter and the intent of the law. Perhaps more relevant here, Jewish teachers sometimes gave detailed attention even to the very letters in the law; the letter here was thus the written law by itself, which "killed" simply by pronouncing its death sentence on the morally guilty. The Spirit, however, wrote the law's morality in the

hearts of God's people, by God's own gracious gift (Ezek 36:26-27).

3:7-18
The Glory of Two Covenants

Paul naturally infers that the glory of the new covenant would be greater than that of the old (3:6), and therefore articulates here the ways in which it was greater. Writers and speakers could "dwell on a point" that was important at length, as Paul does here; Paul also employs antithesis, rhetorically contrasting the earlier glory with the greater one. Ancient speakers could contrast good and bad, but as here could also contrast good and better (the comparison with what was good honoring what was better all the more).

Anyone in the Roman Empire who knew much about Judaism knew that Moses had been an important Jewish leader. But the glory revealed in *Christ is much greater—though more subtle—than that revealed to Moses; thus *apostles like Paul are in some sense in a position superior to that of Moses. Here Paul responds to Corinthian criticisms (perhaps fostered by the arrogant opponents in 11:13); Paul is even greater than Moses—but only because he preaches a message greater than that of Moses. If his opponents were appealing to Moses for their authority (cf. 11:22), Paul effectively short-circuits their claims here.

3:7. When Moses returned from beholding God's glory, his skin was shining so much that the people were afraid of him (Ex 34:29-30, 35). Jewish tradition had expanded on this *narrative extensively, so Paul's readers have probably heard other expositions of this passage before, although they could understand his exposition simply from the *Septuagint of Exodus. But Moses could see only part of God's glory, since seeing God's glory brought death (Ex 33:10)—in contrast to the *Spirit that brings life (2 Cor 3:6).

3:8. The prophets had compared the new covenant favorably with the old (Jer 31:31-34) and spoken of the Spirit and the internalized *law to come as the ideal (Ezek 36:26-27). Thus no one could deny that the Spirit of God in one's heart was better than a law scroll before one's eyes.

3:9-11. Paul reasons according to the Jewish principle *qal vahomer*, "how much more": if the giving of the law on stone tablets was revealed in great glory, how much more the greater giving of the law of the Spirit?

3:12. Paul continues explaining his confidence throughout this section of the letter (4:1, 16). Moralists and other speakers commonly used his word for "boldness" (NASB, NRSV) here to explain that they spoke forthrightly; they thus contended that they were not flatterers like the demagogues who sought popular support but did not care about the masses.

3:13. Moses' glory had to be covered (Ex 34:30, 33-35)—unlike Paul's forthright speech (v. 12)—and would always fade away—unlike the glory of Paul's message, revealed through the Spirit who came to reside in believers. Jewish men in Paul's day did not cover their heads unless they were ashamed or mourning.

3:14. The law of Moses was read aloud regularly in *synagogues. Only in the new covenant in Christ could the glory be revealed openly, when it would come internally by the Spirit. The future coming of the Spirit (in contrast to the present dearth of the Spirit in the world) was a common Jewish belief.

3:15-16. Paul says that the full glory present in the law still cannot be heard (human nature being unchanged since Moses' day), until one turns to Christ (3:14, 16) and has the law written on one's heart (Jer 31:31-34). In the same way, Moses, who had an intimate relationship with God, did not need a veil (Ex 34:34).

3:17. Following a standard Jewish method of interpretation, Paul shows the correspondence between figures in the first giving of the law and those under the new covenant: "The Lord" in the text about Moses (Ex 33:9, 11, 19; 34:5-6, 34) corresponds to "the Spirit" today.

3:18. Greeks told many stories of people who became "metamorphosed" or "transformed," but many Greek philosophers spoke of being transformed toward divinity by contemplating divine things. The *Dead Sea Scrolls spoke of the righteous reflecting divine splendor. But although Paul could be relating to his hearers in such culturally relevant images (minus Greek divinization), the basis of his image is simply how Moses reflected God's glory, as is clear in this context. Those under the new covenant behold God's glory even more plainly than Moses could (Ex 33:20);

thus, like Moses, they are transformed to reflect God's glory by the Spirit. In Platonic philosophy, the mind could envision the deity as pure reason, stripped of all passion; the glory revealed to Moses, by contrast, was full of love and faithfulness, revealing the biblical God's heart (Ex 34:6-7). On the "mirror" (NASB, NRSV), see comment on 1 Corinthians 13:12; for divine Wisdom being God's image and a mirror that reflects God's glory, see Wisdom of Solomon 7:26. On Christ as God's image, see comment on 4:4.

4:1-6
True Messengers of God's Glory

4:1-2. Merchants sometimes "adulterated" (cf. NASB here) substances by mixing in something cheaper to cheat their customers (contrast real treasure in 4:7); philosophers often accused professional speakers of doing the same, because they were more concerned about speaking ability than about correct content. Greco-Roman teachers often distanced themselves from such charges.

4:3-4. Paul continues his exposition from 3:1-18: the good news remains veiled (3:13) to some; *Christ is the complete revelation of God's glory (cf. 3:18). *Diaspora Jews sometimes argued that God stamped his image on people by his *logos,* his "word," or Wisdom (cf., e.g., *Philo, *Creation* 25, 31; *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.96; *Confusion of Tongues* 146-47; *Special Laws* 1.81; 3.207). Christ fills the place assigned to preexistent, divine Wisdom in Jewish tradition; for Paul the divine image and glory obscured in Adam are restored in Christ. Other Jewish teachers did not explicitly speak of *Satan as the "god of this age" (NIV), but most of them recognized that the nations (everyone but themselves) were ruled by spiritual powers under Satan's command.

4:5. To be the slave of a high official in the Greco-Roman world often meant to hold more honor and to control more wealth than the majority of free people. When Paul calls himself a "slave of Christ" (e.g., Rom 1:1), this is a title of honor, similar to the *Old Testament's calling the prophets "servants of God." But here Paul may use the image of the hired servant: Jesus has lent him to them to serve them on Jesus' behalf. Moral teachers like Paul would always have to be ready to refute the charge leveled against some philosophers that they proclaimed themselves, a charge that Paul seems to refute here.

4:6. Contrast was a frequent *rhetorical device; Paul contrasts unbelievers in 4:4 with believers in 4:6. God spoke light into being at the first creation (Gen 1:3); he similarly could make the light of his glory shine in the hearts of those who saw greater glory than Moses had—the glory in Christ (thus he uses here wording from Is 9:1-2). In various Jewish traditions the light in Genesis 1:3 represented the light of God's *law, of the righteous or of God himself; cf. comment on John 1:4.

4:7-15
Fading Flesh but Enduring Glory

The message of Jesus' witnesses is greater than Moses' message because Moses' glory could fade and the *law could be ignored, whereas the glory of God lives through Jesus' witnesses even in death.

4:7. Many Greek writers felt that philosophers' contentment in suffering displayed special power. But whereas philosophers were often hailed as strong and unswayed by testing, Paul reminds his readers that his power is from God alone.

"Earthen" or "clay" jars, as opposed to bronze ones, were readily discarded; because clay was always available, such containers were cheap and disposable if they were broken or incurred ceremonial impurity—an odd container for a rich treasure. (Paul's audience would be very familiar with these; evidence suggests that Corinth abounded in frail pottery lamps.) Some Greek writers similarly described the body as the soul's container; for Paul, however, the contrast is not between body and soul but between humanity and God. Some others portrayed people as weak vessels (e.g., Ps 31:12; *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 11.22; in images of judgment, Is 30:14; Jer 19:11), and wisdom or similar virtues as treasures (e.g., Prov 2:4; Sirach 20:30; Wisdom of Solomon 7:14; Philo, *That the Worse Attacks the Better* 59; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 4.2.9).

4:8-9. As an example to others, *Stoic philosophers often listed their various sufferings to show their commitment to a life of contentment and perseverance. Thus they remained content in illness, in hardship, in

death and so on. Jewish people often appealed to prophets and martyrs of the past as examples of endurance. In 4:8-12, Paul develops *rhetorical antithesis (cf. *Testament of Joseph* 1:4-7).

4:10-12. On Paul's proleptic experience of Christ's death and *resurrection, see comment on 1:9-10; here the glory is Christ himself living in Paul and other believers through the *Spirit, as the context makes clear. Paul describes his participation in Christ's sufferings quite graphically.

4:13. Paul here offers one way to translate Psalm 116:10, the way followed by the most common recension of the *Septuagint (the dominant Greek translation of the *Old Testament) in Paul's day. In the psalm's context, a righteous sufferer praises God's deliverance. Jewish teachers accepted arguments based even on short phrases; Paul establishes a principle explaining why he boldly proclaims Christ despite the opposition he receives.

4:14. Judaism believed in a *resurrection at the end time, when everyone raised would be presented to God for the judgment (cf. 5:10). While acknowledging Christ's resurrection in the past, some of the Corinthian Christians had been more skeptical about future resurrection and judgment, especially of the body; the idea was foreign to Greek thought (see comment on 1 Cor 15).

4:15. People in the Greco-Roman world honored benefactors; more people receiving the good news would yield more thanks to God. The Old Testament had prophesied that the *Gentiles would also give thanks to God in the end time, and Paul is zealous to see this *prophecy fulfilled in his day (1:11).

4:16–5:10
The Present and Future Life

4:16. Following *Plato's lead, some Greek thinkers (and a number of Greco-Jewish writers) distinguished between physical decomposition and the survival of the soul. Stoic sages emphasized that inner choices, not outer circumstances, were what mattered. Adapting the Corinthians' own Greek language where it is relevant, Paul the master missionary seeks to convince them with their own language that the glory of proleptic *resurrection is present even in proleptic dying (see comment on 4:7-12).

4:17-18. Some others also understood that the future reward would be greater than present sufferings (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 3:5; **1 Enoch* 103:9–104:2; **4 Ezra* 7:14-16). Plato and many philosophers after him rightly contrasted the temporal and the eternal. By Paul's day many Platonists thought that bodily things were heavy and weighed down the soul (cf. even Wisdom of Solomon 9:15), but that the soul was light; once freed by the body's death, it would soar up to the pure heavens from which it had originated. Paul here inverts the image but perhaps partly for a play on words that a few Jewish readers skilled in Hebrew exposition might catch: "glory" and "weight, heaviness," represent the same Hebrew word.

Plato also believed that the world of ideas was the real, unchanging world, whereas the temporal, changing world of sense knowledge was only a world of shadows. Paul does not deny the reality of the visible world but does agree that it is subject to decay, whereas the unseen world is eternal. In making this statement, however, Paul is still contrasting his ministry with that of Moses: he does not teach an outward *law written on stones, but the law written in his inner person by the *Spirit (chaps. 3–4).

Although Paul finds some common ground with his Greek readers on the righteous soul's endurance (4:16-18), he is quick to bring them back to the future hope that is the basis for it (see 5:1-10). Like the Greek sages, Paul is ready to face death; unlike them, he has a hope of future bodily life. *Pharisees accepted both the immortality of the soul and the future *resurrection of the body, and many Jewish writers described the experience of heaven after death as a proleptic experience to be completed in paradise after the resurrection. Paul apparently likewise accepted both the soul's continuance after death and bodily resurrection (cf., e.g., Phil 1:21-23 with Phil 3:20-21).

5:1. Greek writers described the body as a vessel, a house, a tent and often as a tomb; Paul says that a better body awaits (he can use the present tense because of the secure down payment; see 5:5). A *Hellenistic Jewish work depicts the body as a tent (Wisdom of Solomon 9:15).

5:2-4. "Groaning" may allude to Exodus 2:23 (the same word in the *LXX); or it may

relate to birth pangs (Rom 8:22-23), in the light of some Jewish teachings that the resurrection would be preceded by a period of suffering described as birth pangs. At any rate, groaning was behavior characteristically ascribed to those in agony.

Paul's longing here is not for death (as in Greek views of the body as a tomb, which made even suicide acceptable if life became too difficult) but for the resurrection, when he will receive a new body. Some described the body as clothing (*Epictetus, *Diatribes* 1.25.21), death as disrobing (e.g., Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 2.56) and/or the resurrection body as clothing (cf. *1 Enoch* 62:15). Although Greeks regularly exercised in the nude and Romans had adopted nude bathing from the Greeks (probably including at the many baths in Corinth), all Jews except those who had surrendered to Greek custom abhorred nakedness in public. (Others also disliked nakedness in some social situations.) For Paul, the image of "nakedness" is thus an unpleasant one.

5:5. The term translated "pledge" (NASB) or "deposit guaranteeing" (NIV) was used in business documents for "down payment," a first installment. Because the *Old Testament (e.g., Is 44:3; Ezek 39:29) and much of early Judaism associated the outpouring of the *Spirit with the future age, the present experience of the Spirit is the Corinthians' initial experience of the resurrection life to come, "guaranteeing" (cf. NRSV) its fulfillment (1:22).

5:6-9. Jewish accounts of the righteous dead in heaven portrayed them as experiencing a measure of the future glory now, while awaiting the resurrection. Although this state was inferior to the resurrection (5:4), it meant an end to the present toils—and Paul's continual experience of gradual martyrdom (4:8-10). Some sages who listed their sufferings (cf. 4:8-12) also emphasized their willingness to surrender life (cf. *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 120.12-15). Some expected greater vision of God at death (e.g., Maximus of Tyre, *Orations* 10.3).

5:10. Corinth had a magnificent "judgment seat," the raised platform where governors would pronounce judgments and decrees; the Corinthians know that Paul had appeared before it (Acts 18:12). Paul's allusion here, however, is especially to the standard Old Testament and Jewish image of the day of judgment, in which God's throne became the ultimate judgment seat (Christ here filling the divine role; cf. Rom 14:10). Paul's emphasis on judgment for deeds in the body reiterates his opposition to any remaining elements of common Greek ideas disparaging the body, which Paul had refuted in 1 Corinthians 6:12-14.

5:11-19
Paul's Ministry of Reconciliation

5:11. The "fear of the Lord" was a common motivation for righteousness in Jewish texts, often associated with a recognition that God would judge (5:10).

5:12. In ancient culture, self-commendation was generally offensive (see also 3:1; cf. Prov 25:27; 27:2); one needed a good reason to employ it, like defending oneself (here; 3:1), for his audience's good (10:8), responding to charges (10:10), challenging others' arrogance (11:12), necessity (12:1) or compulsion (12:11). Bringing pride to a group of people who should identify with the speaker would also count. Paul here employs the inward-outward contrast of 4:16-18 against his boastful opponents and borrows some terms from 1 Samuel 16:7 LXX (as well as continuing the "uncovered face" theme from 3:12, 18).

5:13. Both philosophers (Diogenes Laertius 6.3.82) and prophets (2 Kings 9:11; Jer 29:26; Hos 9:7) were sometimes thought "insane" (GNT here; the standard meaning of "beside oneself"—KJV, NASB, NRSV). Greek sages often acknowledged this erroneous perception of themselves, although they believed that they themselves were the only truly sane ones (cf. also Wisdom of Solomon 5:4); similarly, ecstatics often described their experiences in these terms. The Greek term contrasted with being "sober" or "of sound mind," as here. Paul's contrast between his behavior toward the Corinthians and his behavior toward God probably derives from Moses' behavior in Exodus 34:33-34 (see comment on 2 Cor 3:7-18); he would have revealed more of his ecstatic side to them had he thought it helpful (see comment on 12:1-7; cf. 1 Cor 14:18-19).

5:14-17. The new person on the inside, participating in Christ's *resurrection, means more than the decaying outer person ob-

servable to human eyes (see comment on 4:16-18). The new identity included an entirely new framework for thinking, including about Jesus. Judaism applied the language of "new creation" in various ways. For example, for divine Wisdom spiritually "making all things new" in the present, cf. Wisdom of Solomon 7:27. In later rabbinic texts one who made a *proselyte was considered as if he or she had created the proselyte; the New Year was also given some significance as a new beginning, because sins were shortly thereafter absolved on the Day of Atonement. But in early texts like **Jubilees* and the *Dead Sea Scrolls, "new creation" language applies especially to the world to come (cf. **1 Enoch* 72:1; *Jubilees* 1:29; 4:26; **2 Baruch* 44:12). This was the most obvious application of new creation language, since it referred to the life of the world to come in the *Old Testament (Is 65:16-18; 66:22). For Paul, that the *Messiah Jesus has come means that believers have already begun to participate in the resurrection life of the coming world (see comment on 4:10-12; 5:5).

5:18-19. By "us" as "ministers of reconciliation" Paul refers to himself and his associates—not to the Corinthians in their present state (5:20). Paul styles his words here in a relevant way to a Greek audience: Greek speakers often spoke on the subject of "concord," thereby urging reconciliation and unity. The term translated "reconciliation" applied especially to relations between people; but here, as in the Old Testament, reconciliation between people and God presumably presupposes *repentance and *atonement by blood sacrifice (here by Christ's death).

5:20–6:10
A Plea from Christ's Suffering Ambassadors

Ancient *rhetoric sometimes used shocking words to grip people's attention. Having established that he and his colleagues are Christ's representatives, Paul entreats the Corinthian Christians to be reconciled to God again by being reconciled again to himself (7:2; cf. Mt 10:40). Treatment of a herald reflected one's attitude toward the sender, and in ancient Mediterranean life (and especially in Roman party politics, well known in Corinth), one should be friends of one's friends and enemies to their enemies. If the Corinthians welcomed Paul's opponents, they were rejecting him; if they rejected Paul, they rejected the one who sent him.

5:20. An "ambassador" was a representative of one state to another, usually applied in this period to the emperor's legates in the East. This image fits "*apostles" as appointed messengers (see comment on 1 Cor 12:29-30), just as the *Old Testament prophets had been (Ex 7:1). (The prophets frequently delivered messages in the form of a covenant lawsuit or in words to kings used by messengers of suzerain [supreme] kings to vassal [client] rulers.) In the context of a plea for reconciliation, Paul as an ambassador urges the Corinthians to make peace with God the ultimate King; emperors normally took action against unrepentant client states that had offended them, and no one took such warnings lightly.

5:21. Paul might blend the idea of unblemished sacrifices with that of the scapegoat that embodied the sin of God's people (Lev 1:3; 16:21-22). Here Paul could mean that *Christ became sin's representative when he bore its judgment on the cross, and Paul and his associates become righteousness's representatives when they proclaim his message. This verse carries on the representative idea set forth in 5:20.

6:1-2. Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8, which is in the context of the messianic redemption, reconciliation and peace for God's people (52:7), a time that Paul says has arrived in Christ (5:17). His argument would also be quite relevant to his readers: Greek sages sometimes discussed appropriate moments for speaking, especially for bold speech. They often also spoke boldly about and stressed urgency for reconciliation (concord, harmony; see comment on 5:18-19).

6:3. "Giving no offense" (KJV) was important for those in public office or for those whose behavior would influence public perceptions of their group; this topic was widely discussed by ancient political theorists, public speakers and minority religions. (The "ministry" is the ministry of reconciliation—5:18.)

6:4-5. Philosophers often listed their hardships, sometimes in triads, as Paul does here; these catalogs of hardships verified their commitment to contentment and thus the sincerity of their message. (Orators also sought to es-

tablish a person's *character* as a central part of arguing for guilt, innocence or reliability.) Some of Paul's words are essentially synonyms; as in ancient *rhetorical style, they are repeated for effect. The list in 6:4-10 is the sort an orator would have composed (cf. *Cicero, *In Catalinam* 2.10.25; *For Scaurus* 16.37; *For Caelius* 22.55; *Orationes philippicae* 3.11.28; 8.5.16): prefaced by the Greek *en,* nine sufferings (6:4-5) and eight virtues (6:6-7); prefaced by *dia,* three antitheses regarding weakness (6:7-8) followed by seven more structured by "as . . . yet" (6:8-10). One can also read this as three sets of nine elements (cf. nine in 1 Cor 12:8-10; Gal 5:22-23; two sets in 2 Cor 11:23-25, 26).

6:6-7. Philosophers also often described themselves by catalogs of virtues, which made their lives models for those of their readers. Because charlatans were abundant, true teachers had to stress their pure motives and that they acted on knowledge of what was real. Paul's defense here would impress a Greek audience who thought that Paul was out of touch with their culture's proper speaking conventions (see 1 Cor 2). By "weapons" Paul may refer to the shield, which was carried on the left, and the spear or sword, which was carried on the right.

6:8-9. Paul again relates to issues that other speakers on moral issues faced in Greco-Roman society. Paradox, contrasting apparently irreconcilable opposites, was a standard literary and rhetorical technique. Sages often liked to jar audiences with oxymorons (cf., e.g., Musonius Rufus 9, p. 74.10-12 Lutz). Some philosophers (particularly *Cynics) used paradox and the similar technique of irony for turning the comments of their accusers (insane, foolish, shameful) against them, proclaiming themselves truly wise and rich (see comment on 1 Cor 4:8). Radical sages proclaimed that the opinions of foolish men (nonphilosophers) did not bother them; *Stoics often reflected on their lack of worldly honor.

But many philosophers avoided unnecessary criticism when possible, lest their message be dishonored; moralists often even sought to learn some truth from false accusations leveled against them. Both Greek and Jewish traditions stressed being honorable and irreproachable, and most people cared about public opinion. "Well-known" here presumably means known to the one who counts—God. On "dying" and "living," see 4:10-12 and the language of Psalm 118:17-18 (familiar to many Jews from the Hallel, Psalms 113–118, sung at Jewish festivals; cf. Ps 116:10 in 2 Cor 4:13 and possibly Ps 119:32 in 2 Cor 6:11).

6:10. Although better off than most peasants, artisans (Paul had earned his living as a leatherworker—Acts 18:3) toiled, remained poor and had little social status; this was especially true of those who moved around, as Paul did. *Cynic philosophers gave up all possessions to pursue their lifestyle but considered themselves spiritually rich. Cynic and Stoic philosophers claimed that, although they owned little or nothing, all the world belonged to them, because they were friends of the gods who owned it; as a servant of the true God, Paul has all the more reason to apply the phrase "possessing all things" to himself.

6:11–7:4
Receive Christ's Ambassadors

Orators often climaxed arguments with an intense emotional appeal, as here (letters, which were less formal than speeches, could also give free play to emotion). By refusing to be reconciled to Paul, the Corinthians are in effect refusing to be reconciled fully to God, whose agent Paul is (cf. Mt 10:40). In 6:14–7:1, Paul calls the Corinthians to give up their intimate ties with the world; in the context of 6:11-13 and 7:2-4, his point is that they should instead resume their intimate ties with him and other true representatives of God. Thus Paul here offers a calculated insult to his spiritual opposition in Corinth.

6:11-13. It is they and not Paul who are hindering proper reconciliation. A "mouth speaking freely" and a "heart bared wide open" fit Paul's emphasis on "open speech," an important motif in ancient speaking (see comment on 3:12). Paul's words here are deeply affectionate, again beseeching them to return his love. Recording deep feelings and reasoning on an emotional level were not out of place but were a normal part of ancient public speaking and writing. Public speakers purposely appealed to their hearers' emotions (cf. Gal 4:20). Letters often expressed deep affection (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 1.9.1;

2.1.1; 2.1.2; 2.2.1; 2.3.2; 12.12.1); sometimes they also affectionately protested that the other should show more love. Affection, writers sometimes urged, ought to be reciprocated (e.g., Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 6.15.1; 7.14.2; 12.30.3; 15.21.3).Of course, these speakers and writers were supposed to feel these emotions genuinely, not merely pretend to have them.

6:14. In 6:14–7:1 Paul makes a *digression, a common literary device; he frames it like some of his other digressions and uses antithesis in a striking emotional climax to the preceding section. Perhaps he summons the believers to choose between him (as Christ's agent) and the rival teachers; ancient Mediterranean values required one to befriend one's friends and oppose their enemies.

"Unequal yoking"(cf. KJV) here might evoke Leviticus 19:19 (cf. Deut 22:10); the principle would reinforce the *law's prohibition of marriage with nonbelievers (cf. Deut 7:3; Ezra 9:12; Neh 13:25) but need not be limited to marriage. The *Dead Sea Scrolls contrast the people of light and the people of darkness (e.g., 1QM 1.1, 11).

The lack of concord between the wise and the foolish was a Greek proverb; more prominently, the division between wise and foolish, righteous and wicked, and Israel and the *Gentiles was central to *Old Testament and Jewish thought. Others offered similar contrasts (Sirach 13:16-19, using one of the same verbs as here). Very religious and less religious Jews could work together, but the more religious Jews imposed some limitations. Rhetorical questions were a common part of rhetorical style, and Paul has several successive ones in verses 14-16.

6:15. "Belial" or "Beliar" (NRSV) was another Jewish name for *Satan (e.g., **Jubilees* 1:20; Dead Sea Scrolls CD 4.13-16; 1QM 1.1, 5, 13; 13.2, 4, 11); some passages demanded a choice between God and Beliar (*Testament of Naphtali* 2:6; 3:1).

6:16-17. Jewish law forbade doing business with *Gentiles on pagan festival days or in any other way that would bring associations with idolatry. Jewish people did not try to interfere with pagan temples, but when an emperor planned to set up an idol in Jerusalem's temple less than two decades before Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, the Jewish people were ready to revolt rather than to allow it.

Portraying the Corinthian Christians as God's temple (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19) who have no fellowship with idols (1 Cor 10:20-21), Paul can cite relevant Old Testament texts (listing together various texts, as early Jewish sources sometimes did): verse 16 cites Leviticus 26:11-12 (apparently correcting the usual Greek translation where necessary), probably echoed in Ezekiel 37:26-28 (esp. v. 27). Verse 17 adapts Isaiah 52:11, addressing the time of the new exodus of the messianic salvation (52:7-15); cf. Leviticus 11:31, 44-45 and 22:4-6. "I will welcome you" uses a *Septuagint rendering of God's promise to gather his people in a number of texts, perhaps especially Ezekiel 20:34, 41.

6:18. God's people were his sons and daughters (e.g., Deut 32:19; Jer 3:19), who would be restored to their special relationship with him in the time of the end (Is 43:6). Paul blends the language of several texts (probably including 2 Sam 7:14, in the immediate context of building a temple), as Jewish writers sometimes did; here he may also blend his own prophetic insight (cf. 1 Cor 14:37-38).

7:1. The promises of 6:16-18 were confirmed in *Christ (1:20), applicable to those consecrated to God. Jews often spoke of pure and undefiled hearts; undefiled flesh usually referred to ceremonial purity (hand washing or ritual immersion). Purity in body and spirit here (see comment on 5:10 and on 1 Cor 6:20) invites abstention from sin.

7:2-3. *Rhetorically, the Greek of 7:2 uses *anaphora* (three times beginning with "no one") and *homoioptoton* (three verbs ending the same way); 7:3 is full of pathos (emotional appeal). Speakers often followed shocking or offensive statements with more welcome words; writers often indicated the end of a digression by returning to the point. Paul uses language of great affection; see comment on 6:11-13. A writer could clarify that he stressed a point not for other reasons but to show love (*Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 2.4.2). The greatest expression of friendship in Greco-Roman literature was willingness to die with someone (which also makes sense outside Greek culture; see 2 Sam 15:21; Jn 13:37; 15:13).

7:4. Moralists felt that true friends should speak frankly (cf. KJV, ASV: "boldness of speech"). Greco-Roman speakers often em-

phasized their confidence in their hearers for the purpose of establishing intimacy and to secure willing compliance.

7:5-16
Reconciliation Between Paul and the Corinthians

7:5-6. Paul resumes here the *narrative introduction that he suspended in 2:13; even in speeches, where the *narratio* was normally at the front, it could also appear later when needed. *Old Testament texts often emphasized God's comfort for his people (e.g., Is 40:1; 51:3; 52:9), including, as here, God comforting the "humble" (NRSV, "downcast"; see the *Septuagint of Is 49:13; 54:11); Paul here continues his opening theme (1:3-6). Paul crossed over from Troas to Macedonia to find Titus, whom he had sent to the Corinthians with a harsh letter (2:12-13). He was comforted not only by Titus's safety but by their response.

7:7. Rhetorically sensitive hearers would appreciate the repetition of three qualities of the Corinthians in quick repetition.

7:8-9. Writers sometimes had reason to be anxious how recipients would understand their letters (*Cicero, *Letters to His Brother Quintus* 2.16.5) or to apologize when a letter inadvertently inflicted pain; more relevant here, moralists often regarded themselves as physicians inflicting pain only to restore the patient. When gentle warnings failed, harsher words were deemed appropriate. Frankness could bring *repentance, and a writer would not regret it if it benefitted the reader (Fronto, *Ad Verum Imperator* 1.4.1). Ancient teachers of speaking and letter-writing skills warned that open rebuke should be reserved for the most extreme circumstances; people were more likely to listen if one mixed in praise with blame. In the technical language of such teachers, "rebukes" were meant to generate shame and repentance.

7:10. Like the Old Testament (e.g., Amos 5:6-11) and Judaism, pagan philosophers sometimes recognized that divine judgments were not only acts of justice but also attempts to bring the guilty to repentance.

7:11-12. The sixfold repetition of "what" in 7:11 is rhetorical *anaphora* (cf. similar patterns in, e.g., Fronto, *Ad Antoninum Imperator* 2.6.2); piling up related terms was an acceptable expression of Greek rhetoric and simply added emphasis to the point of the terms. Others understood zeal to recoup what was lost (Diogenes Laertius 4.16).

7:13. Titus received great hospitality; hospitality to travelers was emphasized in antiquity, especially in Jewish and Christian circles.

7:14. Whereas self-commendation had to be done discreetly, boasting about one's friends was always considered acceptable in antiquity.

7:15-16. If the Corinthian Christians received Titus with such respect, it means that they saw him as Paul's own representative; one was always to receive a representative with the same honor one would grant the person being represented. Expressions of confidence could prepare hearers for (or even be shared during—Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 13.44.1) a request (coming in chaps. 8–9).

8:1-9
Models of Giving

Concerned with an active symbol of the unity of Jewish and *Gentile *churches (Rom 15:25-26) and relieving genuine poverty (Gal 2:10), Paul must do here the very thing that he has so assiduously avoided in his own ministry (1 Cor 9)—asking for funds. Although he had previously told the Corinthians about the need (1 Cor 16:1-3), some could be offended at what they would see as inconsistency. They had wanted Paul to accept pay as a regular philosophical teacher rather than maintain himself as a low-status artisan (12:13; cf. 1 Cor 9); by identifying himself with the poor in the congregation, Paul had risked alienating their well-to-do friends who despised artisans. Paul thus defends the collection in chapters 8–9.

8:1. Moral writers frequently offered positive role models. Public speakers used a standard *rhetorical technique called "comparison," which often served to stimulate moral competition. Civic rivalry was common, and many speakers, including Paul, were willing to appeal to ancient city and other geographical rivalries to spur their hearers on to greater zeal. Macedonia and Corinth were such rivals. When it appears in business documents, the term usually translated here "*grace" (8:1, 4, 6-7, 19; 9:14; cf. 8:9; 9:8, 15) can also refer to benefactors' generosity, to the gift or to gratitude (cf. 8:16; 9:15).

8:2. Some Greco-Roman aristocrats ridiculed those who lived simply, but other writers praised the simple lifestyle that enabled its followers to give generously. Philippi in Macedonia was prosperous, but the prosperity had not filtered down to the poor, who often were unemployed; further, persecution and ostracism may have increased the financial hardship of the Christians there.

8:3. One was to give alms according to one's ability (Ex 35:24; Deut 15:14; cf. Ezra 2:69; Tobit 4:8, 16), but the Macedonians went beyond this rule. Greco-Roman sources used phrases like "according to their means" and "beyond their means" (NRSV) for benefaction.

8:4-5. The term translated "participation" (NASB), "sharing" (NIV, NRSV) or "fellowship" (KJV) was used technically in business documents of Paul's day for a "partnership." It could also signify an institution of Roman trade known as the *societas,* by which members contracted to supply whatever they had to fulfill their goal. Whether Paul conceives of this "partnership" officially or unofficially, it is clear that the Macedonians saw support, like hospitality, as a privilege. Judaism used the term here translated "service" (NIV) or "support" (NASB) technically for distributing alms for the poor.

8:6. Titus had raised this issue of support as well as the issue of the harsh letter when he was among them; because Titus has now reported back to him, Paul's concern as to whether the Corinthians were ready (9:3) probably indicates that they were not. Inscriptions often praise benefactors for "completing" a project to which they had pledged.

8:7. They have important spiritual gifts (1 Cor 1:5-7; 12:28) and other expressions of God's work among them. Paul uses praise as a basis for exhortation, as moralists often did. One could appeal to a reader's love for the writer to urge some action for the reader's good (Fronto, *Ad M. Caesarem* 5.1). If Paul means his circle's love for the Corinthians, superlative claims of love expressed affection (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 2.3.2; 13.1.5; 13.45.1).

8:8. Because contributors in antiquity were often forced to support public works (occasionally this forced support could bankrupt someone less well-to-do than the tax roll had indicated), speakers and writers calling for funds had to be particularly careful to stress the voluntary nature of the contributions. (Later Jewish teachers even charged charity collectors who pressured the poor for contributions with "oppressing the poor.") Paul alludes to the rhetorical technique of comparison he has used (8:1).

8:9. Moralists often appealed to role models, and Paul here uses the supreme one, insisting that the Corinthian Christians follow Christ's example of using their prosperity to enrich the poor. Like both Jewish and non-Jewish writers of his day, Paul can use the language of wealth figuratively as well as literally, but he may mean Christ's enrichment of believers literally, as provision through one another (8:14). Ancients could respect someone who remained poor to enrich others (cf. *Plutarch, *Lysander* 2.4; 30.2).

8:10-15
Give According to What You Have

8:10-12. "Eagerness" (NRSV) appears often in inscriptions about benefactors. The Corinthians had already eagerly committed themselves to supporting the Jerusalem church (1 Cor 16:1-3). (Commentators note that the phrase translated "last year" or "a year ago" could mean from nine to fifteen months earlier.) Because their church was more prosperous than others (8:1-2), however, they had contributed more, and some may have felt that they were contributing an inordinate percentage of the collection. Paul employs a common argument for why they should continue what they have begun: many ancient arguments were weighed by a principle here translated "advantage" (NASB) or "what is best" (NIV) (see, e.g., 1 Cor 6:12); Paul explains the advantage in 8:13-15. The *Old Testament normally described gifts and sacrifices as "acceptable" only if they reflected the best one had to give (e.g., Lev 1–4). It was widely understood, however, that one could give only according to what one had (e.g., Tobit 4:8, 16; Sirach 14:13; Mishnah *Pe'ah* 7:8; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquities of Rome* 11.27.7).

8:13. The Corinthian Christians may have resented having to provide a large portion of the offering, but Corinth was a prosperous city. One common definition of friendship was that "friends share all things in common" and are

"equal" (including in some *Diaspora Judaism; *Letter of Aristeas* 228, 257, 263, 282), even though this principle came to be applied even to wealthy *patrons who sponsored poorer *clients. Ancient speakers and writers stressed "equality" as much as "concord" (see comment on 5:18-19), and the Corinthians could not miss Paul's point: their conversion made them "friends" to other Christians and required a more equitable distribution of provision within Christ's body.

8:14. A famine was an emergency (Acts 11:28). Jewish wisdom writers exhorted their readers to remember famine when they were prospering (Sirach 18:25). Benefaction in antiquity involved reciprocity (often honor is what benefactors achieved in return). Although Corinth was extremely prosperous and the Christians there might not envision their own poverty, Paul encouraged them that if *they* were ever in need, someone else would supply their need. God always supplies enough to the whole body of Christ, but it is up to Christians to make sure that the "enough" is adequately distributed.

8:15. In case 8:14 sounded too good to be true, Paul introduces the principle of God's provision by way of the manna in the wilderness: God meant everyone to have just what they needed, no more and no less (Ex 16:18). (Other writers, such as *Philo and *Josephus, taught equality from this Exodus passage.)

8:16-24
Envoys for the Collection

8:16-18. Here Paul provides a letter of recommendation (3:1) for Titus and his companion. Using the ancient technique of literary bracketing, Paul might bracket 8:16–9:15 with thanksgiving.

8:19. Just as *synagogues throughout the Mediterranean would send their annual tribute to the Jerusalem temple via local representatives of high reputation (Philo, *Special Laws* 1.78; cf. Mishnah *Sheqalim* 3:2), this offering is also to be administered in an irreproachable manner: envoys would be "appointed by the churches." The term for "appoint" often involved elections, as was common in Greek administration. Ancients expected generosity to be repaid with honor—here (and in 8:21, 23) to the chief benefactor, God.

8:20-21. In a culture obsessed with shame and honor, Greco-Roman writers were quick to emphasize that leaders and other beneficiaries of the public trust must be open and of irreproachable moral credentials. Judaism also stressed that charity collectors must act irreproachably to prevent even false accusations. Verse 21 echoes the *Septuagint of Proverbs 3:4 and the proverbial saying that grew out of it. Jewish teachers stressed doing what was good in the sight of both God and people. The term in 8:21 translated "intend" (NRSV), "providing for" (KJV) or "have regard" (NASB) applied in inscriptions to benefactors' foresight; sometimes this involved sending honorable representatives.

8:22. Both Jewish and Greco-Roman moralists recommended that potential leaders be "tested" in lower positions before achieving public office. This brother (distinct from the one mentioned in 8:18) had already been proved in ministry; sometimes one could use an epithet instead of a name if a person were well-known (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.31.42). Messengers usually traveled at least in pairs; sensitive matters could merit a larger delegation (see 8:23).

8:23-24. As "delegates" (literally "apostles") of the churches, they were commissioned representatives of those churches. As such, they were like the representatives of local Jewish communities who would band together and travel to Jerusalem to deliver the temple tax each year. Titus is Paul's representative in the group. Thus they are to be received hospitably, as hospitably as Paul and the other *churches would have been received. Throughout the ancient Mediterranean envoys were to be respected and received with honor. On "boasting," see comment on 7:14. Displaying affection, one could ask for proofs of love (e.g., Fronto, *Epistulae Graecae* 6; *Ad M. Caesarem*, 3.2.) One could invite a benefactor to demonstrate to the recommended how effective the recommender's recommendation was (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 3.1.3; 13.19.3, 20.1, 26.4). Asking a reader to prove their affection for the writer by granting the latter's request revealed confidence in the friendship (Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 12.18). Calling one the "glory" of something could mean that one brought honor to it (Fronto, *Ad M. Caesarem* 2.3.2; 2.7; 5.3).

9:1-5
Boasting in Advance

In 9:1-5, Paul employs here the *rhetorical techniques of endearment (by boasting about them) and comparison. The terms translated "undertaking" (9:4, NRSV), "blessing" (often translated "gift," 9:5) and even "case" ("matter," "part," 9:3) appear in ancient documents referring to financial matters.

9:1. Against those who think that 9:1 is disconnected from the preceding context, the first three words of 9:1 usually refer to preceding context; 9:1-2 may be a *digression (a common ancient literary form) between 8:16-23 and 9:3-5, which involve the delegation.

9:2. Citizens' first loyalties were to their cities, and bitter rivalries often arose between cities. Paul appeals to their civic pride to make sure that the well-to-do Corinthians do their part. Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia, south of the province of Macedonia (which included Philippi and Thessalonica).

9:3-4. By boasting about the Corinthians (possibly before the rise of recent conflicts with them), Paul has laid his honor on the line. If chapters 10–13 are part of the same letter, Paul may have some reason to worry (despite politely expressing confidence, 9:1; cf. especially 12:16-18)! Similarly, *Cicero can assure a benefactor of the requester's confidence, but simultaneously urge him not to disappoint that confidence (*Letters to Friends* 3.1.3).

9:5. Inscriptions show that the public held benefactors to their promises. Paul acts from "necessity," a commonly cited reason for actions (e.g., Hermogenes, *On Issues* 77.6-19).

9:6-15
Sowing and Reaping

Jewish tradition recognized that God rewards the generous (Prov 11:24-26; 22:9).

9:6. Reaping what one had sown reflects an ancient proverb, related to many other agricultural images prevalent in antiquity (cf., e.g., Job 4:8; Prov 11:18; 22:8; Hos 8:7; 10:12; Sirach 7:3; *Cicero; *Aristotle); the specific image of sowing and consequently reaping sparingly seems to have also been in general circulation. Using a familiar rhetorical device (*symploche*), Paul structures the principle with repetition (x . . . y/x . . . y).

9:7. Paul here cites standard Jewish wisdom; willingness may evoke Exodus 25:2, 35:5, 21-22 (cf. 1 Chron 29:6-9; Ezra 2:68), suggesting that Paul had a fairly developed theology of giving based on the *Old Testament. "Not reluctantly" (NRSV) echoes Deuteronomy 15:10 in the *Septuagint. "God loves a cheerful giver" is from an addition to Proverbs 22:8 in the Septuagint ("God blesses a cheerful and giving person"; cf. Sirach 35:11). The term rendered "cheerful" often applied in Jewish texts to gifts for the poor.

9:8. Greeks appreciated repetition of sounds; Paul here uses seven words beginning with *p,* including using "all" five times (three of them in succession). Philosophers applied the term translated "sufficiency" (KJV, NASB; "enough," NRSV) to the sage's contentment in all circumstances (e.g., *Epictetus, *Diatribes* 1.1.27); others also appreciated this virtue (e.g., Prov 30:8 LXX; **Psalms of Solomon* 5:16). Although some Greek traditions emphasized that one could be self-sufficient without anything to live on, most Greek thinkers would have agreed with Paul that basic needs had to be met before a person could be self-sufficient. For views on possessions and wealth in antiquity, see comment on 1 Timothy 6:3-10. Ancient business documents often used the term here often translated "abundance" (8:2, 7, 14; 9:8, 12), applying it to profit margins.

9:9. This quotation from Psalm 112:9 refers in the context of that psalm to the behavior of a righteous person; thus Paul may be saying in 9:8-9 that their reward for sowing seed (giving money) to the poor is that their righteousness will stand forever.

9:10. Because the Corinthians are to be righteous "sowers" ("scattering" seed—v. 9), Paul cites Isaiah 55:10: "He who provides seed for the sower and bread for food," which proves that God (the supreme benefactor) will continue to supply them so they can continue to give and hence have a greater reward of righteousness (v. 9). Paul uses the second text (Is 55:10) to apply the first text (Ps 112:9, cited in 9:9) to their situation; linking together texts with a similar key word or concept was a common practice in Jewish interpretation. God provides enough overall and then invites those with abundance to share with those in need (Deut 15:4-11).

9:11-15. In Greco-Roman antiquity, recipients of gifts were expected to reciprocate by publicly honoring the benefactor. Jewish people believed that God heard the cries of the poor (Deut 15:9-10); Paul's readers would understand his point that their aid to the poor brought direct honor to God in praise (2 Cor 9:11-12; cf. 1:11) and would also benefit the Corinthians through the prayers of the poor in Jerusalem (9:14). (God's "gift"—v. 15—may thus include his strategic provision to the Corinthians by which they can benefit the poor of Jerusalem.) The term translated "service" (NASB) or "ministry" (NRSV) in 9:12 can apply to priestly service, but also applied to yearlong roles as public benefactors (frequently assigned to the wealthy, sometimes as an involuntary obligation, but Paul insists on voluntary contributions, 9:7).

10:1-18
Not Like Paul's Opponents

Paul's change in tone here, from generally cautious affection to often addressing opponents, has led many scholars to believe that chapters 10–13 belong to a separate letter. Others believe that Paul received new information just before penning these words, or that he saved his real *diatribe for the concluding chapters of the letter. Writers could dictate longer letters in stages (e.g., Fronto, *De Feriis Alsiensibus* 4), sometimes added something after receiving news (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 12.12.5), or composed an additional letter for the same traveler to carry (Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 8.6). But the letter can also be read as a planned unity (see introduction). Defenses usually went on the offensive against opponents and could reserve the most controversial elements until near the end, after establishing rapport.

10:1-2. One sometimes opened a section with the opponent's charge. Paul's harsh letter (2:4; 7:8; letters of hortatory blame were reserved for the severest circumstances) had provoked a hostile reaction among some members of the congregation: ancient *rhetoricians insisted that letters ought to reflect the same personality that the person exhibited when present. Because of love and in order to spare them, Paul had sent a firm letter rather than coming in person (1:23–2:4); but some, who valued forceful speech, mistook his affectionate strategy for weakness (10:9-11). In most contexts envisioned by his critics, "meekness" was considered base, weak and low status (cf. 1 Cor 2:3); yet Paul knew that people respected a "meek" ruler, that is, a merciful and benevolent one. Christ's "meekness and gentleness" probably alludes to Jesus' saying later recorded in Matthew 11:29—a good reply to the Corinthians' complaint.

10:3-5. Far from being weak (10:1-2), Paul wages war. Greek sages sometimes described their battle against false ideas as a war, in terms similar to those Paul uses here (e.g., *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 109.8-9;117.7, 25; Diogenes, *Epistles* 10; Diogenes Laertius 6.1.13; *Philo, *Abel* 130; *Conf.* 129-33). Like those sages, Paul claims to be doing battle with false ideas. (Orators also employed such images; e.g., *Cicero, *On the Orator* 3.14.55; *Brutus* 2.7; *Letters to Friends* 4.7.2; *Tacitus, *Dialogue on Oratory* 32, 34, 37.) "Arguments" (NIV, NRSV, GNT) or "speculations" (NASB) is a technical term for rhetorical or philosophical reasonings; the prisoners of war in this extended metaphor are human thoughts. Cf. Proverbs 21:22.

10:6. Sieges, hence siege imagery, were common (e.g., Prov 21:22; 1 Maccabees 8:10). Rulers generally executed vengeance on those who had rebelled against them after the war was finished (e.g., 2 Sam 12:31). Paul may mean that the believers must work harder to make up for time lost through disobedience.

10:7. The Corinthians' preoccupation with outward appearances matched that of sophists concerned with proper and persuasive speech, but true philosophers constantly ridiculed this attitude (4:16-18). The more well-to-do members of the Corinthian *church were enamored with Greek philosophy; Paul thus rebukes them on their own terms here.

10:8. Some wealthier Corinthians assail Paul for not conforming to their cultural standards (i.e., for working as an artisan although he is a moral teacher). *Old Testament prophets were called both to build up and to tear down (e.g., Jer 1:10), but Paul is called only to build up the Corinthians (2 Cor 12:19; 13:10).

10:9-10. A basic rule of ancient letter writing was that one's letters should be appropriate to one's personality when present, because letters in some sense communicated one's presence. Philosophers who failed to be

consistent in this manner were typically attacked verbally.

Paul's (literally) "bodily presence" (KJV, NRSV) was unimpressive; socially respectable speakers were strong in their appearance, gestures and intonation, as well as having the right Greek accent (e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Demosthenes* 54; *Arrangement of Words* 11; Cicero, *Brutus* 55.203; 91.316; *Plutarch, *Demosthenes* 7.2-3; 11.1-2; *Cicero* 4.3). Unfortunately, Paul was a better writer than public speaker.

10:11. Philosophers and Jewish teachers often contrasted words and deeds; deeds weighed more heavily. Even if Paul was an inferior speaker, his life backed up everything he said.

10:12. Paul's "some" may follow the ancient literary practice of obscuring opponents with anonymity. "Comparison" was a standard rhetorical and literary technique; here Paul mocks his opponents: they are so foolish that they do not realize that one cannot compare oneself with oneself. Higher-class *patrons would usually write letters of recommendation for socially inferior *clients, but sometimes people were forced to commend themselves; self-commendation was to be accepted only if done discreetly, but Paul paints his opponents as pretentious—a vice in Greek culture.

Paul satirically declines to compare himself with such teachers—satire was a common argumentative device. One of the rules of "comparison" was that one could not compare dissimilar items; yet the dissimilarity turns out to favor him in 10:13-18.

10:13-16. Teachers of rhetoric and philosophy in cities throughout the Mediterranean competed for students and their fees. One means of self-advertisement was to compare oneself favorably to rival teachers; Paul uses the ancient literary device of irony and turns his opponents' advertising on its head, refuting them while satirizing their very form of boasting. Ancients despised boasting beyond one's appropriate class, but in the matter of the Corinthians, Paul plainly outclasses his critics (cf. 3:1-2). Ancients often considered as hubris failure to "know oneself," including one's limits as a mortal.

10:17. On Jeremiah 9:23-24 see comment on 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

10:18. Applying Jeremiah 9:23-24, Paul notes that self-commendation is obviously out of place—unless, like Paul, one were forced to resort to it by unpleasant circumstances (e.g., to defend oneself). Public speakers used self-commendation but recognized that it was offensive (*Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* 11.1.15; Plutarch, *Cicero* 24.1-2; Prov 27:2) unless done carefully and with appropriate reasons.

11:1-15
Countering False Apostles' Boasts

In contrast to Paul, who humbled himself by taking a socially demeaning role (11:7), his opponents have boasted. Paul therefore parodies their boasting with his own brag sheet, following the ancient conventional form of self-praise. At the same time, however, he inverts his opponents' values in the light of the values of God's *kingdom, using another common literary technique called satire (11:16-33).

11:1. Speakers often prefaced shocking statements with warnings (professional *rhetoricians called this practice *prodiorthosis*). In Greek literature "madness" (here, "foolishness") was sometimes a divine punishment for insolent arrogance; philosophers considered the "ignorant" masses insane, and some people considered the most radical philosophers insane. Paul may simply imply that, while he assumes the guise of a madman for rhetorical purposes (being able to assume various styles was part of rhetorical training), it is his opponents who generally boast and hence are truly mad.

11:2. Being jealous over God's people with God's jealousy (cf. Ex 20:5; 34:14) would have been viewed as pious (cf. Num 25:11). Fathers normally pledged their daughters in marriage, and Paul compares the Corinthian *church with a daughter (1 Cor 4:14-15) whom he has pledged in marriage to *Christ (cf. biblical depictions of God marrying Israel or Israel being corrupted, e.g., Is 54:5; 62:4-5; Jer 2:32; 3:1-2; 31:32; Ezek 16:32; Hos 2:19-20; later Jewish depictions of God marrying his son Israel to the *law).

11:3. Fathers had to protect their daughters from men who would prey on them sexually (Deut 22:15-21; Sirach 42:9-12). Some Jewish traditions highlighted Eve being deceived or (unlike Paul) even considered her primarily responsible for Adam's fall (e.g.,

Life of Adam and Eve 25:35; 38:1-2; 44:1-5), but Paul need not allude to such ideas here. In some Jewish traditions, *Satan, disguised as a good angel (cf. 11:14), deceived Eve sexually (*Life of Adam and Eve* 9:1-2; *Apocalypse of Moses* 17:1-2). Given the image of the betrothed virgin (11:2, perhaps betrothed to Christ, the new Adam), Paul could have this tradition partly in view here. More certain is the biblical allusion to Genesis 3, where the serpent deceived Eve. Paul presents his opponents as adulterers who corrupt betrothed virgins—a crime punishable by banishment under Roman law and death under *Old Testament law (Deut 22:23-27).

11:4. The Old Testament and later Jewish literature portrayed false prophets as those who claim to have God's *Spirit but are really moved by a different one. Paul offers mock praise of his hearers' acceptance of this bad treatment (cf. also 11:19-20), using the common ancient device of satire.

11:5-6. Rhetoric was important in Greco-Roman society, including in Corinth (see comment on 1 Cor 1:5). By skilled rhetoric a speaker showed that he was educated and truly worthy of being heard by the well-to-do. Philosophers, however, stressed their genuine knowledge rather than others' persuasive speech; Paul appeals to the ideal of knowledge to defend himself. Speakers would sometimes concede a secondary weakness to emphasize a more important strength.

Paul's statement that he is "unskilled in speech" (NASB) need not mean that he is a terrible speaker; even the best speakers played down their oratorical skills to lower audience expectations (e.g., Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 12.15). He seems to have been accused of inadequate rhetorical skill by others, however; his writings attest a higher level of rhetorical sophistication than possessed by most people of his day, but no matter how hard he worked at it, he did not have the early rhetorical training of an aristocrat, and some elements of delivery would not come to him as naturally as they might to others (see comment on 10:10).

11:7. Refusing a gift often signified refusing friendship, hence choosing enmity (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 14.3.1). Paul claims to be an amateur: sophists not only valued rhetorical skills over one's message (11:6), they also could charge fees (a practice to which Socrates and some other thinkers objected). Teachers were supposed to gain support by a *patron's sponsorship, by charging fees or even by begging, but never by engaging in a working-class job (1 Cor 9:6). Paul's opponents appeal to higher-status Corinthian Christians embarrassed by Paul's labor as an artisan; they, at least, are professional enough to take payment. (Some had likewise charged that Socrates did not accept money because he was not worth any; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.6.12.) Paul may have avoided accepting payment to keep from appearing as a common sophist who is teaching for monetary gain or to avoid appearing dependent on them as a *client; he was not their employee (see comment on 1 Cor 9:15-27). Except when they meant it as kindness, Greeks saw humility as "humiliation" and considered it appropriate only to those of very low status. Paul's question is sarcastic; their culture demanded honor and gratitude for benefactors who gave services freely.

11:8. Paul *embraces* low status: he became the Corinthians' servant (contrast whom his opponents serve—11:15). Accepting wages from one employer while genuinely working only for another was naturally viewed as dishonest; robbery was naturally considered even lower status than manual labor! (The term could also be used for "plundering" a defeated enemy's spoils after a military campaign.)

11:9. Patrons could view clients, their social dependents, as "burdens." Sometimes teachers were clients of wealthy patrons, but Paul is not dependent on, hence not a client of, the Corinthian church. Thus he need not answer to them.

11:10-12. Boasting was considered acceptable if it was for someone else's sake and not simply for one's own. For example, *Plutarch permitted self-praise if it was mixed with praise of one's audience; one could also use it to remove others' excuses for failing to heed one (Isocrates, *To Nicocles* 47). As in 11:11, writers sometimes reminded readers of their love (cf. 7:3; Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 2.4.2).

11:13-15. In some Jewish traditions Satan disguised himself as an angel or in other ways (e.g., as a beautiful woman to some *rabbis or as a beggar to Job's wife; for one tradition regarding Satan and Eve, see comment on 11:3);

Judaism regarded Satan as a deceiver. Although Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 do not in context refer specifically to Satan (against a common view today), a large body of Jewish tradition taught that Satan and other evil spirits were originally angels who had fallen in Genesis 6:1-3.

11:16-21
Paul's Apology for Boasting

If his critics have denigrated him as ignorant (11:6; cf. 10:10), he can justifiably adopt, for *rhetorical purposes, the alleged role of fool (speaking in the role of another was a familiar rhetorical device, *prosopopoiia*). Implicitly, however, he attacks his opponents' boasting as foolish (returning charges against opponents was conventional rhetoric). Paul's way of boasting parodies and thus mocks self-boasting, and therefore a central feature of the Greco-Roman valuing of masculine competition and self-promotion. He walks the tightrope of answering fools as their folly deserves without being truly like them (Prov 26:4-5).

11:16-18. Because appearing to boast was otherwise offensive, speakers had to cite justification for their boasts (see *Plutarch, *Praising Oneself Inoffensively*). Such justifications included refuting criticism (Demosthenes, *On the Crown* 299-300), challenging opponents (Demosthenes, *False Embassy* 174; 2 Cor 11:12), competing against a less fit rival (*Cicero, *Against Caecilius* 12.40), for one's hearers' good (2 Cor 12:19), offering a positive role model and the like. Even autobiographers had to come up with ways to decrease the potential offensiveness of their own claims. Paul, however, boasts in weakness, in contrast to most of his contemporaries. Paul's boastful opponents had apparently laid themselves open to Paul's attack—indicating their own lack of rhetorical skill.

11:19-20. Irony, including mock respect, was a common rhetorical technique. A blow on the face, like spittle, was a grievous insult to one's honor (see comment on Mt 5:39). The ideology of the upper classes (shared by Paul's opponents) held that persons of truly noble character, those suited for freedom, could never tolerate being slaves. Complaints that the hearers were putting up with what was inappropriate implicitly invited hearers to stop doing so (Sallust, *Bellum jugurthinum* 31.11).

11:21. Continuing the irony (11:19-20), Paul confesses his "shame" or "dishonor"—one of the most grievous offenses one could endure in status-conscious society. Confessing what was not an offense was a common rhetorical strategy; so was returning criticisms and depicting the critics as the true exploiters (11:20). Paul uses again the rhetorical technique of "comparison" to mock the boasting self-appointed *apostles who have come to Corinth.

11:22-33
Boasting in Sufferings

Aristocrats typically boasted in their heritage, their accomplishments and so forth; but they did not normally boast in their sufferings. For example, the emperor Augustus boasted at length of his exploits (in his famous *Res Gestae*), though never his setbacks. Some philosophers listed the sufferings they endured as a model for emulation. (In other contexts, lists of sufferings could prove one's devotion to another cause; e.g., generals boasting of what they suffered for the state; in romance novels, lovers recounting what they had suffered for their beloved.) But those who list sufferings to prove endurance do so to boast in their strength, not in their weakness. For Paul, if one boasts, one should boast in the values of the *kingdom (10:17), humbling oneself for God's honor.

11:22. *Rhetoric often used point-by-point comparisons of virtues and other matters (11:22-23; cf. e.g., Menander Rhetor 2.3, 381.31-32; 386.10-13; 2.10, 416.2-4; 417.5-9); as is the case here, elements in such comparisons could even include homeland (2.3, 379.6-8). Matching critics in sets of three claims (including home city, *Josephus, *Life* 198), or posing and responding to three rhetorical questions (Cicero, *For Sextus Roscius of Ameria* 1.2), was good rhetoric. Even in Greco-Roman Corinth, the church recognized its Jewish roots; and traveling Jewish Christians, especially those with Palestinian roots, could claim authority in a tradition earlier than Paul. (This "Are they . . . ? So am I" reasoning seems to have been persuasive in antiquity; cf., e.g., Josephus, *Life* 40, 199.) "Israelites" and "descendants of Abraham" refer in the parlance of

ancient Judaism to anyone Jewish; "Hebrews" probably means the same thing (rhetoric valued repetition with synonyms), although it might apply especially to Palestinian Jews (see comment on Phil 3:5).

11:23. Paul's comparison escalates from his equality (11:22) to his superiority (11:23). The term translated "servants" here may be a term of respect ("ministers"—KJV, NRSV); if it means "slaves of Christ" in this case, they are high-status slaves (see comment on Rom 1:1). On "insane" (NASB), see comment on 11:1; when reducing an opponent's argument to the absurd, one could acknowledge the parody as "insane" (Aelius Aristides, *Defense of Oratory* 339, §112D). Paul begins by boasting in the very cause of the Corinthians' reproach: his low-status "labors" (see comment on 11:7). Imprisonment was typically a matter of shame. Some philosophers boasted in ignoring beatings; Jewish people praised those beaten and martyred for their faith.

11:24. People sometimes enumerated accomplishments, as in 11:24-25; for example, the emperor Augustus, boasting of his exploits, numbered some of them, such as three gladiatorial games he sponsored for the Roman people (*Res Gestae* 22.1). Under Jewish *law, some sins (like sabbath violation or being a false prophet) merited stoning (because the Jewish people could not legally enforce this penalty in this period due to Roman restrictions, they usually just excluded capital offenders from the community). Other, lesser sins required only a beating of thirty-nine lashes with a whip (Deut 25:2-3); a *synagogue court decided such cases, and the synagogue attendant administered the beating. As in the case of violations of festivals or ritual laws, this penalty was administered only after the person had been warned and yet persisted in the offending behavior. Within reason, Romans allowed Jews to execute nonlethal discipline in their own community; Paul could have escaped such discipline had he renounced connection with his people, but clearly he proved unwilling to do so.

11:25. Roman citizens were not supposed to be beaten with rods, but ancient reports demonstrate that officials sometimes overlooked these rules (see comment on Acts 16:22). On Paul's stoning see Acts 14:19. Frequent travelers were also well aware of the danger of shipwrecks, and death at sea was the most frightful form of death in antiquity (partly due to the pagan belief that the spirits of those who died at sea roamed forever because they were not properly buried). Because there were no lifeboats per se (see comment on Acts 27:30) or life jackets, shipwrecked victims could spend a long time in the water and often did not survive. To ancient hearers, surviving multiple times could suggest divine protection.

11:26. Expanding on "frequent travels," Paul uses the rhetorical device *anaphora* (repeating an opening word or phrase) with the eightfold, "in dangers from." Travel was one of the more dangerous activities in antiquity; a later Jewish tradition even speaks of priests' praying and fasting two days a week for travelers' safety. Rivers were often used to navigate inland from the coast to cities; more likely, Paul could refer here to the danger of crossing swollen rivers or how they flooded nearby roads, especially in winter and early spring. Robbers were one of the most dreaded dangers of land travel and one reason many parties did not travel at night. Pirates had become much less common on the sea than in earlier times but remained a potential danger; more generally, mercantile Corinth knew well the perils of sea travel. The climax of Paul's "dangers," however, is probably ironically pointed at his opponents: "perils among false brethren" (KJV).

11:27. Sleeplessness could stem from difficult sleeping conditions during travel, potentially dangerous night travel, or nocturnal ministry (Acts 20:31; though that would be limited at night because most people were asleep); insomnia is possible (though likelier at 11:28-29). One traveling to the interior of Asia Minor would face "cold"; particularly coupled with "nakedness" (sometimes used, as here, to mean inadequate clothing), this was a serious hardship.

11:28. Paul's "anxiety" (NRSV; the same term translated "worry" in Mt 6:34) over the state of God's people is motivated by love (11:29-30), as the *Old Testament prophets' concern for Israel had been. Philosophers emphasized that one should never be anxious (also Phil 4:6), but Paul's anxiety is one of love, not a selfish kind (2 Cor 2:13; 7:5-6; 1 Cor 7:32—same word; 1 Thess 3:5).

11:29-31. Paul's identifying with the "weak" would again offend the socially powerful leaders in the Corinthian church, who would view it as a sign of low status. To boast in his weakness inverts his opponents' position. It was honorable, though, to share others' sufferings (Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 14.3.1; *Seneca, *Natural Questions* 4.pref. 15).

11:32. Paul supplements the list with a humiliating example. Aretas IV controlled Nabataea, including many Nabatean Arabs in the region around Syrian Damascus. Some argue that he may have controlled Damascus itself about A.D. 34–39 (he died about 39–40), but it is sufficient here to think of his ethnarch as the representative of the significant Nabatean community in Damascus. Damascus had a Nabatean quarter, and the Nabatean community in Damascus had its own rights. (Similarly, though Jews were usually treated as resident aliens, the community leaders who spoke for them might wield significant local influence.) If Aretas did not actually control Damascus, he certainly wielded political influence beyond his immediate sphere of legal jurisdiction. Because most of the caravan trade from the east passed through his kingdom, it was the strongest and wealthiest of the minor kingdoms of the Near East.

11:33. The "window" Paul mentions would have belonged to a house built along the city wall; many houses were built on such walls. Windows were sometimes large enough to fit through, but generally too high for intruders to climb into; a window in a house on the wall would be high enough to be dangerous if something went wrong. Paul's strategy was borrowed from the Old Testament (Josh 2:15; cf. 1 Sam 19:12). Acts 9:25 mentions this escape. This was hardly the sort of heroism in which high-status people would boast, because they did not value being in trouble with the authorities, even for the cause of Christ. Some commentators contrast a particular prize for heroism in the Roman army, for the first soldier to scale an enemy wall; here Paul instead escapes from a wall secretly.

12:1-10
Revelations and Weakness

12:1. Ancient Mediterranean culture viewed boasting negatively, unless it could be justified by particular reasons, one of which was "necessity." Like many *Old Testament prophets, Paul experienced visions and revelations. Some Jewish writers of Paul's day diligently cultivated visionary experiences with fasting and sleep deprivation, but Paul, however, was simply "caught up" (v. 2; see comment on Rev 4:2).

12:2-4. "Fourteen years ago" was perhaps a decade after Paul's conversion. Because later Jewish teachers sometimes used "that person" as "you" or "I," it is possible that Paul here relates his own experience in the third person to avoid boasting. Some Greek writers suggested that one should describe one's experience as another's if one were ashamed to speak of it openly; analogously, some Jewish *apocalyptists may have transferred their own visions to those heroes of the past in whose name they composed their writings. Willing to boast only in his weaknesses, Paul will not accept any praise for his personal revelations (cf. Prov 27:2).

Greek writers spoke of ascents of the soul, especially after death, as did Jewish mystics and apocalyptists. Jewish visionaries sometimes described their mystical experiences of heaven as being "caught up"; although they could mean that only their souls saw heaven (e.g., **1 Enoch* 71:1-6), the experience was sometimes so vivid that the whole person seemed to be caught up (Ezek 2:2; 3:14, 24; 8:3; 11:1, 24), and some texts explicitly included the body in this experience (as in *1 Enoch* 39:3). (The Jewish ascent stories sometimes emphasized the danger of the ascent, as in the case of the four *rabbis, only one of whom reportedly escaped unscathed [cf. Tosefta *Hagigah* 2:3-4]. But except for *Philo, all the Jewish stories are either pseudonymous or later than Paul, so it is difficult to reconstruct the exact nature of Jewish mystical experience in Paul's day.)

Visions given by God are not the same as the practice of some Greek sorcerers and wonderworkers and spiritist experiences in many cultures today, where the soul could travel abroad in astral projections; even Philo, the Jewish philosopher most influenced by Greek thought, saw ecstasy as the soul's experience with *God,* not simply wandering around on the earth.

In Jewish texts, "paradise," the new Eden that was the opposite of hell (*Gehenna), would exist on earth in the world to come but

was reserved in the heavens in the present time. Different texts varied in the number of heavens they envisioned (from 3 to 365); three and seven were the most common numbers, and paradise was often thought to be located in one of these heavens. Paul's "third heaven" probably means he thought in terms of three heavens, with paradise in the highest. (The lower atmosphere was usually regarded as the lowest "heaven.") Many Greek readers thought that the pure soul would ascend to the highest heaven at death, so the Corinthian Christians would have no problem understanding Paul's words here.

Revelations of deities in the Greek *mystery cults were also "forbidden to be uttered"; some Jewish writers like *Josephus and *Philo applied this description to God's highest wisdom or to the divine name.

12:5-6. One common *rhetorical device was to say, "I could say this, but I won't" (cf. also in Philem 19). To avoid boasting, one could also appeal to what others see in one.

12:7-8. "Flesh" here need not indicate a physical ailment (like the one in Gal 4:13), as is often supposed (so GNT); Paul may allude to the "thorn in Israel's side," the Canaanites God left in the land to keep Israel from exalting themselves (Num 33:55; Judg 2:3; cf. Josh 23:13; Ezek 28:24). Scholars debate exactly what Paul's "thorn" was, but in view of the context and Paul's "buffeting" (KJV, NASB) in this verse (cf. 1 Cor 4:11), it may be continuing persecutions; or this "messenger of Satan" might be an ironic insult against his opponents themselves (11:14-15). As in the Old Testament (e.g., Job 1:6–2:6) and most Jewish thought, God is here sovereign even over Satan and his angels.

12:8-10. Philosophers spoke of self-sufficiency, but Paul emphasizes the sufficiency of God's *grace. Miracle reports in pagan temples sometimes followed the same form as Paul's request (v. 8) but concluded with the deity's appearing to heal the person. Although Paul had performed many miracles (12:12), he boasts in his weakness.

12:11-18
Paul's Closing Irony

12:11. Many ancient writers advised that one could praise oneself inoffensively only if one were compelled to praise oneself, especially to defend oneself (cf. e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 5.12.8). Calling himself a "nobody" now rejects boasting.

12:12. "Signs and wonders" were miracles (e.g., Deut 6:22; 7:19). Appealing to readers' own eyewitness knowledge was one way of deflecting some of the offensiveness of self-boasting (so, e.g., the earlier Greek rhetorician Isocrates).

12:13. The well-to-do in the Corinthian *church want an *apostle they can be proud of—one who conforms to their high-society expectations for a professional moral teacher. Thus they want Paul to stop working and to accept support from them, to become their *client or dependent (see 1 Cor 9). Paul avoids playing into the hands of the well-to-do faction of the church (see the situation in the introduction to 1 Corinthians) by accepting support from others instead; here he replies in irony: "Forgive me!"

12:14-15. The well-to-do Corinthians want Paul to be their client and they his *patrons (12:13), but Paul reminds them that he is their father (1 Cor 4:15). Thus he reverses their own position: he refused their support not because he was socially ignorant, but because they were his dependents rather than his being their dependent. (Once a Roman father declared a child to be his, parents supported the child growing up and helped young couples establish themselves. Clients and children were both viewed as dependents in the Roman household.) It was appropriate to honor benefactors but not to pay them.

12:16-18. Speakers sometimes challenged their detractors to prove any wrongdoing on the speakers' part (e.g., 1 Sam 12:3-5; *Cicero, *Pro Sestio* 21.47). The same people who criticize Paul for not accepting their support—so their faith could appear more respectable to their social peers—also apparently accept his opponents' arguments against his offering for the poor in Jerusalem (chaps. 8–9). Occurring this close to the end of Paul's argument, his request for funds for the poor may have been at the center of his opponents' accusations against him: this Paul would not accept your support when it was socially appropriate, but now he wants money to help others you do not know!

12:19–13:4
Paul's Coming to Discipline

Paul, who had been "weak" among them before, would now be strong (13:3).

12:19. An "apology," or defense speech, was a standard type of writing, but Paul explains his ironic defense and display of *rhetoric as motivated only by love for the Corinthians, rather than a genuine defense of himself.

12:20. One standard theme of Greco-Roman moralists was "harmony"; they commonly attacked strife, envy and so forth. Ancient moralists also attacked anger, among other attitudes. The Corinthians cannot defend their behavior even on the basis of their own culture's ethics.

12:21. If the powerful members of the Corinthian church despised Paul's humility (11:7), their wretched spiritual state (12:20) is about to humiliate him further. So much for his boasting of them (9:3)!

13:1-2. Moses' *law (Deut 17:6; 19:15) and all subsequent Jewish (and Christian—Mt 18:16; 1 Tim 5:19) law required a minimum of two witnesses in the case of a charge against someone. Paul is treating his next visit to Corinth as a courtroom battle (cf. 1 Cor 6:3-4).

13:3-4. Because Judaism talked of God speaking by the prophets, Paul's appeal to "Christ speaking in" him is probably an appeal to his prophetic gift. Because the Corinthian Christians, like their surrounding culture, valued rhetorical power that drew attention to speakers rather than to the supreme God, Paul often drives home God's power revealed in the weakness of the cross to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:18–2:8).

13:5-10
True Power and Weakness

13:5-6. Corinthian culture evaluated speakers (cf. 13:3); Paul turns the question of evaluation back to them. Many philosophers urged self-evaluation or testing. Paul, their spiritual father, has *Christ in him (13:3-4), but the Corinthians must decide whether Christ is in them.

13:7-9. Philosophers generally reasoned that it did not matter what others thought of them; but many reasoned that they should guard what others thought of them, not for their own sake but for the sake of bringing others to philosophy. Paul is unconcerned with what others think of him but wants his friends to be built up.

13:10. On Paul's authority in this regard, see comment on 10:8.

13:11-14
Closing Words

13:11. This closing exhortation to unity fits Greco-Roman "harmony" speeches well enough that even nonbelievers in Corinth would agree with its moral message.

13:12. Very light kisses on the lips were used as a sign of affection among family or friends.

13:13. Letters often included greetings from others present where the writer was.

13:14. Most Jewish people thought of the *Holy Spirit as a prophetic, divine force from God. Thus, for Paul to parallel Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit as he does here probably indicates his belief that Jesus is also divine and that the Spirit is also a personal being like the Father and Son.

Galatians

Introduction

Authorship. Virtually all scholars recognize Galatians to be from Paul.

Type of Letter. Formal divisions of letters by type occurred later and categories overlapped, but some consideration is helpful. Although Galatians has apologetic elements (i.e., points where Paul seems to defend himself), Paul is not concentrating on the kind of *rhetoric used in law courts. Rather, the argumentation in Galatians is more like "deliberative rhetoric," the kind of argumentation ancient speakers and writers used to persuade people to change their behavior. The argument itself is very rational, and the emotional language of the letter was standard rhetoric characteristic of stern letters (Galatians includes elements of what later Greco-Roman composition handbooks called "letters of rebuke").

Date. Some scholars have argued for a very early date (making this one of Paul's earliest letters), because Paul does not explicitly appeal to the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15; but that Paul can refer to taking Titus to Jerusalem with him (Gal 2:1) probably suggests that he had already completed his first missionary journey (Acts 13–14) and thus that the Council may have taken place (Acts 15). Galatians may thus date to the latter half of the fifties, probably some time before Romans.

Situation. Paul is clearly battling opponents who have settled in Galatia (for the location, see comment on 1:2; given the likely South Galatian theory for the location of Paul's readers, accepted also by archaeologists of Asia Minor, Acts 13–15 provides especially helpful background for the letter). These are Jewish Christians who would rather circumcise the Galatians—thus alienating them from their own *Gentile culture—than allow Judean Jews back home to think that Christian missionaries were lax (4:29; 5:11; 6:12-13). Unlike Paul, a more seasoned missionary, these missionaries want to impose their own culture on the Galatians.

The Issue. At an earlier time, some Judean Christians had insisted that Phrygian (maybe Galatian; see comment on 1:2) believers be circumcised to be saved (Acts 15:1). Although the Jerusalem Council had apparently settled this issue, side effects lingered: could Gentiles be part of God's people without circumcision? Some of the strictest *Pharisees may have required circumcision for salvation, but many Phar-

isees believed that any Gentiles who kept the few laws given Noah, or followed the levitical requirements for strangers in the land, would be saved. But even for this more lenient class of Pharisees (cf. Acts 15:5), one could not become part of the *people of God* without circumcision; very few Jews were so lenient as to accept Gentiles on such terms. Indeed, circumcision had become a or even the major cultural symbol of fidelity to Judaism: attempts to restrict the practice led to revolts both before and after Paul's time.

Some Judean Christians were now arguing that one must become culturally Jewish to become a full Jesus-follower, fully righteous; after all, the Bible itself made this requirement for one who wished to belong to God's people (Gen 17:10-14). Further, they may have reasoned, if Paul argued for *baptism (a post-Old Testament Jewish addition to circumcision), why could Judean Christians not require circumcision, even though it drove away potential converts? Paul argues forcefully against this view: those who submit to Israel's *Messiah and receive the *Spirit belong to the covenant and already have what circumcision merely symbolized.

Commentaries. Among the useful commentaries on Galatians are those by Donald Guthrie, *Galatians,* NCB (1973; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians,* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians,* WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990); and Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013). Helpful specialized works include George Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography: Toward a New Understanding,* SBLDS 73 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985); Aliou Cissé Niang, *Faith and Freedom in Galatia and Senegal* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). Hans Dieter Betz, *A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia,* Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), offers helpful insights, although his specific model of judicial (courtroom) rhetoric for the book is questionable (see George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984]). Some of my primary sources appear in Craig Keener, "The Pillars and the Right Hand of Fellowship in Galatians 2:9," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 7 (2010): 51-58; and Craig Keener, "Three Notes on Figurative Language: Inverted Guilt in Acts 7:55-60, Paul's Figurative Vote in Acts 26:10, Figurative Eyes in Galatians 4:15," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 5 (2008): 41-49.

1:1-5
Introduction

Like many polite ancient letters, Paul's letters characteristically include a thanksgiving at the outset, but Galatians lacks one. In extreme circumstances, a speaker could challenge wrong behavior angrily, especially when the speaker was trusted enough to get away with it; this also fits the way of framing a letter of blame.

1:1. Letters normally opened with the sender's name; less often, they included a description of the sender, where that was necessary. An "*apostle" was a commissioned messenger; although Paul had once been a humanly appointed agent (Acts 9:2), he is one no longer. His opponents may claim authority from Jerusalem (cf. also Judea in general—Acts 15:1). (The status that Jerusalemites had in the eyes of many other Jewish people may be illustrated by the authority others ceded to *Josephus's opponents from Jerusalem in one of his accounts.)

1:2. Writers sometimes included greetings from others as if coauthors even though they may have contributed little beyond greetings (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 16.1.title); here perhaps their inclusion strengthens Paul's authority. Scholars dispute whether Paul here addresses those in North Galatia (a region in Asia Minor settled by Celts, not mentioned in Acts and only slowly Christianized) or more often the South Galatian region (which some scholars call Phrygia-Galatia). If Paul uses the term especially for ethnic Galatians (Celts), he presumably means North Galatia (which includes Ancyra, Tavium and Pessinus). Given his frequent reference to provinces in his letters, it is much more likely that Paul refers to the province of Galatia, like some other ancient writers. In this case, it may instead cover the Phrygian region addressed in Acts 13–14 (including Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe).

1:3. Paul here adapts standard Jewish greetings; see comment on Romans 1:7.

1:4-5. Jewish people frequently divided history into two main ages: the present age (under the dominion of evil nations) and the future age (when God would rule unchallenged). Because the future *Messiah has already come the first time, Paul can argue that Jesus' followers are already citizens of the future age of God's unchallenged reign.

1:6-9
True and False Gospels

Paul minces no words in these verses; although speeches and letters often opened with praise of the hearers or a polite thanksgiving, Paul begins with a direct rebuke (noticed at least as early as Origen). This literary convention is found only among the harshest of ancient letters.

1:6. Ancient letters, including often harsher letters of blame, sometimes used the expression "I am amazed" (NASB; cf. Demosthenes, *Epistles* 3.11, 23). Paul replaces his usual thanksgiving with this claim.

1:7. Speakers sometimes corrected themselves with a starker claim to reinforce the point. Paul might possibly know more than he says; sometimes critics refused to dignify their enemies by naming them. Messengers who distorted the contents of their message were subject to legal penalties. In the *Old Testament those who distorted the divine message were false prophets (e.g., Jer 23:16), for whom the penalty was death (Deut 13:5; 18:20).

1:8-9. One could repeat a statement for *rhetorical effect. Some Jewish mystics of the period claimed revelations from angels (especially in *apocalyptic literature; e.g., **1 Enoch* 1:2; 74:2; *3 Baruch* 1:8), though Paul might use *hyperbole here. Oaths and curses were familiar in ancient religion, *magic and everyday life. Paul might allude here to the curses of the covenant leveled against those who failed to keep Moses' *law (Deut 27–28); more clearly, this same word for "curse" appears in the *Septuagint of Deuteronomy 13, where false prophets and those who listened to them were to be destroyed.

1:10-17
Not Revealed by People

Argumentative speeches, treatises and other works often included a long *narrative section, normally in chronological order. In a defense, the narrative of events (e.g., *Cicero, *For Quinctius* 3.11–9.33) could precede a statement of the case (10.36) and the proofs (which can include events, but not normally chronologi-

cally; 11.37–27.85). A letter is not a speech, but Paul may draw on conventional argumentative patterns to build his case. Narrative could sometimes be autobiographical, and autobiography could be used apologetically (see, e.g., Josephus, *Life* 336-67). Paul here uses standard themes of ancient autobiography to bolster his argument. Themes in ancient argument included divine attestation, examination of character and behavior, and comparisons between figures personifying different values or sides of the dispute. In deliberative speeches, the speaker first had to demonstrate the integrity of his character and conduct if it were in question.

1:10. Pleasing God rather than people echoes a common theme of philosophers (and of course Scripture; cf. Ex 15:26 LXX; Deut 6:18; 12:8, 25). Many criticized demagogues who flattered the masses. Paul paints his opponents as pleasers of people (6:12-13).

1:11. "I make known to you" or "I would have you know" (NASB) was sometimes used to introduce the narrative portion of a speech. Like philosophers and moralists who presented themselves as models of the virtuous life, Paul can present himself as a model of the *gospel. But anything that could be interpreted as boasting or self-exaltation was offensive to ancient ears, unless one had proper reasons for it; defending oneself or claiming to be boasting on behalf of another (here, God) was, however, considered sufficient reason.

1:12. In argumentation, firsthand knowledge counted highly. Paul refers here to his experience recounted more fully in Acts 9.

1:13-14. "Advancing" (v. 14) is the technical language of philosophical schools for progress in one's studies, but it was also current in *Diaspora Judaism and could naturally be applied, as here, to a student of Jewish teachers. Students often competed (frequently in friendly ways) with fellow students, normally their age peers. The Palestinian Jewish emphasis on "zeal" was commonly rooted in the models of Phinehas (Num 25:11) and the *Maccabees, who were willing to kill for God. "Traditions" could refer to general community customs, but given Paul's Pharisaism (Phil 3:5), it probably refers to Pharisaic traditions, on which Jews discussing Pharisaism generally commented. (*Pharisees were known for their adherence to oral tradition.) Paul thus understands the Palestinian Jewish piety of his day far better than his opponents do. His position and activities are reported in greater detail in Acts 8:1-3 and 9:1-2.

1:15. That God set his servants apart even before birth is clear from Jeremiah 1:5 (see also Gen 25:23; Ps 71:6; Is 44:2; 49:1); Paul presents his own call in the light of those of the *Old Testament prophets.

1:16. "Flesh and blood" (KJV, NASB) was a common figure of speech for mortals, human beings (see "any human being"—NRSV, NIV, NLT).

1:17. "Arabia" refers to Nabatea, the area around Damascus in Syria. This area was prosperous; Greek cities like Petra (Aretas's capital), Gerasa and Philadelphia (modern Amman in Jordan) belonged to the Nabatean Arabs, and Bedouins traveled through the land. Damascus was next to Nabatea; some think that it was controlled during this time by Nabatea's king, Aretas IV, but more likely Nabateans wielded influence because of their numbers (a Nabatean quarter there) and mercantile prosperity (see comment on 2 Cor 11:32). Most Nabateans spoke their own dialect of *Aramaic, although Greek was also known and later (by the early second century) became dominant.

1:18-24
Return to Judea

In 1:11-24 Paul makes clear that he did not receive his gospel as a tradition from the Jerusalem *apostles; he is not, therefore, their subordinate (as a *disciple passing on tradition from his teachers would be). If his opponents claim direct tradition from Jerusalem, Paul can counter their claims by pointing out that he is an equal of the Jerusalem apostles and has his own information firsthand.

1:18-19. On ancient reckoning, where part of the first year counts as the whole, "three" years can mean two. Hospitality was important in Jewish homes. "Peter" (*Petros*) was the Greek translation of *kefa,* *Aramaic for "rock" (not yet used as a personal name).

1:20. Oaths like this one ("before God") could be used in court to underline one's integrity; breaking the oath invited divine judgment, and most people had enough piety to believe that God (or the gods) would execute judgment on one who took such an oath (i.e., called the gods as witnesses) in vain.

1:21. Whether or not Paul means the whole province of "Syria-Cilicia" (as he could have in this period), Paul spent time both in Cilicia (Tarsus) and Syria proper (Antioch, its capital); cf. Acts 9:30, 11:25-26 and 13:1.

1:22. Paul means "*churches of Judea" generally, not Jerusalem; his fluency in the highest and most Hellenized circles of Palestinian Jewish education (evident from 1:14 and Paul's *rhetoric) almost certainly places his education in Jerusalem, as Acts 22:3 also suggests.

1:23-24. The few Jewish stories that culminated in the conversion of a persecutor always emphasized the greatness and power of God. Paul's genuine *repentance would naturally produce the same response among Jewish Christians.

2:1-10
The Jerusalem Council

Although the matter is disputable, it seems likely that Paul here reports the relevant features of the Council that Luke records in Acts 15 (some prefer Acts 11:30); the issues addressed in Galatians 2:3-9 correspond to the issues addressed in Acts 15. Paul uses a variety of ancient literary devices to make his point in this passage (e.g., aposiopesis or ellipsis, antithesis). Given the probable claims of his opponents that Paul is relaxing biblical requirements to gain more converts, and that their views emanate from Jerusalem, the Jerusalem apostles' support bolsters Paul's case.

2:1. The "fourteen years" here probably refers to his previous visit to Jerusalem, about three years after his conversion (cf. 1:18); if the Council met around A.D. 48, Paul's conversion may have occurred around A.D. 31, within perhaps a year of Jesus' *resurrection. Because reckoning could include parts of years, however (fourteen could represent as few as twelve), the conversion could possibly be a few years later.

2:2. Paul sought first the support of the Jerusalem leaders for his revelation (cf. 1:12, 16), before the assembly gathered to make a decree. On the importance of majority rulings in ancient Jewish groups emphasizing consensus, see comment on Acts 15:22.

2:3-5. Although many Jews believed that nonidolatrous *Gentiles would be saved, almost no one believed that they were adopted into the covenant on equal terms with Jewish people until they were circumcised. That some Jewish believers wanted to force circumcision on Titus is thus not surprising (cf. Acts 15:5). Paul graphically describes the other side as "spies" (GNT), infiltrators who seek to betray the Christian camp and finally enslave them as prisoners of war. Paul's incomplete sentence (in the Greek of Gal 2:4) may reflect the passion with which he was writing, and which was expected in passionate letters or speeches (for rebuke, forensic intensity or expressing anxiety).

2:6-8. Those of "reputation" (2:2, 6—NASB) are the Jerusalem *apostles (2:9). But Paul regarded God's opinion more highly than any human opinion, no matter how highly reputed. Whenever a Greco-Roman speaker argued against tradition or custom, that speaker had to assume the burden of proof; divine revelations were, however, regarded as important evidence even among Gentiles. Many later Jewish teachers considered the majority opinion of the sages normative, to be weighed more heavily than a direct voice from heaven; but Paul circumvents an appeal to such valued tradition by appealing instead to the standard Jewish doctrine that God is an impartial judge. In 2:7-9, even the "pillars" themselves recognized Paul's equal (but different) task. Ancient sources sometimes report friends disagreeing or even competing.

2:9. Ancient writers often used "pillar" as Paul does here, for prominent or important persons, as in our English idiom, "pillars of the community." Receiving another's right hand usually connoted greetings, welcome or assurance; but sometimes, as here, it indicates an agreement or treaty. "Cephas" is *Aramaic for Peter.

2:10. Palestinian Judaism sometimes called the pious "the poor"; but the literal poverty of the majority of Jewish believers in Jerusalem is more likely in view here. The *Old Testament and Judaism heavily emphasized alms for the poor, and Paul's collection (e.g., 2 Cor 8–9) was undertaken to alleviate this need.

2:11-14
Confrontation in Antioch

Paul extends the *rhetorical technique of comparison (used positively in 2:7-8), contrasting Peter's refusal to comply with the Jerusalem

Council's agreement with Paul's defense of it. The Galatians should thus recognize that even if Paul's opponents had been authorized by the Jerusalem apostles—which is not the case (2:1-10)—the Jerusalem apostles would have been wrong to have authorized them.

2:11. Jewish tradition, also supported by Jesus, warned that one should initially reprove a person privately to avoid causing undue shame or loss of face; Paul thus treats this situation as an extreme case. Antioch was the largest city of Syria-Palestine, over three hundred miles north of Jerusalem, and the center of the Jewish Christian mission to the *Gentiles (Acts 11:20; 13:1-3; 14:26-27).

2:12. Pious Jews were not supposed to engage in table fellowship with Gentiles (Acts 10:28; 11:3). The Jerusalem Jewish leaders may have agreed with Paul in theory, but they also had to keep peace within their own Jerusalem constituency and maintain their witness to their culture, with its recently rising anti-Gentile sentiments. Peter probably saw his actions here the way Paul saw his own in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22—appealing to everyone—but Paul would have seen the qualitative difference as enormous: withdrawing from table fellowship with culturally different Christians made them second-class citizens, violated the unity of the *church and hence insulted the cross of Christ. Although Peter and others undoubtedly claimed to oppose ethnocentrism, they accommodated it on what they saw as minor points to keep peace, whereas Paul felt that any degree of ethnic separatism or segregation challenged the very heart of the *gospel.

2:13-14. Jewish piety demanded that reproof be given in private; for Paul to reprove Peter publicly suggests that he regarded the offense as quite serious and urgent. "Hypocrisy" or pretense was universally regarded negatively; philosophers and Jewish wisdom writers alike attacked it.

2:15-21
Paul's Case in Antioch

Paul seems to summarize the substance of Galatians here. (Betz even views this as the thesis statement of the book; it seems long, however, for such a statement.) Paul's response to Peter might continue even as far as through verse 21 (as in NIV), although this is unclear.

2:15-16. Paul argues that Jewish Christians are also made righteous by faith, which does not give them any advantage over *Gentiles who must come to God on the same terms. Jewish people regarded Gentiles as different by nature; later *rabbis taught that Gentiles' ancestors were not freed from the evil impulse at Sinai as Israel was.

2:17-18. Paul then argues—refuting opposing arguments in advance—that righteousness by faith does not lead to sinful living. He uses a *rhetorical objection to make his point, as was standard in ancient *diatribe.

2:19-20. The *law itself taught Paul the way of *Christ and Paul's death to sin in Christ. Ancient speakers sometimes used dramatic contrasts—here, both dying and living. The closest parallels to the divine empowerment of Christ's indwelling are *Old Testament teachings about empowerment by God's *Spirit (although the *New Testament writers develop these teachings much further).

2:21. Paul continues his point that righteousness (both before God and in one's behavior) comes through Christ's life in the believer (through the Spirit—3:1-2; cf. 5:13-25). Christ would not have died if salvation could have been provided another way. Jewish people often believed that all Jews were chosen for salvation in Abraham and were saved unless they were very disobedient; by contrast, Gentiles might be saved without conversion to Judaism but could attain to Israel's full status as members of the covenant only if they converted. By insisting that righteousness is through Christ alone, Paul places Jew and Gentile on the same terms with regard to salvation.

3:1-5
Consistency with Their Conversion

In 3:1–4:31, Paul employs an argumentative style popular in his day, with vivid images, *rhetorical questions and intense reasoning. Multiple rhetorical questions can hammer home a point, often challenging the hearer.

3:1. Good public speakers were known for their dramatic gestures and vivid accounts, enacting before their audience the very events they narrated. All major ancient writers on public speaking emphasized this vividness of speech, in which the events narrated seemed to appear before the hearers' "very eyes" (NIV,

GNT). Here Paul may mean that he acted out the crucifixion through his own lifestyle (2:20). Calling someone "foolish" was harsh (cf. 1 Cor 15:36). The term translated "bewitched" refers to the evil impact of spells (see GNT) or the "evil eye," a jealous look with magical efficacy.

3:2. Speakers often used antithesis (contrasting opposites, as in 3:2-3, 5) in forceful argumentation. Some ancient Jewish sources link the *Spirit with human merit: for example, it was said that no one in a given generation could receive the Spirit because the generation was unworthy, even if the potential recipient were worthy. But the Galatian Christians had a different experience; they had received the Spirit shortly after leaving paganism, in keeping with the Christian teaching that the future outpouring of the Spirit on God's people had been made available to all in Christ.

3:3. Although Paul's opponents do not seem to have denied that the Galatians received *Christ and the Spirit before knowing the *law, they insisted that "perfect" (cf. KJV, NASB) or complete Christianity included obedience to the law. Many Jewish teachers believed that the Jewish people had been saved through *grace, but that Jews who rejected the law were lost; in their view, *Gentile converts to Judaism also had to prove the genuineness of their conversion by obeying all the details of the law. Many philosophers and pagan cults spoke of "perfection" or "maturity" as the ultimate stage of moral or (in the case of the cults) religious advancement. Circumcision was done in the "flesh" (6:12-13; Gen 17:11; **Jubilees* 15:26, 33).

3:4. Here Paul asks whether their conversion by grace and consequent persecution were meaningless. An appeal to the readers' own experience would constitute the ultimate eyewitness argument and was rhetorically effective. Sometimes speakers would hold attention by presenting and then correcting a statement.

3:5. Not only their conversion but also the miracles continuing among them were by grace. Although ancient peoples were more open to miracles than modern secularists are, the idea of a religious community (in contrast to a pagan healing shrine of Asclepius) where miracles occurred regularly would have been spectacular even in antiquity.

3:6-14
Abraham's Blessing and the Law's Curse

Paul here refers five times to the *law of Moses and once to the Prophets, making a case from Scripture that those who claimed to respect the law had to accept. He contrasts the message of faith (3:6-9, 14) with works directed toward the law (3:10-13), as in 3:5. (The two major interpretations of this passage are that *Gentile Christians believe as Abraham did—the traditional position, followed here—or that they are saved by Abraham's faith [as in Judaism] and hence Christ's faith, i.e., Abraham's and Christ's fidelity to the covenant.)

3:6. Paul cites Genesis 15:6, a popular Jewish proof text for showing how Abraham modeled the work of faith. For Paul it involves dependence on God's favor rather than counting as meritorious.

3:7. Jewish people (and sometimes others) used "descendants" or "sons" (so NASB here) both literally (genetically) and spiritually (those who acted like their moral predecessors). They normally applied the title "Abraham's offspring" (or "children"—KJV, NIV—or "descendants"—NRSV, GNT) to the Jewish people but occasionally referred specifically to those who excelled in righteousness—although Jewish people would never have applied this designation to Gentiles. Here Paul demonstrates that those who believe as Abraham did are his spiritual offspring (Gen 15:6, quoted in Gal 3:6).

3:8-9. Jewish teachers sometimes spoke of Scripture "speaking." Because Gentiles could believe as Abraham did (3:7), they could also be made righteous as he was. (Jewish teachers saw Abraham as the model convert to Judaism and consequently would be forced to respect Paul's argument more than they would like.) Like a good Jewish expositor, Paul proves his inference from this passage by appealing to another text dealing with the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3 = 18:18; cf. 17:4-5; 22:18). God's purpose all along had been to reach the Gentiles too, as had been stated at the very opening of the Abraham *narrative. Many Jewish people believed that the righteous (Israel) were chosen and saved in Abraham; here, believing Gentiles are saved (blessed) in him.

3:10. Both Genesis 12:3 and the blessings of the law in Deuteronomy 28 contrast the curses of those who oppose Abraham or those who break the covenant with the blessings of Abraham's descendants or those who keep the covenant. Reasoning by opposites was a frequent Jewish method of interpretation. Paul thus gives the verdict on righteousness sought by the "works of" (KJV, NASB) or by "obeying" (GNT) the law: imperfect obedience brings a curse (Deut 27:26, the summary of the curses). According to Jewish teaching, human obedience was always imperfect, and God could therefore not require perfect obedience as a condition for salvation; but like a good ancient Jewish teacher would often do, Paul interprets Deuteronomy 27:26 for all that he can get from it—after all, God was in a position to demand perfection.

3:11. Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 (on which see comment on Rom 1:17) as evidence that a righteousness based merely on human obedience is inadequate. (Some of Paul's contemporaries understood faith here as law-obedience; 1QpHab 8.1 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls.) Paul's knowledge of the *Old Testament is thorough: he has selected the only two texts in the entire Old Testament that speak of both righteousness and faith together (in v. 6 Gen 15:6; here Hab 2:4).

3:12. Because Habakkuk 2:4 connects righteousness and life, Paul cites another Old Testament text that refers to both, again demonstrating his Jewish exegetical skill (Jewish interpreters regularly linked texts on the basis of key words they shared). Paul contrasts the faith approach (3:11) with the works method of Leviticus 18:5 (cf. Ex 20:12, 20; Lev 25:18; Deut 4:1, 40; 5:33; 8:1; 30:16, 20; 32:47; Neh 9:29; Ezek 20:11, 13; 33:19). Although these Old Testament texts speak of long life in the Promised Land, Paul knows that many Jewish interpreters applied these texts to the life of the world to come (cf., e.g., *Sifra Aharé Mot* par. 8.193.1.10); hence he responds: "This is the works approach." His opponents may have been using this text to make their case that faith was not enough. Paul agrees that the righteousness of the law has to be fulfilled, but he believes that it is fulfilled by being in Christ and living by his Spirit (5:16-25); his opponents believe that a Gentile has to achieve it by obeying the details of the law, especially the initial act of circumcision.

3:13. Again following the Jewish principle of linking Old Testament texts on the basis of key words they shared, Paul cites Deuteronomy 21:23 to show that Christ took the "curse" that belongs to all who fail to perform the whole law (Gal 3:10). Deuteronomy spoke of hanging corpses, but the punishment had long since been applied to living persons being executed.

3:14. In Jewish expectation "the blessing of Abraham" includes the whole world to come; here Paul says that believers have the down payment of that world (cf. Eph 1:3, 13-14) in the blessing of the Spirit (cf. Is 44:3). (For the relationship of the promise of land to the promise of the Spirit, cf. perhaps Hag 2:5 with Ex 12:25; 13:5.)

3:15-20
The Law Does Not Annul Abraham's Covenant

Greeks usually used the term Paul uses for "covenant" for a "testament" or "will" (a legal document opened at someone's death), but the *Septuagint had used this term for "covenant" and Paul expects his audience to be familiar with this biblical usage. Although Paul means "covenant" in the biblical sense rather than as "testament," he can play on the legal nuances of the latter (wordplays were common in ancient argumentation, and Scripture spoke of Israel's "inheritance"). Judaism stressed the covenant made at Sinai, but most Jewish writers saw that same covenant foreshadowed (or, less accurately from an *Old Testament standpoint, actually practiced in advance) in Abraham (Gen 17:9-14).

3:15. Like other legal documents, testaments or "wills" (NRSV) were sealed so they could not be altered. Once a Greek will was sealed, one did not open it to make changes, since this would require breaking the seals (cf. also Roman practice in Pliny, *Epistles* 5.7.1-2). Once the testator died, the will was final. Adoption was also permanent (although even a birth child could be disinherited). One kind of will divided the property immediately, the testator, however, retaining the right to use it until death. When replaced by a subsequent will, the new will might be strongly contested

by the original heirs (e.g., as a forgery or the product of unethical influence). Under Greek law, testaments were confirmed by their deposit with the municipal records office; if a new testament would interfere with an older one, it was rejected. (Under Roman law, a later will nullified an earlier one; Gaius, *Institutes* 2.144.) As in most analogies, one does not press all points; God did not need to die for Israel to receive its promised inheritance.

3:16. Paul means that *Christ is the ultimate seed of the promise through whom the nations will be blessed; this thesis makes good sense of the promise motif in Israel's history. But he argues his case the way the *rabbis often did: by attention to a grammatical peculiarity that was not actually peculiar. (As in English, the Hebrew term for "seed" could convey either the singular or the plural [a collective], which Paul well knew—3:29. But rabbis argued in this manner too; "sons of Israel" meant either "sons and daughters" or only the men, depending on what the rabbis needed it to mean in a given text. Paul's opponents no doubt read Scripture this way, and Paul responds in kind; he takes "seed" as singular, a sense that the term can have in general but that does not seem to fit of the primary sense of most of the most relevant Genesis texts [Gen 13:15-16; 17:8; 22:17-18; 24:7, 60], because he already knows, on other grounds, that Christ is the epitome of Abraham's line. When later rabbis applied "Abraham's seed" to one person, it was naturally to Abraham's son Isaac.) Judaism nearly always took "Abraham's seed" as Israel; Paul would agree that this is usually what it means (Rom 9:7, 29; 11:1). But his argument in Galatians 3:6-9 permits him to apply this expression to *Gentile Christians who are in Christ, hence in Abraham.

Roman law allowed testaments to stipulate that property be left first to one heir and then to another after the first one's death. If Paul expected his readers to know this sort of custom, this might explain how his argument for them can move in principle from Christ as the heir to all who are in Christ.

3:17-18. Many Jewish teachers argued that the *law existed before the creation of the world (though many held that its period of influence in the world started with Moses; some others believed that the patriarchs observed it before it was officially given). On the legal principle of 3:15, God would not institute a law that retracted his earlier promise based on faith. Paul might be responding to an opposing argument that the new covenant could not alter the old; if so, Paul responds that the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34) returns to the *original* covenant. "Four hundred and thirty years" comes from Exodus 12:40. Scripture promised Israel an inheritance, and Jewish tradition spoke often of "inheriting" the coming world (e.g., **1 Enoch* 5:7; **Jubilees* 32:19; **4 Ezra* 7:96).

3:19. The law's function of restraining transgressions would have also made sense to non-Jewish readers: Greco-Roman philosophers felt that law was necessary for the masses but that the wise were a law for themselves. In his image of the guardian in 3:23-25 Paul elaborates on this function of the law, meant to last till the promise could be fulfilled; such an addition could not change the earlier covenant (3:15). According to post-Old Testament Jewish tradition, the law was given through angels (cf. comment on Acts 7:53), and (as in the Old Testament) the mediator was Moses himself.

3:20. Mediators intercede between two (or more) parties; if the law was given through a mediator (3:19), therefore, it was adapted to the needs of both parties. But the promise was not given through a mediator; it was a unilateral enactment of the one God (God's oneness was the most basic belief of Judaism). Paul again argues from analogy in a manner that would be persuasive in his readers' culture.

3:21-29
Before Faith Came

3:21. Jewish teachers said that life did come by the *law, both in this world and in the world to come (cf. 3:12; *Dead Sea Scrolls CD 3.16; **Psalms of Solomon* 14:2-3; **4 Ezra* 7:20-21; Mishnah *Avot* 6:7). But Paul here concludes his argument (3:15-20) that the law was never meant to do the work of the promise.

3:22. In contrast to Romans 3:10-18, Paul has not argued humanity's universal sinfulness from Scripture in Galatians (Gal 3:10-12 at most implies it). Humanity's sinfulness could be safely assumed, however, because Jewish teachers in his day agreed that all people had sinned; Paul simply takes the consequences of

that sin far more seriously than other teachers did, in that the death of God's Son was needed to cancel them.

3:23. Jewish traditions divided human history into various stages (in one tradition, chaos prevailed for two millennia, then the Torah for two millennia, and then the messianic era for two millennia); Paul likewise divides history, viewing the law as a temporary guardian till the original promise was fulfilled.

3:24. A key element in the passage is the term translated "tutor" (NASB) or, better still, "guardian" (NIV, ESV, NLT). The slave assigned to this role would watch out for the student on his way to school and help him with his manners and schoolwork, but he was not the teacher himself. Children sometimes resented but often grew fond of their slave guardians and later freed them. Such guardians were also normally better educated than the free masses; the image is not intrinsically demeaning. But it was hardly the way most other Jewish teachers would have described the law. (They occasionally describe Moses as Israel's "guardian" till Israel grew up. Philosophers spoke of philosophy as a "moral teacher," and Judaism spoke of the law as a "teacher.")

3:25. The coming of faith is described in terms of coming of age, when a boy would achieve adulthood (usually about thirteen or fourteen years old in various Mediterranean cultures).

3:26. Israel was called God's "children" in the *Old Testament and often in Judaism. In contrast to standard Jewish teaching, Paul says here that one becomes a spiritual descendant of Abraham (3:29) and child of God through faith, not through ethnic participation in the covenant.

3:27. Ancient writers sometimes spoke of being spiritually "clothed"; Judaism occasionally spoke of being "clothed" by the *Spirit (see also comments on Rom 13:12; Eph 4:20-24). *Gentiles who wanted to convert to Judaism were baptized. By putting on Christ in converting to Christianity, Gentiles took his status as Abraham's seed (3:16, 29) and God's child (3:26).

3:28. Some Greco-Roman cults claimed to ignore social divisions like those Paul mentions here, although they rarely erased them (most cults were expensive enough to exclude all but the well-to-do; some, however, such as the Eleusinian mysteries, welcomed a range of initiates). But the early Christians were especially distinctive in surmounting such divisions. They formed the only bridge between Jews and Gentiles and had few allies in challenging class (slave versus free) and gender prejudices. (The allies included some philosophic groups, but their views rarely proved widely influential on social mores.) Some Greeks thanked the deity for not making them animals, women or non-Greeks; some Jewish teachers thanked God for not making them Gentiles, women or ignorant people (in some versions, slaves).

3:29. The Jewish people were called "Abraham's seed" (KJV, NIV) or "offspring" (NASB, NRSV; see comment on 3:16), heirs of the promise; Paul's argument in this chapter has transferred this position to all believers.

4:1-11
Sons, Not Slaves

Under ancient law, sons were heirs, destined to inherit what belonged to their fathers; in contrast, slaves were part of the inherited property. The contrast between slaves and children appears elsewhere in ancient literature. But in practice and in household codes, which explained the proper relations of all members of a household with the head of the household, minor children, like slaves, were subordinated; only after leaving the home did a child achieve fullest freedom. Paul here continues the image of the slave guardian versus the child (3:24).

4:1. Under Roman law, the status of the minor still under a guardian was roughly that of a slave (at least regarding property; cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 3.211).

4:2. Minors were required to be under legal "guardians" if their father was deceased (e.g., Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 31.73); this guardian was normally chosen from the father's will, or, if this was unspecified, the role fell to the nearest male relative from the father's side of the family. The "managers" (NASB) or "trustees" (NIV, NRSV) or "stewards" of estates were often slaves or freedmen but wielded considerable power. Heirs under the testator's authority could inherit only at the time specified by the latter (Gaius, *Institutes* 2.87) or at puberty (1.196; later in some places,

Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 1.13). In antiquity people considered it unwise to give a minor heir access to the resources prematurely (e.g., *Sifre Deuteronomy* 11.1.2).

4:3. In their previous, pagan state, the Galatians had reverenced the elements of the universe as deities (e.g., wind, fire and other aspects of nature such as the sea; Judaism had long since demythologized them as angels who ruled over nature, like those implied in Ps 148:2-4; cf. **1 Enoch* 20:2; 60:12-22; 66:1-2; **Jubilees* 2:2; *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QM 10.11-12). In late antiquity growing numbers feared the personified, tyrannical power Fate, which was thought to exercise its will through the astral spirits, the gods who ruled the stars. Paul believes that even the Jewish people were enslaved by such evil spiritual powers apart from Christ; see comment on 4:9.

4:4. Jewish texts often speak of the fulfillment of appointed times in history as a way of recognizing God's perfect wisdom in and sovereignty over history (e.g., *Jubilees* 1:26; **4 Ezra* 7:74; *Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 3:10). (Some commentators have compared "the fullness of the time"—NASB—to how ripe Greco-Roman culture was for the spread of Christianity; some are more reticent, citing the difficult obstacles that this culture presented to the early Christians.) Here Paul compares this fulfillment to the point at which a boy attains maturity and is considered an adult (about thirteen or fourteen years old). "Born under *law" means that Jesus was obligated to keep the law of Moses.

4:5. Greek law combined adoption with heirship; the same seems to have been true in the case of childless persons in ancient Near Eastern law (cf. Gen 15:2). Paul uses common *Old Testament imagery to make his point, however; God had made Israel his children (e.g., Ex 4:22), and the Old Testament repeatedly speaks of the land as Israel's "inheritance," bestowed on them by God (without any thought of God's dying, of course).

4:6. Roman adoptions required a witness of the transaction: the *Holy Spirit performs this function here. That the Spirit should testify is natural, because Judaism understood the Spirit especially as the one who inspired the prophets; the Spirit here inspires believers, speaking to them as he did to the prophets, to remind them of their calling as God's children. "Abba" is the *Aramaic word for "Papa," a term of special intimacy rarely if ever used in Judaism to address God directly, undoubtedly borrowed from Jesus (see comment on Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15).

4:7. The Galatians are now freed from the slave guardian of 3:24-25, for the time has come (4:4).

4:8. Jewish people often said that the pagans did "not know God," and that their gods, which were creations of the true God, were "not gods at all." (Philosophers often decided the moral value of an idea or action by how it corresponded to nature; Paul and other Jewish and Christian writers recognized that worshiping a created object as if it were the Creator failed this criterion. Some pagan thinkers, following an ancient Greek philosopher named Euhemerus, distinguished between real gods, which were evident "by nature" [sun, moon, planets and stars], and those invented by people [other deities].) Jewish people, because they were in covenant with God, said that they "knew" God truly.

4:9. Speakers sometimes deliberately "corrected" themselves to make a stronger point. As was fitting in *rhetorical rebuke, Paul uses harsh language: he is not sure that the Galatians "know" God even now. As in 4:3, the "elemental things" (NASB), "forces" (NIV) or "principles" (ESV, NLT) to which they are returning are presumably the "spirits" (cf. NRSV, GNT) of nature they used to worship as gods (4:8). Foremost among these would be the astral spirits (stars and other celestial bodies), associated with special days and seasonal rituals (4:10; cf. angels of nature and seasons in *1 Enoch* 72:1; 82:10-20). South Galatians were known for their strict and moralistic religion; in addition to Greek imports, Phrygians had indigenous cults, including the mother goddess (contrast perhaps Gal 4:26).

4:10. *Gentiles had unlucky days, special festivals, and so forth. Judaism had its own special calendar of holy days, new moons, sabbatical years and so forth. Paul is saying that by returning to a ceremonial, calendrical religion, the Galatians return to pagan bondage under these spirits in the heavens (4:3, 9). From a technical standpoint, this argument is standard rhetorical exaggeration: Judaism and

paganism felt that they had little in common (including regarding calendars, *Jubilees* 6:35). From the standpoint of experience, however, they would relinquish the *Spirit (3:2; 4:6) for tradition and custom. Some commentators think that Paul here links the deified elements of paganism (4:8-9), which correspond to Judaism's angels of nature, with the angels who gave the law (3:19); although that linkage is uncertain, Paul's image here is negative, at best that of an adult going back under the guardianship of a slave.

4:11. The prophets sometimes complained of pleading with Israel to no avail; disappointed servants of God hoped that their devotion was not "in vain" (so KJV, NASB here), that is, not unrewarded (Ps 73:13; cf. Is 49:4; 65:23); even God's judgments were "in vain" when Israel did not return to him (Jer 2:30). The image was that of great labor expended with no return, due to the recipients' obstinacy (Phil 2:16; cf. 1 Thess 3:5) or the ineffectiveness of a message (1 Cor 15:2, 14, 17, 58).

4:12-20
Paul's Plea

Although Galatians resembles a "letter of blame," it is not the harshest sort of blame; Paul does not intend to break fellowship with his readers. In this section, Paul employs standard themes found in "letters of friendship," emphasizing that he still loves the Galatians deeply. Ancient *rhetoricians emphasized appropriate expressions of emotion as well as logic in persuasion, and recognized the need to lighten the tone after a section of heavy reproof. Often they intensified their arguments by adding intense emotional appeal, especially toward the end of their case. Paul's words here would thus sound entirely appropriate.

4:12. Especially in Greek culture, "friends" (so NRSV here) were viewed as "equals" (although the Roman idea of friendship between *patrons and their dependents was likewise widespread). "I became as you are" means that Paul relates to them as equals, not only as their father in the faith (4:19). Reciprocity was important (cf. 1 Kings 22:4); in ancient ideals, friends shared everything in common, so what belonged to one belonged to the other (e.g., Pliny, *Epistles* 1.4.2-3; 6.30.1).

4:13. Paul's first visit (Acts 14:1-20 as opposed to 14:21-25, if we follow the South Galatian theory; see comment on 1:2) or preaching was occasioned by some "infirmity" (KJV); the term could be applied either to sickness or to injuries inflicted by persecution. *Stoic philosophers said that sickness should not affect one's attitude, and the Galatians may have been impressed with how Paul bore up under an infirmity. Some scholars have suggested (on the likely assumption that South Galatia is in view; see the introduction) that Galatia was a good area for someone sick to go to recuperate.

4:14. Physical infirmities were quite often regarded as the curse or punishment of the gods; this belief in sickness as divine retribution appears often even in Jewish texts. Receiving Paul as God's "angel" (cf. Acts 14:12) meant receiving him with the hospitality due the one who sent him, *Christ Jesus. Messengers were to be received as representatives of their senders. (The wording need not imply that Christ is present as an angel; cf. 1 Sam 29:9; 2 Sam 14:17, 20; 19:27; Zech 12:8. Many second- and third-century Jewish Christians did portray Christ as the chief angel, because of the limited categories available in Judaism to communicate him to their culture. The image was discontinued in the fourth century due to its exploitation by the Arians, who regarded Christ as deity but created, although the image fit earlier use by Ebionites who rejected Christ's divinity. Some Jewish writers, like Philo, portrayed the Word as the supreme angel, but earliest Christianity lacks any direct evidence for this portrayal.)

4:15. Sacrificing one's eye for someone else was a figure of speech for a great sacrifice, attested in various sources. Thus Paul's statement that the Galatians "would have dug out your own eyes to give them to me" need not mean that his infirmity (4:13-14) was an oozing eye sore, as some commentators have suggested. In Greek culture, friendship was especially demonstrated by sacrifice; Paul here reaffirms the bond that exists between himself and the Galatians. Letter writers sometimes appealed to the recipients' love for them (e.g., Fronto, *Ad M. Caesarem* 5.1-2; Symmachus, *Epistles* 1.95.2). Likewise, letter writers sometimes affirmed their affection by protesting the recipients' lack of or decline in comparable affection.

4:16-17. Demagogues who told people what they wanted to hear became popular through their flattery. Moralists thus always pointed out that the flatterers were not concerned for their hearers' good; those who told them the truth openly were those who really loved them (cf. similarly Prov 27:6). Speakers would sometimes ask what crime they committed against their hearers (e.g., Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 45.8) or would rhetorically confess a noncrime (cf. Acts 24:14). Speakers could complain if someone treated them as an "enemy" without good cause (*Cicero, *For Sestius* 52.111) or could ask why accusers treated the speaker as an enemy when he has loved them so much (Sallust, *Letter of Gnaeus Pompeius* 1).

4:18. In contrast to the Galatians' response to his opponents' flattery (4:17), the Galatians had sought Paul in genuine love (4:13-15)—as long as he was with them to defend himself (4:16). In ancient thought, letters were a surrogate for one's presence; Paul here hopes to reverse their questioning of his teaching.

4:19. Teachers were often viewed as "fathers." Galatians well understood the Roman custom of the ruling father, whose authority over his children was absolute. But Paul appeals to a different aspect of ancient parenthood: that of affection and intimacy. Although the image of affection was also applied to the father, Paul here takes the role of the mother as well. Labor pains were regarded as the severest pains humans experienced, and even with skilled midwives, mothers often died in childbirth. Paul's image of his love and sacrifice—and of their apostasy—could not be more graphic. Some others in antiquity borrowed the metaphors of pregnancy, midwifery and birth pangs for their arduous work.

4:20. Rhetoricians like Isocrates recommended honestly confessing, "I am at a loss as to what to say," when confronting an emotionally stirring and painful situation. (Pretending such distress that one could not decide what to do was called *aporia* by rhetoricians.) Letters were considered a surrogate for one's presence (4:18) and were supposed to reflect the same character the person would display if present. But it was easier for Paul to write stern letters than to be stern in person (2 Cor 10:10-11); indeed, even when he was writing a letter of blame, it hurt him worse than it hurt them (2 Cor 2:4).

4:21–5:1
The Hagar-Sarah Analogy

If Genesis derives from the period of Moses and the exodus, the literary function of the Hagar *narrative could include a warning to the Israelites against going back to Egypt (Gen 16:1), although Hagar is ultimately more a positive than a negative character. Further, the entire section of Genesis (chaps. 16–21) emphasizes that the child who came according to God's promise (the promise Abraham believed in Gen 15:6; cf. Gal 3:6, 14) was the key to everything else God had promised Abraham; the child conceived "according to the flesh," by merely human means, was blessed by God but had nothing to do with this promise. Unlike the interpretations of *Philo and some other interpreters of his day (and not a few modern sermon illustrations), Paul's "allegory" (a term with a wider sense in the first century) is an analogy controlled by the biblical text, not merely by what he wants to say. Some think that Paul replies to an opposing argument that only Jewish people and circumcised converts can be Abraham's children.

4:21. "Tell me" was one way of addressing an imaginary opponent in a *diatribe. In common Jewish parlance, "the Law" included Genesis, hence the Hagar-Sarah story.

4:22-23. When Abraham and Sarah tried to have a son by human means (apart from a divine intervention), they had Hagar bear a son to Abraham (Gen 16:1-4, 15). (Scholars have often suggested that they were following an ancient Near Eastern custom of using the barren wife's handmaid as a surrogate mother.) But God still planned to send a son miraculously, a son who would inherit the covenant God had made with Abraham (Gen 17:15-21). Paul is still playing on the slave-free image of 3:23–4:11.

4:24. Given his pedagogical views, Philo naturally interpreted Hagar as imperfect training and Sarah as perfect virtue. Paul instead draws an analogy between the slave, who produced according to the flesh, and those who seek to fulfill the *law's righteousness according to the flesh. Hagar was from Egypt (Gen 16:1) and thus could have reminded the

first Israelite readers of Genesis of their own slavery in Egypt; Mount Sinai was near Egypt.

4:25. "Arabia" included Mount Sinai, south of Judea, as well as the northward area mentioned in 1:17. The Nabataean Arabs were viewed as Ishmaelites, descendants of Hagar, in Paul's day, thus making the connection clearer to ancient readers familiar with eastern Mediterranean geography. Commentators have suggested that Paul answers his opponents' claims here, because an allegorical style of argumentation is rare for him. His opponents may have identified Sinai with the new Jerusalem, the place from which the law would go forth in the future (Is 2:2-4; cf. 65:17-19).

4:26. Many Jewish texts in Paul's day reinforced the *Old Testament hope of a new Jerusalem, often speaking of a heavenly Jerusalem that would come down to earth. These texts also sometimes spoke of Jerusalem (present or future) as "our mother" (e.g., **4 Ezra* 10:7; cf. Is 66:7-10 with 65:17-18). Others spoke of the Jerusalem "above" (*4 Baruch* 5:35). (*Gentiles often spoke of earth as a "mother," and the mother goddess was particularly popular in Phrygian Galatia; but Gentiles also spoke of their "mother city" and would understand that Jerusalem was Judeans' mother city.) Because Judaism associated the *Messiah and the *Spirit with the end time, Paul would naturally identify followers of the Messiah Jesus with the future Jerusalem rather than with the present one.

4:27. Isaiah 54:1, following Isaiah 53, depicts the restoration of God's people in terms of Jerusalem as a mother giving birth (relevant for Gal 4:26). It was natural for some Jewish teachers to connect Isaiah 54:1 (which Paul cites here) with Genesis 21:2: Sarah's giving birth typified her descendants' giving birth after the suffering of the captivity to a restored Israel and Jerusalem. Perhaps Isaiah himself intended such an allusion (Is 51:2).

4:28. Paul's opponents argued that one must be circumcised to enter the covenant of Abraham and Isaac and become their spiritual descendants. Although they could make a strong case from Genesis 17:10-14, Paul goes beyond Jewish tradition (which generally expected the law to be strengthened, not radically changed, in the end time). Circumcision was a sign of the covenant, but a greater proof of the new covenant is the gift of the Spirit (Ezek 36:24-27), which makes the lesser sign unnecessary; the Messiah's coming has inaugurated a new era in which the old rules no longer strictly apply (Gal 4:4, 26). Under this new covenant, these Gentile Christians are children of Isaac, and their circumcising opponents, who resist the real point of the new covenant, are spiritual Ishmaelites.

4:29. That the inferior are envious of the superior was a frequent moral in antiquity; cf. 1 John 3:12 or Philo's work entitled *That the Worse Attack the Better* (regarding Cain and Abel); the Old Testament likewise often illustrated that the wicked persecute the righteous (e.g., Ps 37:32). Paul uses this idea to explain why his Jewish Christian opponents are succumbing to the pressure of non-Christian Jewish opinion (cf. 5:11; 6:12-13).

4:30-31. Paul's opponents felt that uncircumcised Gentiles were excluded from the covenant; Paul here argues that it is instead the opponents who are. Completing his analogy, he cites Genesis 21:10: Hagar's line could not inherit with Sarah's, and Sarah demanded that Abraham expel Hagar and Ishmael lest Ishmael have a legal right to Isaac's inheritance. Paul calls on his readers to do the same—to expel his opponents, the spiritual Ishmaelites.

5:1. On the "yoke," see comment on Acts 15:10.

5:2-6
The Real Law

In 5:2–6:3 Paul emphasizes that the real *law is of the *Spirit and of love, not of the flesh.

5:2-3. Most Jewish teachers allowed that righteous *Gentiles could be saved by keeping merely the basic laws believed to have been given to Noah; but any Gentile who converted to Judaism was responsible to keep all 613 commandments given to Israel at Mount Sinai (according to rabbinic count). Rabbis said that the law was a whole, and one had to keep all of it; rejecting any part of it was tantamount to rejecting the whole thing. *Stoics believed that all transgressions were equal (Pliny, *Epistles* 8.2.3); many others rejected this idea (e.g., *Cicero, *On the Ends* 4.27.74-75).

5:4. Although most Jewish people believed that they were born into the covenant by virtue of being Jewish, they recognized that

one could be cut off from the covenant by refusing to obey it. But because salvation is only by *Christ (2:21), Paul declares that seeking it any other way leads to being "cut off" (NRSV).

5:5-6. Most Jewish people believed that the Spirit had been active in the *Old Testament and would become more fully active again in the end time. For Paul, the Spirit activates the power of the future *kingdom in believers' lives in the present, thus enabling them to experience the "righteousness" or "justification" that will be fully revealed at Christ's return. See comment on 6:15.

5:7-12
Paul Castigates His Opponents

5:7-8. Ancient writers on moral topics often compared the moral life to running a race. Paul here speaks of someone "hindering" (cf. NASB), possibly meaning "cutting in" (NIV, fitting the term's etymology, though it can refer to any sort of interrupting or hindering), which throws the runners off balance and perhaps out of the race. *Rhetorically skilled persons liked to play with words, and Paul here alludes to circumcision (which involved cutting), as in 5:12 ("cut off," KJV).

5:9. One of yeast's most basic properties is that it spreads throughout the dough; Paul uses the same idea, possibly an ancient proverb, in 1 Corinthians 5:6 to warn of the negative effects of an unchecked spiritual malignancy.

5:10. Letter writers urging a course of action sometimes expressed confidence in their readers (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 2.4.2).

5:11. If Paul were simply converting *Gentiles to Judaism in the ordinary manner (circumcision for the men, *baptism for both men and women), he would not be experiencing Jewish opposition—to which his opponents in Galatia, more sensitive to their own culture's expectations than to those of the Galatians' culture, have accommodated themselves (6:12-13). (If his readers are in South Galatia, Acts 13–14 records some of the persecutions.)

5:12. "Cutting themselves off" (cf. KJV) could mean to cut themselves off from the community, but most commentators take the words as meaning "mutilate" (NASB), "emasculate" (NIV) or "castrate" (NRSV, GNT) themselves: while they are circumcising others, they ought to make a full sweep of themselves and remove the entire organ. Although Paul's language purposely avoids being explicit, there is no reason to think that such an insult is beneath him; witty insults were the mark of good public speakers in the heat of debate, and Paul is far more impassioned in his criticism of his opponents than in his blame of the Galatians themselves. Many pagans thought of circumcision as a form of mutilation, and the Roman emperor Hadrian later outlawed it under an anticastration law. (Many people also ridiculed some self-castrated followers of a Phrygian goddess.) But as Paul knew, Jewish people particularly abhorred eunuchs, castrated men (Deut 23:1).

5:13-18
Fulfilling the Law

5:13-14. Other Jewish teachers also summarized the humanward commandments of the *law in terms of this quotation from Leviticus 19:18; Paul prefers this summary to all others, however, because this was the summary Jesus offered (Mk 12:31).

5:15. The ancients (especially in the *Old Testament and Jewish sources, e.g., Prov 30:14; Ezek 34:3; Mic 3:2-3) used the metaphor of being eaten by others as a grotesque description of a horrible fate or inconceivable wickedness, such as exploitation (literal cannibalism horrified ancient sensitivities even more than it does modern ones).

5:16. The Old Testament and Judaism spoke of "walking" (so KJV and NASB here) in the way of the Lord, in righteousness, in the law and so on (e.g., Lev 26:3; 1QS 3.9; 5.10 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls); it meant "behaving" in these ways. Jewish teachers described their moral laws derived from the Old Testament law as *halakhah,* which literally means "walking." Although this expression was not as common in Greek, Paul's hearers (especially those becoming more acquainted with the Old Testament and Judaism) would understand his point. He may allude here to Ezekiel 36:27: when God put his *Spirit in his people in the end time, they would walk in all his commandments, even though they had failed to keep the law's righteousness in their own strength.

5:17. "Flesh" is human weakness and mortality ("human nature"—GNT), and suggests

the best (or worst) anyone can do in himself or herself. Philosophers and Jewish teachers sometimes spoke of an internal conflict between reason and passion, but some argue that the point here is that, because flesh has nothing in common with God's power, one can be either a person of the Spirit (a Christian) or a person of the flesh (one who runs his or her own life without depending on God); one cannot have it both ways (5:16, 18). (Where such binary language appears in ancient sources, it speaks in principle rather than claiming perfection; although the Dead Sea Scrolls recognize that all humans are imperfect in themselves, they speak of humans being ruled either by the spirit of truth or the spirit of error.) See comment on the introduction to Romans 8:1-11.

5:18. Philosophers often said that the wise person needed no laws, because he would simply choose to do what was right by the law written in his heart; the Old Testament also speaks of the law's being written in one's heart, a benefit that characterizes especially the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34). The Old Testament often described Israel's being "led" by God, especially in the wilderness after he redeemed them from slavery in Egypt.

5:19-26
Flesh Versus Spirit

When "flesh" referred to people in the *Old Testament, it meant humans viewed in terms of their finiteness, creatureliness and mortality. The *Dead Sea Scrolls thus often apply this idea especially to the moral weakness of humans in themselves, their susceptibility to sin.

The *Spirit of God, however, energized people in the Old Testament to speak and do God's works miraculously. In the Old Testament, flesh and Spirit had nothing in common (Gen 6:3). (The view that Paul contrasts the human body with the human spirit, rather than human weakness and God's Spirit, is based on a Platonic misreading of Paul, the sort that led to *Gnosticism. Despite its strong condemnation of Gnosticism, the later *church was influenced by some of the same Greek philosophical ideas.) Paul thus declares that those who have God's presence living inside them by the Spirit have new moral ability (cf. Ezek 36:25-27) and are able to reflect God's own character; for Paul, this was the only way for believers to live out the new life.

5:19-21. Ancient writers commonly used lists of vices, as here, although Paul is much more forceful (v. 21) than most Gentile writers (who often said one merely needed to avoid excess in most vices). Ancient moralists also could use lists of virtues (5:22-23; Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 4.3; in the Old Testament, cf. Ps 15). Some writers, like here, laid vice and virtue lists side by side to contrast them. The standard moral image of the "two ways" (the good and bad ways) or two dominions is frequent in both Jewish and non-Jewish texts. "Works" (KJV) recalls the "works of the *law" that Paul has challenged throughout the letter (2:16; 3:2, 5, 10, 12), but "of the flesh" (KJV, NASB, NRSV) tells why: they are merely human, without God's empowerment.

5:22. The Old Testament also uses the metaphor of God's people bearing "fruit" (e.g., Is 27:6; Hos 10:1; 14:8); Greek sometimes employed the term figuratively. Here Paul contrasts "fruit" with "works" (5:19) because fruit is simply produced by the nature of the tree, and for Paul, believers' nature has been made new in *Christ (5:24). Philosophers sometimes contrasted positive and negative emotions (Peripatetics trying to rule the latter, and *Stoics rejecting the latter wholesale); some of their positive ones correspond with much of Paul's fruit of the Spirit, although his concern is moral more than emotional (e.g., "peace" may be at least partly relational, Rom 12:18; 14:19; 2 Cor 13:11).

5:23. Self-control was one of the virtues most emphasized by philosophers and respected in Roman society. Philosophers often taught that the wise needed no law to regulate them, because their virtue itself was a law. Paul says that people of the Spirit fulfill the moral intent of the law (5:14) by means of the Spirit guiding their lives.

5:24. Philosophers warned about the dangers of unchecked passions; Stoics (the most popular philosophic school of the era) spoke of all passions (negative emotions) being eradicated in the (ideal) wise person, although generally not claiming to have attained this themselves. Paul speaks here not of controlling or overcoming passions, however, but of a completed death with *Christ in principle (2:20; 6:14). Paul nearly always uses verbs

in the past tense for this death; one does not die to sin gradually (which the imperfect or present tense would suggest) by works, but one accepts one's completed (the aorist and perfect tenses he uses signify the action is completed) righteousness by faith and learns to live accordingly (5:19-23).

5:25. Believers "live" or "have life" by the Spirit; they should then "behave" or "walk" (KJV, NASB) the Spirit's way, which will fulfill the moral principles of biblical law (5:16).

5:26. Paul returns (5:15) to a call to harmony, a common theme of ancient speakers. For Paul, true depth of relationship with God must be expressed in one's relationships with others.

6:1-5
Restoring Others Meekly

Paul continues his exposition on the true law of the *Spirit, the law of *Christ (6:2). The gentleness that comes from the Spirit (5:23) is the proper way to correct faults; conversely, the legalist who is obsessed with addressing his or her own spirituality by fleshly means will have little patience with the spiritual needs of others.

6:1. A variety of ancient sources, including Greek and Jewish wisdom traditions and the *Dead Sea Scrolls, stressed wise and patient reproof for the other person's good, and often stressed examining oneself before correcting others. Judaism considered humility one of the greatest virtues, even for the most noble.

6:2. The image of bearing another's "burden" or "weight" (the term was also applied metaphorically to griefs) might remind readers of slaves or of impressment (Roman soldiers could require local people to carry something for them). In either case, it is an image of subservience that demands more than convenience. "Bear burdens" in this context must include helping a fellow Christian deal with sins (6:1). Many take "law of Christ" as referring to a saying of Jesus; others argue that in the context of Galatians it more likely refers to his example and the character of Jesus imparted by the Spirit (2:20; 5:14).

6:3. Philosophers also warned about the ignorant thinking themselves to be someone when they were nothing (*Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.24.19; Diogenes Laertius 2.38).

6:4-5. Greek literature includes some maxims similar to "each one shall bear his own load" (6:5, NASB), which usually stress self-sufficiency. This could relate here to supporting oneself and others (6:6), but in the context of stressing humility in dealing with others (6:1, 3-4), bearing one's own load (6:5) might mean answering to God himself for what one has done (6:7-8).

6:6-10
Providing for Others

This passage may have a financial emphasis (6:6, 10), although it need not be limited to the collection for the Jerusalem *church (1 Cor 16:1), as some scholars have suggested.

6:6. Many teachers charged fees for their instruction; some philosophers insisted that they and their students should share all things in common, and some groups of teachers and *disciples lived communally. Here Paul urges the Galatian Christians to support their teachers who could provide sound teaching (unlike that of his opponents).

6:7. Reaping what one sowed was a familiar image in antiquity (in the *Old Testament, e.g., Job 4:8; Prov 22:8; Hos 8:7; 10:12; cf. Prov 11:18; Is 3:10; Jer 12:13; widespread in other Jewish literature). Paul elsewhere used sowing as a monetary image (2 Cor 9:6), as did some other ancient authors; thus here he might continue the thought of 6:6. "Do not be deceived" was a familiar phrase in ancient moral exhortation (e.g., *Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.20.7; 2.22.15).

6:8-9. On the flesh's mortality, see the introduction to 5:19-26; Paul often associates the Spirit with *resurrection of the body (cf. Ezek 37:5-14).

6:10. With the exception of the *Cynics, philosophers and moralists advocated working for the common good; no one would have complained about a group that lived accordingly. Paul's emphasis is especially on (though not limited to) ministering to the needs of one's fellow believers.

6:11-18
Crucifixion, not Circumcision

Greeks and Romans viewed circumcision as a mutilation of the flesh, but it in no way compared with the most shameful and painful

form of death employed in the Roman world—crucifixion.

6:11. Most letters of this length were dictated to *scribes, who wrote small to finish the task quickly. Paul, who may be unaccustomed to writing full letters (or whose hands, some suggest, may have been weakened by leatherworking in cold artisan shops in the winter), cannot write small and quickly. Some documents also seem to have called attention to especially important points at their beginning or end by using larger letters. Whatever the purpose of "large letters" here, the main point is that not a scribe but Paul himself writes this section, as the handwriting shows. Paul's special effort expresses (as it often did) special affection, his literary competence and/or the special importance of what he writes.

6:12-13. The metaphor here is grotesque: Paul has been assailing those who live "by the flesh," by merely human, mortal power, ignoring God; physical circumcision was commonly said to be "in the flesh" (so also KJV, NASB, NRSV here). Here Paul may speak of these culture-bound missionaries as if they want to show the Galatians' foreskins to their senders. See comment on 4:29 and 5:11.

6:14. Paul boasts in a wounding (cf. 6:17) far more severe than circumcision: crucifixion. He is thus unafraid to face persecution from hostile Jewish leaders; cf. 5:11.

6:15. "New creation" means that the life of the future world has begun in believers now (see comment on 5:5-6; 2 Cor 5:17). Again Paul appeals to the product of God's power, as opposed to any merely human effort.

6:16. Paul blesses those who "walk by this rule" (NASB) as opposed to the "rule" of Jewish *halakhah* (see comment on 5:16). The phrase "peace be with/on" someone was a common Jewish expression; it is one of the most common phrases on Jewish tombs. "Peace be on Israel" was also a regular *synagogue prayer, the final benediction of the Amidah (its basis is as early as Ps 125:5; 128:6); it is a fitting antithesis to the curse against the *law's distorters in 1:8-9. (The blessing of "mercy upon" someone was also familiar; e.g., **Jubilees* 1:20; 22:9; **Psalms of Solomon* 4:25.) Scholars dispute whether "Israel" here means the faithful Jewish remnant or all believers as spiritual heirs of Abraham (3:7, 29).

6:17. Soldiers or others often displayed their wounds as signs of loyalty or to invite sympathy for their claims. Some slaves (cf. *Philo, *That Every Good Person Is Free* 10), criminals and prisoners of war were tattooed, as were devotees of some religious cults in Egypt and Syria. Greeks and Romans normally associated tattooing with barbarians, and branding was usually reserved for horses. Paul's term is the one normally used for tattooing, but could more commonly apply simply to any mark or puncture wound. In this context, Paul simply means that he was crucified with *Christ (6:14), who was flogged and nailed to the cross; the evidence was Paul's "scars" (GNT) from his past persecutions (5:11; 6:12-13).

6:18. The term often translated "brothers" here means "siblings" (i.e., "brothers and sisters"—NRSV; in Greek, a masculine plural form can include women). It was regularly applied to those of one's race or nationality, but members of religious associations also often addressed one another in this manner; see comment on Acts 9:17. For a blessing of *grace, see comment on Galatians 1:3; Romans 1:7.

Ephesians

Introduction

Authorship. Although scholars often dispute the authorship of Ephesians, most of the so-called non-Pauline words, phrases and stylistic features appear at least occasionally in letters that everyone agrees were written by Paul. Many differences between Ephesians and earlier Pauline letters are insignificant. For example, some note that "the genuine Paul" speaks of *Christ as the head (1 Cor 11:3) and the *church as his body (Rom 12:4; 1 Cor 12:12) only separately. But ancient philosophers sometimes used the body metaphor with the head and sometimes without it, and requiring Paul always to express himself the same way in his few extant letters, although other writers did not, is hardly fair to Paul.

Unlike many of his earlier letters, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians seem to have been written after Paul had experience in presenting Christianity in an ancient academic context, where he would have used some basic philosophic language to communicate to his hearers (Acts 19:9). That Paul could adapt his language to his audience, including those to whom the occasional sort of *Stoic language in Ephesians appealed, is evident elsewhere in his writings (e.g., Rom 1; 1 Cor 8); such language is more common in Ephesians and Philippians, with some more Middle Platonic language in Colossians. Although the dispute over the authorship of Ephesians will continue in scholarly circles, this commentary works from the position that Paul wrote it.

Genre. Paul's exhortations in the letter cover several main themes, all of which the recipients' situation seems to have elicited (although he uses standard forms to describe them). This point would argue against the idea that Ephesians is merely a "letter essay" communicating general truths.

The abundant parallelism and repetition in the letter have been compared with Hebrew poetry, but they were also used in epideictic *rhetoric (i.e., in orations of praise concerning gods or humans). Rhetoric could expand statements, sometimes to underline their force; cf., e.g., "power" and "might" in Ephesians 1:19 (also Col 1:11; 2 Pet 2:11; but also, e.g., 1 Chron 29:12). Some compare this more flowery rhetorical style of repetition in Ephesians to what ancient writers called the Asian

rhetorical style, which would be appropriate in and around Ephesus. Worship language is more common in the first three chapters of the letter, which elaborate the sort of introductory prayer and thanksgiving that often appeared in ancient letters. To the extent that we can speak of rhetoric in letters (which were usually nonrhetorical, but also usually did not include argumentation as Paul's letters do), the rhetoric here is mixed: the exhortation parts of his letter are "deliberative," intended to persuade the readers to a particular course of action; other parts of his letter are "epideictic," such as where he praises God and praises the church that is to reflect God's glory to creation.

It is possible that Paul, drafting other letters at the same time (e.g., Colossians), used a *scribe for some letters to help him adapt his basic message for different situations in different churches.

Situation. Paul writes this letter from Roman custody, probably in Rome. As readers in the Ephesian region of Asia Minor would know, he had been arrested on the charge of having brought a *Gentile into the temple (Acts 21:28-29; 28:16). Ethnic and cultural division between Jew and Gentile was a major issue in the Ephesian church (cf. Acts 19:17), and Paul was one of the best-qualified writers of antiquity to address both sides intelligently.

From his detention under Roman authorities (probably in Rome), Paul is also aware of the possibility of imminent persecution and the need for the church to be a good witness in society (cf. especially comment on Eph 5:21–6:9). He is also aware of the struggle of some of the believers with their own background in the occult practices of Asia Minor—*magic (Acts 19:19), astrology and attempts to escape the astrological power of Fate (cf. comment on Eph 1:8-11, 19-23; 3:9-11).

Commentaries. The most thorough and useful are Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); Markus Barth, *Ephesians,* AB 34, 34A, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974); and A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians,* WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990). Less technical but useful commentaries include Pheme Perkins, *Ephesians,* ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997); Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians,* Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison,* New Clarendon Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); George Johnston, *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon,* Century Bible (Greenwood, SC: Attic, 1967). Some of my primary sources for my treatment of Ephesians 5:18–6:9 appear in Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), pp. 133-224, 258-79.

1:1-2
Introduction

As notes in most translations point out, not all manuscripts include "in Ephesus" (v. 1). Many scholars have argued that Ephesians was originally sent to a number of *churches, of which Ephesus was only the most prominent. (Thus it would be a "circular letter," like imperial edicts.) But because Ephesus (the province's most prominent city) was one of the cities addressed, and because all these churches would presumably be in the area around Ephesus, the history of the Ephesian church will help us understand the background to this letter (see Acts 19:1-41).

"*Grace" and "peace" were variations of standard greetings and blessings from deity; what is significant here is that they are "from God the Father *and* the Lord Jesus Christ." See further the introduction to Paul's letters and comment on Romans 1:1-7.

1:3-14
Praise for Salvation

The opening, or *exordium,* of Paul's letter includes a benediction ("Praise be to God"—NIV, or "God be praised") and a prayer; ancient letters commonly included either prayers or thanksgivings, although Paul's elaboration of them here is unusual. Many Jewish prayers would begin with "Praise be to God who [helps his people in some way]." In Greek, 1:3-14 is one long praise to God; this one recounts, as Jewish prayers often did, God's redemptive plans and acts on behalf of his beloved people.

In these verses as many as eleven different terms used for Israel in the *Old Testament are applied to believers in Jesus. Because the church in Ephesus comprised both Jews and *Gentiles (Acts 19:17), and Jews and Gentiles had different cultural practices, the church may have had cultural and ethnic tension. Paul reminds believers that whatever their ethnic or cultural background, they are all one people in *Christ and must work together for God's purposes (cf. 2:11-22).

1:3. Today we distinguish between "the heavens" in a scientific sense (i.e., the outer atmosphere and the rest of the universe except the earth) and the spiritual place God lives. But in Paul's day he did not need to make this distinction to communicate to his readers; they divided "the heavenly realms" differently from the way we do. Almost everyone in the ancient world believed that the heavens had numerous levels (often three or seven), that different spiritual beings (various kinds of angels, *demons, stars, etc.) lived in different levels and that God or the purest spiritual beings lived in the highest heaven. In much Jewish teaching, the spirits of the righteous would live with God there after death. "Heavenly realms" (NIV) can thus mean both "where God is" (as here) and "where the angelic powers live" (as often in Ephesians).

1:4-5. Salvation was God's initiative, because of his love (Deut 7:7-9). The Old Testament declares that God "predestined" or (literally) "chose" Israel (e.g., Deut 14:2) in Abraham to be his covenant people and adopted them as his children, but that his people often fell short of the covenant. Paul explains that in a practical sense one becomes a member of God's covenant by Christ and what God has done, not by one's background.

1:6. One reason God chose Israel was for them to bring him glory (Is 60:21; 61:3; Jer 13:11); so central was revealing his glory that even his acts of judgment were meant to turn people to him (Ex 7:5; Amos 4:6), the real source of life (Jer 2:13).

1:7-8. God had redeemed Israel (i.e., freed them from slavery) through the blood of the Passover lamb. The Old Testament also connected forgiveness with the blood of animal sacrifices. Paul blends these images here. Closely related terms such as "wisdom" and "insight" were often paired in biblical language (e.g., Ex 31:3; 35:31; Prov 1:2, 7; 2:2, 6).

1:9-12. Jewish people sometimes spoke of the secrets or mysteries of God's plan, now revealed (e.g., Dan 2:27-30; *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 4.6; 11.19). It was a common Jewish belief that history was moving through many stages to its climax, when everything would be put under God's rule. Some philosophers argued that the whole universe was permeated by God and would be absorbed back into him. Like Jewish writers who adapted the language of such philosophers, Paul believes that history moves toward a climax of subordination to God, not absorption into him. The Old Tes-

tament and Judaism recognized that God had a sovereign plan in history to bring it to this climax. On "inheritance" (KJV, NASB, NRSV), see comment on 1:13-14. On God's ultimate purpose here, see comment on 3:8-11.

1:13-14. A wax seal would have a mark of ownership or identification stamped in it, identifying who was attesting what was inside the container that had been sealed. Because Scripture suggested that the *Spirit would be made especially available in the time of the end (cf., e.g., Joel 2:28), Paul here speaks of the Spirit as a "deposit" (NIV)—a term used in ancient business documents to mean a "down payment." Those who had tasted the Spirit had begun to taste the life of the future world that God had promised his people.

After God "redeemed" (see comment on 1:7-8) Israel from slavery in Egypt, he led them to their "inheritance" or "possession" in the Promised Land. Later Jewish literature viewed the world to come as Israel's ultimate "inheritance," and early Christian writers used this language the same way (Mt 5:5; 25:34; Rom 8:17; 1 Cor 6:9; Jas 2:5). For Paul, Christians are God's people, redeemed but waiting for the completion of their redemption; as with Israel of old, God's presence among them is the assurance that he will take them into the land he has promised (cf. Hag 2:5). Writers sometimes repeated a refrain, as here (for God's praise in 1:6, 12, 14); the repetition of "in whom" (1:7, 11, 13; cf. 2:21-22; 3:12) also reinforces the point (similar to *rhetorical *anaphora*, repeating an opening phrase).

1:15-23
Prayer for Revelation

Ancient letters often included prayers or mention of prayers for the recipients, though these were typically brief.

1:15-16. Like pious Jews, pious Christians apparently had a time set aside for prayer each day. Many pious Jews prayed several times a day, and if Paul continued such a custom we can understand how he could pray for all his churches.

1:17-18. Jewish people commonly prayed for enlightened eyes to understand God's Word; the *Old Testament also spoke of opening one's eyes to God's Word (Ps 119:18) or to other spiritual realities (2 Kings 6:17). Some Jewish sources characterized the Spirit of God as the "Spirit of wisdom" (cf. 1QS 4.3 in the Dead Sea Scrolls; **4 Ezra* 5:22; the Old Testament especially emphasizes this: e.g., Ex 28:3; 31:3; 35:31; Is 11:2; cf. Deut 34:9). For blessings about enlightening, see, for example, Numbers 6:25; Psalm 19:8; for enlightening with wisdom, see, e.g., 1QS 2.3 in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

*Rhetorically skilled writers often introduced major themes in their introduction, and Paul is no exception. He is about to explain the points that he has been praying for them to understand. On "inheritance," see comment on 1:13-14.

1:19-20. A daily Jewish prayer viewed God's ability to raise the dead in the future as the ultimate example of his power. Paul agrees, but for Paul the decisive event has already begun: the first installment of the future *resurrection has taken place. The position to a ruler's right was a position of great honor and authority; to be seated at God's right hand was to be enthroned as ruler of the cosmos, even if not all his enemies had yet been destroyed (Ps 110:1). The piling up of closely related words (such as power, strength and might; cf., e.g., 1 Chron 29:12; Is 40:26; Jer 16:21; **1 Enoch* 1:4; 60:16) fit Jewish praise and also the sort of flowery rhetoric valued for praise in Asia Minor; God's power was experienced through the Spirit (Mic 3:8; Zech 4:6; cf. Eph 1:17). On "heavenly places," see comment on 1:3.

1:21-23. The subordination of these powers beneath *Christ in this age and the coming one express the confident exaltation above enemies in Ps 110:1 (linked with Ps 8:6; cf. 1 Cor 15:27). Exorcists and magicians tried to manipulate powerful spirits by invoking their names (see comment on Acts 19:13); the supremacy of Jesus' name above all other names means that he is higher than all the spirit-powers being invoked and could not be exploited.

By Paul's day Jewish people commonly recognized that demonic and/or angelic powers were at work behind the political structures of the world; these powers were thus thought to direct the earthly rulers and peoples (v. 21; see Deut 32:8 LXX; **Jubilees* 15:31-32; 35:17; Dead Sea Scrolls 1QM 15.13-14; *1 Enoch* 61:10; esp. Dan 10:13, 20; for angelic ranks, *1 Enoch* 69:3).

A growing view among some in Paul's day

was that the world was run by Fate, which was usually expressed by the stars (which were viewed as heavenly beings). Some *mystery cults, such as the cult of Isis, later gained popularity by claiming power to free initiates from Fate. Jewish people often believed that these powers ruled all the nations except Israel (*Jubilees* 15:32; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 315.2.1; cf. Dan 10:21; 12:1); later, by the third century, some teachers explained that Israel had been lifted above those heavenly powers in Abraham their ancestor (*Genesis Rabbah* 44:12; 48:6). Paul says that those united with Christ had also been raised above those powers. His words would be a great encouragement to Christians who had been converted from an occult background (cf. Acts 19:18-20). Some may have expected *eschatological exaltation to the heavens (**Testament of Moses* 10:8-10; cf. Dan 12:3).

Jewish teachers came to speak of these heavenly powers that guided earthly rulers as "angels of the nations." Such beings were the ultimate expression of the spiritual division among different peoples, but Paul says that this distinction has been transcended in Christ—again making a point relevant to a congregation experiencing ethnic or cultural tensions (see introduction to 1:3-14). Thus Christ's body is "that which is filled by him who fills all"—"all" indicating especially representatives of all peoples in the church (4:6-10; cf. 3:19; 5:18). Rhetoric liked repetition for emphasis, thus the repetition of both filling and "all" here (for two "all" words together for emphasis, cf., e.g., *Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 118); rhetoric also liked alliteration, and in Greek these repeated words begin with *p*. Such language was common in expressing praise for gods or rulers.

2:1-10
Exalted with Christ Above Sin

Paul continues to explain God's gracious exaltation of the Christian with Christ.

2:1-2. Most Jewish people believed that *Satan or the chief of the heavenly angels of the nations ran the whole world except for Israel (cf., e.g., 1QS 3.20-21; 1QM 17.5-6 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls). "Ruler with authority over the realm of the air" was a natural title for his dominion; it was commonly believed that evil spirits circulated especially in the lowest realm of the heavens (i.e., the atmospheric realm), far below the realm of God's highest angels and his throne. "Air" was the usual term for the atmospheric heaven. Some spoke of nonphysical death: for example, *Pythagoreans considered apostates "dead," *Philo regarded those who neglected their soul as "dead," later *rabbis called the wicked "dead," and so forth.

2:3. Many Jewish people sought to explain all sin as the direct result of demonic activity (cf., e.g., *Jubilees* 10:8; 12:20; especially the "spirit of error" in the Dead Sea Scrolls, e.g., 1QS 3.19, 24-25). Paul does not see sin as always directly inspired by *demons but thinks that the world is pervaded with the devil's less direct influence (including in ethnic division—1:21-23); one is not delivered from this influence by one's Israelite ancestry but (vv. 4-6) through faith in Jesus. "Children of wrath" is a Semitic construction indicating people destined for judgment.

2:4-7. This picture of God's delighting to bestow his love on his people forever develops *Old Testament pictures of his special love for his people (e.g., Deut 7:6-9).

Scholars have compared the image of the exaltation of the believers in 2:6 with the fairly common Jewish image of the righteous enthroned in the world to come; Christians have begun to experience the life of the coming age in advance (see comment on 1:14). The context would drive an additional point home especially forcefully to readers once enslaved by fear of Fate, the stars, *magic or spirits: to be "seated with Christ" means in 2:6 what it meant in 1:20-21—to be enthroned over the evil powers. Christians need not fear spirits, Fate or anything else; their lives are ruled by God.

2:8-10. Good works flow from what God does in us, rather than God's work in us flowing from our works. God redeemed Israel before he gave them commandments (Ex 20:1), and did not choose them because of their righteousness (Deut 9:5-6); it was always his purpose for good works to flow from his *grace, even if Israel (like many people today) did not always grasp that point (Deut 5:29; 30:6, 11-14). Most Jewish people in Paul's day apparently agreed in principle that they were saved by God's grace in the covenant, but they did not extend this idea to

non-Jews, who could not inherit the covenant by virtue of birthright.

2:11-22
United in the New Temple

2:11-13. Most ancient Jewish people believed that non-Jews could never participate in the fullness of the covenant without circumcision, although they could be saved by keeping some basic commandments. To be circumcised was to be grafted into the community of Israel, to become part of God's covenant people. That done "by hands" evokes a negative phrase in the Greek version of the *Old Testament (usually associated with idolatry; e.g., Lev 26:1).

2:14-16. Paul writes this letter from prison because he has been falsely charged with taking a non-Jew inside the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 21:28). Taking a non-Jew beyond the specified dividing point in the temple was such an important breach of Jewish *law that the Romans even permitted Jewish leaders to execute violators of this law(*Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.194; 6.124-26). Paul's readers in Ephesus and Asia undoubtedly know why Paul is in prison (Acts 21:27, 29); thus for them, as well as for Paul, there can be no greater symbol of the barrier between Jew and non-Jew than "the dividing wall" of verse 14. But Paul says that this dividing wall is shattered in *Christ (cf. 2:20-22). Paul's message would have been difficult for believers in many cities; a few years after this letter, the *Gentile residents of Caesarea (where Paul had recently stayed, Acts 23:23) slaughtered thousands of its Jewish residents (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.457-58); Jews retaliated and attacked other cities (2.458-60); and Syrians then slaughtered thousands of Jews (2.461-68). For "He is our peace," cf. perhaps the Hebrew of Micah 5:5.

2:17-18. Isaiah 57:19 could be understood as referring to the scattered seed of Israel as those "who were far away," but not long before this passage God had promised that his house would be for foreigners too (Is 56:3-8). This text thus fittingly expresses Paul's point concerning the unity of Jew and Gentile in the new temple (cf. also Acts 2:39).

2:19. In many cities, foreigners who settled could remain "resident aliens" for generations, lacking voting rights and other privileges that belonged to citizens. Paul can play on the different senses of "house" in Greek: both "household" (as here) and a building (the temple as God's house; see 2:20-22).

2:20-22. In the Old Testament, the only division in the temple was between priests and laity, but by Paul's day architects had added barriers for non-Jews and for women (contrast 1 Kings 8:41-43); Paul says these barriers are abolished in God's true, spiritual temple. Some other Jewish writers spoke of God's people as his temple, but only Paul and other early Christians recognized that this new temple included non-Jews. (Paul derived the image of Christ as the cornerstone or capstone from Ps 118:22, probably via Jesus' teaching; see comment on Mk 11:10.)

3:1-13
The Mystery of a Unified People

The Bible had already taught that God would seek out non-Jews to join his people (Rom 16:26; e.g., Is 19:25); King David and others had welcomed non-Jews into the fellowship of God (e.g., 2 Sam 6:10-11; 8:18; 15:18-22; 18:2; 20:23; 24:18-24; 1 Chron 11:41, 46; 18:17). But to be full members of the covenant, male non-Jews had to be circumcised; by this period, men and women were also usually required to immerse themselves in water to become ritually pure. But the coming of *Christ had made it clear to his *apostles and prophets that by faith in Christ everyone could now approach God on the same terms.

Public speakers and writers frequently used a standard element of persuasion called *pathos,* an emotional appeal. By reminding his readers of what he, their apostle, had suffered for the ideal, multiethnic people that God was building, Paul appeals to them not to nullify his labors. The universal *church should be all that it is called to be, a united, multiethnic, interracial people in all its glory.

3:1. Being a Roman prisoner was normally a mark of shame but, like wounds (see comment on Gal 6:17), could arouse sympathy among loved ones. Paul's refusal to compromise the mission to the *Gentiles had precipitated his captivity (Acts 22:21-22; cf. 21:28).

3:2. Instead of immediately finishing the sentence begun in 3:1, Paul digresses concerning his mission for the Gentiles in 3:2-13; *digressions were common in ancient writings.

"Stewards" were household managers, often slaves or freedmen, with great responsibility and prestige in a wealthy home.

3:3-5. The term translated "mystery" was used in *mystery cults and elsewhere, but the main background for Paul's use of the term is in Daniel 2 and in Jewish writings (especially the *Dead Sea Scrolls) that follow Daniel. In the Dead Sea Scrolls it means especially God's plan for history, encoded in the Scriptures but understandable only to the wise or to those with the *Spirit's insight. Because most of Judaism believed that full-fledged prophets had ceased after the *Old Testament prophets died, Paul's claim that God has now actively unveiled his truth through "apostles and prophets" would underline for his hearers the uniqueness of the Christian claim. The content of his teaching would also be striking because of the frequent conflict between Jew and Gentile and frequency of anti-Judaism in antiquity. The "reading" (literally, 3:4) refers to the public reading of his letter in the worship service, necessary because most people could not read.

3:6. "Heirs" refers to the Old Testament idea that the Promised Land was Israel's inheritance; the "promise" was also a sole possession of Abraham's descendants (and those who joined that nation by circumcision). To make uncircumcised Gentile Christians part of this same covenant would have sounded like heresy to many Jewish readers, jolting their ethnic sensitivities.

3:7. The Old Testament often spoke of divine empowerment for God's servants (e.g., Ex 31:3; Judg 15:14); see comment on Ephesians 3:16.

3:8-9. When writers formed an unusual expression, as Paul does here (literally, "leaster"), it reinforced the point. For "stewardship" (NRSV: "administration"; NASB: "plan"), see comment on 3:1-2; for "mystery," see comment on 3:3-5.

3:10-11. Some pre-Christian Jewish texts also speak of God showing the angels his power and glory through his people, and thus receiving their praise. Because these heavenly "rulers" were viewed as angels of the different nations, the ethnic unity of the church (3:6-8) displayed the rule of God, whose authority transcended that of the angels and all earthly boundaries. The point is that the church, a people destined to bring eternal glory to God, represents God's ultimate purpose in history (see 1:9-12); all Christians should find their life's purpose in their role in that ultimate purpose (see 4:11-13).

3:12. "Boldness" often applied to the sort of frank speech appropriate among friends, but in Jewish circles also for prayer; here, conjoined with "confident access" (NASB), it probably relates to the certain place all members have in the household of God (2:18).

3:13. Roman detention was normally a matter of shame; Paul inverts this to honor in view of the reason he is detained. Paul also suffers for the purpose of serving the body of Christ as a whole; cities could view their local athletes as competing on their behalf in regional contests, and some viewed ideal leaders as acting or being used by God for the sake of their people.

3:14-21
Prayer for Empowerment

3:14. Paul returns to the point begun in 3:1 (writers often repeated some wording to signal that they were returning to their point after a *digression). Jewish prayers were usually offered standing, but kneeling or prostration was sometimes used (in the *Old Testament cf. 1 Kings 8:14, 22, 54; *Gentiles typically prostrated themselves also before rulers). Gentiles sometimes knelt to pray but this was not their usual posture for prayer except in extreme circumstances; like Jewish supplicants, they normally stretched out their arms with hands facing the gods being invoked (in the heavens, in the sea or toward statues).

3:15. Here Paul may mean that all peoples and families (i.e., each group descended from a common progenitor; see notes in NIV, NRSV) reflect God's own fatherhood over the world (cf., e.g., *Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.11.5); thus one would have to expect God's concern for all peoples (e.g., Gen 12:3). (Families "in heaven" may refer to the guardian angels of the nations.) Ancient writers often spoke of God as father in the sense of creator (*Gentiles often spoke of "the father of gods and people") and sometimes spoke of paternal authority in families as deriving from the example of God. The Roman father was also a supreme authority figure, with the right to rule all descendants as long as he lived.

3:16-17. Although Paul derives some language ("inner person") from the Greek world (see comment on 2 Cor 4:16), his ideas here are not specifically Greek, and other Jewish people had already adapted this language. Old Testament accounts associated the Spirit especially with prophetic endowment but also with purity, strength and prowess or ability to fulfill whatever God calls one to do; the Old Testament sometimes also presents internalizing the Bible as a way to overcome sin (e.g., Ps 119:11). Israelite piety also recognized God as the source of strength (e.g., Ex 15:2; Ps 18:1-2; 27:1; 59:17; 119:28; Jer 16:19). When Paul speaks of the ability to live rightly because *Christ himself lives in the believer through the Spirit, these points from the Old Testament are probably the closest parallels to his idea in ancient literature; apart from *Qumran texts (depending on the same biblical themes, esp. Ezek 36:25-27), rarely did anyone suggest that one's moral life would be empowered by the presence and activity of God. Paul advocates total reliance on *grace, even in the believer's ability to perform righteousness.

3:18-19. Many take "breadth and length and height and depth" to describe how all creation is filled with God's glory or as a description of the immeasurable vastness of his love. Some have suggested that Paul continues the temple image (2:18-22), describing the perfect cube proportions of the holy of holies in the Old Testament, although the idea is not explicit here. But the text probably applies the language of divine Wisdom (e.g., Job 11:5-9; cf. Job 28:12-28; Sirach 1:3) to God's love; cf. "manifold" (multifaceted) wisdom in 3:10.

3:20-21. Jewish people customarily ended their prayers with a blessing to God; sometimes the blessings closed with "forever and ever" (cf. 1 Chron 16:36; Ps 106:48). It was likewise customary to respond to prayers and benedictions with "Amen."

4:1-16
One Body, Many Members

Despite exceptions, most ancient letters simply addressed business or personal issues; many of Paul's letters, however, "preach." Persuasive speeches and letters often engaged in a detailed argument, but Paul to this point has mainly used "epideictic," or "praise," *rhetoric. He has praised the *church, calling it to be what God had planned for it to be. He now turns to an element characteristic of persuasive rhetoric (as the *exhortatio,* or exhortations) and more generally found in the advice of moralists and philosophers. Exhortation fills the rest of the book until the closing *peroratio,* or rousing conclusion, of 6:10-20.

4:1-2. Although gentleness was a recognized virtue even for rulers, Greek writers often viewed "meekness" in the sense of "humility" negatively, unless it was the socially appropriate self-abasement of a social inferior to a superior. On Paul's captivity (probably in Rome), see comment on 6:20.

4:3-6. Many Jewish teachers praised the virtue of peace. Paul drives home the point by repeating "one" multiple times (though in Greek it appears in varied forms). Some Jewish texts (especially in *Philo and **2 Baruch***) suggested that Israel was united because God was one. These texts would never have united Jew and *Gentile in one people, however, even though all the nations were admittedly joined in common humanity. Paul's language sounds closer to *Stoic philosophical language about the unity of creation (on the "body," see comment on 1 Cor 12:12). But even the common Greek rhetorical theme of concord (unity, peace) does not match Paul's emphasis on the unity that believers in Jesus share and must live out.

4:7-8. Paul adapts the text of Psalm 68:18, as ancient expounders of Scripture often did, to make his point (a later *targum of the Psalms rewords it much the same way that he does). This psalm refers to God's "going up" at Mount Sinai, as Jewish interpreters recognized, and Paul applies the principle to Jesus. (In some Jewish traditions, Moses ascended all the way to heaven to receive the *law; if Paul or any of his readers knew such traditions, it would make the application of this psalm to Jesus all the more vivid. But it is questionable how widely known this tradition was in Paul's day.) Paul's point is in harmony with the image of the psalm, although he changed its language; once a conqueror had received tribute and plunder from the defeated (as in Ps 68:18), he distributed most of these spoils to his soldiers (as here). Jesus's exaltation positions him to distribute gifts (listed in 4:11) to his people.

4:9-10. Paul interprets and applies the text just cited, the way a good Jewish teacher would. "Lower parts of the earth" probably means the realm of the dead, hence that Jesus had died (Ps 63:9; 86:13; Ezek 32:24; *Prayer of Manasseh* 13), although it could mean his descent from heaven to become a servant at his incarnation (Phil 2:7; cf. Ps 139:15).

4:11. "*Apostles" were literally commissioned messengers carrying out their sender's mission; as such, they were backed by the sender's authority to the extent that they accurately represented that commission. In the *New Testament, the term applies to commissioned agents of *Christ authorized in a special way (more authoritatively than others) to declare and propagate his will. "Prophets" were spokespersons for God, whose role was known from the *Old Testament and continued in the church; apostles were to prophets perhaps as prophetic judges (e.g., Samuel and Deborah) or seminal leaders (e.g., Elijah and Elisha) were to other Old Testament prophets—with special rank and authority.

"Evangelists," as proclaimers of good news (the message of Christ), were seen as "heralds," again a type of messenger. "Pastors" were literally "shepherds" (used for overseers in the Old Testament, e.g., Jer 23:2-4; a common image for leaders throughout the ancient Mediterranean world), elsewhere in the New Testament identified as overseers of local congregations (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1-2; cf. Tit 1:5, 7); they were called to shepherd God's people, at least partly by declaring his message accurately (cf. Jer 23:18-22). "Teachers" were expounders of the Scriptures and of the Jesus tradition; if they functioned like Jewish teachers, they probably offered biblical instruction to the congregation and trained others to expound the Scriptures as well.

As in many ancient lists, some of these terms may overlap considerably (the Greek indicates an especially strong overlap between "pastors" and "teachers"). They share a common focus and basis of authority as bearers of Christ's message. The authority is resident in their message and spiritual gifting; as in the case of Jewish teachers of God's message (as opposed to the chief priests), none represents institutional authority in the sense of a supralocal church hierarchy, which is not firmly attested until the early second century (although the translocal networking of churches certainly is). Together these ministers of God's Word were to equip all God's people for their ministry (4:12-16).

4:12. The term for "training" or "equipping" was sometimes used in the Greek world to describe training or discipline, including in the work of philosophers and teachers.

4:13-16. The images of a person growing into maturity and a person in trouble as a ship being tossed about by waves were common in Paul's day. The image of growing to maturity was not usually applied to an entire community of people as here, but the point would have been no less easy to grasp. Paul's image is a generic one, lacking standard Jewish images for the end time; he may therefore refer to the church's need for maturity in general, rather than specifically predicting its completion in the end time.

4:17–5:2
Living the New Life

4:17-19. Ancient thinkers sometimes depicted moral ignorance as blinded or darkened minds. Greek writers often developed their moral exhortation by contrasting opposites, as Paul does here. Literature from this period demonstrates that most Jewish people would have described non-Jews in language similar to that which Paul uses (cf. earlier Lev 18:3, 24-30; 20:23-24; Deut 26:16-19). What is significant is that Paul refuses to call ethnically Gentile Christians "Gentiles" any longer; they may be ethnically Gentile, but they are to be *ethically* Jewish. Premarital sex, homosexual intercourse and idolatry were considered typically Gentile sins from which nearly all Jews abstained; they expected *proselytes to Judaism to reject this former lifestyle. By contrast, Greeks were raised with this lifestyle; for example, many Greek men had intercourse or affairs with boys on the verge of puberty or with adolescents. "Walk" (KJV, NASB) means "behave"; see comment on Galatians 5:16; "hardness of heart" is common in the *Old Testament (e.g., Ex 4:21; Ps 95:8).

4:20-24. The "new self" (v. 24) is literally "the new person," who is (literally) "created according to God," which means according to his image or likeness. Paul presumably alludes to

the way God originally made Adam and Eve in his image, and says that the new person that a Christian has become is equipped with moral purity because he or she is made like God morally (cf. comment on Rom 5:12-21). Thus, he points out, one should live accordingly. "Clothing" and "unclothing" provide a natural image, used in the Old Testament and Greek literature, for "putting on" and "putting off" or "removing" some kinds of behavior (Job 29:14; Ps 109:18; especially Is 61:3, 10; see comment on Rom 13:12), other attributes (2 Chron 6:41; Ps 93:1) and so forth.

Jewish wisdom writers and Greek philosophers could have agreed with Paul's emphasis on "renewing the mind"; they understood that one's attitudes and values affected one's lifestyle. They even understood conversion to Judaism or philosophy as adopting a new way of life. But Paul's basis for renewal differs from theirs; he bases it on the new kind of life available in Christ, a kind of life that most Jewish people expected only in the world to come (after the *resurrection of the dead).

4:25. Except for 4:30 and 4:32–5:2, most of Paul's moral exhortations in 4:25–5:2 are the sort that most ancient moralists uttered. Exhortations to truthfulness, labor, opposition to slander and so forth were standard. Failures in these areas are not sins attributed only to *Gentiles (cf. 4:17-19) but those with which Jewish people also struggled.

Paul's way of overcoming moral problems differs from that of other ancient moralists (4:22-24, 32), but he can find common ground with many moralists in his culture who oppose the same wrongs that he does. Despite many points in common with the ethics of his culture, however, Paul often cites the Old Testament as his ethical authority; his exhortation to truthfulness here echoes a line from the commandments listed in Zechariah 8:16-17, where one must speak truth to one another and truthfulness may be opposed to false witness in a legal setting.

4:26. The exhortation to avoid sinning while angry is from Psalm 4:4; on the wickedness of those who hold anger overnight, cf. Hosea 7:6; the *Essenes and some Greek philosophers also required that disputes be settled the same day. (For taking care of matters before nightfall, cf. Deut 24:13, 15.) Learning to speak in the most helpful way (4:29) was also stressed.

4:27. The image here might be one of warfare, and that the one who sins surrenders ground to the devil's side (cf. 6:10-20). Following the Old Testament, Jewish tradition understood the devil (*Satan, Belial) as deceiver, tempter and accuser.

4:28. Judaism valued laboring with one's hands and sharing with the poor. Although Greek artisans no doubt prided themselves in their work, the aristocracy throughout the Mediterranean world disdained work with one's hands as the duty of the lower classes.

4:29. Ancient wisdom literature often emphasized learning to speak rightly (cf. 4:25; 5:3-4); many sayings in Proverbs emphasize the idea, including the encouragement to speak gracious, uplifting words (e.g., 12:25; 15:23; 25:11; cf. Zech 1:13).

4:30. "Grieving" the *Spirit reflects a serious offense; in Isaiah 63:10 (one of only two Old Testament texts to use the title "holy spirit"), it refers to Israel's rebellion in the wilderness, which led to their rejection by God. Similarly, Israel's rebellion against the Spirit led Moses to sin with his mouth according to Psalm 106:33 (cf. Num 20:10; Deut 3:26). On "sealing" as a sign attesting that no one had tampered with the sealed merchandise or document, see comment on 1:13-14. The Ephesians must preserve their attestation for the day when their redemption would be complete (the Old Testament "day of the Lord," when he would judge the world and vindicate his people).

4:31. Vice lists were a common literary form in the writings of ancient moralists; sometimes all the vices listed pertained to a particular topic, as here (anger). Piling up related terms reinforced a point.

4:32–5:2. Other moralists, including Greek and Roman non-Christians, appealed to the imitation of God for a standard of ethics. But non-Christian writers of Paul's day could not cite the example of a god who had lovingly sacrificed himself for his people (4:32–5:2). (Some scholars have appealed to the example of the Titan Prometheus, who suffered for his betrayal of divine secrets to people. But it is not clear that Prometheus expected the severe punishment he received, and the example would not have been prominent; given the

punishment of the Titans and wounds inflicted on immortals in Greek mythology [e.g., the wounding of Ares in the *Iliad*], Prometheus cannot offer a pre-Christian parallel to the Christian idea of Jesus, who, though divine, voluntarily offered himself for humanity. Furthermore, the qualitative difference between Greek and Jewish conceptions of deity makes comparison between the stories of Prometheus and Jesus even less likely.) Earlier Scripture also urged imitation of God (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2), a theme elaborated in Jewish tradition (e.g., **Letter of Aristeas* 188, 190, 192, 208, 209, 210, 254, 281; *Philo, *Special Laws* 4.73; *Decalogue* 98, 100; *Virtues* 168; *Allegorical Interpretation* 1.48; *Sifra Qedoshim* par. 1.195.1.3).

On God's accepting someone as a fragrant aroma, cf. Ezekiel 20:41 (his saved people); Ephesians 5:2 means that God accepted Jesus as a pleasing sacrifice (see Gen 8:21; Ex 29:18).

5:3-20
More Exhortations

5:3-6. Premarital and other immoral sex, insolent speech and sexual humor were as common in ancient *Gentile society as they are in many societies today. Paul did not water down God's standards to accommodate the culture; instead he warned that those who engaged in this lifestyle would not be among God's people in the world to come. Sexual humor was highlighted, for example, in mimes used for entertainment; Paul would not have approved of finding them humorous. On vice lists and "inheriting" the *kingdom of God, see comment on 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.

5:7. Here Paul does not advocate total separatism (like that of the wilderness community of the *Dead Sea Scrolls), or even the partial separatism that Judaism's food and sabbath laws imposed on *Diaspora Jews. But many in Greco-Roman society would have branded Christians as antisocial for refusing to take part in immoral conversation and, even more, in the pervasive civic religious cults that were regarded as a mark of local loyalty.

5:8-13. Jewish texts (most prominently the Dead Sea Scrolls) often used "light" and "darkness" to contrast good and evil, and Paul milks this image here. Taverns often doubled as brothels upstairs, exploiting slave prostitutes; deeds that people wished to perform in secret were often performed at night. Some Greek religious groups known as "*mystery cults" emphasized night initiations, and some of them also developed a reputation for sexual immorality; because some Roman critics of all foreign religions associated Christians with immoral cults, Paul would have all the more reason to wish to dissociate Christianity from cults he already regards as pagan. People could enact deeds in darkness of which they would have been ashamed in public (cf. Is 29:15; 47:10).

5:14. Some commentators have suggested that here Paul cites an expository paraphrase of Scripture, like a *targum on a text such as Isaiah 60:1 or perhaps Daniel 12:2. Others think that Paul cites an early Christian *prophecy or song, composed by either Paul or another prophet (cf. 1 Cor 14:37). Also possible is a combination of the two (a prophecy or song based on biblical texts); in any case the quotation was no doubt familiar to both Paul and the letter's first hearers.

5:15-17. "Redeeming the time" (KJV, literally) probably means "making the most of the time"; cf. Psalm 90:12; **Letter of Aristeas* 256; the idea may resemble "seizing the opportunity." The *LXX of Daniel 2:8 uses the phrase for trying to gain a delay ("buying time"). (The other possible interpretation is bringing redemption to the present evil age.) That a "time of evils" would affect how the prudent behaved is also expressed in Amos 5:13. In Jewish tradition "wisdom" and "foolishness" had much more to do with morality than they did in pagan thought (e.g., Jer 29:23).

5:18. In Greek, the participles of verses 19-21 flow out of Paul's command to "be filled with the Spirit" and express the nature of *Spirit-filled living. Jewish tradition regarded drunkenness as scandalous behavior (cf. Prov 23:20-35).

Drunkenness was associated with loss of self-control and was common in the late-night banquets of the rich and the taverns of the poor. Sometimes people also associated it with a sort of inspiration, madness or possession by Dionysus, god of wine. In some settings, Dionysus's most active worshipers had a reputation for being possessed by him and performing sexual acts or acts full of sexual

symbolism (often to the distaste of conservative Romans). Being controlled by drink was a far cry from inspiration by God's Spirit.

5:19. Both Greeks and Jews commonly believed that music could come by inspiration, an idea that appears in the *Old Testament as well. Paul emphasizes the kind of worship that Jewish people celebrated in the temple (e.g., psalms and hymns); we cannot be sure whether most other Jewish gatherings, such as those in *synagogues, included the singing of psalms and hymns in this period. "Spiritual songs" may refer to Spirit-inspired songs (cf. 1 Chron 25:1-6; Eph 5:18), possibly spontaneous, which would clearly distinguish Christian worship from nearly all worship in antiquity (cf. 1 Cor 14:15).

5:20. The ancient writers (Jewish writers and some Greco-Roman, especially *Stoic, writers) who stressed thanking God for everything were those who believed that God (whether the Stoic Fate or the personal God of Judaism) ruled the course of events.

5:21-33
Wives and Husbands

The section 5:21–6:9 addresses what we call "household codes"; ancients used such codes to express what their culture regarded as virtuous relations within the family. In Paul's day, many Romans were troubled by the spread of "religions from the East" (e.g., Isis worship, Judaism and Christianity), which they thought could undermine traditional Roman family values. Members of these minority religions often tried to show their support for those values by using household codes, a standard form of exhortations developed by philosophers from *Aristotle on. These exhortations about how the head of a household should deal with members of his family often break down into discussions of husband-wife, father-child and master-slave relationships. Paul borrows this form of discussion from standard Greco-Roman moral writing. Paul is probably concerned with outsiders' views of Jesus' movement (cf. 1 Tim 5:14; Tit 2:5). But unlike most ancient writers, Paul undermines a basic premise of these codes: the male head of the house's assumption of absolute authority.

5:21. The final expression of being filled with the Spirit is "submitting to one another" because *Christ is one's Lord. All the household codes Paul proposes are based on this idea. But although it was customary to call on wives, children and slaves to submit in various ways, to call *all* members of a group (including the *paterfamilias,* the male head of the household) to submit to one another (cf. Mark 10:43-45) was unheard of. A minority of ancient writers did express the value of mutual concern and sensitivity.

5:22-24. Wifely submission remained the ideal (see e.g., *Philo, *Creation* 167; *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.255; Marcus Aurelius 1.17.7). Most ancient writers expected wives to obey their husbands, desiring in them a quiet and meek demeanor; some marriage contracts even stated a requirement for absolute obedience. This requirement made sense especially to Greek thinkers, who could not conceive of wives as equals. Age differences contributed to this disparity: husbands were normally older than their wives, often by over a decade in Greek culture (with men frequently marrying around age thirty and women in their teens, sometimes early teens).

In this passage, however, Paul differs from the usual conventions, which normally addressed only the male head of the household. The closest Paul comes to *specifically* defining submission here is "respect" (v. 33), and in the Greek text, wifely submission to a husband (v. 22) is only one example of general mutual submission of Christians (the verb of v. 22 is borrowed directly from v. 21 and thus cannot mean something different). Note also the difference in 5:25.

5:25. Although it was assumed that husbands should love their wives, ancient household codes typically told husbands not how to love their wives but how to rule them. Although Paul upholds the ancient ideal of wifely submission, he qualifies it by placing it in the context of mutual submission: husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the *church, by willingly laying down their lives for them. At the same time that he relates Christianity to the standards of his culture, he subverts some cultural values by going far beyond them. Both husbands and wives must submit and love (5:2, 21).

5:26. This "washing" might allude figuratively to the bride's prenuptial washing (of

course, washing was natural before any occasion on which one wished to impress another positively). After this washing the bride was perfumed, anointed and arrayed in wedding clothes. The betrothal ceremony in Judaism also came to be called "the sanctification of the bride," setting her apart for her husband. The "word" naturally refers to the saving *gospel of Christ (1:13).

5:27. After the bride's preparation (5:26), the next stage in a Jewish wedding was the bride's removal from her father's house to the groom's house, followed by the bride's introduction into the groom's home. "In glory" (NASB) or "splendor" (NRSV) also fits the image of the passage, appropriate to the bridal array (5:26).

5:28-32. Although Greek and Roman moralists sometimes alluded to the unity of husband and wife, the image was especially prominent in Judaism, which shared Paul's and Jesus' dependence on Genesis 2:24, mentioned explicitly in Ephesians 5:31. The head-body analogy of 5:23 here becomes an image of unity rather than one of authority.

5:33. Writers sometimes closed a book or section with a concluding summary; Paul here summarizes the point of 5:21-32: the wife should respect her husband, and the husband should love his wife.

6:1-4
Children and Fathers

Jewish and Greco-Roman writers unanimously agreed that children needed to honor their parents, and, at least till they grew up, needed to obey them as well. The command to honor one's parents was in the *Old Testament (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16) and included living in such a way as to bring honor on them in a godly society (Deut 21:18-21). Many Jewish writers believed that honoring one's parents was the most important commandment. Household codes (and thus this passage) particularly addressed minor children.

At the same time, children were often taught through beating, which was standard in child rearing and education; fathers were considered responsible for their education. Paul may be among the minority of ancient writers who disapprove of excessive discipline (6:4). (Greek and Roman society was even harsher on newborn children; because an infant was accepted as a legal person only when the father officially recognized it, babies could be abandoned or, if deformed, killed. Early Christians and Jews unanimously opposed both abortion and abandonment. This text, however, addresses the discipline of minors in the household.)

6:5-9
Slaves and Masters

Household codes (see comment at 5:21-33) told the male householder how to rule his wife, children and slaves. Of these, slaves more often faced the worst abuses, though household slaves could often become free (see comment on 1 Cor 7:21-22).

The slaveholding class had various stereotypes of slaves, for example that they were lazy, especially when no one was looking. Paul encourages hard work but gives slaves a new hope and a new motive for their labor.

Given Christians' tenuous social situation (cf. 1 Tim 5:14; 6:1), Paul urges Christian slaves, like wives, to submit to the head of the household as if to Christ, but this duty is again *reciprocal.* Only a few writers in the ancient world suggested that slaves were in theory their masters' spiritual equals (cf. Job 31:13-15), and so far as we know only Paul goes so far as to suggest that in practice masters do the same for slaves as slaves should do for them (6:9).

When *Aristotle complained about a few philosophers who thought that slavery was wrong because against nature, the philosophers he cited did not state matters as plainly as Paul does here. Paul confronts the practical issue of how slaves can deal with their situation, not whether slavery should be abolished (an issue not relevant to his point in the context of household codes); almost no one discussed the question in his day. In the Roman Empire even slave revolts were meant to free particular slaves, not to end slavery, and these were brutally suppressed anyway. But the way Paul deals with the issue leaves no doubt where he would have stood had we put the question of slavery's abolition to him: people are equals before God (6:9). Apart from groups that eschewed ownership of everything, others who might have agreed with Paul in principle did not carry the prac-

tical advice as far as he (mutual submission). For more on slavery in general, see the introduction to Philemon.

6:10-20
Divine Armor

Although Paul does not follow a formal *rhetorical outline in Ephesians, 6:10-20 could resemble a *peroratio,* a rousing conclusion to his case. Philosophers and other speakers sometimes described their conflict with wicked ideas as wrestling in an athletic contest or a war; they also used lists of virtues, the general idea of which Paul incorporates here. Some compare aspects of Paul's conclusion to the exhortations that generals gave to their armies before battle.

The *Old Testament has many pictures of Israel as God's warriors, and God himself appears as a warrior in full armor, dealing out his justice (Is 59:17; cf. Wisdom of Solomon 5:17-20). But although Paul borrows his language from the Old Testament, the image Paul's words in this paragraph would have evoked for most of his hearers is that of a Roman soldier ready to do battle. Most adults who heard his letter read would have seen Roman soldiers and could relate this image to their spiritual warfare against the demonic powers at work in the world; God who fought for them had supplied them his armor.

Paul omits some pieces of the Roman soldier's armor in his description; for instance, since he mentions only one offensive weapon, he uses the sword but omits the lance (the *pilum*) and dagger. (Usually soldiers had two *pila;* they could imbed the first into an enemy shield, making it unwieldy, and then strike with the second.) Paul probably has no particular purpose in correlating specific strengths of the Christian with specific armor body parts (cf. 1 Thess 5:8); rather, he wants his readers to know that they need all these strengths to be victorious.

6:10-11. Ancient exhortations regarded retreat and wounds in the back as disgraceful (note that none of the following armor covers the back). In the day of battle, Roman soldiers were to stand their ground, not retreat. As long as they stood together on a flat, open field and did not break ranks, their legions were considered virtually invincible.

6:12. Some people in the Old Testament learned that the nature of their battle was spiritual (cf. Gen 32:22-32; Dan 10:10-21), although in both Daniel and Paul the battle was fought by prayerfully submitting to God and doing his will, not by directly addressing the hostile powers in the heavens (Dan 10:12-13, 21). Some pagan deities were called "world rulers," and terms for high ranks of good and evil angels were becoming popular in this period (see comment on Eph 1:21-23); "spiritual beings of wickedness" is idiomatic Greek for "evil spirits," a Jewish and *New Testament term.

6:13. The "evil day" could refer generically to any time of judgment or testing (cf., e.g., Amos 5:13; 6:3; 2 Maccabees 1:5; Sirach 51:11-12; Eph 5:16), though some scholars think it applies specifically to the period of intense tribulation Jewish people expected prior to the end of the age (cf. Dan 12:1), which some scholars believe Paul elsewhere regarded as present (cf. Rom 8:22-23). For "stand," see comment on 6:10-11.

6:14. The "belt" or "girdle" may refer to the leather apron beneath the armor or to the metal belt over the tunic protecting the lower abdomen. The "breastplate" normally consisted of leather overlaid with metal, and it protected the chest in battle; like the helmet (6:17), it was used only in battle, not for normal wear. Roman soldiers were to face forward in battle, side by side, so the armor needed to protect only their front. In view of Isaiah 59:17 (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 5:18), this "breastplate of righteousness" is truly "God's armor" (6:13).

6:15. Soldiers needed to wear sandals or boots (technically the Roman *caliga,* a half boot) so they could advance toward the enemy undistracted about what they might step on; this gear was essential to their "preparation" for battle. Paul takes the image especially from the herald of Isaiah 52:7 who announces good news: sharing the message of *Christ advances God's army against the enemy's position.

6:16. Roman soldiers were most commonly equipped with large rectangular wooden shields, four feet high, the fronts of which were made of leather. Before battles in which flaming arrows might be fired, the leather would be wetted to quench any fiery darts launched against them. After Roman legionaries closed ranks, the front row holding

shields forward and those behind them holding shields above them, they were deemed virtually invulnerable to any attack from flaming arrows.

Because the Greek and Roman god of passion (called Eros and Cupid, respectively) was said to strike with flaming arrows, some of Paul's readers may have thought specifically of the temptation of sexual desire in this verse, although Paul probably intended the image to cover more than that danger (cf. Ps 11:2; 57:4; 58:3-7; 64:3; perhaps 120:1-4; Prov 25:18).

6:17. The bronze or iron helmet, equipped with cheek pieces, was necessary to protect the head; though essential garb for battle, it was normally not worn outside battle. For the phrase "helmet of salvation," see Isaiah 59:17; cf. comment on Ephesians 6:14. The double-edged sword (*gladius,* 20–24 inches long) was a weapon used when close battle was joined with the enemy and the heavy pikes that frontline soldiers carried were no longer practical. Thus Paul implies that the battle is to be joined especially by engaging those who do not know God's word (the *gospel) with its message, after one is spiritually prepared in the other ways listed here. Paul's ministry was thus particularly strategic, because it included close-range battle advancing into enemy ranks (vv. 19-20).

6:18-19. It is not clear that prayer for one another (v. 18) continues the figurative image of warfare in the preceding context, but if it does it might relate to how the soldiers had to stand together in their battle formation, covering one another by moving as a solid unit. A Roman soldier by himself was vulnerable, but as a unified army a Roman legion was considered virtually invincible. "Watching" or "being alert" may also be military language (suggested by Jesus; cf. Mk 14:38). Prayer in the *Spirit probably implies *inspired* prayer (cf. 1 Cor 14). In Greek, the alliteration of multiple *p-* words could appeal to Paul's hearers as rhetorically sensitive.

6:20. Ambassadors were to be received with all the respect due the ones who sent them; as heralds, they were to be immune from hostility even if they represented an enemy kingdom. Paul, an "ambassador" of the greatest king and the greatest *kingdom (6:20) is instead chained in Rome for his mission of peace (6:15). In Greek literature, a true philosopher was characterized by his "boldness," or frank speech.

Like 3:1-13, this section adds *pathos,* or feeling; although its most important function is to solicit prayer, it also sets an example for the *church. Chains were normally deemed a mark of great shame.

6:21-24
Closing Greetings

6:21-22. Mail and other news were normally carried by travelers, because the Roman Empire had no official postal service except for imperial business.

6:23-24. The *Old Testament promised God's covenant love to all who loved God (Ex 20:6; Deut 5:10; Neh 1:5; Dan 9:4; cf. 1 Kings 8:23); here the promise applies specifically to those who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians

Introduction

Authorship. Given the personal allusions and style, the vast majority of *New Testament scholars accept Philippians as an authentic letter (or letters) by Paul.

Unity. Some scholars have divided Philippians up into smaller units (more common in the past than today). The division of Philippians is not impossible: short letters were often sent in antiquity, and Paul maintained regular contact with the Philippians. Conversely, letters often had multiple subjects, especially when they were as long as Philippians. Two factors ultimately support the letter's unity: (1) the burden of proof is on those who would divide it, because different letters are usually distinguishable in letter collections; (2) the arguments for division are based on modern letter-writing conventions that overlook ancient *rhetorical and epistolary conventions.

Structure. Chapter 1 addresses topics of Paul and the Philippians' common labor in the *gospel (using motifs from ancient friendship letters). Chapter 2 provides models for imitation (in which he includes letters of recommendation). Chapter 3 includes a *digression (common in ancient letters). Chapter 4 turns to the main business of the letter (a thank-you note eager to avoid any suggestions of the common ancient *patron-*client ideology).

Situation. Paul states that the purpose of Philippians is to thank them (4:10-20); but writing from prison (probably in Rome, as a majority of scholars think), he also wishes to address some other issues, including the likely further persecution the *church will face and an exhortation to work together. As much as the Philippian church (probably made up of several house churches) loved Paul, its members were divided among themselves; thus the recurrent exhortations to unity (1:27; 2:2, 14) and mutual service (2:3-11). Exhortations to unity were commonplace in antiquity, but usually corresponded to genuinely present and no less common divisions. At least part of the division here revolves around disagreement between two of Paul's fellow laborers, possibly leaders of separate house churches (4:2-3). If opposition to Paul exists, it probably involves Jewish Christians who advocate circumcision, if Paul believes they have already arrived in Philippi (3:2-21).

Commentaries. Useful commentaries for background include Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians,* WBC 43 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983); and Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). On a less technical level, see, e.g., Ben Witherington III, *Friendship and Finances in Philippi* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1994).

1:1-2
Introduction

1:1. The title "servants" is not necessarily demeaning in either a Jewish setting (the prophets had been called "servants of God") or a Greco-Roman one (slaves of the emperor and other high officials wielded far more power than independent free persons). On "overseers" and "deacons," see comment on 1 Timothy 3:1, 8, where these terms also occur together. Some letters opened by naming multiple authors, yet continued as if written only by the first one (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 16.11.1).

1:2. Paul here Christianizes a customary ancient greeting form (see comment on Rom 1:7).

1:3-11
Thanks to God for the Philippians

Thanksgivings were common in ancient letters; Paul is particularly fond of them, omitting them in congregational letters only to the Galatians, and there for obvious reasons.

1:3-4. Jewish language sometimes connects prayers with "memorials" or "remembrances" before God (as in Rom 1:9); here Paul may mean that he thanks God during his regular prayers for the Philippians (cf. Phil 4:6). Letter writers often remarked that they had joy when thinking of or hearing about the recipient.

1:5. The term translated "participation" (NASB) or "partnership" (NIV) was often used in an economic sense for those who "share" (cf. NRSV) monetarily. Here it includes the financial help the Philippians have given (4:10-20).

1:6. "Day of *Christ Jesus" adapts *Old Testament language for the "day of the Lord," and so assumes that Christ is divine. Writers or speakers of exhortations or requests often expressed confidence that the recipient would do well; Paul's confidence in their perseverance is based on 1:5, 7.

1:7. Letters of friendship often mentioned sharing one another's feelings (including sorrows). Given his imprisonment and legal situation, Paul also naturally uses language common in legal proceedings: the "defense" and "confirmation," or vindication, acquittal. His situation was relevant to their own (see comment on Phil 1:19). People often abandoned their friends if the latter were imprisoned or otherwise shamed, but loyalty was respected.

1:8. Letters of friendship often displayed affection and mentioned the writer's longing for his friends. Ancients commonly called on a deity as a witness, assuming the deity's knowledge; to lie under such conditions was to invite the deity's wrath.

1:9-11. As Paul does here, philosophers also stressed the need to discern what was good from what was bad. On the source of "righteousness" (v. 11), see also comment on 3:9.

1:12-26
The Profit in Hardship

Greek philosophers typically declared that neither imprisonment nor death mattered; only one's attitude did. Paul partly agrees with this view but for very different reasons: God's sovereign use of hardship for his glory (1:12-14, a Jewish and *Old Testament belief) and the superiority of undistracted devotion to Jesus (1:21, 23). Letters often filled in readers on recent news; public documents and speeches usually included a *narrative component leading up to the circumstances of writing.

1:12. *Stoic philosophers argued that imprisonment, like death, was not a bad thing; Jewish faith recognized that God was sovereign even in sufferings (cf., e.g., Joseph's imprisonment).

1:13. Some commentators have suggested that "palace" or "praetorium" here may refer to a provincial governor's residence, such as the place of Paul's detention in Caesarea (Acts 23:35); Paul was often detained (2 Cor 11:23), and a detention in Asia or in Syria-Palestine would clarify the presence of so many helpers in Colossians 4:10-15. Others, taking "Caesar's household" (4:22) literally, think that "praetorium" here refers to detention in Rome by the "praetorian guard" (NASB), as in Acts 28:16; the centrality of Rome in the empire attracted many people, which could account for the presence of the ministers in Colossians 4:10-15. No army was allowed in Italy, but the Praetorian Guard consisted of several thousand free Italian soldiers in twelve cohorts of as many as a thousand each. They were the emperor's elite bodyguard under the praetorian prefect. Viewed as *clients of the emperor

(thus part of his extended household), they were kept loyal with the highest pay in the Roman military; they were also kept loyal by the leadership of a prefect who could never legally become emperor (being a knight rather than a senator).

1:14-17. Despite the disapproval of some philosophers, competition for honor was a central value for men in much of society, including, conspicuously, Rome and its colonies. Jewish teachers allowed that serving God from impure motives was better than not serving him at all. They also unequivocally insisted, however, that those who used the *law only for their own gain would not share in the world to come. Ancient writers and speakers sometimes outlined alternatives (1:15) before elaborating them (1:16-17).

1:18. "What then?" was a common phrase for furthering an argument or transitioning to a conclusion. One could repeat a word or phrase for emphasis (thus here Paul's rejoicing, though he varies the verb tense and voice; ancient hearers also appreciated variation).

1:19. "This will turn out for my deliverance" precisely echoes Job 13:16 in the *Septuagint, although Paul, unlike Job, sees God as his defender here. "Salvation" (KJV) often meant physical "deliverance," sometimes from prison, and in this context it must have this meaning. Not all residents of Philippi were citizens, but those who were Philippian citizens (who would often be the most prominent members of the *church) were also Roman citizens (see comment on 3:20) and as such enjoyed certain legal protections. Paul's fate in court as a Christian who was also a Roman citizen would set a legal precedent that could affect their own legal standing, so they would have more than one reason for concern about how his case turned out.

1:20-23. Ancient speakers sometimes contemplated their options in front of their audiences (though the choice here is not really Paul's). Philosophers often argued that death was neutral, not evil; it was either annihilation or the migration of the soul from one place to another. They contended that it could be either advantageous or not, and that one could choose accordingly. Paul sees death as an evil (1 Cor 15:26) and not something to be chosen, but also, when it comes in God's plan, as a way to pursue *Christ undistracted (2 Cor 5:4-10). Most Judeans emphasized the future *resurrection of the bodies of the righteous but believed that the souls of the righteous dead were meanwhile in heaven with God; Paul agrees with them. Many Greco-Roman writers expressed a desire to die and so be free from sufferings; Old Testament writers did not usually take this position (Ps 30:9), but some became discouraged enough to express this sentiment (1 Kings 19:4), or even to wish that they had never lived (Job 3:1-19; Jer 15:10; 20:14-18).

1:24. Ancient thinkers sometimes argued that one should use reason to determine whether it was more profitable to die or to continue to endure suffering for the good one could accomplish (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to His Brother Quintus* 1.3.1-2; Pliny, *Epistles* 1.22.9-10). Although Paul's death, if it happened, would not be voluntary, he reasons nonetheless; his remaining would help them by virtue of his continuance as a teacher, and perhaps also for legal precedent: see comment on 1:19. Speakers commonly cited "necessity" as a reason for a choice; a writer who affirmed that he clung to life for another's sake (Phil 1:24) thereby also demonstrated love for them (e.g., *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 104.2-3; Fronto, *Ad M. Caesarem* 5.33/48).

1:25-26. "Progress" was commonly used for educational or moral advancement. (Although Stoics viewed people as either perfect or not, according to ideal types, on the practical level even they emphasized "progress" toward virtue.) Nero was not particularly interested in legal questions, and in A.D. 62 he freed Jewish prisoners that the procurator Felix had previously sent him (Josephus, *Life* 16). Paul was likely released at this time (see comment on Acts 28:30-31).

1:27-30
Endure in Hope

1:27. "Conduct yourselves" uses Greek terminology sometimes applied to a citizen in a free state (cf. 3:20), language that Jewish writers used to describe their people obeying God's *law (as in Acts 23:1; 2 Maccabees 6:1; *3 Maccabees 3:4; *4 Maccabees 2:8; 5:16). On the athletic image (here undoubtedly implied in the Greek word that KJV and NASB translate "striving together"), see comment on 1:30. Ex-

hortations to unity commonly included calls to be "of one mind" or the like.

1:28. The confidence that Paul suggests here alludes to the *Old Testament and Jewish hope that God would destroy his people's enemies in the end time but vindicate and save his people. Cf. Wisdom of Solomon 5:1-2; Baruch 4:24-25.

1:29. Although Jewish people sought to avoid persecution when possible, they extolled the martyrs who preferred death to disobeying God. (One could perhaps distinguish public attitudes, such as praise for past heroes, from personal attitudes, such as the price individuals paid in daily life for their convictions. In the case of Paul, however, he was daily confronted with the personal choice and in his own life modeled commitment to the point of martyrdom.) Paul regards suffering for Christ as a privilege (cf. similarly Acts 5:41). The idea of sufferings indicating the nearness of the end (as in Jewish thought) might also be present here.

1:30. Although the term had also developed a more generic use, Paul probably applies the language of ancient athletic competitions ("contest" or "conflict"—KJV, NASB) to the life of the moral person, as do many Greek moralists. Here the issue is persecution; on the Philippians' sharing in Paul's fate, see comment on 1:19.

2:1-11
Be Servants Like Christ

Paul continues his exhortation of 1:27-30, advocating unity (1:27) and fearlessness in the face of martyrdom's reward (1:28; 2:9-11; cf. 3:20-21). Ancient moral writers often adduced examples to prove their points, and Paul here adduces Jesus (2:5-11), himself (2:17-18), Timothy (2:19-24) and Epaphroditus (2:25-30). Correspondences between 2:6-11 and 3:20-21 indicate the extent to which Paul uses *Christ as a model for believers here. (The majority of scholars accept Phil 2:6-11 as a pre-Pauline hymn, based on the structure and language of the passage. Others point out that Paul could be responsible for the hymnic features himself. Greek authors peppered their writings with quotations from Greek poetry, and Paul's use of an earlier Christian hymn is possible, although it cannot be regarded as proven. Despite its *rhetorical patterns, the material need not be a hymn per se; ancient writers and speakers often used exalted prose, sometimes even with rhythm, to describe deities.)

2:1-4. Competition for honor was heavy in Roman society, a behavior if anything more pronounced in Philippi. Paul borrows language commonly used in Greek *homonoia* speeches, which advocated harmony and unity among the hearers. Most philosophers advocated preferring the larger good to one's own. Jewish teachers also had maxims such as, "Value your fellow's honor no less than your own" (cf. Mishnah *Avot* 2:10; *Avot of Rabbi Nathan* 15, 19 A; 29, §60B). One could urge a person to act on the basis of affection, e.g., sometimes for the exhorter (Fronto, *Ad M. Caesarem* 5.1: "If you have any love at all for me . . . ").

2:5-6. Some intellectuals urged being of "one mind" with the gods, having the correct, divine perspective. Some scholars suggest that Christ's being in the "form of God" alludes to Adam being formed in God's image (Gen 1:26). Unlike Adam, who being human sought divinity (Gen 3:5), Jesus, being deity, relinquished his rightful position of honor. Also and probably even more to the point here is that Jewish texts described divine Wisdom as the perfect, archetypal image of God ("form" may mean "role" more than "image" here; cf. 2:7b, "form of a servant," although this phrase parallels "likeness" in 2:7c; cf. comment on Col 1:15). (One might contrast Jesus' voluntary surrender of status with the emperor during Paul's time, Nero, who aspired to divinity.)

2:7. The "servant" of Isaiah 53 also was "poured out" or "emptied himself," though not in incarnation but in death (Is 53:12; cf. Phil 2:8). (Paul uses a more specific Greek word for "slave" [so NRSV] here than appears for the servant in the *LXX of Isaiah 53; elsewhere, however, cf. Is 49:5, 7.)

2:8. Judaism prized obedience to the point of death in stories about its martyrs. Crucifixion was the most degrading form of execution, reserved for non-Roman criminals who were slaves or free persons of the lowest status. Writers and speakers sometimes repeated a word (here "death") to reinforce the point.

2:9. Some commentators have seen in the language of this verse an allusion to the exaltation of Isaiah 52:13. If, as is likely, that verse

refers to suffering more than glory (Is 52:14–53:11), Paul either does not refer to it here (the term in Isaiah is very common in the *Septuagint) or *contrasts* the exaltation accomplished by God with the suffering Jesus experienced among people.

2:10-11. Isaiah 45:23 ("every knee will bow . . . every tongue will declare") refers to the final submission of all nations to God; that Paul applies the text to Jesus (especially with an *Old Testament divine title, "Lord," in v. 11) is telling. Those "in heaven" would include the angels, probably including the rebellious angels who rule the *Gentile nations (see comment on Eph 1:21-23). Greeks worshiped gods in the heavens, earth, sea and underworld; traditional Greek mythology also placed the shadowy existence of departed souls in the underworld. Paul announces that whatever categories of beings there are, they must acknowledge Christ's rule, because he is exalted above them. One often bowed the knee in obeisance before a ruler or deity.

2:12-16
Live Right

Paul here continues his exhortation to the believers to live in unity (2:1-11).

2:12-13. Letters were often used as proxies for one's presence; Paul thus entreats the Philippians through the letter to obey his teaching as if he were present. They secure their ultimate "salvation" by persevering together (see 1:27-28). The reward of this obedience is implied by the parallel with Jesus' obedience in 2:8-9. The teaching that they are enabled to obey by God's power is at best rare in pre-Christian literature outside *Old Testament teachings on the *Spirit; see comment on Galatians 2:19-20. "Fear and trembling" appear together often in the Old Testament and Jewish sources (cf., e.g., Ps 55:5; *4 Maccabees 4:10; **1 Enoch* 14:13).

2:14. "Grumbling" and "disputing" (NASB) had characterized Israel in the wilderness and were condemned in the Old Testament; philosophers who emphasized the wisdom of the gods did not approve either. See comment on 1 Corinthians 10:9-10.

2:15. "Crooked and perverted generation" closely echoes Deut 32:5, which complains that rebellious Israelites are not God's children; here, by contrast, believers are God's children. Jewish tradition often compared the righteous with "lights" in a dark world; cf. especially Daniel 12:3 (the term Paul uses here was especially applied to heavenly bodies, reflecting an image like the one Daniel uses).

2:16. The "day of Christ" is modeled after the Old Testament "day of the Lord" (see comment on 1:6). The expression "labor in vain" was not uncommon; on athletic metaphors, see comment on Phil 1:30; 3:12-14.

2:17-24
The Examples of Paul and Timothy

Paul continues to model the servant lifestyle by examples.

2:17-18. Israel had drink offerings (e.g., Lev 23:18, 37), and other ancient religions also regularly poured out libations to the gods, usually wine but sometimes water or another substance. *Gentiles also poured libations at the beginning of banquets and could pour them in memory of person who had died. Paul is being poured out (cf. 2:7) as such a "drink offering" to the true God, a willing offering on their behalf that joined their own sacrifice.

2:19. Travelers regularly carried news and letters.

2:20-21. Both Greek philosophers and *Old Testament prophets complained about the scarcity of those fully devoted to the cause. Paul offers many "letters [or passages] of recommendation," a common ancient form of writing (see comment on Rom 16:1-2), but he places Timothy, his special emissary, in a category by himself, offering the highest commendation. Those writing letters of recommendation often offered such superlative praises (occasionally for more than one person). Thus *Cicero can claim, "There is no one like him" (e.g., *Letters to Friends* 13.1.5; 13.18.2; 13.26.1); or "This is the most special recommendation" (*Letters to Friends* 13.32.2; 13.34.1; 13.35.1).

2:22. Messengers were often sent as personal representatives, to be received with the same honor accorded the sender (e.g., 2 Sam 19:37-38). Teachers and *disciples often developed an intimate relationship described in terms of "father" and "son."

2:23. News was difficult to send, because it had to be carried by an available traveler and

otherwise by a messenger—a sometimes dangerous undertaking given travel conditions at various times of the year (cf. 2:30). Paul therefore wants to wait until he can give a full report of the outcome of his trial.

2:24. Letters were used as surrogates for one's presence but also often announced one's coming.

2:25-30
Epaphroditus's Sacrificial Service

People often wrote letters of recommendation, often supporting the carrier; Paul includes this recommendation in his larger letter. Epaphroditus had been the Philippians' messenger, bringing their gift to Paul in prison (4:18); he no doubt carried Paul's letter back to them. Travel conditions were dangerous and harsh, especially at sea in late fall and early spring, and these conditions decreased one's resistance to antiquity's many diseases (vv. 26-27). Because "Epaphroditus" is a common name, no firm conclusions about his ethnic origin may be drawn from it, but the context suggests that he was from Philippi. Soldier metaphors (2:25) appear elsewhere, and military images were common (see comment on Rom 13:12).

People often reported on theirs or others' health in personal letters, as well as expressing concern for others' health. We cannot know the cause of Epaphroditus's ill health, but malaria, for example, was very common, and typhoid existed. *Gentiles prayed to their gods for healing (especially certain deities associated with healing, most notably Asclepius); Jewish people prayed to and praised the true God as the healer of body as well as the forgiver of sin. Jewish prayers for healing were sometimes described as prayers for "mercy." "Risked" (in "risked his life," v. 30) was often used as a gambling term, and some scholars have noted that gamblers invoked Venus, goddess of gambling, with the term *epaphroditus;* on this view Paul could be making a wordplay on his friend's name. Although God usually healed those in the Bible who prayed to him, his activity could not be taken for granted; even some of his most faithful servants had died from sickness (2 Kings 13:14; cf. 1 Kings 1:1; 14:4).

3:1-16
Righteousness Not from Human Works

The section from 3:1 to 4:1 is a *digression. Some scholars have suggested that it was a different Pauline letter accidentally inserted into the middle of Philippians (though in papyri such accidents must have been extremely uncommon), or one combined with several other Pauline letters to the Philippians. But digressions were common in ancient speaking and writing, and literary connections with the rest of the letter strengthen the suggestion that it is part of a unified letter.

3:1. The expression often translated "finally" here sometimes indicated the end of a letter (cf. GNT: "in conclusion"), but just as often functioned as a transition device within a letter (cf. 1 Thess 4:1; 2 Thess 3:1; cf. *Testament of Reuben* 5:5). (Less relevantly, "ending" twice also could fit the casual nature of some letters; cf., e.g., apparent plans to end in Pliny, *Epistles* 3.9.26-27, 37; *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 119.9, 16.) One might also say again a point that bore repeating (and even say so, e.g., *Cicero, *On Friendship* 22.85). Reminders were common in moral exhortation.

3:2. The threefold repetition of "beware" is *rhetorical *anaphora*, opening repetition to highlight a point. The opponents here are not Jewish persecutors, who would be unlikely in Philippi, which apparently had a very small Jewish community (cf. Acts 16:13). Rather, they are like the traveling Jewish Christian teachers Paul had encountered in Galatia who want to circumcise *Gentiles. Scholars debate whether they have already visited Philippi or are simply traveling about; if the latter, Paul is warning that they may come there.

"Dog" was a familiar insult, sometimes implying dogs' vulgar public sexual, excretory or (cf. 3:8, 19) dietary habits. *Cynic philosophers were regularly called "dogs," but given the specific error Paul refutes in this passage, he clearly does not use it as a reference to these philosophers; that use merely illustrates to what a great extent the term was one of disdain. Philosophers called those ruled by passions "beasts." Probably more to the point, Jewish teaching considered dogs unclean and sometimes sexually immoral; the *Old Testament

might apply the title to male cult prostitutes (Deut 23:17); especially to enemies in Psalm 22:16. Such a title would certainly make the pietists who were demanding circumcision recoil. There were "beware of dog" signs even in ancient Rome, where they were pets and watchdogs (*Petronius, *Satyricon* 29), no doubt reinforcing the biting sarcasm of Paul's phrase. Here Paul uses another word for "circumcision" (NASB), which means "mutilation" (NIV, NRSV; cf. the *LXX of 1 Kings 18:28); see comment on Galatians 5:12 for the cultural significance of this idea. Plays on words were common; cf. mutilation (*katatome*) here and circumcision (*peritome*) in 3:3.

3:3. Paul says that spiritual circumcision (Deut 10:16; 30:6; cf. Lev 26:41; Jer 4:4; 9:25-26) is what really matters to God. Because ancient Judaism usually associated the *Spirit with *prophecy, "worship in the Spirit" (NASB, NRSV) may refer to charismatic worship of the sort depicted in 1 Chronicles 25:1-6; because most Jewish people believed that the Spirit was no longer available in that fullness in their own time, Paul lays claim to an experience for the *church that confirms the *Messiah's arrival and that most of his Jewish contemporaries (possibly excepting other "fringe" groups such as the *Qumran sectarians) would not pretend to match.

3:4. Lists of virtues or vices were common in epideictic (praise and blame) speeches, and in *narrative form they characterized epideictic biographies. Self-commendation was considered appropriate if one were defending oneself or using oneself as a legitimate model for others. By claiming to have greater merit than his opponents even on their own terms, he turns this self-commendation into an occasion to undermine them; professional speakers and writers often used the standard rhetorical technique of "comparison" to accomplish this end.

3:5. Gentile lists of praises (cf. Menander Rhetor 2.3, 385.5-9) could begin with nature and nurture (cf. Phil 3:5) and proceed to accomplishments and actions, the latter including the four cardinal virtues (which included justice; cf. 3:6). Gentile lists of a person's virtues typically included items such as noble birth or beauty as well as character traits like prudence or steadfastness. Those born Jewish males were circumcised the eighth day; by this virtue Paul eliminates any competition from *proselytes converted by his opponents later in life—in practice proselytes had lower social status in Judaism than those born Jewish. "Hebrew of Hebrews" could indicate a Palestinian Jewish origin, although this is not clear; however, that Paul lived in Judea before his conversion is clear from the fact that he was a *Pharisee (in Acts, cf. comment on 22:3). Although Pharisaic piety was known elsewhere, Pharisees themselves seem to have lived only in Palestine and been concentrated around Jerusalem. They were noted for being the most meticulous observers of the *law—something Paul's opponents now claimed to be.

3:6. "Zeal" for the law did not always or necessarily include violence, but the chief models for such zeal included Phinehas (Num 25:7-13) and especially the *Maccabees, and Jewish patriots called themselves "*Zealots" in the war against Rome not long after Paul wrote these words. By defining his legalistic righteousness in terms of his persecution of Christians, Paul associates his opponents' position of "zeal" for the law with opposition to the Philippian Christians' faith.

3:7. Appealing to the Christian faith shared by himself, his readers and (according to themselves) even his opponents, Paul dispenses with his worldly credentials—and thus the only credentials to which his opponents could lay claim at all; see comment on 2 Corinthians 11:16-18. "Gain" (or "gains"—NIV; or "profit"—GNT) and "loss" are marketplace terms, like other terms later in the letter (4:10-20); Paul had to sacrifice all his former spiritual assets to follow Christ, who was what really mattered.

3:8. "Dung" (KJV) or "rubbish" (ESV, NASB, NRSV; "garbage"—NIV) usually meant either excrement or food to be thrown away, which dogs might enjoy (3:2). (Ancient speakers valued skill in producing insolent insults.)

3:9. As in 3:6, the problem is not the law but that the righteousness is Paul's own, hence inadequate. Both biblical psalmists and later Jewish ones whose hymns appear in the *Dead Sea Scrolls waited on God for their vindication or acquittal, and Paul likewise had to receive his justification, or righteousness, from God alone, but Paul understands that this is found in Christ.

3:10. The ultimate revelation in the Old Testament was to "know" God (Ex 33:13), a relationship available to all the people of the new covenant (Jer 31:34). This language reflects both the covenant relationship (on the corporate level) and intimate fellowship with God (on the personal level experienced by the prophets). But Paul also connects knowing *Christ with sharing his sufferings and glory. On the imitation of God, see comment on Ephesians 5:1.

3:11. The ultimate sharing of Christ's *resurrection occurs at the future resurrection of the righteous (in which most Jews believed). Many Jewish people believed that a period of sufferings would precede the resurrection, and this seems to be Paul's view as well (clear in Rom 8:18-22), though Paul speaks here of his own sufferings (Phil 3:10-11).

3:12-13. In the language of athletic competition—often used metaphorically by ancient moralists (e.g., *Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.17.29; Diogenes Laertius 6.2.34) and Greek-speaking Jews (e.g., **Testament of Job* 4:10; *Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.217-18)—Paul describes his striving for the future hope of 3:11. Greco-Roman sages generally admitted that they were not yet "perfect" (in contrast to the *ideal* sage) but were making progress. Nevertheless they sometimes spoke of themselves as the "mature," the wise, as opposed to those who were still novices. (Older commentators note that the *mystery cults described the highest stage of initiation as "perfection" or "completion," but this is probably less relevant here than the language of sages.) "What is behind" (NIV) belongs to Paul's image of the race; to win, one must keep one's eyes on the finish line; Greek runners often ran in a straight line and back.

3:14. At the end of each race, officials had their heralds proclaim the winner and call him up to receive his prize (in the Olympic games, a palm branch). ("Above" or "upward" also alludes to Christ in heaven, 3:20; cf. Col 3:1-2.) In Paul's metaphor, the prize is the full revelation of Christ at the resurrection (3:10-11).

3:15. In philosophy, those who were advanced in learning, as opposed to novice students, could be described as "mature" (NIV, NRSV; "perfect"—KJV, NASB). (This was, however, mostly "in principle"; *Stoics depicted the ideal so starkly that even sages did not claim to have attained it themselves.)

3:16. Although not looking back to one's past (3:13) and not yet complete (3:11-12), they were to maintain what they had already achieved. "Live" here can mean "walk" (KJV) or "keep to a straight line"; possibly here Paul adapts his race metaphor from 3:12-14 (races were often in straight lines and back), although this is by no means certain.

3:17–4:1
Judgment and Salvation

Teachers like Paul would make it to the *resurrection of the righteous by staking their righteousness on nothing but Christ (3:9-11); his opponents, however, like dogs interested in dung (3:2, 8), were headed for destruction, as were those who followed them (3:18-19).

3:17. *Disciples often learned by imitating their teachers; examples were important for learning. (Paul had given four examples, using himself for one, in chapter 2, and again used himself in 3:4-14.)

3:18. Displays of emotion were considered appropriate in public speaking, both expressions of outrage (3:2) and "weeping," which often invited audiences to feel the same. Letter writers could also mention their tears (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to His Brother Quintus* 1.3.3; Pliny, *Epistles* 5.21.6). "With tears" (NIV, NRSV, GNT) or "weeping" (KJV, NASB) indicates his love for his opponents.

3:19. Greco-Roman philosophers and non-Palestinian Jewish writers (especially Philo) repeatedly railed against those ruled by their passions, often remarking that they were ruled by their "belly" (KJV, NRSV) or their (sexual or culinary) "appetite" (NASB), disdaining their neglect of eternal things. Gluttony especially became part of Roman culture, and its practice by the aristocracy was a frequent butt of satirists' humor. But being ruled by one's "belly" meant more than gluttony; it was used to mean any fleshly indulgence (cf. "bodily desires"—GNT). This would be a serious insult to those who thought they were zealous for the *law (*Diaspora Jews emphasized how the law enabled them to master passions); but Paul had already "shamed" their "glory" by his own example in 3:4-8.

3:20. Citizens of Philippi, a Roman *colony,

were automatically citizens of Rome, sharing all the rights and privileges of Roman citizens even though most of them had never been there. (Not everyone who lived in Philippi was a full citizen of Philippi, but the citizenship held by some of the church, especially owners of many or most of the homes in which it met, would raise the status of the whole movement there.) Paul's readers in Philippi therefore understand quite well what it means to be citizens of the supreme city while not yet living there. Philosophers sometimes declared themselves citizens of the world rather than any mere city-state. Citizenship in heaven was more important than descent from a tribe in Israel (3:5). ("Citizenship" is not "conversation," as in the KJV.)

Many deities in Philippi were called "*saviors," as was the emperor; although this title for Jesus derives from *Old Testament language for God (e.g., Is 45:21), it provides a stark contrast with the paganism Christians outside greater Judea had to confront daily.

3:21. Paul's view of the *resurrection is that it involves the body, but one distinct in nature from the current body (Greek culture considered the idea of a bodily resurrection vulgar superstition, but many Jews valued the whole person; see comment on 1 Cor 15). Many Jewish conceptions of the resurrection body differed from the current body (cf. Dan 12:2-3). As in Judaism, the resurrection occurs at the time of the ultimate battle, when God subordinates all his enemies (cf. also 1 Cor 15:25-28).

4:1. Letters often expressed longing to see the recipient in person. That the Philippians are Paul's "crown" indicates that they are in some sense his prize (potentially fitting his recent athletic metaphor; cf. 3:14; 1 Thess 2:19 and comment on 1 Cor 9:24-25). They must stand firm against Paul's opponents and persevere if Paul is to receive the reward he seeks for his labor for them—their salvation. There were different sorts of crowns. Heroes could be rewarded with public crowns, but the term applied especially to athletes' wreaths; Judaism also used the image for rewards at the end time.

4:2-9
Work Together

Moral writers often strung together short, unrelated statements of moral advice. Paul similarly lists several admonitions in 4:4-9 here, although a common theme runs among them.

4:2. "Euodia" and "Syntyche" are Greek names; because Philippi was a Roman *colony, their Greek names might indicate that they are foreign merchants like Lydia (Acts 16:14; see comment on Acts 16:21), although this is only a surmise (some commentators suggest that one of them *is* Lydia). Their prominence as Paul's coworkers may have been more acceptable at Philippi than it would have been in some other parts of the empire. Macedonian and Roman women had more freedoms than women in more traditionally Greek areas, and inscriptions indicate heavy involvement of women in the religious activities of this city.

4:3. Ancients appreciated mediators who could reconcile estranged parties (see, e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 1.3; also 1.5; 1.10; *Tacitus, *Histories* 2.5). Clement may be the author of *1 Clement,* a late-first-century Christian letter from Rome to Corinth, as tradition suggests, although Clement is a common Roman name. The "book of life" is an *Old Testament image further developed in ancient Judaism (e.g., Ex 32:32-33; Dan 12:1; Mal 3:16; the *Essene CD 20.19; **Jubilees* 36:10).

4:4. One could repeat a word or phrase for emphasis (see comment on Phil 1:18). Constant rejoicing, like constant gratitude (cf. 4:6), reflects confidence in God (see comment on Eph 5:20).

4:5. "The Lord is near" could refer to the Second Coming (3:20-21; cf. Is 13:6; Ezek 30:3; Joel 1:15; 3:14; Zeph 1:7) or that the Lord is close to his people and hears their cries (see Deut 4:7; Ps 34:18; 145:18).

4:6-7. "Peace" (v. 7) could indicate tranquility (vs. the anxiety in v. 6), a trait valued by many philosophers, although in the context of unity it may also have its usual meaning of peace with one another (as in Greco-Roman *homonoia* speeches; cf. 4:2). If any connotations of the latter use are present, the image of such peace "standing guard" (if pressed in a military sense) over hearts and minds is striking. Jewish prayers (some based on Num 6:24-26) often asked God to keep his people from harm and grant peace. On the mind, cf. 4:8 and 2:5.

4:8. Like many writers, Paul resorts to a full list of virtues, including *arete,* "excellence,"

which was central to the Greek concept of virtue. Throughout this list he borrows the language of Greek ethics, although nothing he says would have been objectionable to traditional Jewish hearers. (He omits some traditional Greek virtues, like "beauty" and "goodness" per se, but the last omission need not be viewed as significant, because such lists were never intended to be complete.) Greek and Roman philosophers repeatedly emphasized thinking such virtuous thoughts, and Jewish writers repeatedly borrowed their language the same way Paul does to communicate to Greek-speaking Jewish readers.

4:9. Teachers often exhorted students to live what they had been taught and to follow the example set by the teacher.

4:10-20
Paul's Thank-You Note

Paul avoids a direct "thank you" in this section (which could portray him as a dependent on the *church's benefaction) while expressing his appreciation. Paul acknowledges their gift graciously, without sounding as if he is requesting more. (Gratitude may have been particularly valued in Macedonia, of which Philippi was a part; in earlier times an ungrateful man was said to have been liable to prosecution there—*Seneca, *On Benefits* 3.6.2.) In the ancient world, *patrons showed hospitality to and looked out for their *clients; if Paul had said "thank you" forthrightly, he might have cast himself in the role of a subordinate, dependent client.

4:10. Letters of friendship, when responding to a friend's letter, often opened with a statement of joy about receiving that friend's letter (e.g., Oxyrhynchus papyri 1676.4-5). Writers also often assured letters' recipients that the writers trusted the readers' intentions.

4:11-13. Greek moralists, influenced by *Stoic thought, praised those who could be content with little as well as with much. (*Cynics went so far as to prove their contentment in little by making certain that was all they ever had.) It was said that the wise man needed no one but himself and was completely independent. But although Paul uses the language of contentment in all circumstances (being able to do "all things," as in 4:13) common among Stoic philosophers and others, the idea of persevering and enduring for God's sake was commonly lived out by the *Old Testament prophets, Jewish martyrs and other servants of God.

Paul's "abundance" (NASB) would have been meager and simple by modern standards; artisans were better off than the poor, but far below the standard of living enjoyed by the modern Western middle class or by the well-to-do of antiquity. ("Moderation"—seeking a mean between two extremes—was central to most Greek discussions of virtue, especially in *Aristotle; it also appears in *Diaspora Jewish ethics. But Paul nowhere seeks such a mean; like the best of Greek philosophers, he can live in any situation. His language is thus closer to the dominant philosophic school of his day [Stoicism] rather than to the Peripatetic [Aristotelian] school. Unlike such philosophers, who depended only on themselves, however, he is "self-sufficient" only by virtue of Christ, who works in him.)

4:14-16. The language of "sharing" (partnership, 4:14-15) is the language of ancient business documents; it may even suggest a special account from which the Philippians sent Paul help when he was in need. "For my needs" (NASB, NRSV) also occurs in business documents specifying the purposes of a disbursement. The form he uses for the title "Philippians" is normally bad Greek but was what the Roman citizens of Philippi called themselves; it is thus a mark of sensitivity to their local traditions and culture.

4:17. "Profit" (NASB, NRSV, GNT), "what may be credited to your account" (NIV), is literally "fruit" (KJV), but because many business transactions involved crops this was a natural extension in ancient documents. Paul trusts that God will reward the Philippians with interest for their sacrifice on his behalf.

4:18. "I have received" was very common, perhaps the most common standard phrase, in receipts; Paul acknowledges their gift in regular business terms. But he also uses Old Testament language for a sacrifice ("sweet-smelling," GNT; "acceptable"; sacrificial language was sometimes applied figuratively); in being partners with this missionary, they are partners with the God who sent him.

4:19-20. Verse 19 may be a wish-prayer, as some commentators have suggested (see

comment on 1 Thess 3:11); others take it as a statement. On either reading, the point is much the same: Paul cannot pay back the Philippians, but he trusts that God will. Although ancient writers often used wealth as a metaphor for spiritual riches like wisdom, in this context Paul no doubt means that he trusts that God will reward them for their faithfulness to his work (cf. Deut 15:10; Prov 19:17). "Needs" in the case of most of the Philippian Christians were genuine, basic needs (see 2 Cor 8:1-2), not mere "wishes" (as some readers take it today). "In glory" (KJV, NASB, NRSV) can be translated "in a glorious way" or "glorious riches."

4:21-23
Conclusion

4:21. Greetings were common in ancient letters. Because Paul knows most of the believers in Philippi, he keeps his greeting general. Letters also commonly included greetings from others (in this case probably believers in Rome), because mail had to be sent via travelers and thus could not be sent frequently.

4:22-23. The "household of Caesar" could refer to anyone in the Roman civil service directly dependent on Caesar, including all his slaves and freedmen; it always indicated great prestige. It most likely refers here to the Praetorian Guard (see comment on 1:13); if Paul was in Rome at this point, anyone who guarded him (Acts 28:16, 30) would naturally be exposed to his teaching. Even Caesar's slaves wielded more power and prestige than most well-off free persons; the Praetorian Guard itself held the prestige of the Roman military's elite, often rewarded by Caesar himself. Paul's greeting would impress his readers: his imprisonment has indeed advanced the gospel (1:12-13).

Colossians

Introduction

Authorship. Not all scholars agree that Paul wrote Colossians. Some think that a *disciple of Paul wrote the letter in Paul's name (probably with his approval, or posthumously in faithfulness to his teachings). Others think that Paul simply dictated this letter to a *scribe, as he did most of his previous letters (e.g., Rom 16:22); in any case the probable date of the letter was in Paul's lifetime (see "Situation," below).

By the time Paul wrote Philippians (the likely period also for Colossians), he was increasingly borrowing popular philosophic language (cf. Acts 19:9). But although Paul may borrow language from some of the false teachers to make his case against them, most of the language that is used in Colossians has parallels in his undisputed writings (which also differ from one another). Given the brevity of the letter, the probable use of a scribe, similarities with undisputed Pauline letters and the lapse of several years since his earlier letters, the differences between Colossians and the undisputed Pauline letters need not require different authors. Pseudonymous letters existed but were normally written long after the death of the person in whose name they were written. Because an earthquake devastated or destroyed Colossae around A.D. 60–64 and it was never completely restored, it is unlikely that a letter would be written even purportedly addressing the *church there after that date; nor could a forgery have gone undetected during Paul's lifetime (which probably lasted till at least A.D. 64).

Colossae. Colossae was in Phrygia, where religion was practiced with intensity. There is evidence for a Jewish presence in Phrygia as early as the sixth century B.C.; this Phrygian Judaism seems to have mirrored its culture to a significant extent. Christianity likewise exhibited unorthodox tendencies in this region in subsequent centuries. Colossae was a small and socially unimportant city by this period; it is probably only one of many cities in which Paul's students had founded churches (Acts 19:10); perhaps some received similar letters. As noted above, the city was severely damaged or destroyed by an earthquake around A.D. 60–64 and never completely restored, hence many scholars think that Paul wrote before that date.

Situation. Colossians 2 may indicate that Christians were attracted to mystical

or *apocalyptic elements in a Judaism thoroughly influenced by Phrygian culture. A great number of backgrounds have been proposed for the error at Colossae: *mystery cults, broader *Hellenistic mysticism, Hellenistic Judaism, *Qumran-type Judaism and so on. The merit of considering these sources is that they all reflect some broader cultural ideas that played into the problems Paul confronted in Colossae; even Qumran parallels, while strictly limited geographically to Judea, provide evidence for some more widespread Jewish beliefs in this period. The one suggestion with little merit to sustain it is *Gnosticism, since full Gnostic systems cannot be dated this early. But that the Colossian error reflects one synthesis of different streams of thought that later developed toward Gnosticism is possible.

That some Jewish Sibylline oracles may issue from that region and the activity of later Christian Montanists there might suggest the possibility of ecstatic elements in local Judaism (2:18). Acts testifies that Paul was preaching *Christ to philosophically minded audiences in this period (see comment on Acts 19:9), and letters like Ephesians and Colossians give us an indication of Paul's grasp of popular-level Greek philosophy and also some of the popular philosophical ideas that permeated both *Gentile and Jewish thought in mid-first-century Asia Minor.

Commentaries. J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (1879; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), is still helpful; Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon,* NCB (1974; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), is also helpful; see now also Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). For more advanced work, important and useful scholarly commentaries include James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon,* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon,* trans. W. R. Poehlman and R. J. Karris, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon,* Pillar (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon,* WBC 44 (Waco, TX: Word, 1982); Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982). Some of my primary sources appear in Craig Keener, "Heavenly Mindedness and Earthly Good: Contemplating Matters Above in Colossians 3.1-2," *Journal of Greco-Roman Chistianity and Judaism* 6 (2009): 175-90.

1:1-2
Introduction

The opening follows the standard form of ancient epistolary prescripts (name of sender, name of recipients and greeting). As is customary in Paul, "greetings" (Greek *charein*) becomes "*grace" (Greek *charis*); "peace" was a standard Jewish greeting, sometimes combined with "greetings" in Jewish letters (cf. comment on Rom 1:7).

1:3-14
Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Fruit Bearers

Thanksgivings to God or gods were fairly common in the openings of ancient letters. In Paul's letters, they often introduce major themes, which were on his mind from the beginning of the letter. Thus they often function the way that *exordia* did in speeches, introducing what follows and beginning the letter with a positive relationship with the readers.

1:3. Regular Jewish prayer times included many blessings, and Paul's prayer times clearly include many thanksgivings to God. Paul's mention of thanks is not merely conventional, for the purposes of the letter.

1:4. News was often carried by travelers. The Colossians' spiritual condition was reported to Paul by Epaphras, apparently Paul's student working among them (1:7; cf. Acts 19:10), who was originally from their city (Col 4:12). Speakers and writers often started on a positive note, even if they planned to offer some correction.

1:5. Jewish texts spoke of future rewards already reserved for the righteous (the rewards sometimes depicted as treasures in heaven), hence early Christian readers would be familiar with the idea.

1:6. The image of God's message bearing fruit may go back to Jesus' teaching (Lk 8:11); the *Old Testament often compares Israel with a vine or other plant and summons them to bear fruit for God (e.g., Hos 10:1; 14:7-8; cf. Gen 1:28; comment on Col 1:10).

1:7-8. "Epaphras" was a common name; this may well be the same Epaphras of Philemon 23. But Philippi and Colossae are too distant geographically for us to think that this is the same person as Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25, although that name could legitimately be contracted as "Epaphras."

1:9. For unceasing prayer see Exodus 28:30 and 1 Samuel 12:23. Although philosophers sought "wisdom" and "knowledge," Paul here emphasizes the Old Testament moral and relational sense of the terms (e.g., Prov 1:2-7).

1:10. On fruit bearing and growing, see Genesis 1:28 ("growing" appears especially in the *LXX), immediately after speaking of humanity being made in God's image (Gen 1:26-27; cf. Col 3:10); and see comment above on 1:6. On "walk" (literally; KJV, NASB) or "live" (NIV, GNT), see comment on Galatians 5:16. *Gentiles sometimes spoke of people behaving "worthy" of God. Likewise, in Jewish tradition, "worthy" could mean "appropriate to" (2 Maccabees 6:23-24, 27), "deserving of (reward)" (2 Maccabees 15:21); Wisdom sought those worthy of her (Wisdom of Solomon 6:16), and the righteous who persevered would be "worthy for God," like an acceptable offering (Wisdom of Solomon 3:5). The Old Testament spoke of knowing God relationally, in covenant with him (Jer 24:7; 31:34; Hos 2:20), an idea developed also in the *Dead Sea Scrolls.

1:11. Paul groups closely related terms here ("power," "might"); *rhetoric could pile up terms with related meaning to dwell on a point, and such combinations also appear in the Old Testament, especially for praises of God (e.g., 2 Chron 20:6).

1:12-13. In the Old Testament, the "*saints" or "holy" or "set-apart ones" were Israel. Israel's "inheritance" was first of all the Promised Land but in Jewish tradition pointed toward the ultimate possession of the world to come (see comment on Eph 1:14). Christians become heirs of these promises in Christ. "Light" and "darkness" were regularly contrasted as good and bad respectively (e.g., Ps 27:1; Is 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; 58:8-10; 59:9; 60:1), and this was often applied to the conflict between good and evil realms (in the Dead Sea Scrolls and often in ancient literature). Perhaps relevant to Colossians 1:13-14, Jewish people on the Passover described their deliverance from Egypt as a call "from darkness into great light" and redemption from slavery (Mishnah *Pesahim* 10:5). (Some scholars have suggested that the image of transferral from one kingdom to another here recalls the many peoples in the an-

cient Near East uprooted by powerful rulers and settled elsewhere. But if any image from human kingdoms was intended, the image of a provincial achieving Roman citizenship or Gentiles accepting the yoke of God's *kingdom in Judaism might have been images more natural to Paul's audience; see also comment on 1:14.)

1:14. "Redemption" meant freeing a slave by paying a price for that slave; in the *Old Testament, God redeemed Israel from their slavery in Egypt by the blood of the firstborn and the lamb. This would fit the image of transferring a captive people from one realm to another (1:13). *Philo also believed that the Logos, God's Word, participated in redemption (cf. also Wisdom of Solomon 18:15); but this Logos background might be more relevant if it were mentioned as part of 1:15-17.

1:15-23
The Supremacy of Christ

Some of those in error at Colossae want to emphasize intermediate spirits and the forms of rigorous human spirituality found in their culture (see comment on 2:16-23); Paul insists that Christ is enough (cf. 2:6-15) and describes him in the language Judaism normally reserved for personified Wisdom. This image was a natural one for early Christians to describe Christ; Judaism personified God's Wisdom as divine, and the roots of the image in Jewish tradition go back at least as far as Proverbs 8. (It is possible, as some have suggested, that Paul cites a two-stanza Christian hymn in 1:15-20; such citations occur without notice in other ancient literature. But despite the evidence and scholarly consensus that favor it, the theory falls short of proof either for or against it. Speakers sometimes employed exalted and even rhythmic prose, especially when praising deities.)

1:15. Here Paul describes Christ in terms Judaism reserved for divine Wisdom, which was portrayed as God's archetypal image by which he created the rest of the world (cf. Prov 3:19; 8:27-30; Wisdom of Solomon 7:26-27; 8:1, 5-6; 9:1-2, 9; 10:1). This emphasis is particularly evident in *Philo, a then-recent *Diaspora Jewish philosopher who may reflect or represent some wider Diaspora Jewish ideas. He describes God's Logos, his Word, as his image (e.g., *Flight and Finding* 101), through whom the cosmos was formed (e.g., *Creation* 25, 31; *Special Laws* 1.81).

"Firstborn" could refer to the position of authority and preeminence given to the firstborn son in the Old Testament (Gen 49:3-4; cf. the "chief" in 1 Chron 5:12 and its *Septuagint translation). (Jewish texts most commonly applied the term to Israel. Ancient Near Eastern kings were sometimes acclaimed as sons of gods at their enthronements.) This term could also be another title for God's "Son" (Col 1:18; see Ps 89:27, although David was the youngest of eight sons). Both Greek and Jewish religion sometimes describe God or supreme deities as "First" and occasionally called some deities "the firstborn"; the emperor also claimed to be "first" among equals, the "equality" part being a rhetorical fiction. In Philo, the Logos was also God's "firstborn" (*Birth of Abel* 119; *Agriculture* 51; *Confusion of Tongues* 146; *Dreams* 1.215), though Philo could not have imagined the Logos becoming human.

1:16. The "invisible" creations of God refer especially to the angels in heaven who correspond to earthly rulers (see comment on Eph 1:19-23). Ancient Judaism accepted that God created both visible and invisible worlds. (Following *Plato, some Greeks emphasized in addition to the visible world the invisible patterns or images on which it was based.) Many Jewish writers, including Philo and even some Judean sources, gave angels or subordinate divine powers a role in creation; other Jewish and Christian writers (like Paul) are prepared to combat that view, as here.

Many Greco-Roman thinkers said that all things derived from, were held together in and would return to the Logos or nature or the primeval fire. In Jewish tradition, all things were created through and for God's Word or Wisdom. (In variants of that tradition, they were created for the righteous who upheld his word in practice.) Using different prepositions, ancient intellectuals often distinguished kinds of causation, including material ("from"), instrumental ("through"), modal ("in" or "by") and purpose ("for"); Paul employs three of these for Jesus here.

1:17. Many Greco-Roman philosophers said that all things were held together by Zeus or by the Logos, divine reason; by this they

meant to emphasize the unity of the cosmos. Greek-speaking Jewish writers like Philo also emphasized that God's Logos held the creation together, further identifying the Logos with divine Wisdom. In *Stoic thought, the Logos gave form to the primeval fire; in Judaism, Wisdom existed before all things and through it God created and then shaped the world.

1:18. "Head" could mean "authority" (2:10), "most respected or honored part" or "source" (2:19); on "body," see comment on Romans 12:3-5 or 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. God was sometimes called "the beginning" in Jewish tradition, and the term was even more often applied to Wisdom and the Logos; it was a natural term for the one from whom all things began. (In v. 18, it could be applied to the beginning of the new creation, however, as with "firstborn" here.) On "firstborn," see comment on 1:15. The *resurrection of the dead was expected at the end of the age; Jesus' resurrection ahead of that time was seen as the proleptic beginning or inaugurating of that future event (1 Cor 15:23).

1:19. The Old Testament speaks of God's choosing a place for his name to dwell, and delighting to dwell among his people, to dwell in Zion and so forth. Some suggest that "fullness" may refer to God's wisdom or glory filling the world (as in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition), or to the fullness of God's presence or attributes (as in Philo and other Jewish sources; cf. Col 2:9-10).

1:20-22. The reconciling even of the invisible powers (1:16) refers to their subordination rather than their salvation (2:15), "peace" being an end to hostilities. (In imperial propaganda, for example, the emperor was said to establish "peace" by subjugating his enemies.) Paul denies not their continuing activity in the world (2:8) but their real power to challenge Christ's *kingdom. (One might compare Enoch's mission to proclaim judgment against fallen angels in some early Jewish stories.)

1:23. Paul may intend the statement that the *gospel was announced throughout creation to counter the false teachers who claim secret, esoteric revelations (2:18). If "all creation" is meant literally ("everywhere" and "all the world" frequently appear in ancient *hyperbole), it might refer to the witness of creation (Ps 8:1; 19:1; 89:37; 97:6; cf. Rom 10:18). But here it is almost certainly a cosmic way (Is 51:16) of portraying that the gospel of Christ is for all peoples (Rom 1:8, 13; Mt 24:14). Jewish people generally believed that a person who rejected the covenant would be cut off from God; Paul similarly requires perseverance from those who profess Christ.

1:24–2:5
Paul's Labor for Them

Because Paul can describe his labor in terms of conflict suitable to an athletic contest (1:29), it is significant that Greek athletes traditionally strove in pan-Grecian competitions not only for their own honor but also for that of the cities they represented. Paul's sufferings are thus on the *church's behalf (1:24; 2:1).

1:24. Many Jewish people believed that some suffering had to be fulfilled before the end would come. Many scholars have thus read 1:24 as saying that Paul was taking an extra share of these afflictions, sometimes called "the *Messiah's birth pangs" because they presaged the messianic era. Others connect it with sharing Christ's sufferings as part of union with Christ (a concept with fewer non-Christian parallels). A speaker could appeal to hearers who would think favorably of one who suffered on their behalf (e.g., *Cicero, *In Catalinam* 4.1.2). (Paul suffers "for their sake" [NASB, NRSV], apparently meaning as their representative, because they are part of the church; it is not, however, vicarious suffering, because Paul clearly believes that Christ's suffering was sufficient in that regard; cf. 1:14; 2:8-10, 14.)

1:25. "Stewards" (cf. NASB) were managers of large household estates; they were often slaves or freedmen of high status. The phrase "fulfill the word of God" (KJV, literally) was sometimes used for obeying God's word, sometimes for being an instrument in bringing it to pass; Paul here both obeys and fulfills God's word by making it available to the *Gentiles.

1:26. The *Dead Sea Scrolls and other texts speak of "mysteries" in the Scriptures that only the spiritually enlightened can understand; for Paul, Christians are now enlightened (1:9, 12). This statement would refute mystics who claimed special, elite revelations belonging only to themselves (2:18).

1:27. That this mystery would be made

known among the Gentiles had been prophesied (e.g., Is 66:19) and was now being fulfilled (1:25). *Old Testament writers often said that God dwelled "among" his people Israel (Num 35:34), and on a personal level, "within" some of them (Gen 41:38; Num 27:18; Dan 4:8, 18; 5:11, 14; 1 Pet 1:11; more often, "filled," "rested on"; less relevantly, except to how some recent converts might hear Paul, some philosophers spoke of divinity or a deity within humans). But no one expected him to dwell among the *Gentiles*—indeed, on the personal level, within them (Col 2:12; 3:4, 16).

1:28. This teaching leads to their maturity or completion; cf. 1:22; 1 Corinthians 2:6 and 3:1-2; 2 Corinthians 11:2 and comment on Philippians 3:12-13. (Stoics viewed the ideal wise person as complete, but rarely believed that they attained that ideal.) Thus teaching Christ would lead to the hearers being prepared for the final day (1:22-23). "We" presumably includes Epaphras (1:7) and other proclaimers as well as Paul; "every person" again probably implies the free inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan (1:27).

1:29. Philosophers commonly used metaphors from athletic competition, such as "strive" (KJV, NASB) here (the image is much rarer in the Old Testament, e.g., Jer 12:5). Divine empowerment "within" (NASB, NRSV) has very limited ancient parallels apart from Old Testament texts about the *Spirit's enabling God's servants; Paul's language here would have impressed ancient hearers in a special way (see introduction to Rom 8:1-11).

2:1. He continues the athletic image of 1:29 ("struggle"). Although Paul had never met most of the Colossian Christians personally, he expresses his longing for them; this was a common element of ancient "letters of friendship." Colossae was in the Lycus Valley and not on an easy route from Ephesus. Like Colossae, Laodicea was in Phrygia; it was roughly ten miles west of Colossae.

2:2-3. Ancient sages (including *Gentiles but also common in the Old Testament and Jewish wisdom writers) often spoke of wisdom as the true wealth (in the Old Testament, see Job 28:12-19; Ps 19:10; 119:14, 72, 127, 162; Prov 3:13-15; Is 33:6). Writers sometimes also spoke of "hidden" treasures, a dream especially valued by the impoverished multitudes.

2:4. Sages often criticized professional public speakers for their unethical use of persuasion at all costs, regardless of truth. Many educated people in antiquity were trained and skilled in persuasive speech.

2:5. Letters often served as a surrogate for one's presence while one was absent, as ancient writers sometimes pointed out (cf., e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 1.7.1; *Letters to Atticus* 12.53; Dio Chrysostom, *Epistles* 3; Symmachus *Epistles* 1.84). Saying that one remained with someone "in spirit" was an expression of intimacy and affection. The point is intimacy, not metaphysical unity (see comment on 1 Cor 5:3).

2:6-15
Complete in Christ

2:6. "Walk" (KJV, NASB) or "live" (NIV) was a regular term for behaving according to God's laws (see comment on Gal 5:16), and "receive" was often used for Jewish teachers of the *law passing traditions on to their students. Paul thus exhorts the Colossians to continue in what (and whom) they were taught, not according to mere human traditions (2:8).

2:7. Paul combines agricultural and building images here, as in 1 Corinthians 3:9 (see comment there). The *Old Testament prophets used this language for Israel (if they obeyed God, they would take root, be planted, built up, etc.), and early Christians probably took this language from their preaching of the Old Testament.

2:8. Paul uses philosophical language in his letters (including this one), but his source of knowledge is God's revelation in *Christ (2:2-3, 6), not the finite human reasonings of philosophers (2:4). Even though only the most educated went on to study *rhetoric or philosophy, the influence of these disciplines permeated the ancient world. Because philosophy in this period grappled most often with moral and ethical issues, new Christians in the culture now struggling with the same questions would naturally be interested in philosophers' ideas. *Diaspora Jewish writers praised "philosophy," and some, like Philo, combined it readily with ecstatic experiences (cf. 2:18). (*Josephus, a Palestinian Jew writing for a non-Palestinian Gentile audience, even calls Judaism a "philosophy"—*Against Apion* 2.4,

47—and describes the different Jewish movements as philosophical sects. The *Letter of Aristeas,* *Philo and even *Justin Martyr's Trypho approved of and were skilled in Greek philosophy, and many Jewish apologists, including Philo and Josephus, accused the Greek philosophers of plagiarizing Moses.)

On "traditions," which characterized especially Pharisaic teachers in Palestine, see comment on 2:6; Greek *disciples also "passed on traditions" of their teachers' sayings. "Elementary principles" (NASB) translates a term that can refer to the personified forces of nature, spirit beings or "spirits" (NRSV, GNT; cf. NIV, ESV), as in Galatians 4:9 (cf. Colossians 2:10); but here it may refer, as usually, to elementary principles (the term is often used of the alphabet). If this is the case, Paul affirms that the simple message of Christ is much more profound than the greatest secular wisdom could be. (Philosophers also addressed cosmology, debating the universe's basic "elements.")

2:9. *Stoics spoke of the deity as being filled by all things, usually in a pantheistic sense; Greek-speaking Jewish writers modified this language to refer to God's rule encompassing all things. For Philo, the "fullness" can be the sum total of the powers manifesting God's rule, denoting God's all-sufficiency in himself; much later Jewish mystics spoke of the heavens around God's throne as his fullness. Other Jewish writings spoke of God's *Spirit, wisdom or glory filling the world, as in the Old Testament, which may be more to the point here.

Whatever precise sense Paul means by "fullness," he clearly means that access to all that God is and does is available only through Christ, a function ancient Judaism often attributed to divine Wisdom.

2:10. "Rule and authority" (NASB) probably refers to the angelic powers thought to rule the nations of the world (see 1:16; comment on Eph 1:19-23), a doctrine that is somehow central to the erring persons wishing to influence the Colossian Christians (see comment on 1:16; 2:18). Of the various possible meanings for "head" (1:18), "authority" or "ruler" makes most sense here, although Jesus is also their "source" (1:16).

2:11-12. Physical circumcision was normally said to be "in the flesh" (Gen 17:11). The Old Testament and some Jewish (mainly *Essene) texts speak of "spiritual" circumcision (Deut 10:16; 30:6), which in the *Dead Sea Scrolls can enable one to overcome the evil impulse (see comment on Rom 7:14-25). Paul might here play on the Greek idea of the body as a "tomb" from which one must escape for mystical experiences and for ultimate deliverance in death; if this view has been a temptation for his readers, Paul is saying that they have already experienced all the deliverance from flesh's power that they need.

2:13-14. The term translated "written code" (v. 14, NIV) was used for "handwritten" (see KJV) notes, usually "certificates of debt" (NASB) with penalties attached. Paul intends his readers to think of an IOU before God; Jewish tradition also portrayed sins as "debts" before God. Jewish people used the term translated "decrees" (NASB) or "regulations" (NIV) for God's laws; decrees were often posted in public locations. The Jewish people believed that their sins were forgiven when they repented; records of sins would be blotted out on the annual Day of Atonement. Paul says the *atonement occurred when the debt was nailed to the cross in Christ and thus paid. (Crucifixion did not require nails, but these were used in Jesus' case; Jn 20:25; cf. Acts 2:23.)

2:15. On "rulers and authorities" (NASB, NRSV), see comment on 1:16 and 2:10. In 2:8 Paul used a word that could mean "take as a prisoner of war"; here the cosmic powers themselves are shown off as captives in Christ's triumphal procession, an image familiar to Romans and presumably known to others throughout the empire (see comment on 2 Cor 2:14). In Roman triumphs, the general (in this period normally the emperor) dressed as the chief god Jupiter and led behind him humiliated captives, stripped of their possessions; prominent captives were the most impressive. Here Christ displays his triumph over the most prominent captives possible. (Ironically, though Paul was in Roman custody, the spiritual rulers behind the earthly ones were Christ's captives.)

2:16-23
Avoid Human Religion

*Christ is sufficient (2:6-15); *ascetic additions to the *gospel would only detract from faith in it.

2:16. Asceticism was growing in paganism, and many viewed it as a means of achieving spiritual power or revelatory experiences. But this text clearly refers to Jewish customs; although much of Palestinian Judaism opposed asceticism, Judaism and Christianity in other parts of the empire often took on the characteristics of the surrounding culture. *Gentiles sometimes associated local Judaism with asceticism (even linking the sabbath with fasting, although the forms of Judaism we know about would not have permitted fasting on the sabbath). Gentiles mocked Jews as separatists especially on three issues: circumcision (2:11), special laws about food and drink, and special holy days. The "new moon" celebration was used to greet each new month; the sabbath was a weekly festival.

2:17. *Plato distinguished the "real" world of ideas from the shadow world of sense experience. *Philo developed Plato's concept to argue that the invisible God was known through "shadows," or copies, of his character, rather than through sensory vision. Writers by this period distinguished substance or body, the original reality, from shadows or mere copies; adapting their language, Paul believes that the *Old Testament prescriptions testified to genuine principles, but that those principles are fulfilled in Christ. Those with the reality did not need to depend on the shadows whose function was to point to the reality. Paul's term for "substance" is also his term for "body," perhaps pointing to the embodiment of new values in Christ's physicality (1:22; pace Platonism and the ascetics in 2:23) and in the *church (1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15).

2:18. Jewish literature often conjoined "humility" ("self-abasement," NASB, NRSV) in a positive way with fasting. But when taken to an extreme, "humility" included ascetic practices designed to open oneself to "visions" and ecstatic experiences. Such practices became popular in second-century Christian asceticism. (Insufficient protein and sleep deprivation are known to induce hallucinations today as well.)

"What they have seen" (NIV) may be the language of visions (NASB, NRSV). It suggests that the erring people in Colossae may have been like the Jewish mystics, known from other sources, who regularly sought to achieve the heavenly vision of God through ecstatic revelations of God's throne. Although these were attempts to simulate the experience of biblical visionaries like Ezekiel, the biblical visionaries sought only to heed God, not to achieve mystic experiences per se. On vain visions, cf., e.g., Jeremiah 23:32 and perhaps Ecclesiastes 5:7.

Jewish mystics and *apocalyptists sometimes claimed communications from angels (cf. Gal 1:8; in a positive vein, Acts 27:23; Rev 1:1). It appears that in Colossae, some were venerating angels; although this veneration violated the teachings of some Judean sects such as Pharisaism, some evidence indicates that many common *Diaspora Jews addressed prayers and petitions to angels, a practice that overlapped with magical spirit invocations. (Some Jewish literature, especially the *Dead Sea Scrolls but also other texts, spoke of the earthly community entering into the worship of the heavenly community, and some scholars think Paul attacks that idea here; but the book of Revelation might approve of joining heaven's worship, and it is unclear that Paul would have reason to attack the practice.)

2:19. Ancient medical literature sometimes described the head as the source of life for the rest of the body.

2:20-21. Union with Christ in death was sufficient (cf. 2:11-12); adding ascetic rules (2:18) was useless (on "elementary principles," see comment on 2:8). The "decrees" (NASB) or "rules" (NIV, GNT) may be Jewish "regulations" (NRSV), as with the cognate term in 2:14. (Although the language with which Paul describes them in v. 21 has been compared to descriptions of *Pythagorean asceticism, the language could fit Old Testament purity rules just as well.) Most Jews outside Palestine still kept the food laws, and some Jews forbade even touching particular foods (**Letter of Aristeas* 129); other Old Testament laws explicitly decreed one impure for touching some things (e.g., Lev 11:39; 15:5; Num 19:11; but cf., e.g., Mt 9:25). (This application would be especially appropriate if Paul thought of people adding to those rules, as Jewish teachers noted that Eve or Adam her tutor apparently added "Do not touch" to God's "Do not eat"—Gen 2:17; 3:3.)

2:22. Those influenced by philosophical

thought recognized that transitory, perishable things were much less valuable than what was eternal. "Human commands and teachings" (NIV, NRSV) is an allusion to the Greek translation of Isaiah 29:13, which Paul's hearers might also recognize from the Jesus tradition (Mk 7:7).

2:23. Pagan philosophers (especially Stoics) often spoke of freeing oneself from bodily pleasures so one could concentrate on the contemplations of the soul. Some elements of paganism were tending toward asceticism, which became still more prevalent in the second century. (Pagans converted to Christianity may have also thought Christianity tended toward asceticism, with its countercultural emphasis on avoiding premarital sex and drunkenness; Judaism was sometimes similarly misinterpreted as ascetic. This misinterpretation of Jewish and Christian morality may have disposed some of the converts toward genuine asceticism after their conversion.) But for Paul, "beating down the flesh" is worthless for dealing with fleshly passions.

3:1-11
Living Out the Dead Life

Paul's premise is that the Colossians have died with *Christ (2:20); therefore trusting the finished work of Christ and living as what they are in him, rather than following human religious regulations (2:21-23), will produce holy living.

3:1-4. In *Plato's famous *parable of the cave, centuries before Paul, shadows on the wall (cf. 2:17) merely reflected the real world above. Many people by Paul's day believed that the heavenly realms were pure and eternal, in contrast to the temporal and perishable world below. Philosophers thus became known for meditating on heavenly things (many repeated the joke about the philosopher who fell into a ditch because he was staring at the heavens). Jewish *apocalyptic writers also distinguished between the heavenly and earthly realms, emphasizing the purity of God's realm in the upper heavens.

The Jewish mystics creating problems at Colossae may have been seeking these upper realms through mystical experiences (2:18). For Jewish mystics, the goal was vision of God's throne; for some philosophers, the goal was vision of the ultimate deity, who was pure mind and separate from the world of matter. For Paul, by contrast, the object of heavenly contemplation is Christ. In the context, this includes Christ's character or heavenly values centered around Christ (3:10-17), available because those who died and rose with Christ were also exalted with him (cf. 2:20; 3:1, 5, 9-10; Eph 2:6). The phrase "heavenly matters" was sometimes used this way.

3:5-7. Other Greco-Roman writers (including Jewish ones like the author of *4 Maccabees) also listed vices and warned against passions. Paul might emphasize their "earthly" body because the erring people influencing *church members had adopted a popular Greek view in which one's soul was heavenly and eternal but one's body earthly, perishable and sometimes thus viewed as unimportant. Paul uses their own language to emphasize that it does matter what one does with one's body.

Paul does not believe in "beating down the body" (2:23), but he is willing to speak of amputating appendages or "putting them to death" in a *figurative* sense. Perhaps borrowing an image from Jesus (Mk 9:43, 45, 47), Paul here describes passions as "members of the body." (The body was not evil, but indulging all its desires without observing God's restrictions was. *Philo speaks occasionally of the soul's needing to extinguish the body; but most thinkers recognized that morally therapeutic amputations were ineffectual, such as postadolescent castration, which did not remove sexual desires; they would mean such statements metaphorically.) But one puts to death the sinful lifestyle by depending on one's finished death in Christ (3:3-4), not by harsh treatment of the physical body (2:18, 20-23). The sins Paul lists here are typical sins *Gentile converts to Judaism would have committed before their conversion.

3:8. Greco-Roman (the Stoic Zeno, Diogenes Laertius 2.93) and Jewish teachers (see 4 Maccabees and the rabbinic commentary *Sifra*) sometimes had a second list of subordinate or less obvious vices following the first list, announcing that these too should be removed. In contrast to the more obvious vices of 3:5 practiced primarily by Gentiles, even Jewish people grappled with the sins listed here.

3:9-10. "Take off" and "put on" (NIV) may reflect the image of armor used by Greco-Roman moralists or Jewish tradition's occasional image of being "clothed" with the *Spirit, although Paul could also have simply concocted his own image of spiritual clothing (which he uses frequently; see comment on Rom 13:12); there is nothing profound in the fact that ancient peoples had to put on and take off clothes. (Some scholars have argued that this is a baptismal image. Because *baptisms in Jewish ritual baths were normally performed naked, disrobing and being clothed again afterward would make sense. We can hardly imagine, however, that John's public baptisms in the Jordan [Mk 1:5]—which probably included men and women—were done in the nude, and we have no clear evidence of how non-Palestinian churches practiced baptisms in this period.)

"Old person" and "new person" probably allude respectively to Adam, in whom the old humanity lived (in the light of Jewish concepts of corporate personality and the use of *'adam* as a term for "human" in Hebrew), and to Christ. An allusion to Adam is the likely import of "image" and "created" in 3:10 (see Gen 1:26). The language of "renewing" fits Jewish teaching about a new creation arriving with the messianic era at the end of the age, which Paul believes has been inaugurated in Christ, the new Adam (see comment on 2 Cor 5:17); it has come, but believers living out the life of the new age in the old age must continually realize their participation in this newness to behave accordingly. The renewal may also reflect the language of the *Old Testament (Ps 51:10; cf. Ezek 18:31), especially language about God's work in his people at the end (cf. Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-27).

3:11. Of all peoples in the empire, Greeks, fiercely proud of their own heritage, were often the most intolerant of Jewish people. Circumcision divided Jews from non-Jews. In the Greek language, which was widespread by Paul's time, "barbarians" technically still meant all non-Greeks, although some non-Greeks broke down these categories differently (e.g., some Alexandrian Jews claimed to be Greeks, even though this claim infuriated Alexandria's ethnic Greeks). Scythians were generally considered the most barbaric, cruel and anti-Greek people (although some ancient writers portrayed them as "noble barbarians"). "Slave and free" was one major way of dividing humanity socially, although some slaves were more advanced socially than many free persons. "Christ is all" may mean thus that he, rather than any human divisions, rules all of human life.

3:12-17
Rules for the Christian Community

The parallels with Ephesians here are so close that many scholars believe that Ephesians copied and expanded Colossians. When a letter purportedly from Paul diverges significantly from another Pauline letter, some scholars attribute the different letter to another author. But when the letter with differences also exhibits similarities to another Pauline letter, some scholars say one writer copied the other one. Neither line of argument is adequate by itself, however, without substantial evidence for non-Pauline authorship. Paul may have sent out similar instructions to different churches in this period of his life, or even allowed an assistant to revise some basic instructions for different congregations (see comment on 4:16). *Scribes were sometimes tasked with drafting material in documents based on already available material.

3:12-13. "Chosen," "holy" and "beloved" (NASB, NRSV) were all terms that the *Old Testament applied to Israel. For "put on" (KJV, NASB) see comment on 3:10. Paul includes a list of virtues, also a standard literary form in his day.

3:14-15. Love often appears as an important virtue in antiquity (sometimes as the chief virtue in Judaism), but it appears repeatedly in early Christian literature as the supreme virtue, in a manner not consistently paralleled in any other body of ancient literature (e.g., for some "wisdom" was the dominant virtue, or *Aristotle's four cardinal virtues dominated). "Peace" (v. 15) probably especially means "among one another," in unity (v. 14); this virtue was highly valued in both Jewish and other Greco-Roman literature.

3:16. Whereas Ephesians 5:18-19 emphasizes the Spirit in worship, Paul in Colossians is concerned with erring persons who have not

recognized the full sufficiency of Christ; he thus emphasizes the "word of Christ" here. On the worship, see comment on Ephesians 5:19.

3:17. Ancient culture was pervasively religious, but most pagan religious practices were ritual observances that did not cast moral influence over one's daily life and ethics. For Paul, by contrast, every aspect of life must be determined by Christ's lordship.

3:18–4:1
Rules for the Household

*Aristotle had developed "household codes" directing a man how to rule his wife, children and slaves properly. By Paul's day persecuted or minority religious groups suspected of being socially subversive used such codes to show that they upheld traditional Roman family values. Paul takes over but modifies the codes (though less in Colossians than Ephesians). See the more detailed discussion on Ephesians 5:22–6:9.

3:18. All ancient moralists insisted that wives should "submit" to their husbands, though few would have stopped short of using the term "obey," as Paul might do here (cf. 3:20, 22; see comment on Eph 5:33).

3:19. Although the ancient instructions to husbands normally stressed how he should rule his wife, Paul stresses instead that he should love her.

3:20. Throughout the ancient world (including under *Old Testament *law, Deut 21:18-21), minor children were expected to obey their parents; although Roman law allowed the father to demand obedience even of adult children, adults no longer living with their parents were normally expected only to honor their parents.

3:21. Most ancient fathers and educators beat their children as a matter of course; like a minority of ancient moralists, Paul advocates a more gentle approach to child rearing.

3:22-25. Ancient law treated slaves as property as well as treating them as people, and their obedience was expected. Many, however, considered slaves generally lazy (an attitude easy to understand in some cases, since slaves rarely shared the profit of their own labors). The admonition that slaves devote their work to the Lord relativizes the master's authority (cf. 4:1); "not pleasing people" was also common advice in ancient Jewish ethics. For more on slavery in general, see the introduction to Philemon.

4:1. Some Greek and Roman philosophers warned that masters themselves could become slaves someday (unlikely as this was), so they should treat their slaves rightly. Aristotle attacked philosophers in his own day who said that slavery was against nature and therefore wrong. By contrast, Paul clearly believes all people are by nature equal before God; although he does not address slavery as an institution here, what he does write thus suggests that he does not favor it. Although he has no control over the system, he can warn masters to keep in mind their status before God. For an example of a situation in which he does have more potential influence, see Philemon.

4:2-6
Rules Beyond the Community

4:2-4. For an "open door" as opportunity, see comment on 1 Corinthians 16:9. Keep in mind that Paul is in Roman custody. Most prisoners lacked access to washing or haircuts, though Paul may be in a lighter form of custody here (see comment on Acts 28:16).

4:5. The *New Testament often uses "outsiders" for "those outside the *church." It may be related to a term used by later Jewish teachers for those who did not understand the *law, but it is a natural image by itself, perhaps more analogous to the way Jews viewed *Gentiles in general. "Redeeming the time" (KJV, literally) probably means "making the most of the time" (NRSV). (Cf. Ps 90:12. The *LXX of Dan 2:8 uses the phrase for trying to gain a delay.)

4:6. "With grace" (KJV, NASB) can mean with gracefulness, pleasantness and so forth (closer to the classical Greek usage of "*grace" than the usual New Testament usage); see comment on Ephesians 4:29. Salt was a preserving and flavoring agent; thus Paul probably refers to speech designed to make sense to outsiders and be relevant to them (cf. the common ancient depiction of pleasant speech as "honeyed"). When a particular *rhetorician recommended salting one's words properly, he seems to have meant sarcastic wit; in this context, Paul seems to mean instead a gentle answer (cf. Prov 15:1).

4:7-18
Closing Greetings

Letters often closed with greetings from others, because letters went out irregularly and undependably (whenever someone was traveling to the recipients' area).

4:7-8. News was often carried by word of mouth via travelers. Hosts usually asked their guests about people they both knew elsewhere. Such news bearing was thus normally only incidental, but Paul sent Tychicus for the purpose of bearing news. Personal news from custody or during war was sometimes dangerous to put in a letter, entrusted instead to a discreet traveler who could supplement the letter.

4:9. Because Paul is writing from imprisonment (4:18), this Onesimus could be the same one as in Philemon 10 (cf. perhaps 2 Tim 1:16), at a later period. An Onesimus became bishop of Ephesus by the early second century, but we cannot be certain it is the same one Paul mentions here.

4:10. Both Aristarchus (Acts 20:4) and Mark (Acts 13:13; 15:37-39; 2 Tim 4:11; cf. 1 Pet 5:13) were junior colleagues of Paul in ministry. "Fellow prisoner" could mean that Aristarchus was also a captive, but it might be figurative, simply meaning that he accompanied Paul, who was in custody (cf. Acts 27:2).

4:11. "Jesus" (which can also be translated "Joshua"—GNT) was a common Jewish name. Many Jewish people used a second Greek or Latin name resembling their more traditional Jewish name, and this "Jesus" bears also the Latin name "Justus." That Paul sent greetings from Jewish and Gentile workers engaged in spiritual ministry together would have struck ancient readers as far more profound than most modern readers can guess.

4:12. "Striving" ("wrestling"—NIV, NRSV; "laboring"— NASB) is a term that can designate conflict or athletic competition signifying great exertion; philosophers and others often used it metaphorically (see comment on 1:29; cf. Gen 32:24?). Paul thus depicts prayer as a form of spiritual conflict or discipline crucial to their mission (4:2-4).

4:13. Recommendations could speak of another's fondness for the letter's recipients (e.g., Pliny, *Epistles* 7.31.1). The three largest cities of the Lycus Valley in Phrygia were Colossae, Laodicea and (six miles from Laodicea) Hierapolis; in this period Colossae was the least significant of the three. Hierapolis hosted healing cults, a temple to the emperor and the reported entrance to the underworld; it also had a significant Jewish presence in this period. Laodicea was a wealthy commercial center, despite its somewhat remote location.

4:14. Physicians were well educated but were often slaves or *freedpersons, with relatively low social status. Although most physicians were men, women physicians (most often but not limited to midwives) are known. Empirically valid observations existed alongside folk traditions, superstition and guesswork; there were no board-accredited physicians, and different schools of medical thought existed. Pagan healing cults (such as that of Asclepius) allowed for medical practice alongside prayers to a deity; views varied somewhat in Judaism, but later hospitals evolved especially from the eventual Christian practice of caring for the sick in late antiquity. Although I deem it unlikely (based on the geographic distribution of "we" in Acts), some have suggested that Luke studied medicine in Laodicea (where there is evidence of a prominent medical practice) or practiced for a healing cult in Hierapolis (before his conversion); the readers seem to have heard of him. *Papyri attest that some Jews did bear the Greek name "Demas" (cf. 2 Tim 4:10), but in this context (Col 4:11) Demas seems to be a Gentile.

4:15. Early manuscripts differ on the gender of "Nympha," but *scribes would more likely change a woman's name into a man's name here than the reverse; hence the feminine form "Nympha" is probably original, giving her a position of influence in a house church.

4:16. Paul's letter to the Laodiceans is no longer extant, although some scholars have suggested that it is our current letter to the Ephesians (contrast comment on Eph 1:1; but the circular letter could have gone to Laodicea, the nearest location it went to Colossae); like Ephesians, it may have been similar to Colossians. Nearly all reading was done aloud, and letters to groups would naturally have been read to the whole group by one person, because even in urban areas

most people could not read well. In a church service, Paul's letter may have been read alongside *Old Testament Scripture, although it is unlikely that either Paul or his earliest readers guessed that some of his letters would become Christian Scripture.

4:17. Archippus may have been Philemon's son or at least a colleague in his house church (Philem 2).

4:18. Writers usually dictated letters to scribes but often closed with a signature in their own handwriting.

1 Thessalonians

Introduction

Authorship. The vast majority of scholars acknowledge 1 Thessalonians to be Pauline, the majority recognizing it as Paul's first extant letter.

Date. First and Second Thessalonians may be the earliest of Paul's extant letters, written shortly after the evangelization of the Thessalonians, hence by about A.D. 50, within two decades of Jesus' *resurrection.

Situation. While preaching Jesus as *Messiah (the Jewish king) in Thessalonica, Paul had been accused of preaching another king besides Caesar (Acts 17:7; cf. "*kingdom" in 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5). The very young Thessalonian *church continued to experience persecution after Paul's departure, but he encourages them with the promise of a future hope, which applies even to those who have already died (1 Thess 4:13-18). Paul borrows much of the language used by Jesus and Jewish *apocalyptic motifs that had become part of the early Christian movement.

Form. Technically, the handbooks that mention letter types are later, and divide letters into types merely to provide examples for composition; nevertheless, they may provide some sensitivity to ancient ways of thinking about important themes in letters. Most of Paul's letters include a thanksgiving, but some commentators think that his thanksgiving in this letter extends from 1:2 to 3:13 (which is unlikely); thus they characterize this as a "letter of thanksgiving." Others categorize it as a "letter of comfort" or a "parenetic letter" (a letter telling them how to behave); it also contains substantial elements of a "letter of praise," commending the Thessalonians, and features from "letters of friendship." Like most ancient letters, 1 Thessalonians is a mixture of various types, borrowing themes as necessary from each type (to the extent that they existed as such) without concern for formal categories; its closest parallels, however, are to parenetic letters. It has deliberative elements.

Unity. Nearly all scholars today acknowledge that 1 Thessalonians is a unity (the change of tone in chaps. 4–5 is characteristic of Paul's and some similar letters), except for 2:14-16, which some scholars think (on content grounds) were added later to Paul's letter. Chapters 1–3 seem to exhibit a slightly modified chiastic (inverted parallel) structure, however, which suggests that even these verses belong: thanks-

giving (1:2-5; 3:9-10), victory in suffering (1:6-10; 3:6-8), apostolic care (2:1-13, 17-20) and suffering (2:14-16; 3:1-5).

Commentaries. Among commentaries helpful for background are Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians,* AB 32B (New York: Doubleday, 2000); I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians,* NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); note also F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians,* WBC 45 (Waco, TX: Word, 1982); and Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians,* NICNT, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). Among other helpful studies, see Karl Paul Donfried, *Paul, Thessalonica, and Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Abraham Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

1:1-10
Introduction and Thanksgiving

It is uncertain where (or if) Paul's thanksgiving breaks off; because Paul did not write in paragraphs but according to flows of thought and *digressions, one cannot always outline his letters as we might outline discussions of topics today.

1:1. This was the standard way to open a letter. "Silvanus" is Silas's Latin name as a Roman citizen; a Jewish Roman citizen's parents often chose for their child Jewish (*Aramaic) and Latin names that sounded similar.

1:2. Thanksgivings were a common feature of ancient letters. Verses 2-10 might function like a proem, the customary opening designed to secure the hearers' goodwill, although Paul also wishes at the same time to encourage them; he is lavish in praising them (a skill emphasized in antiquity most extensively in epideictic *rhetoric). On "mentioning" in prayers, see comment on Philippians 1:3-4.

1:3-4. "Chosenness" (v. 4) was a term the Jewish people applied exclusively to themselves; Paul applies it here to a *church that includes many *Gentile converts.

1:5. Parenetic letters often reminded readers of what they already knew. Appealing to readers' own eyewitness knowledge was an irrefutable technique of argument.

1:6. Students often imitated their teachers, and invitations to imitation were normal in parenesis; but Paul claims that they have already begun to do so. The common Jewish association of the *Spirit with divine inspiration might suggest inspired or even ecstatic joy (perhaps in jubilant worship), although the Spirit was associated with other activities as well. Most of pagan culture reacted angrily to Jewish people's converting pagans from the religion of their ancestors; because a greater percentage of Christians were converts from Gentile backgrounds, they would face still greater hostility.

1:7. Achaia, south of Macedonia, was well aware of events in that nearby province.

1:8. Travelers usually carried news with them, and the other churches may have heard of the Thessalonians through the Philippian messengers, also from Macedonia, who brought Paul support (2 Cor 11:9; Phil 4:15-16), or through any other Jewish or Christian travelers. Cf. Psalm 19:4. Geographical *hyperbole ("every place") was not uncommon.

1:9. Statues of deities were pervasive; some Gentile intellectuals (as opposed to the masses) viewed them as merely reminders of the deities, but Jews rejected them as idols. Jewish texts often described the radical change required of pagans converting to Judaism in terms like those Paul uses here; the Roman writer *Tacitus also criticizes Judaism for making *proselytes despise the gods and so reject their own countries and families. Foreign religions could become accepted in Thessalonica, however. Among major cults in Thessalonica were the Egyptian cults of Serapis and Isis, as well as those of the more traditional Greek gods like Dionysus and the Roman cult of the emperor; some of the upper class sponsored the cult of the Cabiri from the Aegean island of Samothrace.

1:10. Jesus' *resurrection was the advance installment of the resurrection of all the righteous dead at the end of the age (which figured prominently in Jewish teaching from Dan 12:1-2 onward); Jesus will thus deliver the Thessalonians from wrath at the time of their resurrection. The *Old Testament often applied the term "wrath" to God's judgments within history, but this term was often extended, as nearly always in Paul and the *New Testament, to the outpouring of God's wrath in the final day of the Lord, the day of judgment when, according to the New Testament, *Christ returns to punish the wicked (e.g., Is 13:9, 13; 26:20; 30:27; Zeph 1:18; Rom 2:5).

2:1-12
The Nature of the Apostles' Coming

Speeches and letters often contained a strong *narrative element near the beginning, recounting the events leading up to the circumstances of the speech or writing. As in much other parenetic (i.e., moral exhortation) writing, Paul contrasts proper and improper lifestyles by antithetical parallels ("not . . . but").

Paul need not be responding to actual "opponents" in this section, as some earlier commentators thought (although given the perse-

cution the *church in Thessalonica faces, it is not unlikely that he suspects that standard criticisms have been raised against him in his absence). Wandering sages were often criticized and hence developed some traditional themes that they emphasized whether or not they were defending themselves, themes that Paul also uses here. As Malherbe points out, Dio Chrysostom, a public speaker who lived a generation after Paul, accused most *Cynics (wandering beggar philosophers) of error, impurity, deceit (2:3), flattery (2:5), and love of honor (2:6) and money (2:5). In contrast, Dio Chrysostom also observed that a true philosopher is gentle, like a nurse (2:7).

2:1-2. Dio Chrysostom criticized false philosophers, who feared insulting treatment from the masses, and he described their speech as vain. True philosophers, he said, spoke with boldness even in the face of opposition. Paul and his companions were "mistreated" (NASB, NRSV), "treated outrageously" (NIV) or "shamefully treated" (ESV) in Philippi shortly before arriving in Thessalonica; this term means that they were scandalously treated in a humiliating manner, being publicly stripped and beaten without a hearing (Acts 16:22-23).

2:3. Spurious philosophers were charged with speaking out of error, impurity and deception. ("Impurity" here might allude to the philosophical idea that one should use reason to purify one's mind from its slavery to human lusts. Given the complaints about Judaism and eastern cults seducing women away from their husbands' religions, it is also possible that charges of sexual impurity [cf. 4:7] could have been raised against the sponsors of Egyptian, Jewish and Christian religious associations in Thessalonica; cf. Acts 17:4.) Religious and philosophical charlatans were widespread in the ancient Mediterranean, and genuine philosophers were thus at pains to distinguish themselves from the phony variety by denying these characteristics.

2:4. This contrasting style ("not . . . but") was a common way of emphasizing the point, whether or not these exact charges had been leveled against Paul and his companions. Pleasing God rather than people was an important part of *Diaspora Jewish ethics. Divine authorization and inspiration were accepted as a sure sign that one was not a charlatan, although not everyone who claimed such inspiration was believed.

2:5. Despite the encouraging proem (opening) in this letter (1:2-10), Paul disclaims dishonest flattery. Selfish sages were often guilty of flattery, which could earn them more money by begging or employment; demagogic politicians likewise catered to the masses, becoming "all things to all people" (cf. comment on 1 Cor 9:19-23). But most philosophers and moralists complained that flattery was not for the hearers' good; although one should speak gently, a true teacher ought to correct faults boldly. Contempt for flatterers is thus one of the most common characteristics of ancient moral literature (cf. also Prov 28:23; 29:5).

2:6. Sages claimed the right to rule all things because of their wisdom. Openly seeking honor for oneself was seen in a negative light, although competition for honor was rife.

2:7. Well-to-do Romans often had slave or free wet nurses to care for young children, as did some, though fewer, lower-class Romans. According to the ideal of the educated Romans who could afford them, wet nurses should be educated so they could teach the young children; their most important trait, however, was their gentleness. They often endeared themselves to young children, who when they grew older frequently freed those nurses who had been slaves. The harshest Cynics criticized those who were gentle like wet nurses or the aged; other thinkers, like Dio Chrysostom, insisted that such gentleness should be cultivated.

Many moralists, e.g., *Plutarch, recommended that mothers nurse their own children rather than delegate the task to nursemaids, and this was no doubt the common practice for most people, who could not afford wet nurses anyway. The image could thus be one of a nursing mother, although all Paul's hearers would have known of the custom of wet nurses as well. The particular image—wet nurse or nursing mother—does not affect Paul's point: gentleness. People in the eastern Mediterranean, where nursemaids were less frequent, often considered mothers more affectionate than fathers (see *4 Maccabees 15:4), although Roman culture frequently emphasized mothers' severity.

Although flattery was to be avoided (2:5), Dio Chrysostom and others despised vulgar Cynics who simply cursed those from whom they were begging; one should mix praise with the blame, making one's message gentle enough for the hearers to be able to respond to it. (Paul's extant letters include no complete "letters of reproach," the harshest form of blame in ancient *rhetoric.)

2:8. Dio Chrysostom claimed that a true philosopher (like himself, he noted) would give no thought for personal danger but speak truth out of concern for his hearers. Others expressed affection in saying they loved their hearers as themselves or wishing to be able to die for them. In contrast to most writers who made such claims, Paul had demonstrated the truth of his claim to endanger himself for the Thessalonians while he was among them.

2:9. The Thessalonian Christians were mostly poor (cf. 2 Cor 8:1-2) and did not share some of the Corinthians' objections to manual labor (see comment on 1 Cor 9:6). The Christians in Philippi had sent him funds while he was in Thessalonica (Phil 4:15-16), but Paul still had to labor as an artisan. Because he could have set up shop in the marketplace, he could have done work and gained customers even if he was there only a brief time (cf. Acts 17:2, though Paul may have remained in Thessalonica longer than he spoke in the *synagogue). Many Jewish teachers in this period had another trade besides teaching, often learned from their fathers.

"Night and day" was a common phrase, which could mean parts of the night and parts of the day. A manual laborer began work around sunrise and could talk with visitors while working; but from the early afternoon on Paul could use his time for more direct evangelism.

2:10-11. Although Romans valued the dignity of the stern public man, most ancient portrayals of fathers (including Roman ones) stress their love, indulgence and concern for their children. True philosophers compared their concern for their hearers to that of a father as well as to that of a nurse (2:7), and *disciples often saw teachers as paternal figures.

2:12. "Worthy" can mean appropriate to the dignity or standards of the person being honored (see comment on Col 1:10-11); Jewish wisdom texts sometimes spoke of the righteous being "worthy of God" (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 3:5; 6:16). To new Christians who could no longer participate in the civic cult that honored the emperor in Thessalonica (1:9), God's "*kingdom" may have had political overtones; recognizing their greater allegiance to God's kingdom would be costly (see comment on Acts 17:7).

2:13-16
Nature and Cost of the Thessalonians' Reception

Far from being non-Pauline, as some scholars have suggested, this paragraph reflects Paul's apocalyptic expectations of judgment on Israel. Against the interpretation of some scholars, Paul does not here deny that the remnant will be saved or that Israel will turn in the end time (Rom 11). His words instead fit the *apocalyptic Jesus tradition (the body of Jesus' sayings about the end time) that Paul uses later in the same letter (1 Thess 4:13–5:11). *Digressions were a common feature of ancient writing.

2:13. Antiquity was replete with stories about people who rejected divine messengers, thinking them only charlatans; Paul is grateful that the Thessalonians embraced himself and his companions more appropriately.

2:14. Virtue was often taught by advocating imitation of a good example. The Thessalonian Christians were persecuted by others in Thessalonica, as Judean Christians were by Judean non-Christians (as Paul of all people could attest—Gal 1:13). That Paul's readers have had some problems with the local Jewish community is also likely (Acts 17:5-7); although they did not make up the majority of the church's opposition (Acts 17:8), they would account for the elaboration on Jewish opposition in verses 15 and 16.

2:15. The Jewish people nurtured the tradition that their ancestors had killed the prophets (Neh 9:26), intensifying the *Old Testament account. Opposition to missions-minded, Greek-speaking Jewish Christians had been increasing among Palestinian Jews as Jewish-Gentile tensions increased there (see comment on Acts 21:20-22 describing a situation that existed within a decade of this letter). Jewish practices led Jewish people to

band together in an often-hostile environment, leading many *Gentiles to accuse them of hatred toward humanity; but Paul's meaning here is quite different, referring only to their opposition to the Jewish Christian missionary outreach to the Gentiles.

2:16. "Filling up the measure of sins" (NASB) is an Old Testament idea (e.g., Gen 15:16) also used by Jesus (Mt 23:32). In keeping with Paul's teaching elsewhere (Rom 11), "wrath has come on them to the end" (the literal translation) may mean "wrath has come on them until the time of the end" (cf. Lk 21:9, 23), rather than "forever," or simply the equally natural "fully" or "finally" (cf. "at last"—NIV, NRSV, GNT). The Old Testament prophets said that after many judgments the remnant of Israel would turn with their whole hearts toward God, and then he would restore his people and bring in the new age of his rule (e.g., Jer 29:11-14; Ezek 34:11-31; Hos 14:4-7; Amos 9:11-15).

2:17–3:10
Longing for His Friends

Emotion was appropriate even in persuasive speeches and letters of friendship; Paul's letters are full of emotion, and this passage is one of the clearest examples of it.

2:17. Letters of friendship commonly expressed a longing to see the other person and often noted that they were apart only in body, not in spirit. (Today we might say, "My heart is with you.") Paul goes even beyond these conventions by protesting (literally), "We were orphaned without you" (see NRSV); though emphasizing gentleness, many philosophers would have considered such language *too* passionate.

2:18. Ancients sometimes spoke of Fate hindering them. Given the geographical proximity of Paul to Macedonia, "*Satan's hindering" (KJV) here may refer to some concrete obstacle preventing his return to Thessalonica—either the Jewish opposition he mentioned in 2:14-16 or opposition from city magistrates and its consequences for his friends there (Acts 17:8-9).

2:19-20. Crowns and garlands were used for rewards throughout Jewish and Greco-Roman literature of this period; not a royal crown but a victor's wreath is in view. Crowns (cf. Is 28:5; 62:3) and garlands (cf. Is 61:3) sometimes appeared as symbols of future reward in the *Old Testament and in ancient Judaism. Paul's reward, however, is simply the perseverance of the Thessalonians themselves (cf. similarly 3 John 4).

3:1-2. Letters of friendship often expressed longing to see another person, sometimes even grief over being separated. Even when the expressions were formulaic, they were usually no less genuine (compare modern greeting cards for various occasions). Timothy and possibly Silas rejoined Paul in Athens, and he dispatched them back to Macedonia while he labored alone in Athens. Luke omits some of these details in the account in Acts (Acts 17:14-16; 18:5), as one would expect; any author who has written a readable *narrative knows that one cannot report every detail and must smooth the narrative out. But the correspondences between the accounts are striking, while the divergences indicate that Luke probably did not derive his account from this letter.

3:3-4. Jesus, the Old Testament and some Jewish *apocalyptic writers had predicted a period of sufferings just before the impending end of the age. These sufferings would accompany the *gospel's proclamation (according to Jesus; cf. Mk 13:9-11) and help bring about the *repentance of Israel (according to the Old Testament, e.g., Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1; cf. Deut 4:30; Is 26:20-21). If this is in view here, Christians were destined to endure this suffering but were also destined to escape the wrath at the Second Coming (1:10; 5:9; cf. Acts 14:22).

3:5-8. Letters often displayed affection by reporting the author's sorrow over not being together (e.g., Oxyrhynchus papyri 528.6-9). Ancient letter writers often complained that their feelings were hurt when they did not receive letters back promptly; this complaint was meant as a sign of their affection. Because letters had to be carried by travelers, Paul would not expect to have heard from them, especially if they had not known where to find him; it would be easier for him to send someone to them than the reverse. Yet his complaint about not knowing their situation expresses affection, like that of a worried parent. On "living" in verse 8, see comment on 2:8. Letter writers sometimes showed affection

by emphasizing that they were well if only their addressees were (*Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 12.12.1; 12.13.1; 13.6a.1; 14.8.1; Pliny, *Epistles* 5.18.1).

3:9-10. Paul resumes, completes or adds a thanksgiving (see comment on 1:2); cf. Psalm 116:12. Most people slept during the night, and prayer during the night was a mark of special devotion in the Old Testament and Jewish literature (e.g., Ps 22:2; 42:8; 63:6; 77:2, 6; 119:55, 148). "What is lacking" in their faith (3:10) might be adequate hope (3:6; cf. 1:3; 5:8), which Paul seeks to supply in 4:13–5:11.

3:11-13
Paul's Prayer

In most letters, the prayer immediately follows the thanksgiving; because the prayer in 1 Thessalonians begins in 3:11, some commentators suggest that Paul finishes the thanksgiving only in 3:9-10. But Paul might simply be following a format in this letter different from his later, more customary one.

3:11. "Wish-prayers" ("Now may God . . . " addressed to those for whom the prayer is offered) were considered genuine prayers in Judaism and were offered with the expectation that God would hear them. Paul continues the motif of longing in verse 11.

3:12. Thanksgivings and prayers could introduce topics to be taken up later in the letter, especially in Paul's letters; he returns to "love" in 4:9 and to "outsiders" in 4:12.

3:13. The *Old Testament, Judaism and Jesus' teaching also looked forward to a future hope that gave meaning to endurance in the present. The "*saints" or "holy ones" here could refer to God's people (4:14) or to the holy angels (Zech 14:5; cf. **1 Enoch* 1:9); both were called "holy ones" regularly in Jewish literature. Paul usually uses the term for the former.

4:1-8
Sexual Purity

The issue throughout this passage is adultery (4:6). Paul may have heard of a specific instance in the congregation, or he may still be concerned because of the known sexual looseness of pagans, reinforced during his stay in proverbially immoral Corinth. Unmarried Greek men (i.e., Greek men below the age of thirty) commonly indulged in intercourse with prostitutes, slaves and other males; non-Christian Greek religion and culture did not provide any disincentive for doing so.

4:1-2. Paul here uses ancient Jewish and Christian language that sometimes designates the passing on of an earlier teacher's words. Paul and his companions spent much of their time in Thessalonica teaching the new believers Jesus' sayings, to some of which he plainly appeals in 4:13–5:11. Speakers often invoked deities when they urged others (e.g., Isaeus, *Menecles* 47: "I entreat you by the gods"), as Paul here exhorts by Jesus.

4:3. Greek and Roman practice allowed for intercourse with prostitutes and slaves; premarital sex was prohibited for males under Roman law only if an aristocrat were doing it with an upper-class woman (this was called *stuprum*). Judaism was much stricter, reserving sex for marriage (although ancient sources indicate that some Jewish men did fall prey to premarital and extramarital temptations). Paul condemns all sexual immorality, although he moves to a specific example in 4:6. He shares the *Old Testament view that premarital sex with someone other than one's future spouse is adultery against one's future spouse and thus is as sinful as adultery after the wedding (under the law, a capital offense; Deut 22:13-29).

4:4. "Vessel" (KJV, NASB) was commonly used as a metaphor for one's "body" (NIV, NRSV) in Greek and *Diaspora Jewish literature; it was occasionally applied to one's wife (in some Jewish texts and, on one interpretation, in 1 Pet 3:7). It probably means "body" here, although the matter is debated. Proper treatment of one's sexuality was a matter of serious honor and shame (among Greeks and Romans, especially for women).

4:5. Adopting more *ascetic Greco-Roman ideals, some Diaspora Jewish writers decided that sex was permissible only for procreation, and passion even toward one's wife was unacceptable. Because Paul elsewhere sees marriage as the only appropriate place to release passion (1 Cor 7:2-9), it is more likely that he opposes only adulterous passion (1 Thess 4:6), not sexual pleasure in marriage. Jewish people viewed nearly all *Gentiles as sexually immoral (later *rabbis even argued that one could not assume the virginity of a Gentile

woman over three years and one day old); some other groups also viewed outsiders as immoral, though by biblical standards, most Gentile men *were* immoral. Although many of Paul's hearers are ethnically Gentiles, he expects them to recognize that they are spiritually non-Gentiles by virtue of their conversion to the biblical faith (cf. Rom 2:29; 4:12).

4:6. Adultery, or "wife stealing," as it was often considered, was shameful and punishable by banishment under Roman law; in some circumstances, a couple caught in the act could be killed on the spot. Adultery seems to have been common and usually unpunished, however; but a Roman husband who learned that his wife was committing adultery was required by law to divorce her or himself be prosecuted on the charge of *lenocinium*—"pimping." Palestinian Judaism could no longer execute the Old Testament death penalty for adultery, but Jewish people believed that what they could not execute, God would (especially on the day of judgment).

4:7. From the standpoint of many temples in ancient culture, intercourse made one ritually impure for a time. This impurity could be extended metaphorically, however, to spiritual impurity in the case of sexual sin (cf. also the *Septuagint of Lev 20:21; *Testament of Joseph* 4:6; perhaps *1 Enoch* 10:11). "Sanctification" (NASB) or "holiness" means being "set apart" to God; Israel in the Old Testament was "set apart" and exhorted therefore to *live* as if they were set apart (to be holy as God was holy; e.g., Lev 20:24-26).

4:8. The *Holy Spirit's major roles in Jewish texts included inspiring *prophecy and purifying the righteous; the latter was particularly prominent in *Essene literature and based especially on Ezekiel 36:25-27. Even someone unfamiliar with this role of the Spirit, however, would catch Paul's point from the title (*Holy Spirit*); although Old Testament writers call the Spirit of God "the Holy Spirit" only twice, this had become a common title by Paul's day. Paul has in mind the Spirit who purifies and sets apart God's people (1 Thess 4:7).

4:9-12
Behavior Toward One Another and Outsiders

4:9-10. Moralists often wrote on the topic "on love of family" and similar themes. For Paul, all Christians were also one family and the ethics of familial love should apply. Many extended the title "brother" to intimate friends or members of a committed in-group (see comment on Acts 9:17). Thessalonica was a prominent city of Macedonia. One who offers advice could graciously add that it was superfluous to offer it, because the person would surely do it anyway (e.g., Galen, *Avoidance of Grief* 79b).

4:11. On working with the hands, see comment on 1 Corinthians 4:12. Landowning aristocrats despised manual labor, but for most of the ancient world manual labor was the only means of livelihood. Although the Thessalonian *church may have included a few well-to-do benefactors (Acts 17:4, 9), Paul seems not to have encountered there the opposition to his views on manual labor that arose in Corinth.

Minding one's own affairs and clinging only to one's own philosophical community were central to *Epicureanism but also came to characterize a number of other people in the first century who remained aloof from public or political life. Complete quietism of this sort drew criticism from the rest of society, just as Jewish allegiance to its own customs and people did.

In the broad sense of avoiding public controversies, however, "leading a quiet life" was wise guidance for a persecuted minority in the first-century Roman Empire. Some writers such as *Plutarch advocated the involvement of wise men in the affairs of the state, but even they advised certain people (e.g., those who had already enjoyed a full political career) to withdraw from active service. Paul asks his hearers to be inconspicuous, not monastic.

4:12. Treating outsiders appropriately ("behaving properly toward outsiders"—NASB, NRSV) may mean that Paul does not only not want them destitute but also (given cultural attitudes) not known for dependence on wealthy benefactors. Many poor people lived in Thessalonica, and unemployment was high there. Begging on the street normally characterized only the poorest, often propertyless persons (and *Cynic philosophers; cf. comment on 2 Thess 3:11-12).

4:13-18
Comfort for the Grieving

People in antiquity often wrote letters of consolation. Paul loads this consolatory section of his letter with Jewish *apocalyptic motifs taken directly from Jesus' teaching. (Given the vast number of apocalyptic motifs Paul omits, and that most of those he includes coincide with the oral tradition of Jesus' teaching later recorded in the Gospels, there can be little doubt as to his source—see 4:15. Given the many prophets and hence prophecies in the early *church, it is quite improbable that Paul and the Gospel writers simply drew on the same *prophecy of someone other than Jesus; it is also unlikely that the Gospel writers would have known of 1 Thessalonians, or if they had, that they would have modeled their reports of Jesus' teaching after it.) Appealing to Jewish future hopes was a natural approach in consolation, as Jewish tomb inscriptions attest. Table 7 shows some parallels between 1–2 Thessalonians and Jesus' teachings reported elsewhere.

Although a number of these motifs appear in other early Jewish sources, none appear with such frequency together in one book (much less one chapter) as to leave any doubt that Jesus' teachings are Paul's direct source here. (Likewise, many conventional Jewish end-time motifs, such as mutant babies, are absent.) In the light of the local persecution that this letter addresses (1:6; 2:14-16; 3:3-6), some scholars have suggested that those in the congregation who died since Paul's departure died as martyrs. Martyrdom must have been the exception rather than the rule around A.D. 50; it would not have taken many exceptions, however (as martyrs or dying otherwise), to provoke questions among the Thessalonian Christians.

4:13. Philosophers often "consoled" the recipients of their letters by saying, "Do not grieve," or "Do not grieve too much," since "it will not do any good." This is not, however, Paul's point; rather, it is that Christians do not grieve for their fellow Christians as non-Christians grieve, because Christians have hope. Most Gentiles believed in a shadowy afterlife in the underworld and did not share the philosophers' optimism or neutrality toward death. Most Gentiles grieved, and Jewish and other Near Eastern peoples engaged in very cathartic grief rituals. "Sleep" was a common euphemism for death.

4:14. Like many Jewish people, Paul believed that the soul lived in heaven till the *resurrection of the body, and that soul and body would be reunited at the resurrection (2 Cor 5:1-10). Many ancient writers distinguished the upper atmosphere ("aether") where pure souls would reside, from the lowest heaven, the realm of "air." Thus here the Lord descends from "heaven," meaning the highest heavens (4:16), and meeting his people in the "air," the lower atmosphere (4:17; cf. comment on Eph 2:22).

4:15. "Word of the Lord" in this case means a saying of Jesus (cf. Lk 22:61; Acts 20:35; 1 Cor 7:10). Jesus spoke of his "coming" (e.g., Mt 24:27), a term that could apply to the visit of a king or royal dignitary, which was celebrated with great pomp and majesty.

4:16-17. In the *Old Testament, trumpets (shofars, rams' horns) were used especially to gather the assembly or give orders for battle; in this context, both connotations may be in view. Roman armies also used trumpets in war; Jewish views of the end time included Israel being gathered with a trumpet and trumpets used in the final war at the same time (daily Jewish prayers; the *Qumran War Scroll). Michael, the chief archangel of Jewish literature, was considered Israel's guardian angel and thus figures in Jewish texts about the final battle; here Jesus seems to assume Michael's role on behalf of believers, God's people.

The "clouds," "trumpet" and possibly "archangel" allude to a saying of Jesus about the end time (Mt 24:30-31); the meeting in the air may be inferred from the gathering to join him (Mt 24:31). Judaism traditionally associated the *resurrection of the dead with the end of this age and the inauguration of the *kingdom, and readers would assume this connection in the absence of a direct statement to the contrary. When paired with a royal "coming" (see comment on 1 Thess 4:15), the word for "meeting" in the air normally referred to emissaries from a city going out to meet the dignitary and escort him on his way to their city. The contrast that this image provides with the honor thought to be particularly due to the "Lord" Caesar and his emissaries could well have provoked hostility from local officials (cf. 2:12; 5:3; Acts 17:7).

Table 7. Parallels Between 1–2 Thessalonians and Jesus' Teachings

Themes	Jesus' teachings in the Gospels or elsewhere	1 Thess 4	2 Thess 2	Sources before these documents
Temple destroyed	Mt 24:2; cf. 23:38; 24:15; Mk 13:2; Lk 13:35	–	–	Some traditions; views on Dan 11:31; 12:11
Temple desecrated	Mt 24:15; Mk 13:14	–	2:4	–
False prophets	Mt 24:5, 11, 24; Mk 13:6	–	2:9	One common motif in end-time woes
False prophets' signs	Mt 24:24; Mk 13:22	–	2:9	–
Eschatological "distress"	Mt 24:21, 29; Mk 13:19, 24	(3:3)	(1:4, 6)	Dan 12:1
Birth pangs	Mt 24:8; Mk 13:8	5:3 (though probably applied differently)	–	Possibly eschatological idiom (cf. e.g., 1QH 3.3-18)
Lawlessness	Mt 24:12	–	2:3, 7-8	One common motif in end-time woes
Apostasy	Mt 24:10, 12; Mk 13:12	–	2:3	One common motif in end-time woes
Parousia	Mt 24:3, 27, 37, 39	4:15; cf. 2:19; 3:13; 5:23	2:1, 8 (cf. 2:9)	–
Coming on clouds	Mt 24:30; cf. 26:64; Mk 13:26; cf. 14:62	4:17	–	Dan 7:13
Trumpet for gathering	Mt 24:31	4:16 (also 1 Cor 15:52)	–	Familiar image (e.g., Is 27:12-13; cf. **Psalms of Solomon* 11:1-4; *Shemoneh Esreh* 10)
Gathering	Mt 24:31; Mk 13:27	(4:15-17)	2:1	Familiar Jewish expectation
Unknown time	Mt 24:36; Mk 13:32	5:1-2	–	A strand in Jewish expectation
Unknown "times and seasons"	Acts 1:7	5:2	–	–
Unexpected destruction	Mt 24:38-41; Lk 17:26-30, 34-35	5:3	–	–
Coming like a thief in the night	Mt 24:43; Lk 12:39	5:2-4 (cf. 2 Pet 3:10)	–	–
Stay alert (in explicitly eschatological context)	Mt 24:42; 25:13; Mk 13:33-37; Lk 12:37-38; 21:36	5:6	–	–
Asleep	Mk 13:36	5:7, 10	–	–

Table 7 is adapted from Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 366-71.

The "shout" is undoubtedly the commander's shout of war (Amos 2:2), an image applied to God as warrior in the Old Testament (Is 42:13; cf. the shout of triumph with a trumpet in Ps 47:5, 8-9), as is his descent (Is 31:4; cf. Zech 14:3-4). From the earliest *New Testament sources, Old Testament imagery about God's coming in the day of the Lord is applied directly to Jesus; Judaism envisioned this role as God's, not the *Messiah's. "Clouds" were used both as imagery for the coming day of God's judgment (e.g., Ezek 30:3; 32:7; Joel 2:2; often the clouds are the smoke of battle and pillaging) and the coming of the *Son of Man (Dan 7:13).

4:18. Writers of letters of consolation (mentioned in, e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 13.20) sometimes urged their readers to "comfort" (KJV, NASB; or "exhort," "encourage") themselves and others with their words. (Funeral speeches especially praised the deceased, but often also offered comfort to the bereaved.) In the same way, Jewish people recognized that committed servants of God could exhort one another to stand firm in the face of suffering and martyrdom (2 Maccabees 7:5). Even the majority of the Old Testament prophets who wrote most fiercely of judgment included words of comfort and hope for the righteous remnant of God's people, and hope is central to Paul's message about the future for his readers, who make up such a remnant.

5:1-11
Watchfulness

Paul continues his discussion of the Lord's coming (4:13-18), ending on the same exhortation to comfort or encourage one another (4:18; 5:11).

5:1. Here Paul cites another saying of Jesus (later recorded in Acts 1:7; writers normally paraphrased sayings when quoting them). The general thought—that the time of the end was unknown—was common enough in other Jewish circles; teachers debated whether the righteous could hasten the time of the end or whether it would simply come in the time that God had ordained, but most agreed that people could not know the time of the end. Some Jewish writers, however, worked up elaborate schemes to predict that it was about to occur; Paul does not subscribe to such theories.

5:2. This verse is another saying of Jesus (Mt 24:43; also used in 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 3:3; 16:15; cf. Joel 2:9, but there is no close parallel in Jewish sources before Jesus). "The day of the Lord" in the *Old Testament was the day of God, the judgment at the end of the age (sometimes prefigured in nearer judgments, but ultimately cataclysmic in its final form; cf. Ezek 30:3; Joel 3:14; Obad 15). Jewish *apocalyptic literature commonly spoke of an unexpected end, yet one that was preceded by signs. Paul does not mean that no signs can precede the day of the Lord (2 Thess 2:2-4)—only that they will not pinpoint the time or provide sufficient warning to the wicked (1 Thess 5:3-4).

5:3. These "birth pangs" are not the initial or age-long ones of Matthew 24:8, but the final pangs of destruction in the day of the Lord (cf. Is 13:8). Birth pangs were a common image of agony and destruction (Ps 48:6; Is 21:3; 26:17-18; 42:14; Jer 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 49:22-24; 50:43; Hos 13:13). Sudden destruction was also a common biblical idea (Is 47:11; Jer 6:26), and unexpected judgment on the wicked became a regular motif of Jewish apocalyptic; but given the other echoes in the context Paul may here especially reflect Jesus' teaching (Mt 24:36-44).

The Jewish people knew well about false peace: false prophets prophesying peace had led to Judah's judgment in the Old Testament (e.g., Jer 6:14); the first-century B.C. Roman general Pompey had entered Jerusalem falsely pretending peace; and roughly two decades after Paul wrote this letter, false prophets of victory led the Jerusalemites to slaughter at the hands of Titus's Roman army. Paul's hearers in Thessalonica, however, could take his words as an attack on claims of earlier Roman emperors to have established peace and security (*pax et securitas*) throughout the empire. Teachings like this one sounded subversive and may have aroused persecution against Christians (Acts 17:7).

5:4-5. The background to these verses is quite natural: Paul extends the image of the day of the Lord coming as a thief in the night (see comment on v. 2). Thieves normally broke in at night, but believers in Jesus were people of the day of the Lord. Paul parallels day with light and night with darkness, using common images for good and evil in his day. "Children

of" (KJV, NRSV, NIV) was a way of saying "people characterized by."

5:6-7. Night was the time for both sleeping and drunken parties. Paul may draw on the sayings of Jesus in Matthew 24:42, 49 and 26:45, besides the obvious Matthew 24:43. Other moralists also used "sobriety" metaphorically.

5:8. Roman guards and other kinds of night watchmen (such as shepherds) were the only people who stayed awake at night, apart from those engaging in drunken revelry. Paul's armor imagery may also reflect the standard Jewish idea of a final war preceding the end and the military imagery used by moralists concerning their struggle with the passions (see comment on Rom 13:12; cf. also comment on Eph 6:10-20).

5:9. Although "salvation" could mean "deliverance," in the context of the final salvation it would also be associated with the bodily *resurrection of the righteous, as here. Judaism juxtaposed this resurrection with the wrath God would pour out on the *Gentiles and disobedient Jews at his coming to judge the earth, which they expected would occur at the same time.

5:10. On the image of "sleep," see comment on 4:13 (it cannot allude to the image of 5:5-7, where it refers to the people of darkness).

5:11. See comment on 4:18.

5:12-22
How to Behave Among God's People

Verses 12-15 deal with how to treat one another; verses 16-22 address corporate (and partly private) worship (cf. similar exhortations to corporate worship in Eph 5:18-21, followed by household codes).

5:12-13. The term for those who "have charge" (NASB, NRSV) or "are over" (KJV) the Thessalonian Christians can refer to oversight more generally, but was also sometimes applied in the Greco-Roman world to *patrons, sponsors of *clients and religious associations. If that sense is in view here, these would be the Christians who opened their homes for the *churches to meet in them and sponsored them, providing what financial and political help they could (the Thessalonian patrons probably included Jason—Acts 17:5-9).

That they would also "admonish" (not just "instruct"—NASB, GNT) is not unusual, since they would probably be the wealthier members of the congregation and hence better educated. (Most people in antiquity were functionally illiterate; exhorting was generally easier for those with the training and leisure to read the Scriptures, since the Scriptures were the source of exhortations in both *synagogue and church.) If no one was particularly well-to-do, those who were relatively better off would have to perform the functions of patron as best they could, requiring either smaller or more crowded house churches; but the congregation probably included relatively well-to-do people (Acts 17:4).

5:14. The "unruly" (KJV, NASB) are the undisciplined—"idlers" (NRSV) or "those who are idle" (NIV) who can work but refuse to do so (cf. 4:11; 2 Thess 3:7-8). The word for "faint-hearted" (NASB, NRSV, NIV) or "timid" (GNT) referred especially to those who were self-denigrating, who had a low opinion of themselves. Cf. Isaiah 35:3-4.

5:15. Compare Jesus' teaching (Mt 5:39); some other Jewish teachers also advised nonretaliation (see comment on Rom 12:17).

5:16. Greek ethics often listed succinct statements one after another as Paul does here. Many biblical psalms associate rejoicing with celebration and worship (e.g., Ps 9:14; 33:1; 47:1; 95:2; 149:1-5); here it is thus naturally linked with prayer and thanksgiving (1 Thess 5:17-18).

5:17. Even the strictest pietists of Judaism did not pray all day; but they prayed regularly, much and faithfully. "Pray without ceasing" could mean this type of prayer or to carry the attitude of prayer with oneself throughout the day, not just in corporate worship or personal quiet times.

5:18. Pagans who recognized that Fate or some god was sovereign over everything acknowledged that one should accept whatever comes or even give thanks for it. For Paul, those who trust God's sovereignty and love can give thanks in every situation.

5:19-20. Most of early Judaism associated the *Spirit especially with *prophecy; Paul does not want anyone quenching genuinely inspired speech. The term translated "quench" was often used with fire, which appropriately fits one *Old Testament image of prophets unable to repress God's inspiration (Jer 20:9).

5:21-22. In the context, "test them all" (NIV) may mean test prophetic utterances (5:19-20), retaining the good but rejecting the bad. *Perhaps* because some Greek religious cults practiced ecstatic inspiration, Paul warns the Thessalonians not to confuse their inspiration with that of paganism; but judging prophecy was already an issue in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, many prophets were trained under senior prophets, guided in their sensitivity to the Spirit's inspiration (1 Sam 19:20); because such senior prophets were not available to most early Christian congregations, mutual testing by others moving in the prophetic gift was necessary (see comment on 1 Cor 14:29).

5:23-28
Concluding Words

5:23-25. On "wish-prayers," see comment on 3:11. Although Paul emphasizes the *whole* person here by listing component parts in good Jewish fashion (cf., e.g., Deut 6:5; Lk 10:27), he uses the language of his culture to describe the parts (which he can divide differently elsewhere, e.g., 1 Cor 7:34; 14:14-15). He is quite unlike the philosophers who constructed detailed analyses, dividing the soul into two (*Cicero), three (*Plato, *Philo) or eight (*Stoics) components. Like most Jewish writers and the *Old Testament, Paul saw people especially as a whole, with body and soul separated at death, and distinguished various components only as needed. (Valentinian *Gnostics, mainly under Middle Platonic influence, later made much more of the differences between soul and spirit, and thus "soulish" and "spiritual" persons, than Paul intended here; their radical distinctions led them to deny the full incarnation, or enfleshment, of Jesus the Word. Some philosophers advocated a form of trichotomy [three parts], although they did not tend to use Paul's wording here.)

5:26. Kisses were a common affectionate greeting for those with whom one had an intimate or respectful relationship; see comment on Romans 16:16.

5:27-28. Many people could not read, so reading his letter aloud was the only way everyone in the congregation could be acquainted with it.

2 Thessalonians

Introduction

Authorship. Some scholars have denied that Paul wrote this letter, because it differs in some respects from 1 Thessalonians; conversely, they attribute the similarities it has with 1 Thessalonians to imitation. But 2 Thessalonians is Pauline in style and moves in the same *apocalyptic world of thought that much of 1 Thessalonians 4–5 does; the differences are no greater than one would expect in two separate letters dealing with such a broad topic, or even than one sometimes finds in passages within a single apocalypse. It seems unlikely that 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 was written after the temple's destruction (A.D. 70); because *pseudepigraphic letters were rarely written during or immediately after the lifetime of their alleged author, 2 Thessalonians was most likely written by Paul (who died around A.D. 64). The majority of commentators today accept it as Pauline.

Relationship to 1 Thessalonians. Although scholars have debated which letter was written first, most scholars think that 1 Thessalonians was written before 2 Thessalonians (the original letters were not titled or numbered, of course). The bearer of his first letter has probably returned with news about the situation in Thessalonica; some of the Christians have embraced Paul's message about future hope without the qualifications he had attached to it, and have decided that the day of the Lord has already come (2:2).

Commentaries. See those listed in the introduction to 1 Thessalonians. Most commentaries cover both letters.

1:1-12
Introduction, Thanksgiving and Prayer

Paul's letters usually open with the basic introduction ("Paul . . . to . . . "), a thanksgiving and either a prayer or a mention of his prayers for the recipients. Each of these features was typical of letters in his day, but Paul adapts them in a Christian way. Paul also stocks his *apocalyptic language here with phrases from the *Old Testament.

1:1. The basic format of letter openings was: sender's name, to recipient's name; greetings.

1:2. The typical Greek greeting was *chairein,* which Paul adapts to *charis,* "*grace." Jewish letters usually added the typical Jewish greeting of "peace," which functioned as a wish-prayer: "May God's peace be with you," "May all be well with you." (On wish-prayers, see comment on 1 Thess 3:11.) Paul makes this prayer more explicit by adding the source of grace and peace: both God the Father and the Lord Jesus. Both "God" and "Lord" are divine titles in the Old Testament.

1:3. Thanksgivings for the recipients were common in Greek letters and helped establish a friendly tone at the beginning of the letter.

1:4-5. A major theme in Jewish thought by this period, including in apocalypses, was God's reward for the righteous who suffer. Developing this theme from the Old Testament, Jewish writers emphasized that God would punish their persecutors in the end and deliver the righteous, no matter what they suffered now. This deliverance was intimately bound up with the hope of the *resurrection of the righteous at the end of the age. Often the present or imminent tribulation was viewed as the final "messianic birth pangs" that would usher in the era of the *kingdom. Some philosophers also spoke of sufferings proving one worthy of God.

1:6-7. As in Jewish literature, so here the righteous receive rest from their tribulation only at the same time that God vindicates them by his final judgment on the wicked (cf. also Deut 32:34-36, 41). God's coming to judge the world appears in various texts (e.g., Zech 14:3-5), including destruction by fire (e.g., Is 66:15-16, 24; **1 Enoch* 91:7-9). Fire burning one's adversaries was a common image in the Old Testament (e.g., Num 11:1; Ps 97:3; Is 26:11; cf. Jer 4:4; 15:14; 17:4; 21:12; Ezek 21:31; 22:20; Nahum 1:6; Zeph 1:18; 3:8) and continued in Jewish expectations (e.g., **Sibylline Oracles* 3.760-61; 4.43, 161, 176-78). This image was natural because of the use of fire in war and because "wrath" was often described in Hebrew and cognate languages in terms of "burning."

This also became customary end-time imagery in Jewish literature; in some Jewish texts the whole earth would be destroyed, in others the kingdom would be established without such cosmic transformation. The wording here is particularly from Isaiah 66:15 (presumably envisioned as belonging to the same era as the new world and new Jerusalem, Is 65:17-18). The "mighty" angels are envisioned as the Lord's army (cf., e.g., 2 Kings 6:17; *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QM 12.8).

1:8. On God's vengeance or repaying his people's enemies, see Deuteronomy 32:41, Isaiah 35:4 and 66:6; it was also an important theme in post-Old Testament Jewish literature.

1:9. This verse directly echoes the *Septuagint of Isaiah 2:10, 19 and 21 (roughly, "from the face of the fear of the Lord and the glory of his strength"). That Jewish literature often describes God turning his "face" (literally) or "presence" from the wicked may be theologically significant, but Paul directly takes over the Semitic idiom ("from the face of" means "from before," "from the presence of") as the Septuagint of Isaiah rendered it. "Eternal destruction" in the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g., 1QS 2.15; 1QM 1.5; 9.5-6) and elsewhere (e.g., **Psalms of Solomon* 2:31; 3:11-12; 15:10) usually meant that the wicked were completely destroyed, but in the contexts of many of these passages they also suffered eternally (both could be mentioned in the same passage, e.g., **Jubilees* 36:10; cf. Is 66:24, cited in Mk 9:48).

1:10. Kings' "glory" was their splendor and royal bearing; the glorification of God's people was to be at the time of Israel's restoration (Is 46:13; 60:1-2; 62:2), when God (here Jesus) would come to vindicate them. (Paul normally associates the *saints' "glorification" with their bodily resurrection—e.g., Rom 8:17-23; 1 Cor 15:43; Phil 3:21. For future glory in ancient Jewish texts, see, e.g., **4 Ezra* 7:98; **2 Baruch* 51:3.) "When he comes" echoes the language of the Septuagint of Psalm 96:13, applying lan-

guage about God to Jesus. "On that day" is the "day of the Lord" (see 2 Thess 2:2; cf. Is 2:11-12, 17, 20; 11:10-11; Joel 3:18—"in that day").

1:11. Ancient letters, including Paul's, often contained prayers or mentions of prayers on behalf of the recipients. On "worthy," see comment on 1:5.

1:12. The Lord could be glorified in his obedient people in the present (Jer 13:11), but the ultimate glorifying of God in his people would be on the day when he would bring all things to light (see comment on 1:10).

2:1-12
The Final Rebellion

Some Thessalonian Christians thought that the day of the Lord had been *so* "imminent" that it had already come. To correct their misunderstanding, Paul reminds them of Jesus' sayings he taught them while he was there (2:5, 15): a final period of rebellion constituted an essential prerequisite for Christ's return.

2:1. The "coming" (described further in 2:8; cf. 1 Thess 4:15) and "gathering" here are grammatically linked, and the use of both terms derives from the sayings of Jesus. "Coming" was a common word, but when applied to a king it took on special connotations of a glorious visitation. Some Jewish texts applied it to God's past theophanies and future revelation in glory; Matthew 24:3, 27, 37 and 39 use it for Jesus' return to judge the world. Many texts, both in the *Old Testament (e.g., Is 27:12-13) and later Jewish literature (**Psalms of Solomon* 8:28; 11:2-5; 17:26; *4 Baruch* 3:11), speak of Israel's gathering as God's people; Paul probably takes the image of the gathering of the righteous from Jesus' saying later recorded in Matthew 24:31 and Mark 13:27 (which uses a related term).

2:2. Those who heard Paul's first letter read only once in the congregation may have misunderstood its point. The Greek outlook included an afterlife in the underworld or an escape of the soul to the highest heavens, but not a future event when the dead would be resurrected. Thessalonian Christians may have read Paul in the light of their own cultural predispositions: they may have assumed that the future reality was already fulfilled, not just initiated, in Christ. Paul replies that the future "day of the Lord" is indeed imminent or unexpected in its timing (1 Thess 5:2) but still preceded by the final rebellion (2 Thess 2:3-12).

2:3-4. The first prerequisite is either the "rebellion" (NIV, NRSV, GNT) or the "apostasy" (NASB). If it is a "rebellion" against God, it is the world's final insult to him (2:4); if "apostasy," it refers back to Jesus' sayings later written in Matthew 24:10-13. Both sins are characteristic of Jewish lists of end-time sufferings, but because Paul omits most of the signs found in such lists and focuses only on those cited by Jesus, the term here might mean apostasy. In either case, Paul indicates that the term does not apply to his readers (2:10-15).

In Jewish sources the figure of a general future antichrist (as he is commonly called) seems to occur mainly later, but contemporary Jewish texts do describe some past or present rulers in similar terms (cf. also the evil rulers in Dan 9–11); the tradition of pagan kings who made themselves out to be gods is also quite ancient (Is 14:13-14; Ezek 28:2; Dan 6:7). The *Dead Sea Scrolls speak of a "man of lies" who opposed the founder of their community; the *Psalms of Solomon* portray the Roman general Pompey in such terms; and Roman emperors lent themselves to such portrayals in general. Nearly a decade before this letter, Gaius Caligula had tried to set up his image in the Jerusalem temple, nearly sparking a Judean revolt. (Caligula immediately preceded Claudius, the current emperor in A.D. 41–54.) Two decades after this letter, when Titus destroyed the temple, his soldiers desecrated the temple by paying divine honors to the insignia of Emperor Vespasian on the site of the temple.

The imagery used here derives especially from Jesus, however (cf. Mt 24:15), who took it from Daniel (Dan 7:25; 8:11; 9:26-27; 11:31, 36; cf. 2 Chron 33:7; Ezek 8:3). Some scholars who have examined the prophecies carefully have concluded that Daniel 11 describes the abomination caused by Antiochus Epiphanes; yet the "end" seems to come at that time (12:1), about two centuries before Jesus. Like the promise of the land to Abraham's descendants, deferred repeatedly during the period of the judges, between David and Josiah, and afterward due to Israel's disobedience, this text might be seen as an example of deferred eschatology. The way that some count (and in the first century counted) the period of Daniel 9:24-27, the

anointed prince (whom some held to be the *Messiah) was to be "cut off" around the time that Jesus died; the destruction of the city followed forty years later, again indicating a delay of at least forty years. Christian interpreters differ as to whether (1) a specific future tribulation remains (perhaps 2 Thess 2:8-9), (2) the Jewish war in A.D. 66–70 fulfilled it completely (cf. Mt 24:15-21), (3) the whole course of history constitutes this period (cf. comments on Revelation, especially chap. 12) or (4) the language is reused in different ways, any and all of which ways may be true.

2:5. The Thessalonians apparently misinterpreted Paul's talk about the future *kingdom (Acts 17:7), much of which seems to derive from teachings of Jesus that Paul is transmitting to them (2 Thess 2:15). Ancient works sometimes refer to information shared between writers and their designated readers but obscure to subsequent readers.

2:6-7. The interpretations of this passage are more diverse than those of most passages in the *New Testament. Even the translation is not certain (is the restrainer "taken out of the way" or does the lawless one "come forth from the midst" at the end of v. 7?). Views of the "restrainer" are plentiful. Some have thought that the "restrainer" is one prerequisite for the end stated by Jesus, the preaching to all the nations (Mt 24:14); this view makes some sense, but the completion of this preaching was technically to precede the end itself, not the rebellion that preceded the end.

The "restrainer" could be simply God's sovereign restraint (e.g., Ezek 5:11); it could be the archangel Michael, angelic protector of Israel in Jewish tradition (also Dan 12:1); it could be the presence of Christians in Jerusalem (Mt 24:16-21); or it could be, as many scholars have argued, the ruler preceding the self-deifying emperor or succession of emperors. (Those who hold the last view sometimes suggest that the name of the emperor when Paul was writing this letter was Claudius, which was related to a Latin word for "restrain"; he immediately preceded the persecutor Nero, on whom see introduction to 1 Peter. But Claudius's name resembles more Latin terms for lameness, and most of Paul's Greek-speaking audience in Thessalonica, not a Roman *colony, would not have caught the pun in any case.) Many of the early church fathers took the view that the "restrainer" was the Roman Empire.

One popular modern view that has no specific contextual support is that the "restrainer" is the *church, which had inadequate social power in Paul's day to perform that function. The church's removal from the earth by the *resurrection described in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 does not fit this context, because the Thessalonian Christians were to receive rest from affliction only at the day of judgment (2 Thess 1:6-9), and be gathered (2:1) only in the day of the Lord (2:2), which was to be preceded by the rebellion (2:3-4), which in turn was to be preceded by the restrainer (2:6-7). Although no ancient Christian authors attest the view that the restrainer is the church (the idea of a rapture before the tribulation first explicitly appears in history around 1830, as a corollary of traditional dispensationalism), adherents of this view today cite various other New Testament texts for its support.

In any case, the Thessalonians would apparently understand what Paul means (2:5), and his point is not in question: this event has not yet happened, so the rebellion and hence the day of the Lord and the church's gathering are still future.

2:8. Paul describes the end of the lawless one in terms borrowed from Isaiah 11:4 (cf. Hos 6:5) and similar to those in other Jewish texts. Paul contrasts Jesus' own coming (cf. 2 Thess 2:1) with the lawless one's (2:9); on such contrasts see comment on Revelation 13.

2:9. Deceptive signs already occurred in Paul's day. Sorcerers and shrines of healing gods were common; although healing was not the primary focus of the imperial cult, some people in the eastern Mediterranean also invoked the spirit of the emperor, who was worshiped as a god, to deliver or heal them. Propaganda circulated that the emperor Vespasian (to whose insignia homage was paid on the site of the temple in A.D. 70) worked miracles, but emperors themselves were not usually known as miracle workers. Although miracle-working false prophets appear early in the Bible (Ex 7:11), Paul's source for their association with the end is probably again Jesus' teachings (cf. Mk 13:22; Mt 24:24).

2:10-12. In the Old Testament, God often

punished people by giving them the very blindness they had chosen for themselves (Is 19:14; 29:9-10); in Jewish tradition, all the nations chose to turn away from God's truth, and only Israel accepted his *law. *Satan's primary roles in Jewish thought were accuser and deceiver or tempter; for Antiochus Epiphanes's deceit, see Daniel 8:25; for that of idolatry in general, see Isaiah 44:20 and Jeremiah 10:3-5. Philosophers characterized themselves as lovers of truth, and this characterization was accepted as a morally high ideal among the leisured class of Paul's day and probably among others who stopped to listen to public lectures. But Paul, like most Jewish people, believed that God's perfect truth came by revelation, not by humans' finite reasonings.

2:13–3:5
Thanksgiving, Wish-Prayer and Prayer Request

As in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, here Paul offers a second thanksgiving and a wish-prayer before moving into the hortatory (exhortation) section of his letter.

2:13-14. In the *Old Testament, God "chose" Israel; *Gentile believers grafted into his people are often called "chosen" in the New Testament (see comment on Rom 9:14-29; cf. Mt 24:31). On the *Spirit (often linked with spiritual purification in segments of Judaism) and sanctification, see comment on 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8. On "glory," see comment on 2 Thessalonians 1:10 and 12.

2:15. Pharisaic Judaism emphasized the careful passing on of traditions from earlier teachers. Paul passed on to the Thessalonian believers the teachings of Jesus, many of which he has alluded to in this chapter (see the introduction to 1 Thess 4:13-18).

2:16-17. Here Paul offers a "wish-prayer," a prayer to God addressed as a wish for a person. Although not directly addressed to God grammatically, such blessings were meant as prayers for God to answer.

3:1-4. The prayer request that God's word may "run" (literally) or "spread" swiftly probably borrows the image from Psalm 147:15. The Thessalonians would think of runners in an athletic competition.

3:5. Paul concludes with another wish-prayer (see comment on 2:16-17).

3:6-15
Dealing with Idlers

3:6. Paul acts "in the name of Jesus"—as his representative. By this period "unruly" (NASB) usually meant "idle" (NIV, NRSV), the clear meaning in this context. The origin of this group of idlers in the *church might be the Greco-Roman aristocratic disdain for manual labor, or *clients or parasites dependent on wealthier *patrons, or a mistaken belief that the day of the Lord had come and canceled the need for such labor (2:2). Alternatively, they may have pursued a philosophic, specifically a *Cynic, lifestyle (see comment on 3:11-12). More certainly, idlers were known to pass their days in the marketplaces of Greek cities (including Thessalonica—Acts 17:5), sometimes easily stirred by demagogues. Some may have been genuinely converted but not given up their previous lifestyle.

3:7-9. Students commonly imitated their teachers. On the labor of Paul and his companions, see comment on 1 Thessalonians 2:9. As some commentators point out, to "eat bread" seems to have been a Jewish figure of speech for "making a living" (e.g., Gen 3:19).

3:10. Although Paul's saying here has no exact parallel, some Jewish and Greek sayings had similar meanings. Judaism had a strong work ethic and a heavy emphasis on charity; Proverbs emphasized both the need to help those who have nothing and for those who are able to work to do so. "Eat" refers either to food provided by other believers (cf. 3:12), as *synagogues cared for needy Jews, or food provided at the churches' communal meals (cf. 3:14), a practice known among religious associations in the Greco-Roman world.

3:11-12. For "eat their own bread," see comment on 3:7-9. "Busybodies" could refer to those engaged in superfluous activity, wasting their time on irrelevant details, or to troublesome "meddlers" (see GNT), or to both. Some Christians may have decided to justify their idleness by citing the lifestyle of traveling sages, such as Paul and his companions. But although Paul and his companions had distinguished themselves from the "bad" Cynic philosophers (see comment on 1 Thess 2:1-12), some Thessalonians may have continued fully in the Cynic vein: unlike Paul, Cynics begged

rather than worked; and with their denunciations of passersby they were certainly "meddlers." Alternatively, they may have followed other models for idleness (see comment on 2 Thess 3:6).

3:13. "Doing good" (NASB, GNT) includes charity, as in Judaism; Paul does not want his readers to misinterpret his limitation of charity.

3:14-15. The synagogue community enforced different levels of discipline, which the churches largely adopted (except for corporal punishment). Even under later rabbinic rules, which allowed less diversity of practice than was common in Paul's day, full excommunication involved treating the person as an infidel, bringing him under a curse (cf. 1 Tim 1:20; 1 Cor 5:5; Mt 18:15-20), but lesser bans that still treated a person as part of the religious community were practiced as well. The *Essenes also had different levels of discipline (1QS 7.1-20 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls).

3:16-18 Conclusion

3:16. This verse and 3:18 are final "wish-prayers"; see comment on 2:16-17.

3:17-18. Forged letters did exist (e.g., *Livy 40.55.1). In law courts, orators often had to argue that documents were forgeries (so *Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* 5.5.1), and some commentators have compared 3:17 with 2:2 to propose that Paul here reinforces the suggestion that the Thessalonians check to ascertain which letters were genuine. But most letter writers used *scribes and signed their names at the end (or sometimes added brief comments, e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 8.1), and Paul often follows this practice elsewhere in his letters (e.g., 1 Cor 16:21). That he fears the work of forgers is thus possible but not certain.

1 Timothy

Introduction

Authorship. Among all the letters attributed to Paul in the *New Testament, it is the authorship of the *Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus) that is the most disputed, although they were widely viewed as Pauline in the early *church. The style is noticeably different from the usual style of Paul's earlier letters: a heavier use of traditional materials (sayings from prior Christian tradition, e.g., the "trustworthy statements" marked by 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:1; Tit 3:8), various literary forms that Paul rarely employs in his earlier letters (e.g., lists of qualifications), significant differences in vocabulary, and so on. Although these differences alone would not necessitate different authors, they have led many good scholars to suggest either that Paul is not their author or (more often favored by many conservative scholars) that he allowed a *scribe or amanuensis considerable freedom in drafting the letter. (It is common knowledge that Paul, like most people, depended on scribes for much of his letter writing—Rom 16:22.) Some have compared the style of the Pastoral Epistles with that of Luke-Acts and concluded either that Luke was the author or that he was the scribe of these letters (cf. 2 Tim 4:11). Especially in 2 Timothy, where the nature of Paul's detention may not have permitted him the materials to write his own letters, an amanuensis (scribe) spending time with Paul, remembering Paul's words and transcribing them in his own terms would make sense. Others suggest that these letters were compiled based on oral memory of Paul's instructions or letters to Timothy and Titus. In any case, all agree that one may speak of "Paul" and his *disciples within the letters' *narrative world. Most individual details of vocabulary and style have some parallels in Paul's earlier letters, although their cumulative effect is different.

*Pseudepigraphic letters (letters falsely ascribed to a great teacher of the past) were a common literary or pedagogic device but were rarely written close to the author's lifetime. Pseudepigraphic epistles and forgeries rarely exhibit the number of personal allusions that appear in 2 Timothy. If 1 Timothy and Titus are "official letters" (cf. comment on 1 Tim 1:2) meant to bolster their respective recipients' authority among their congregations, then the fact that they are more formal than

2 Timothy is understandable. Apart from the special literary forms in 1 Timothy and Titus, these letters may exhibit fewer persuasive *rhetorical devices than Paul's earlier argumentation to churches, perhaps because they are more personal and institutional than directly theological. (Some language similar to that of popular philosophers and moralists remains.)

Situation. Various features sometimes used to argue lateness, such as church offices and the heresy addressed (some scholars read it as second-century *Gnosticism), generally fit as well or better in the circumstances of Paul's time (see comments on specific passages; the heresy need not be Gnostic). Certainly church offices are far less developed than in the early second-century letters of Ignatius. In 1 Timothy, false teachers advocating *asceticism (4:3) based on the *law (1:7) are undermining the work of Paul and his companions in Ephesus (1:3). (Although Ephesus was in Asia Minor, it was culturally more Greek than Anatolian by this period; its particularly Greek culture is presupposed in the following treatment of the background.) Central to Paul's solution to this problem is the appointment of church leaders especially qualified to address the heresies spreading in the church. Paul employs the sorts of stereotypical language normally used to address such situations in his day (e.g., by philosophers against sophists or pseudophilosophers).

Date. On the premise of Pauline authorship, the Pastorals were written toward the end of his life, about A.D. 62–64. This would mean that Paul was released from his detention described in Acts 28:30-31 and completed the journeys presupposed in the Pastoral Epistles, as suggested also by early Christian tradition. Some who date these letters later than Paul date them late enough to allow for the reuse of Paul's name pseudonymously, sometimes as late as the mid-second century (although the Muratorian Canon assumes them to be Pauline not long after that date). Others suggest that the material is Pauline but was organized into its current form more quickly after Paul's death.

Commentaries. Among technical commentaries that provide much background are Benjamin Fiore, *The Pastoral Epistles* SP 12 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007); Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, AB 35A (New York: Doubleday, 2001); I. Howard Marshall with Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles,* ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999); William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles,* WBC 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000); Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); and Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). Very valuable commentaries on a more popular level include Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus,* NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988); Jouette M. Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus,* ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles,* HNTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); Luke Timothy Johnson,

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987); and George T. Montague, *First and Second Timothy, Titus,* CCSS (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). I provided some of my primary sources on 1 Timothy 2 in Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), pp. 101-32; for 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and chapter 5 in Craig S. Keener, . . . *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991), pp. 83-103. On the social location of the Pastorals, see also David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles,* SBLDS 71 (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1983).

1:1-2
Introduction

1:1. Letters customarily began with the name of the author. Many gods were described as "*saviors" in antiquity, but the *Old Testament and Jewish literature reserved this title for the God of Israel (cf. Phil 3:20; Is 43:11; Hos 13:4).

1:2. The next elements of a letter were the name(s) of the addressee(s) and the greeting (cf., e.g., Rom 1:7). Educated persons in antiquity often addressed a letter to a specific person, but intended for that letter to be published or to be an open letter to a group. Paul publicly supports Timothy's authority through this letter. (*Patrons often sent letters of recommendation on behalf of their *clients, or political dependents. Timothy's letter, however, could be publicly read in the house-church gatherings, reinforcing Timothy's apostolic authorization.) Some suggest that "true child" (NASB) echoes legal terminology for a legitimate heir.

1:3-11
Scripture Twisters

1:3. Timothy stayed in Ephesus while Paul traveled northward through Troas (2 Tim 4:13) and across into Macedonia. Paul here reminds the readers (1 Tim 1:2) that he authorized Timothy to act on his authority.

1:4. *Plato and most other philosophers rejected or reinterpreted the "myths" that they believed misrepresented the gods, although some believed that myths could be used to illustrate truths. *Philo, *Josephus and other Jews argued that their Scriptures contained no myths; but extrabiblical elaborations of biblical accounts were common, and Paul probably has them in view here (cf. Tit 1:14). "Genealogies" might refer to expansions of biblical genealogies, as in some Jewish works from this period, or perhaps false postbiblical attributions of ancestry. The phrase "myths and genealogies" had been used pejoratively from Plato on.

1:5. Greek literature also praises a "good conscience"; the *Old Testament extols a "pure heart" (Ps 24:4; 73:1, 13).

1:6. Both Judaism and most philosophers condemned empty, worthless talk, including arguments about words and the verbal skills of wordy *rhetoricians unconcerned with truth. Some groups of philosophers from Protagoras on emphasized verbal quibbling more than seeking truth, regarding the latter as inaccessible; but most philosophers criticized these agnostics. Many professional speakers also valued important speeches above subtle disputes over trivialities, although training in public speaking included extemporaneous speeches on randomly assigned topics.

1:7. Although segments of Palestinian Judaism had or were developing standards for accredited teachers of the *law, there was nothing legally to keep anyone from claiming to be a teacher of the Bible, any more than there is in many Christian circles today. Jesus often had conflicts even with those who were publicly recognized as teachers of the law.

1:8-9. Philosophers believed that wise people did not need laws, because their wise behavior itself modeled the moral truth on which laws were based. For Paul, this ideal was true for Christians; laws were necessary only to restrain those who were inclined to sin. Like many ancient authors, he includes a "vice list" to catalog the sorts of sins he means (1:9-10). Most of these were obvious as sins to ancient readers: for instance, killers of fathers and mothers were considered the most evil of sinners and executed in horrible ways under Roman law (sewn into a bag with animals, including a snake, and drowned).

1:10. On "homosexuals" (NASB; or "men who sleep with men" see comment on 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. "Kidnappers" (NASB, GNT) were "slave traders" (NIV, NRSV; this was the purpose for which people were kidnapped—cf. Ex 21:16; Deut 24:7); Paul's remark directly assaults the vicious slave trade of his day. Many kidnappers sought children to make them male and female slave prostitutes, though infants were available without cost, abandoned on trash heaps by (sometimes destitute) parents. Perjury was a special form of lying that involved the violation of a divine oath, thus showing disrespect to the deity. *Stoics and others described reasonable teaching as "sound" (healthy, wholesome).

1:11. Only the "faithful" (1:12) were to be entrusted with money, given tasks as messengers and so forth.

1:12-17
A Blasphemer's Conversion

Having condemned the false teachers (1:4-11), Paul nevertheless does not want to portray them as beyond hope; although blasphemers were to be excluded from *church fellowship (1:20), Paul himself had been a blasphemer yet was subsequently converted.

1:12. Paul's letters to churches usually open with a thanksgiving for his readers (so also 2 Tim 1:3); these were common in ancient letters. Paul similarly praises God here (concluding in 1:17). This is not, however, Paul's regular epistolary thanksgiving, which would have normally occurred after the introduction (1:1-2). Some suggest that he sticks mainly to official business because this is an official letter meant to authorize Timothy.

1:13-15. Jewish texts condemn blasphemers to hell (*Gehenna). Although ignorance did not absolve one of guilt in Judaism, it did decrease one's guilt; in Jewish texts, this was even true of the *Gentiles, who had some, but only very limited, knowledge about God.

1:16. Both Jewish and Greco-Roman teachers used examples to make their points. Sometimes they used themselves as examples, and occasionally (though rarely) described negative aspects of their past (e.g., Rabbi *Akiba on his conversion to love of the *law; many philosophers despised their past before their conversion to philosophy).

1:17. In praising a deity, Greeks and sometimes Jews would list his or her titles and attributes. Jewish texts unanimously affirm everything Paul says about God in this verse; that God was the "only" God was the view of Judaism. Most people believed in all gods equally, so the Jewish and Christian view could sound intolerant to outsiders. "Amen" concluded prayers and praises in the *synagogues, indicating the assent of the other hearers. In context (1:16), this description might refer to Jesus, but this is not clear.

1:18-20
Removing a Blasphemer

1:18. Philosophers and moralists used battle imagery to describe their labor on behalf of truth. Claims of prophecies were a rare (and in some circles marginalized) phenomenon in Judaism but were apparently common in early Christianity; prophecies to Timothy at his ordination (4:14) would thus be very meaningful.

1:19. Philosophers also used the image of shipwrecks; Christians needed to be good spiritual sailors as well as good soldiers (1:18).

1:20. Early Jewish sources (including the *Dead Sea Scrolls) attest a range of levels of excommunication, including full exclusion from the community (for extended periods or even permanently; here, apparently until *repentance). Some contend that official synagogue excommunication included a curse or execration against the person being banned from the community; it could be viewed as equivalent to capital punishment under the *Old Testament *law. By handing these blasphemers over to *Satan, Paul is simply acknowledging the sphere they had already chosen to enter (5:15). Paul's purpose here is restorative, however, "so that they might be taught not to blaspheme" (NASB), as God had taught Paul (1:13). See comment on 1 Corinthians 5:5. On Hymenaeus's views (Hymenaeus is not a common name, so it is no doubt the same one), see comment on 2 Timothy 2:17-18.

2:1-7
Public Prayers for All

2:1-4. The Romans permitted subject peoples to worship their own gods, but they had to show their loyalty to Rome by also worshiping the goddess Roma and the spirit of the emperor. Because Jewish people worshiped one God to the exclusion of all others, Rome allowed them to pray and sacrifice *for* the emperor's health without praying and sacrificing *to* him. Prayers were offered for him regularly in the *synagogues, showing the loyalty of these Jewish institutions to the Roman state. When the *Zealots decided to throw off the Roman yoke "for God," however, they abolished the sacrifices in the temple. This act in A.D. 66 constituted a virtual declaration of war against Rome, several years after Paul wrote this letter. Christian public prayers for the emperor and provincial and local officials showed Christians as good citizens of the society in which they lived (Jer 29:7). Paul's motive is more than keeping peace (1 Tim 2:2); it is also to proclaim the *gospel (2:3-4). A "ransom"

could be a price for others' freedom (Ex 30:12; Num 3:12; Mk 10:45).

2:5-7. Both Christ's mission and Paul's mission testified to God's purpose, his wish to save all (2:4). In Judaism, wisdom, the *law or, in a lesser sense, Moses was thought to have mediated divine revelation, but it was ultimately effective only for Israel, not for the *Gentiles. Most Gentiles believed in many intermediaries for the gods, just as they believed in many gods.

2:8-15
Proper Demeanor for Public Worship

The passage addresses women (2:9-15) in considerably more detail than men (2:8) here, perhaps because women are erring more severely in this congregation. Their culturally inappropriate behavior can bring reproach against the gospel (something Christians could ill afford, 5:14).

2:8. Apparently men were bringing their dissensions (1:6) into public worship. Hands were normally lifted or outstretched for both praise and supplication in the *Old Testament, Judaism, the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world. *Diaspora Jews usually washed their hands before prayer, so "pure [or holy] hands" became a natural image for genuine worship (cf. also Ps 24:4).

2:9. Whereas many men in the Christian community were apparently quarreling (2:8), many women appear to have been violating a different matter of propriety in public prayer: seeking to attract attention by their appearance. Most Jewish teachers allowed wives to adorn themselves for their husbands, but both Jewish and Greco-Roman moralists ridiculed women who decked themselves out to turn other men's eyes. This was a common theme in ancient moralist literature: Jewish writings warn especially of the sexual temptation involved in such adornments; Greco-Roman writers also condemn wealthy women who show off their costly array. Hair was sometimes braided with gold, which Paul might have in view here (among the wealthy); men were especially attracted by women's decorated hair. Like most other writers who condemned such gaudiness, Paul should be understood as attacking excess, not as ruling against all adornment.

2:10. Greco-Roman moralists often stressed that it was inward adornment rather than outward adornment that would please a good husband; Paul concurs. See also 1 Peter 3:3-4.

2:11. The proper way for any novice to learn was submissively and "quietly" (a closely related Greek term appears in 2:2 for all believers). Although exceptions were made for elite women (for example, *Philo praised the empress as "almost male" in her intellectual capacity; *Embassy to Gaius* 320), and some intellectuals praised the ability of women (or particular women) to learn, most men considered intellectual activity a predominantly male exercise. Women were less likely to be literate than men (sometimes estimated at ten percent as often as men of the same social class), were trained in philosophy far less often than men, were trained in *rhetoric almost never, and, more importantly here, in Judaism were far less likely to be educated in the *law. Boys were raised to recite the Torah; girls were not, although they could listen in synagogues and remember what they heard at home. Given the bias against instructing women in the law, it is Paul's advocacy of their learning the law, not his recognition that they started as novices and so had to learn quietly, that was more countercultural. (Women did occasionally attend rabbinic lectures, but the vast majority of *rabbis would never accept them as *disciples, and *Hellenistically oriented Jews like *Josephus and Philo were even more biased against them than the rabbis were. There is evidence for a few women filling higher roles in some Diaspora synagogues, in local cultures where women had higher social positions, but the same evidence shows that even there prominent women in synagogues were the rare exception rather than the rule.)

2:12. Although some women had opportunities to learn, women became teachers only extremely rarely; in all of antiquity, only a tiny proportion of respected sages (such as Aspasia, Sosipatra and Hypatia) were women who could also teach men. (In Jewish circles, Beruriah, second-century wife of Rabbi Meir, was instructed in the law, but she was a rare exception.) Many accused those they believed

to be false teachers of targeting women because they were more vulnerable. Given women's usual lack of training in the Scriptures (see comment on 2:11), the error spreading in the Ephesian *churches through ignorant teachers (1:4-7), and the false teachers' exploitation of these women's lack of knowledge to spread their errors (5:13; 2 Tim 3:6), the prohibition here fits the situation (the prohibition in fact appears in the only set of letters that specifically reveal that false teachers were targeting women; though cf. comment below). His short-range solution is that these women should not teach; his long-range solution is "let them learn" (2:11). Many believe that the situation might be different after the women had been instructed (2:11; cf. Rom 16:1-4, 7; Phil 4:2-3).

2:13. The argument from the order of creation is the same argument Paul used to support women wearing head coverings (1 Cor 11:7-12). Some writers take the argument here as universal, for all circumstances, even though most OT scholars do not view that as the most natural reading of the Genesis text to which he alludes (Gen 2:18 in Hebrew suggests a complementary partner, and Genesis repeatedly shows that God sometimes blessed the younger over the older). Other writers take Paul's statement here only as an ad hoc comparison (see comment on 2:14), as most writers take his same argument for head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11. Paul sometimes applies Scripture in an ad hoc manner (see, e.g., comment on Gal 3:16), although he more often employs it universally (see, e.g., Rom 5:12-21).

2:14. Paul refers to the account of Eve's fall as it is told in Genesis 3, although some later Jewish stories increased Eve's guilt or deception considerably beyond that account (perhaps sometimes thinking of the Greek story of Pandora). That he compares the unlearned women of the Ephesian *church with Eve is clear; his earlier letters also compare the whole church of Corinth, both men and women, with Eve (2 Cor 11:3), the Corinthian church with Israel (1 Cor 10:1-22) and his opponents in Galatia with Ishmael (Gal 4:24-25). That he would apply this illustration to all women in all times, as some have thought, is more debated. Some argue that if Paul compared *all* women with Eve, he would be implying that all women are more easily deceived than men (at least if he were excluding all women from teaching; indeed, the local false teachers themselves were men—1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17). (Empirically, assuming female deceivability is problematic; from years of teaching biblical interpretation to hundreds of students of both genders, even the author of this commentary can testify that, at least today, gender does not affect performance scores in biblical interpretation courses.) Similarly, his illustration in 2 Corinthians 11:3, comparing Eve's deception to the entire church, might lose its force if Eve necessarily represents all women here. Scholars thus continue to debate the point of Paul's analogy.

2:15. Some scholars argue that "saved" is meant theologically: Christian women will have *eternal life if they live godly lives, which includes following cultural propriety for the sake of the gospel's witness. Alternatively, Paul could mean "saved" or "delivered" in a different sense—the sense it was usually given when related to childbearing. Women normally prayed to particular gods to "save" them, which meant bringing them safely through childbirth. (The curse on Eve came to be associated with death in childbirth in some parts of Judaism, so Paul might be qualifying his comparison in 2:13-14. In this case, he would be noting that Christian women are not daughters of Eve in every sense, thus implying that his illustration in 2:13-14 should not be pressed beyond the service for which he employed it.)

3:1-7
Qualifications for Overseers

Lists of qualifications for offices appear in both Jewish and *Gentile sources; lists of virtues appropriate to such offices are even more common. These lists were applied both to political or military offices and religious ones (e.g., judges in Jewish sources). Exceptions were not stated in general lists of qualifications but might be made for particular qualifications in extenuating circumstances. The term translated "overseer" (NIV, NASB) or "bishop" (KJV, NRSV) was elsewhere in use in the ancient world for leaders, and Paul uses it synonymously with "elders" (Tit 1:5, 7), a leadership title used in *synagogues and with a long history in Israel.

3:1. Many moralists urged any worthy men to become statesmen. Certain officials in the Greek world, in both cities and associations, were naturally called "overseers." The *Dead Sea Scrolls also use the Hebrew equivalent of the term for an office of leadership at *Qumran; here it might be equivalent to the synagogue leaders responsible for the synagogue service, although probably in less formal house *churches. This office is identified with that of elders in the *Pastoral Epistles (Tit 1:5, 7), a situation that had changed by the early second century (Ignatius, *Letter to the Trallians* 3) but that still obtained in Paul's day (Phil 1:1; cf. Acts 20:17, 28).

3:2-3. The office of overseer was open to all, but some qualifications needed to be observed, especially in view of the errors circulating in Ephesus. The qualification of being "above reproach" frames the other qualifications (3:2, 7); this was an ancient way of emphasizing that the qualifications focused on this issue. Political leaders were also expected to be "above reproach," but a persecuted minority sect needed to protect itself against public slander even more than politicians did.

Polygamy was not practiced in the Roman world outside Palestine (hence is not likely the point here), though illegal bigamy and certainly adultery were. "Husband of one wife" no doubt means a faithful husband and probably presupposes marriage. If it expresses a preference for marriage, it might be helpful in standing against the false teachers who opposed marriage (4:3), although this preference might not apply to all situations (cf. comment on 1 Cor 7:8.) "Husband of one wife" (NASB) refers to one's current marital status and behavior (cf. NIV: "faithful to his wife"; see fuller comment on 5:9); validly divorced people who remarried were considered married to one spouse, the second one, not to two spouses.

"Hospitality" included taking in trustworthy travelers as guests. Welcoming strangers and visitors was a universal virtue, but because inns in antiquity usually functioned also as brothels, Jewish people in the *Diaspora were especially willing to take in fellow Jewish travelers, as long as the travelers bore letters of recommendation certifying their trustworthiness. Ideally, eating together at table was supposed to form a permanent bond of friendship.

3:4-5. Politicians were often evaluated by how well their children obeyed them; it had long been accepted that the family was a microcosm of society and that a leader first needed to demonstrate his leadership skills in the home. Men in Paul's day exercised a great deal of authority over their wives and children, especially over children still living in the home. That children's behavior reflected on their parents was a commonplace of ancient wisdom (for society's view, see also the public shame reflected in Lev 21:9; Prov 19:13; 27:11; but contrast Ezek 18:9-20 for God's view when normal means of discipline failed). This factor may have been especially important for leaders of churches meeting in their own homes; but again, it assumes a premise of generally patriarchal ancient culture (where properly disciplined children usually obeyed) not directly, completely applicable to all societies.

3:6-7. Ancient leadership ideology required leaders to be tested in lower offices, to demonstrate their skills before being promoted; the church in Ephesus had now existed for over a decade, hence the Ephesians could insist on more seasoned leaders than some other churches could (the requirement is missing in Titus). The ever-present danger of false accusation required leaders to do everything in their power to avoid scandal; a solid reputation was helpful for church leaders, as it was for public officials.

3:8-13
Qualifications for Deacons

Lists of qualifications were common in antiquity; see the introduction to 3:1-7.

3:8. *New Testament texts use the term translated "deacon" in several ways. It usually means a servant-minister, generally a minister of the word, like Paul. But sometimes it is an office distinguished from "overseers" (Phil 1:1), possibly similar to the office of the *chazan* in the synagogue. This synagogue attendant was responsible for the synagogue building, so an analogous role could have been filled by the owner of the home in which a house synagogue or church met. Unlike elders (3:2), this sort of "deacon" may have fulfilled an administrative function without as much public teaching.

3:9. The qualification that the "deacon" keep "hold of the deep truths of the faith" (NIV; see, literally, "mystery") is all the more critical given the prevalence of severe error in the Ephesian church (1:3-7).

3:10. A common feature of ancient political life was that leaders (or new members of groups) were often tested in lower offices before being promoted to higher ones; see comment on 3:6-7. On being "beyond reproach" (NASB), see comment on 3:2.

3:11. Scholars debate whether "women" here refers to deaconesses or to male deacons' wives, although even the Roman government was aware of Christian deaconesses (apparently female deacons) by A.D. 112 (Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96.8, as usually understood). Thus Paul either requires upright behavior on the part of church officials' wives (in ancient society, men were often ridiculed for their wives' behavior) or explains some different requirements for women deacons. Gossip was especially associated with and probably (given social expectations and association of wives with neighborhoods) more often practiced by women than by men in the ancient world (cf. 5:13).

3:12-13. On "husband of one wife" see comment on 3:2-3; on "managers of their children" (NASB), see comment on 3:4-5.

3:14-16
Purpose of Church Administration

3:14. Letters sometimes announced one's coming and often communicated a fond desire to see the recipient in person.

3:15. The church, which met in homes, was modeled on the household, just as pagan political theorists compared the household to society in general (3:4-5). Paul's prior admonitions to Timothy, especially in 3:1-13, thus serve a function analogous to the household codes of many ancient writers: providing a specific framework of wisdom for administrating the family unit and society. "Pillars" were used to uphold structures, and support for the truth was needed given its challenge by false teachers (1:3-7). (A prominent and important member of a community was often called a "pillar," so the image here may emphasize the church's strength and indispensability.)

3:16. Here Paul gives the standard of faith his readers were to uphold in the form of a creed or hymn (which Timothy probably already knows). If "taken up in glory" refers to Jesus' return (cf. Dan 7:13-14) rather than to his ascension, then the lines are in chronological order; but not all scholars think this proposal likely (cf. the same term in Mk 16:19; Acts 1:2, 11, 22). "Justified" or "vindicated" in the *Spirit refers to the *resurrection, God's acquittal after the human judicial condemnation of the cross.

4:1-5
Errors of the False Teachers

4:1. Ancient Judaism associated the *Spirit especially with *prophecy (speaking under divine inspiration), and Paul here either essentially prophesies or reports an earlier prophecy. ("The Spirit says" is equivalent to the *Old Testament formula "Thus says the Lord.") As a prophet himself, Paul refutes false or errant prophets (cf. 1 Cor 14:37).

Some Jewish groups (including the *Qumran community) predicted widespread apostasy in the end time, influenced by evil spirits. "Later times" probably refers to the "last days," which by the Old Testament definition were normally understood as inaugurated by Israel's *repentance and deliverance (e.g., Is 2:1; but cf. Dan 2:28; 10:14); in the *New Testament these days have begun (e.g., Acts 2:17) because the *Messiah has already come.

4:2. The "branding iron" was especially used on livestock (but apparently at least theoretically could be used also to identify some criminals); the "searing" may thus mean that the consciences of these apostates have become the property of evil spirits.

4:3. *Asceticism was on the rise in Greco-Roman paganism, and although most teachers (both Jewish and *Gentile) advocated marriage, the value of celibacy was becoming more popular (especially among Gentiles, but some *Essenes also seem to have practiced it). "Abstaining from foods" probably refers to Jewish food laws (see comment on Rom 14:1-4).

4:4-5. Jewish people always praised God before their meal; the normal blessing included praise for the God who "created" the fruit of the vine. Another blessing, possibly standardized in the early second century, was used after meals and included the statement

"God is good and does good." This Jewish custom was an appropriate way to show gratitude to God for his provisions. The food was in a sense sanctified by the word of God (Gen 1:30-31) as well as by such prayer; there was thus no need to abstain from it. Faith rather than something intrinsic to the food made the latter pure (Tit 1:15; cf. Mk 7:19; Rom 14:14).

4:6-16
The Importance of Sound Teaching

4:6-11. Paul alludes to the sort of physical training undertaken especially by athletes and others in the Greek *gymnasia,* where men stripped naked for exercises (v. 7). This image would have been familiar to his Greek readers, because the gymnasium was the center of civic life in Hellenized towns. The image of physical training was extremely common in the illustrations of Greco-Roman moralists and philosophers. Like them, Paul speaks of moral, intellectual and spiritual discipline rather than physical training, although he apparently does accept the physical value of exercise (and undoubtedly experienced plenty of his own during his travels). Jewish teachers especially praised study of the *law, which was profitable "both in this world and in the world to come." Paul emphasizes the same point about spiritual discipline (v. 8).

Men sometimes ridiculed older women (e.g., Menander, *Dyskolos* 580-83), sometimes as idle (cf. Pliny, *Epistles* 7.24.5) or chatterers (Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* 1.25.541). Philosophers and others commonly demeaned the tales of old women as fit only for children, and they mocked irrational views as those suited only to old women (cf. *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 94.2; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 5.14; **Joseph and Asenath* 4:10). (For example, in *Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.20.55, an *Epicurean mocks a *Stoic's view of fate as a belief fit only for ignorant old women.) This perspective also presupposes the illiteracy of most older women in antiquity (even those who had learned to read in youth would usually have had little subsequent practice at it). Paul simply uses the current figure of speech (v. 7; but cf. 5:2).

4:12. "Elders" were highly respected in Greek *gymnasia* and exercised a ruling function in *synagogues and *churches, as they had in communities in the *Old Testament. Because Timothy joined Paul before A.D. 50 (Acts 16:1-3; men entered adulthood around puberty, so Timothy may have been in his midteens) and (on the letter's Pauline dating) Paul is writing in the early sixties, Timothy is at least in his late twenties and could well be in his early or mid-thirties; this term for "youth" (KJV) could apply up to the age of forty, although it usually applied especially to someone under twenty-nine. (It may involve youth comparative to elders here.) Despite the valuing of youthful vigor, many regarded youth (albeit especially adolescence) as less responsible, more violent, sexually uncontrolled and impetuous. Those who were not elders were often considered inappropriate for leadership positions (cf. 1 Sam 17:33), and many offices became available only at age thirty; even in Jewish tradition many others became available only at age forty. Some stories about the appointment of young men were made up later to extol prodigies (e.g., postbiblical stories about Daniel, Solomon or several *rabbis), but others were the boasts of young achievers (such as Cicero); Timothy's appointment was thus a rare privilege in his culture. Even though Timothy is younger than the elders he is advising, he is to take the role of the mature leader and act as an example for the community. Teachers normally asked *disciples to imitate them, and in so doing took the role of father figures.

4:13. As in the synagogue (both in Palestine and in the *Diaspora), public reading of Scripture was central to the service (e.g., *Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.175; *Jewish Antiquities* 16.43; *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* 2:332-35, §1404); although the practice of specified readings may have been only beginning to develop, the reading from the Law was probably generally accompanied by one from the Prophets. The reading was then expounded (exhortation and teaching) by means of a homily on the text that had been read. (For reading and then exposition in the synagogues, see *Philo, *That Every Good Person Is Free* 81-82, esp. 82; *Special Laws* 2.62; *Life of Moses* 2.215-16; *Dreams* 2.127; cf. already Neh 8:8. This Jewish practice would be intelligible in a Greco-Roman context; in Greco-Roman

schools, children translated texts from classical Greek into vernacular Greek, then expounded them in response to questions and answers.) By the mid-second century apostolic writings (later officially recognized as the *New Testament) were being read alongside the Old Testament in church services. "Until I come" authorizes Timothy: his exposition of Scripture would function as the best available equivalent of Paul's apostolic presence.

4:14. Oracular utterances had long been used to attest the divine rights of kings and other officials, and Paul's mentioning of prophecies about Timothy's gift (probably teaching, 4:13) at his ordination could help quiet the opposition (see comment on 1:18). The approval of the "presbytery" (KJV, NASB) or "body of elders" (NIV) also could silence criticisms about his youth (4:12). (On elders as leaders, see comment on Acts 14:23. The elders here may be those appointed by Paul in Lystra; cf. Acts 14:21-23; 16:2-3.) Mature Jewish teachers ordained other Jewish teachers through laying hands on them; this practice served as official accreditation.

4:15-16. "Progress" (v. 15) was the standard philosophical way to describe a *disciple's advancement in moral philosophy and was naturally applied to advancement in Jewish (Gal 1:14) and Christian (Phil 1:25) truth as well. It is clear that Timothy's attention to his teaching is critical: his teaching would affect the salvation of his hearers (v. 16; cf. 2 Tim 3:15); the prevalence of error (4:1-3) reinforced the importance of this demand.

5:1-2
Honoring Elders

Given the preceding context (4:14), "older man" here may refer specifically to an "elder" (the same Greek word); the use of kinship terms for officers in the *church accords with the description of God's household in terms of a family (3:4-5, 15). In this case, 5:3-16 would refer to female elders, a special office of older widows devoted to prayer, just as 5:17-25 applies to male elders. Interestingly, prominent individuals in *Diaspora *synagogues were often called "fathers" or "mothers" of synagogues. It is also possible that 5:1-2 is a more general statement, of which widows and elders as church leaders represent specialized examples. In either case, Timothy must address those older than he is (4:12).

Respecting elders was a standard feature of ancient wisdom and social custom, just as respecting one's parents was; treating elders as if they were one's parents, and peers as one's brothers or sisters, was also considered praiseworthy behavior.

Developing the admonitions of Proverbs, Judaism heavily emphasized expressing concern for one's neighbor by offering and accepting correction (see both *rabbis and *Dead Sea Scrolls). But it also emphasized the necessity of private as opposed to public rebuke unless all attempts at private settlement failed.

5:3-16
Honoring True Widows

Here Paul may refer to widows in general, but he probably refers to an order of widows who served the church, as in second-century Christianity. (Commentators disagree on this point.)

We should keep in mind that Paul addresses the values of ancient society for the sake of the church's witness (5:7, 14; 6:1), not implying that all societies should share those values (which would, for example, look down on older women who had never married—5:10).

5:3. Honoring elders was important; "honor" here includes financial support (5:4, 16-18). By "widows indeed" (KJV, NASB) or "real widows" Paul means not simply those bereaved of husbands but those both committed to the church's ministry of prayer (5:5) and experiencing the stereotypical *Old Testament plight of widows: destitution (5:4).

5:4. Adult children or other close relatives were expected to care for destitute widows, who had no opportunity to earn wages (and relatively little potential income by other means, e.g., selling produce from their garden) in ancient society. It was believed that one owed this care to one's parents for their support during youth; Paul agrees. Judaism even understood this support as part of the commandment to honor one's parents (see comment on Mk 7:9-13). (Under Roman law, a father could discard a newborn child; the child was not regarded as a person and member of the household until the father agreed to raise and

support the child. This way of thinking probably contributed to children's recognition of responsibility to parents. Early Jews and Christians, however, unanimously opposed abortion, infanticide and throwing out babies, seeing personhood as a gift of God, not of parents.) Caring for aged parents was a matter not only of custom but of law, and was common even in Western society until recent times.

5:5. The Jewish ideal for older widows, who received support from family or distributors of charity but whose only contribution to society was prayer (no small contribution), was that they be women of prayer (cf. Lk 2:37). (This is probably unrelated to the Roman image of Vestal Virgins' prayers supporting Rome, although that image shows the ease with which the idea could have been grasped even in pagan culture.)

5:6. Here Paul probably refers to some sort of sexual immorality, perhaps becoming a mistress or indulging in lust. (Once remarried—5:11—a woman would not be considered a widow.)

5:7. The Greco-Roman world as a whole was happy to find cause for scandals in minority and foreign religions, and libeled especially any sexual irregularities. Being "above reproach" (NASB, NRSV; also in 5:14; see comment on 3:2) is crucial for the spread of the *gospel (6:1). Although conflicting ideals about widows' remarriage existed in antiquity (see comment on 5:9, 14), all would view negatively a Christian's committing immorality or violating a *vow* of celibacy (cf. comment on 5:11-12).

5:8. Even pagans believed in supporting destitute widows who were relatives; it was believed that one owed support to one's aged parents (cf. comment on 5:4).

5:9. The expression "put on the list" was often used of official registrations (e.g., for troops). In some Jewish traditions, "sixty" was the figure for the beginning of old age (see comment on Lk 1:7; age for elders in Mishnah *Avot* 5:21). Some scholars think that the "wife of one man" may allude to the ancient ideal of remaining faithful to one's former husband after his death by not remarrying; but the more popular ideal in this period was remarrying quickly (cf. 1 Tim 5:14). Another use of a related term is more likely: many husbands praised wives who had been "one-man wives," meaning faithful and good wives (so, e.g., NIV: "faithful to her husband"). In view of 3:2, 12 (there was no ancient ideal that *husbands* not remarry) and 5:14, Paul must simply mean "faithful and good wives."

5:10. Ancient writers (especially Aristophanes; see comment on 4:7) sometimes ridiculed older women, though they sometimes respected them (see comment on 5:2). Paul's qualifications here are to ensure that those "on the roll" are above reproach; the popular ideal standards for women of any age included rearing or having reared children (see comment on 5:14). Providing water for washing of feet was a sign of hospitality in antiquity; the actual acts of washing someone's feet indicated the humble posture of a servant or a subordinate (cf. 1 Sam 25:41 and comment on Jn 13:3-8).

5:11-12. Groups expected members to be faithful to their commitments. For example, *Pharisees became upset with those who reneged on their Pharisaic vows (Tosefta *Demai* 2:9), and the *Essenes were even more angered by those leaving their way of life (1QS 7.22-25 in the Dead Sea Scrolls); the importance that such sects attached to committed membership was reflected in the testing of candidates before their admission into full fellowship. Public departure from a commitment to the order of widows could bring about scandal; the "condemnation" (NASB, NRSV) is that of outsiders, as in 3:6-7.

5:13. Here Paul's language reflects a popular perception of uneducated women's behavior (cf. also 3:11); because of cultural expectations and probably limited education (which Paul seeks to remedy in 2:11), idle gossip commonly characterized women's daily lives, and even moreso stereotypes about them. Jewish and Greco-Roman texts alike condemn gossiping or babbling women, including widows. The *Essenes were so sensitive about their reputation that an Essene who slandered their community would be banished (1QS 7.16-17 in the Dead Sea Scrolls). The language here depicts women spreading false ideas; the false teachers (cf. 1 Tim 1:6-7) may have targeted widows (cf. 2 Tim 3:6) because (1) women were usually less educated and (2) widows were the women who most often owned their own

homes, useful for meeting places for new congregations.

5:14. Since the time of Augustus over half a century before, the rapid remarriage of widows became a Roman social ideal; it was also the ideal maintained by Jewish teachers.

The popular standards for a young woman, stressed in writings of philosophers and moralists, were chastity, modesty, quietness, submission and obedience to her husband, and devotion to domestic duties, including the rearing of young children. In contrast to the ideal wife of Proverbs 31, the ideal wife of Greek society was socially retiring and restricted herself mainly to the domestic sphere, the only place where she had authority. (Ephesus was in Asia Minor, but was originally a Greek *colony there, and Greek culture had pervaded the urban east by this period in any case.) "Keep house" (NASB) is better translated "manage their homes" (NIV); although subordinate to her husband, the Greek wife otherwise "ruled" her home. Although the division was less strict in practice, people generally treated public as the male sphere and private, or domestic space, as more often the female sphere. Paul here upholds some societal values for the sake of the gospel's witness (avoiding "reproach").

5:15. "Turning aside" (KJV, NASB) is used in the Dead Sea Scrolls for apostasy; see comment on 1:20 regarding *Satan.

5:16. Some women were well-to-do enough to become benefactors and *patrons; they had social dependents, which could include blood relatives, slaves, *freedpersons or others willing to be her *clients. By requiring well-endowed Christians to fulfill their responsibilities to family members, Paul hopes to stretch the church budget to help those who really had no other means of support.

5:17-25
Treating Church Elders Respectfully

5:17. "Honor" sometimes included payment, and this is the case here (5:18). "Double pay" (so GNT here) was sometimes given to worthy soldiers and is probably in view here. Because elders who did not have large property holdings would otherwise be at least partly dependent on working children, Paul advocates supporting them well (this support does not imply making them wealthy, of course).

5:18. Paul argues his case both from the *Old Testament (Deut 25:4) and from the sayings of Jesus (cf. Lk 10:7). Citations from authoritative or classical texts were used to prove one's point not only in Jewish but also in other Greco-Roman literature.

5:19. Greek culture also recognized the value of witnesses for legal decisions, but the testimony of two or three was one of the most crucial requirements of Jewish *law (based on Deut 17:6; 19:15). For Paul, it is the other side of being "above reproach" (3:2): accusations must be properly examined and not uncritically accepted.

5:20. Judaism strongly emphasized reproof and correction; public reproof was to be a final resort only if private attempts had failed (see comment on 5:1-2).

5:21. Calling witnesses to an exhortation as Paul does here made it far more authoritative; Paul chooses the ultimate witnesses for such a charge. The angels are "*elect" or "chosen" (NASB) as opposed to fallen angels. The ancient world—especially the Old Testament and Judaism (which did not automatically favor upper classes in disputes, as Roman law did)—stressed that judges must be fair.

5:22. Jewish teachers would "lay their hands" (cf. NASB) on their *disciples to "ordain" (NRSV) them (see comment on 4:14), and that is what Paul has in view here: ordaining an elder who had not first been tested (see comment on 3:10) made one responsible for his subsequent exposure if he turned out to be ungodly. Keeping oneself "pure" (literally) "from sin" was a *Stoic virtue as well as a Jewish one.

5:23. Most people drank wine with their meals (albeit about two parts water to one part wine, and not distilled to a higher than natural degree of fermentation). Timothy has been abstaining (apart from, we may assume, the Lord's Supper), perhaps to avoid the criticism of those influenced by the false teachers (4:3; some *ascetics abstained from wine); Paul tells him to go back to using it. Wine was often helpful in settling stomachs and preventing dysentery (it could be used to disinfect water). Some restorative diets recommended water (e.g., Fronto, *Ad Antoninum Pium* 8), others wine; medicines could be delivered with either.

5:24-25. The sins that were secret or in the heart made evaluation (5:22) difficult, as many ancient writers acknowledged.

6:1-2
Advice to Slaves

In keeping with exhortations dealing with households (3:15), Paul naturally includes advice to slaves (household slaves were considered part of the household). This advice was important because a movement that the Romans thought might incite slave discontent would immediately be labeled subversive and subjected to outright persecution; Paul wants the slaves who are Christian, as well as free Christians, to engage in a culturally relevant and intelligent witness. When Paul says that masters "benefit" from their slaves (v. 2), he employs a term especially used of wealthy benefactors who bestowed gifts on social inferiors. Thus Paul, like the philosopher *Seneca, possibly portrays the slaves as persons free in God's sight who can choose to bestow a gift on their masters by serving them freely.

6:3-10
The Error of Materialism

Those spreading error were using the *gospel to accumulate wealth; Paul says that food and clothing should be enough for a Christian (6:8), who should seek no more than his or her basic needs (cf. Mt 6:25). This greed was one reason that Paul had to prohibit materialistic persons from *church office explicitly (3:3, 8). Some pagan philosophers also used their philosophy for personal gain, and this behavior drew the hostility and criticism of outsiders.

6:3. "Sound" can mean "healthy"; Greek and Roman writers often used medical imagery to describe the spiritual state of people's souls or beliefs, though the figurative use was so common that the metaphor may be a dead one. Perhaps Paul refers here to Jesus' teachings (cf. Mt 6:19-34).

6:4. Pseudointellectuals liked to quibble about detailed nuances of words rather than deal with crucial issues; see comment on 1:6.

6:5. Jewish people often recognized wealth as a sign of God's blessing, and many teachers taught that those who served God would become more prosperous. This teaching was, however, meant as a general principle, as in Proverbs: one who works harder earns more. But these teachers also recognized that wealth could be used for good or evil, and many warned of the dangers of wealth, or even linked piety to poverty. A similar ambiguity is found among Greco-Roman philosophers: many said that wealth was acceptable if put to good use, but others (most obviously the *Cynics) thought that it should be rejected altogether as burdensome. The philosophers did not, however, normally see wealth as a reward for doing good. It is not clear whether Paul's opponents *preach* that godliness is a means of gain or simply *use* religion as a means of gain.

6:6. Moralists sometimes used "gain" figuratively in a contrast to material wealth. Judaism often viewed present wealth as paltry compared with the true wealth of the world to come, which really mattered. One of the most common doctrines of philosophers and those influenced by them was contentment; people should be self-sufficient, recognizing that they need nothing other than what Nature has given them.

6:7. Here Paul cites a moral commonplace, phrased similarly by *Cicero; it is also attested in the *Old Testament (Job 1:21), *Diaspora Jewish literature and other Greco-Roman writers.

6:8. Ancient literature usually recognized "food and clothing" as the basic needs, which even Cynics and the poorest of peasants required (Cynics and most peasants had only one cloak each). On "contentment," see comment on 6:6 and Philippians 4:11.

6:9. Different cultures understand material "wealth" differently. For example, middle-class North Americans understand "rich" much differently from the way Paul's first readers would have; in the widespread poverty of the ancient Mediterranean, most people would have viewed the lifestyle of middle-class North Americans as "rich." Like many writers of his day, Paul addresses those seeking to accumulate wealth (cf. Prov 28:20) rather than those who had already become wealthy through inheritance or industry (6:17).

6:10. Paul cites here a widely used ancient proverb about loving money being the source of various evils (e.g., *Theon, *Progymnasmata* 3.91-92; **Sibylline Oracles* 3.235). The idea was even more common than the saying, but the

saying itself circulated among philosophers and those who respected them.

6:11-16
Fleeing the Evil Lifestyle

In contrast to the greedy preachers (6:3-10), Timothy is to seek righteousness.

6:11. Moralists often exhorted readers to "flee" from vices. Ancient Hittites used the expression "man of God" to describe religious figures, and the *Old Testament used it for men commissioned by God to function as his spokespersons. Its fairly rare occurrences in subsequent Jewish literature (e.g., *Life of Adam and Eve* 41:2; 51:2; *2 Enoch* 7:4; cf. **Letter of Aristeas* 140) are probably dependent on the Old Testament usage, as is Paul's use here. (Some later Jewish sources, such as the *Targum, sometimes change "man of God" to "prophet.")

6:12. Greco-Roman moralists often described moral struggles in terms of warfare, as did Jewish texts influenced by them (e.g., *4 Maccabees, where it refers to martyrdom). The image in the Greek here is not that of a war, however, but another image the moralists equally exploited in a figurative manner: the wrestling match or athletic contest.

6:13. A charge with gods as witnesses (as also in 5:21) was considered especially binding.

6:14. "Without stain or reproach" (NASB) was a natural image for virtual perfection, for example in the requirements for pure sacrifices to God as unblemished (e.g., Lev 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; 4:3, 23, 32) or reports of "undamaged" merchandise and so forth. On "without reproach," see comment on 3:2. "Appearing" was sometimes used in Greek religion for manifestations of gods, but it would be a natural Jewish description in Greek for the revelation of God at the end time.

6:15. Jewish literature repeatedly described God as king. Especially in the East, rulers who claimed to be supreme kings, such as the Babylonian or the Parthian king, called themselves "king of kings and lord of lords." Greek writers like Dio Chrysostom occasionally applied the title to Zeus; Judaism quite often applied it to God, and Christians applied it to Jesus (cf. Rev 19:16).

6:16. "The Immortal" was a common title for God in *Hellenistic Judaism (borrowed from a Greek term for their own gods, which Jews and Christians recognized as an inappropriate epithet for them; thus Paul adds "who alone"). Jewish texts often mentioned the glory of light around God's throne; kings' great authority made them unapproachable for common people. The Old Testament declared that no one could see God's full glory and live (Ex 33:20), and later Judaism amplified this recognition (although some Jewish mystics, expanding the visions of the throne in Ezek 1 and Is 6, claimed to have penetrated the splendor around the throne and seen something of God).

6:17-19
Instructions for Those Who Are Rich

In 6:3-10 Paul condemned those who were seeking wealth, but in 6:17-19 he addresses those who are already wealthy. For Paul, wealth and property are not sinful in themselves, provided that one is not seeking them. Wealth can be used for good or for evil, for selfish or for beneficent causes; Paul says that Christians must use it for good.

6:17-18. The very wealthy usually derived their income from landowning; they rented out the land to tenant farmers or residents, or derived profits from crops grown on the land. A socially inferior but nonetheless wealthy class of merchants also arose, especially of ship owners. Wealth could be gotten by a variety of means, not all of them immoral.

The issue was not whether one had wealth but whether one used it for oneself or for others. This was the usual view in Judaism, which stressed charity, and a view held by many philosophers. Paul does not reject the world, as did the *Cynics, in some ways the *Essenes, or (in the most extreme sense) later *Gnostics; with Judaism, he affirms that creation itself is good (4:4-5). But he also recognizes that material wealth is transitory. Still more important, people matter more than possessions, and in a world of unending human need, possessions were ultimately worthless compared with more important things one could do with one's resources.

6:19. Jewish texts sometimes spoke of storing up treasures in heaven; see comment on Matthew 6:20-21.

6:20-21
Final Exhortation

"Entrusted" is the language of keeping a deposit; those with whom money was deposited were under sacred obligation to keep it secure or increase it, and this principle applied also to teaching (to which the image was extended by other ancient writers as well). Some scholars have seen the "false knowledge" here as a reference to *Gnosticism (which could indicate a date for the *Pastoral Epistles later than Paul), but this interpretation is unnecessary; many philosophers made claims to "knowledge" which other philosophers considered false.

2 Timothy

Introduction

Authorship, Commentaries. See the introduction to 1 Timothy. Of the three *Pastoral Epistles (whose authorship is often disputed), 2 Timothy is the most difficult to dispute, because of the abundance of personal notes. *Pseudepigraphic letters could also contain personal notes (e.g., Diogenes's letter to Rhesus), but they rarely had many, whereas 2 Timothy is full of them. Pseudepigraphers had little reason to include these details. Some scholars believe that a Pauline *disciple wove together Paul's material in this letter, but often in the disciple's words.

Situation. For the general situation of persecution in Rome, see the introduction to 1 Peter. Assuming Pauline authorship, Paul writes 2 Timothy while imprisoned in Rome, awaiting probable execution; he wants Timothy to join him before it is too late (4:21). Paul was probably released after his imprisonment in Acts 28 (see comment on Acts 28:30) and undertook the missions presupposed in 2 Timothy; then he was rearrested, this time during Nero's massive repression of Christians. He was most likely beheaded under Nero in A.D. 64. Second Timothy has in view this second imprisonment.

Paul's opponents have spread in the province of Asia, and the situation has become much worse since Paul wrote 1 Timothy (2 Tim 1:15). Paul could be discouraged; like Jeremiah in the *Old Testament, his life is to end while God's people are turned away from him, and he will not live to see the fruit of his ministry. His consolation, however, is that he has been faithful to God (4:7-8), and he exhorts Timothy to follow in his paths no matter what the cost. (That the letter was preserved almost certainly indicates that Timothy did persevere.) The letter is dominated by the themes of persecution from outside the *church and false teaching within, and Paul's final exhortation to a young minister is to focus on the Scriptures and the sound teaching to be found in them.

Genre. In many ways, Paul's final letter resembles the letters of moral exhortation written by philosophers to their disciples. But as a letter sent before his death, it has also been compared with Jewish tracts called "testaments," in which a dying leader imparted his final wisdom to his sons or followers, wisdom also of value to subsequent readers. Although most testaments were pseudepigraphic and Paul may have written this letter only for Timothy, the similar situation envisioned could give 2 Timothy the force of a testament: Paul's ultimate wisdom for young ministers.

1:1-7
Introduction and Thanksgiving

1:1-2. Paul modifies the normal opening of letters (author, to addressees, greetings—a word related to "*grace") in his characteristically Christian way. Both *rabbis and philosophers could call their *disciples "sons."

1:3. Ancient letters frequently included thanksgivings to God or gods on behalf of the addressee, who was often praised in the thanksgiving. "Unceasingly" or "constantly" probably means in Paul's regular times of prayer. Many Judeans prayed during the morning and afternoon offerings in the temple; they also said special blessings on rising in the morning and going to bed at night. Palestinian Jews reckoned days from sundown to sundown, so "night and day" is not an unnatural sequence. (One should not read too much into Paul's sequence, of course; the same sequence occurs not only in Jewish texts like Judith and **4 Ezra* but also in strictly Latin texts like Horace, *Quintilian and *Cicero. In contrast, *Josephus and usually the *Septuagint, as well as the Roman writer Martial, could say "day and night," and the *New Testament references are not consistent.)

1:4. Expressions of longing were common in ancient letters of friendship, signifying the deepest intimacy. (This is not, as one commentator thought, a poor imitation of Rom 1:11 or other passages!) In the East, tears were an appropriate expression of sadness for troubled or long partings.

1:5. Even though fathers were responsible for their sons' education, Judaism and Greco-Roman aristocrats wanted mothers to be knowledgeable so they could impart knowledge to their young children. (This is true even though Judaism did not provide women advanced education in the *law, and even though Greco-Roman society generally reserved advanced, i.e., *rhetorical and philosophical, training for men.) Until the age of seven a Roman boy's mother was his main formative influence. For those with access to it, Jewish Scripture education ideally began by the age of five or six, although this education always emphasized memorization and recitation more than reading skills.

The "faith" of Timothy's mother and grandmother was Jewish (Jewish Christian by the time Paul met them—Acts 16:1). Jewish fathers were primarily responsible for their sons' instruction in the law, but Timothy's father was a *Gentile (Acts 16:1, 3). Those without a living religious father also learned from grandmothers if they were still living (cf. Tobit 1:8).

Most education included corporal discipline, but some ancient education experts stressed instead encouraging the child, making him or her feel successful, provoking competition and making learning enjoyable (Quintilian). Ancient writers differed on whether public instructors or home schooling was better, provided the former held classes small enough to permit private instruction.

1:6. Laying on of hands was used for ordination (see comment on 1 Tim 4:14). The image of "rekindling" (NRSV) a fire is possible in this verse (cf. Jer 20:9), although the word for "kindle" (NASB) had been extended metaphorically so often by this period that it is not clear that its fire nuance would always be in hearers' minds.

1:7. Although *Essene texts and some other early Jewish sources sometimes linked evil behaviors with pervasive evil spirits, in Greek "spirit of" often meant simply "attitude of." The exhortation not to be afraid was one of the most prominent biblical assurances from God (e.g., Gen 26:24; Jer 1:8) and was a customary expression of assurance from others as well (Gen 43:23). Although Timothy may have been "timid," one should not therefore assume that this was his unique problem, as some interpreters have (cf. Acts 18:9; 1 Cor 2:3).

1:8-14
Carry on Paul's Mission

Timothy is to maintain his ground (1:3-7), joining Paul in suffering for the *gospel entrusted to them.

1:8. *Disciples were called to follow in their teachers' steps. Paul's suffering here entails especially his imprisonment and impending execution.

1:9-11. The language of "calling" is especially *Old Testament and Jewish, that of "appearing" and "immortality" especially Greek (though long before already adopted by *Diaspora Jews), and "*Savior" was both. That Paul is equally conversant in both worlds is not

surprising; most Diaspora and many Palestinian Jews generally saw no contradiction between fidelity to the Old Testament and speaking the language of their culture.

1:12-14. The "entrusted deposit" (1:12, 14) was originally a monetary image, although other writers had also applied it to teaching; one was responsible to safeguard or multiply any money given one for safekeeping. Jewish teachers felt that they were passing on a sacred deposit to their disciples, who were expected to pass it on to others in turn (cf. 2:2).

1:15-18
Allies and Opponents in Asia

Paul briefly addresses the opposition that Timothy and he face in Asia, where Timothy ministers.

1:15. "Asia" refers to the Roman province of western Asia Minor, of which Ephesus was the most prominent city (cf. 1 Tim 1:3). In context, "all" excludes at least the household of 1:16-18; in accordance with the flexibility of common language in antiquity, it means "most." Although many Jewish teachers predicted widespread apostasy for the end time or even felt that it characterized their own generation, they lamented it. This is hardly the sort of detail a later pseudepigrapher writing in Paul's name would have made up about the end of his ministry. (Later *hagiographers sometimes described the rejection of their heroes, but the narrative was normally accompanied by a description of the awful judgment that befell the apostates who rejected them.)

1:16. Chains and imprisonment were normally matters of shame, and people were often embarrassed to be associated with those so stigmatized. "Onesimus" (Philem 10) could be a contraction for Onesiphorus, but the person Paul describes here does not sound like a recently freed slave. Because Paul speaks of a whole "household" of believers, the Onesiphorus to whom he refers may have had slaves and other dependents. "Refresh" is the language of hospitality, which included housing travelers; Onesiphorus must have had a large home and housed Paul whenever he came to Ephesus. He is a good example to Timothy of one not "ashamed" (1:8, 12; 2:15).

1:17. Very many people in the first century traveled to Rome; Onesiphorus, as a well-to-do *patron benefactor in the prominent Asian city of Ephesus, would naturally be able to do so. "Finding" Paul would mainly be a matter of finding local Christians who could tell him where to find Paul, whether during his earlier detention (Acts 28:30) or the more severe current one. If the latter is in view, Paul might have gotten his news about Asia (1:15) from Onesiphorus.

1:18. Because Paul greets Onesiphorus's "household" in 4:19, some writers have argued that Onesiphorus is dead and that Paul here prays for his posthumous salvation (although the context makes it clear that Onesiphorus was already a Christian). Judaism often spoke of departed heroes as "of blessed memory," and some later tomb inscriptions eulogized the righteous dead with "May he [or she] be remembered for good." Posthumous acts of *atonement were sometimes offered for the dead, but prayers for the "salvation" of the dead in the strict sense seem to be either minimal or altogether lacking in first-century Judaism. Further, it is not clear that Onesiphorus is dead; Paul looks ahead to the day of judgment for himself as well (1:12; 4:8). Paul could speak of someone's "household," including the individual, while the person was still alive (e.g., 1 Cor 16:15, 17).

2:1-13
Persevere

2:1-2. Pharisaism strongly emphasized the passing on of sacred traditions; second-century *rabbis stressed the passing on of traditions from one generation to the next, noting that the process had begun long before them. This passing on of tradition was also the practice of Greek philosophical schools, although they usually emphasized the views of the founder more than those of immediate predecessors.

2:3-4. Philosophers emphasized the total commitment involved in being a true philosopher. They also compared their task to that of soldiers and athletes fighting a war or running a race. Soldiers were not even allowed to marry during their term of service (although some had unofficial concubines while they were stationed somewhere) and were to be strictly devoted to their service for over twenty years; probably over half usually survived to retire.

2:5. Philosophers often compared their

task to that of athletes, whose intense discipline and preparation were proverbial. Athletes were pledged by oath to ten months of such preparation preceding their participation in the Olympic games. The winner's prize was a garland; see comment on 1 Corinthians 9:24-25.

2:6. As in 2:4 (pleasing the enlister) and 2:5 (receiving the prize), the emphasis here is on both hard work and future reward; one who labored for God would be rewarded in the day of God's judgment. (Some commentators have suggested that in 2:4-6 Paul wants ministers to be supported only by their congregations, as some philosophers were supported by *patrons, and never to work on the side; but this view would be surprising given Paul's explicitly contrary position in 1 Cor 9, where he allows both forms of support.)

2:7. Authors occasionally exhorted readers to "consider" (KJV, NASB) and hence understand (cf. Mt 24:15; Rev 13:18).

2:8. Appealing to examples was one of the main hortatory methods of ancient parenesis (moral exhortation); Paul here appeals to the example of Jesus, who endured much but received eternal glory (cf. 2:10-12).

2:9-10. Paul uses himself as an example. Ancient philosophers and moral writers commonly used examples in moral exhortation (cf. 2:8).

2:11-13. Although God's character is immutable, his dealings with people respond to their response to him (2 Chron 15:2; Ps 18:25-27). The faithfulness of God to his covenant is not suspended by the breach of that covenant by the unfaithful; but those individuals who break his covenant withdraw from the covenant's protection (see comment on Rom 3:3).

2:14-26
Persevering Versus Deceived Vessels

The Ephesian Christians must observe "these things," which are what Paul mentions in 2:3-13 as summarized in 2:11-13. They must persevere, avoiding the false teachings rampant in Ephesus (2:14-23), and when possible correcting those involved in serious error (2:24-26).

2:14. Many professional speakers gave nitpicky attention to irrelevant twists and turns of phrase; some philosophers believed that one could do no better than examine the logic of words; many Jewish teachers, seeking to be faithful to the letter of the *law, did the same (emphasizing even the slightest variations in spelling or possible revocalizations). But others criticized this method (see comment on 1 Tim 1:6).

2:15. To the images of soldier, athlete and farmer (2:4-6), Paul now adds the general one of a worker. Jewish readers would have understood an exhortation to be diligent in representing "the word of truth" rightly as an exhortation to study God's law, where his word was found (cf. Ps 119:43). Although Paul presupposes such investigation of Scripture (3:14-17), his emphasis here is on accurate representation of the *gospel in contrast to the empty words of 2:14 and 16.

2:16. See comment on 2:14.

2:17. The image of spiritual or moral gangrene also occurred to some other authors; gangrene's basic characteristic is that it spreads and poisons the whole body, ultimately killing it if it is not removed. Hymenaeus and probably Philetus had been officially cut off (1 Tim 1:20) but still retained a pervasive influence and probably a significant following. Then, as today, it was easy for almost any speaker to get a hearing, because only a few were skilled enough in the Scriptures to discern truth from error for themselves, rather than being dependent on others' teachings. In antiquity the difficulty was greater in the sense that most people could not read and copies of the Scriptures were scarce and expensive, being copied by hand.

2:18. A future *resurrection of the body did not appeal to Greek thought, although the proleptic spiritual resurrection that believers experienced in *Christ was far more amenable to Greek tastes. Some false teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus had apparently "demythologized" the gospel to make it more palatable to their culture (cf. 1 Cor 15:12; 2 Thess 2:2).

2:19. Although some stones might be removed, a foundation or cornerstone would remain secure. Seals were often used to attest the witnesses of a document or that merchandise had not been tampered with; here the seal is the inscription on a cornerstone, inscribed by the owner or builder.

2:20-21. Paul shifts to another image. When used figuratively in ancient literature,

"vessels" (KJV, NASB) usually meant people (or their bodies as containers of their souls, a meaning that would be irrelevant here). Expensive vessels were reserved for special purposes like banquets; the cheapest vessels were expendable and in Jewish circles would be shattered if rendered impure.

One could interpret "purifies himself from these things" (NASB) in two ways. On the one hand, Paul may distinguish here the righteous from the wicked (as in Rom 9:22-23); but the righteous, like vessels reserved for honor, had to be separated from the vessels for dishonor in the same house (see comment on 2:17-18). On the other hand, one normally purified important vessels from dirt or, in the religious sense, from defilement (such as the false teachers' talk—2:16). (Paul may intend both senses; under some conditions of Jewish law, a pure vessel brought into contact with something impure, including an impure vessel, had to be purified again.)

2:22. Moralists often exhorted readers to "flee" from vices. Certain passions were associated especially with "youth" (a category that could still include Timothy; see comment on 1 Tim 4:12). Many in antiquity indulged and excused young men's passions; by contrast, Paul respects Timothy's ability for self-control.

2:23. On debates over trifling points, see comment on 2:14.

2:24. Jewish teachers and philosophers like the *Stoics also advised patience in instructing others; in contrast, some moralists, like the *Cynics, verbally abused passersby with their "wisdom." Philosophers typically derided the unlearned (cf. 2:23; "ignorant"—NASB, GNT; "stupid"—NIV) in wisdom who were unwilling to seek knowledge.

2:25-26. Judaism emphasized correcting another person humbly and privately before giving public reproof, in the hope of restoring that person to the right way.

3:1-13
The Wickedness of the Last Days

Ancient Jewish sources (except perhaps the most Hellenized, such as Philo) generally characterized the end time as one of turmoil, apostasy, and increased sin and oppression. This view was widespread despite a common expectation that all Israel would return to greater standards of holiness, ushering in the end and the restoration of Israel; others (see the *Dead Sea Scrolls) believed that only the righteous Israelites would remain after these judgments. Like most Jewish writers, Paul does not anticipate a complete renewal of righteousness in the world until the day of God.

3:1. In "last days" (cf. Is 2:2; Mic 4:1; Dan 2:28; 10:14) Paul includes the time in which he is living (cf. 1 Tim 4:1); he no doubt alludes here to the Jewish idea that came to be called the messianic woes, a period of great suffering preceding the end of the age (for end-time suffering, see, e.g., 4Q162 2.1 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls; for sin and evil, e.g., 4Q390 f1.8; **1 Enoch* 91:7; **4 Ezra* 14:16-18; **Sibylline Oracles* 5.74; for apostasy, e.g., *Testaments of Dan* 5:4; *Issachar* 6:1, 6; 7:3; and *Naphtali* 4:1). (The length of this period varied nearly as widely as those Jewish texts that speculated on it; it was not fixed in Jewish tradition.)

3:2. Other ancient moralists also used "vice lists" (cf. Rom 1:28-32). "Lovers of self" (i.e., self-seeking people) were condemned by philosophers such as Musonius Rufus (a *Stoic), *Epictetus and Philo; the moralist *Plutarch warned readers to avoid even the appearance of self-love. (In today's terms this would refer to narcissism, not appropriate self-esteem.) Love and obedience toward parents was one of the most central virtues of antiquity (see comment on Eph 6:1-3). Many deemed ingratitude the greatest offense against benefactors (see comment on Rom 1:21).

3:3-4. *Philo and other philosophers, especially Stoics, repeatedly condemned "love of pleasure"; among philosophers, only the *Epicureans sought pleasure (which they defined as the absence of pain or disturbance), and they were not nearly as influential as their Stoic competitors. *Philo even subsumed a long list of vices under the title "lovers of pleasure" and opposed pleasure to virtue.

3:5. Both Jewish religion and Greek philosophy condemned those who pretended devotion but whose hearts or lives did not match their professed devotion. For Paul, religion without God's power transforming the heart was useless.

3:6. Because women were usually less educated, they were more susceptible than men to false teaching (see comment on 1 Tim 2:11-12).

Women's penchant for switching religions was ridiculed by satirists like *Juvenal and offended conservative Romans. Women reportedly converted to Christianity, Judaism, and the cults of Isis, Serapis and other deities far more readily than men; and in the second century A.D. women were attracted to many heretical movements. Because they were less educated in traditional religion and had less social standing to lose, they more quickly changed religiously, sometimes for good and sometimes for bad. (With regard to Judaism, they also lacked the male disincentive of the pain of male circumcision.)

The false teachers had to get into the homes because they had less access to the women in public (due to married women's partial segregation in Greek society). After they had gained access to a household, their male or female convert within the household could supply financial and other help to them. The women who owned their own homes were most often widows, so widows may have often been targeted (1 Tim 5:13) to gain access to homes where the false teachers could establish or influence congregations. Greek and Roman men often thought of women as easily swayed by passion and emotion; many may have been, because of their lack of education and cultural reinforcement. But Paul here addresses particular, not all, women.

3:7. Philosophers stressed that change came through knowing the truth, and that this knowledge came through learning from them. These women were learning, but they were learning falsehood designed to play on their passions; Paul says that *repentance, not mere learning, frees those thus taken captive (2:25-26).

3:8. Paul here employs Jewish tradition not found in the *Old Testament. In a widespread Jewish tradition (various elements appear in *Pseudo-Philo, the *Dead Sea Scrolls, *rabbis, etc.), Jannes and his brother Jambres were Pharaoh's magicians who opposed Moses in Exodus 7:11. Even pagan accounts (Pliny the Elder and *Apuleius) record them as magicians of Moses' time (presumably dependent on Jewish tradition). Because Paul's opponents appeal to Jewish myths (1 Tim 1:4; 2 Tim 4:4; Tit 1:14), Paul cites such stories to fill in the names for these characters.

3:9. "Progress" (NASB, NRSV) could be a technical term for advancement in learning a particular school of teaching, but here it probably refers simply to advancement of the opponents' movement. Jannes and Jambres ultimately could not match all Moses' signs (in Exodus and in most later Jewish accounts); God would also eventually expose this false movement (1 Tim 5:24).

3:10. *Disciples of philosophers were to follow and emulate their teachers' words and lives. Some other ancient moralists also naturally used "but you" for moral contrasts (cf. also 3:14; 4:5; 1 Tim 6:11; Diogenes, *Epistles* 12; **Jubilees* 22:19). Timothy's knowledge of Paul's sufferings in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra (Acts 13:50–14:19) apparently dates to his family's initial exposure to the Christian message, before he began traveling with Paul (16:1-3).

3:11. See comment on Acts 13–14. Timothy was from this area of Asia Minor (Acts 16:1).

3:12. Many Jewish people expected repression from the pagans, especially in the end time, but Paul virtually *promises* persecution to every Christian truly living in a holy way (cf. Jn 15:20, etc.).

3:13. Paul here shares the view of much of early Judaism that the end time would be characterized by evil, with sinners proceeding from sin to sin unchecked (for the language cf. Jer 9:3). They would ultimately be stopped only by God's final wrath (cf. Gen 6:11-13). The Greek term here rendered "impostors" or "seducers" (KJV) was often used as a pejorative title for harmful or fake magicians (cf. 3:8).

3:14-17
Equipped by the Scriptures

3:14-15. "Sacred writings" (NASB, NRSV) was also used for pagan religious writings (e.g., in the cult of Isis) but is attested in Greek-speaking Jewish sources as a name for the Bible that then existed, what we call the *Old Testament. Although there were different ways of counting the books, it appears from the listing in *Josephus (*Against Apion* 1.8, 39-40) and subsequent listings that these Scriptures correspond to our Old Testament *canon. The most common recensions of the *Septuagint also appear to have included what we usually call the *Apocrypha; although neither the *rabbis nor Josephus seems to have accepted this material as part of the Bible per se, it was

undoubtedly widely read and probably often drawn on.

At least in pious Palestinian Jewish homes with access to sufficient resources, boys were normally taught the "sacred writings" from around the age of five; teaching Scriptures to the children was commanded in the Old Testament (Deut 6:7; cf., e.g., Ps 71:17; 78:5-7). Other peoples often expressed amazement at how well instructed Jewish children were in their ancestral traditions.

3:16-17. The belief in the inspiration of *prophecy and (usually in a somewhat different sense) poetry and music was widespread in Mediterranean antiquity. This belief was naturally applied to books of prophecy, and most of the Old Testament was attributed to prophets. Paul's claim for Scripture's inspiration matches Old Testament designations for the *law and divine prophecies as "God's word." Like Paul, Judaism virtually universally accepted the Old Testament as God's Word.

Listing examples of "every good work" (3:17), Paul employs standard terms from ancient education (3:16); "training" especially characterized Greek education (the *LXX often used the term for discipline). Reproof was especially important in Judaism, where it had to be done privately and gently first. The proper authority, source and content for any of these works was Scripture. On "man of God" (in Timothy's case; more generally, "person of God"), see comment on 1 Timothy 6:11.

4:1-8
Preach the Word

After reminding Timothy of the source of his authority, the Scriptures (in his day, the *Old Testament; see 3:14-17; cf. 1 Tim 4:13), Paul tells him to engage in the ministry for which the Scriptures are profitable (3:16–4:2).

4:1. An oath sworn by a deity or deities was considered especially binding and dangerous to break; in the same way, a charge witnessed by a deity or deities (originally something like putting someone under oath) was sacred and inviolable. A broken oath would be avenged by the god whose name was violated; for Jewish people and Christians, the ultimate judgment was in the coming day of the Lord.

4:2. As virtually always in Paul, "the word" here stands for the message about Jesus, which was the divine message, as the Law and the Prophets were (3:16). Greco-Roman moralists often discussed the "appropriate" time for speech, especially frank speech; Paul says that Timothy should announce his message whether or not people are willing to listen (4:3). Although Paul adapts Greco-Roman philosophical language, the idea is also a pervasive Old Testament one; prophets had to continue speaking regardless of opposition (Ex 6:9-13; Jer 6:11; 20:8-9).

4:3. Demagogues who told people what they wanted to hear were common among politicians, public speakers and philosophers in Greco-Roman society, and false prophets in the Old Testament (prophets who told people what they wanted to hear were usually false; cf. Jer 6:14; 8:11; Ezek 13:10, 16; Mic 3:5; see also comment on Lk 6:26). "Desiring to have one's ears tickled" means desiring to hear only what one enjoys; *Lucian describes in these terms people who like to listen to slander.

4:4-5. The term translated "myths" was usually used derogatorily for false stories; see comment on 1 Timothy 1:4.

4:6. On one's life being poured out as a libation, or drink-offering, see comment on Philippians 2:17. (Some Jewish texts, especially *4 Maccabees, even assign atoning—hence in some sense sacrificial—value to the deaths of martyrs; but it is not clear that this idea is present in this image.)

4:7. Paul's first image is the athletic contest; moralists commonly borrowed this image to describe struggles on behalf of virtue (see comment on 1 Tim 6:12). "Completed the course" refers to a race, again popular athletic imagery (cf. 2 Tim 4:8). "Keeping faith" was a Greek expression for loyalty, similar to a Hebrew expression meaning remaining faithful to the covenant, or in some cases, guarding the true faith (thus "*the* faith" here).

4:8. The image of the "crown" refers to the wreath given to victors in Greek races (4:7).

4:9-18
Old Acquaintances

Some friends had proved faithless, others Paul had needed to send away; but God had proved faithful all along (4:17-18).

4:9. See comment on 4:21. It was important for close friends to come by and visit a dying

person a final time, and this principle applied above all else to a son, even an adopted or surrogate son (1:2). (Sons normally also buried their fathers, but the officials might be reticent to hand Paul's body over to Timothy.) It was important to Paul that especially Timothy be with him before he died; compare, for example, those friends who spent Socrates's final moments with him.

4:10. Most of Judaism contrasted this present evil age (Gal 1:4) with the *age to come, often insisting that those who valued this age too much would have no part in the next one. The persecutions Paul had faced earlier in Thessalonica had probably diminished; in any case it had an established *church. Apparently Demas (probably an abbreviation for Demetrius, but the name that Paul always uses for him) expected to find less suffering there than he would have faced had he remained with Paul the prisoner.

The motives of Crescens (a Latin name) and Titus are not criticized. "Galatia" probably means the Galatia in Asia Minor to which Paul addressed his letter "to the Galatians." (With some church fathers it is possible, though much less likely in view of Paul's usage elsewhere, that it refers to the land of the Gauls to the north, in what is now France, which was the original "Galatia." If so, this would be the only explicit reference to non-Mediterranean Europe in the *New Testament.) Titus had gone to Dalmatia, which was near Nicopolis, where Paul had arranged to meet him earlier (Tit 3:12). If Timothy came over land to see Paul (2 Tim 4:13), he would probably pass through at least Thessalonica and Dalmatia (the latter on the Adriatic coast), and Paul gives him advance notice that he would find some of his former companions in this area.

4:11. Although "Mark" was a common name, among the limited number of close associates of Paul it almost certainly refers to John Mark of Acts, as in Colossians 4:10. Others besides Luke were with him in Rome (2 Tim 4:21), but Luke was the only traveling companion he and Timothy had shared; he was probably also the only one in Rome specifically to be with Paul.

4:12. Tychicus is bearer of the letter (cf. 1 Tim 1:3), a mutual traveling companion of Paul and Timothy (Acts 20:4; Col 4:7). Because the only Roman mail service was by imperial envoys for government use, personal mail had to be carried by travelers.

4:13. Prisoners' friends could supply their needs, but only if permitted by prison officials and guards, who sometimes demanded bribes. The sort of cloak mentioned was like a blanket with a hole for one's head; the ease with which it could be donned probably made it popular with travelers. It was useful only in cold or rainy weather; Paul had apparently left it at Troas when it was becoming warm and had not been able to return for it. Now, imprisoned, Paul is cold and anticipates the approach of winter soon after Timothy's arrival (cf. 4:21). (Some commentators have suggested that the term refers here not to a coat but to a wrapping for books; although this meaning is possible, most of the purported evidence for it derives from comments on this verse!)

Some commentators have suggested that the "parchments" refer to certificates (e.g., to prove Paul's citizenship), but it is not clear that certificates took this form in this period. The term was, however, already in use for codices (collections of papyrus sheets with a cover, as opposed to scrolls), a form of book already in existence but popularized by Christians. They were originally used for notebooks, account ledgers and other nonliterary purposes; Christians quickly popularized them, using them for the Scriptures. Some suggest that Paul might have notebooks for Scripture study in view; the other "books" could be papyrus scrolls, the most common form of writing in this period.

Paul apparently expects Timothy to journey northward to Troas, from which he would cross over to Macedonia and take the main Roman road through Thessalonica and to Dalmatia, sailing thence to Italy (though cf. 4:21).

4:14-15. Many coppersmiths lived in the eastern Mediterranean, but working with copper produced so much noise that Alexander, unlike Paul the leatherworker, could not have engaged in much discussion at work. He thus could not have gained much of a following until his workday was ended (unless he was a former coppersmith now living off his false teaching).

Alexander may be the false teacher of 1 Timothy 1:19-20, although this name was

common. The term Paul uses for "did me harm" was sometimes used of *delatores,* "accusers"; it is not clear whether Paul also refers to Alexander as the one who betrayed him to the Roman authorities. Paul was probably not arrested in Ephesus, because he had spent the preceding winter in Nicopolis; he may have been on his way to Rome and simply arrived in time for Nero's persecution (Tit 3:12; cf. 2 Tim 4:10). Paul had earlier faced conflict with many metalworkers in Ephesus (Acts 19:24-29).

The psalmist often prayed for God to vindicate him and repay his enemies (e.g., Ps 17:13-14; 35:1-8, 26; 55:15; 69:22-28). Grammatically, Paul here makes a prediction (future tense) rather than a prayer for vengeance (cf. Ps 52:5; 55:23; 63:9-10; 73:17-20; etc.); nevertheless, his point is that God will put things right on behalf of his servants in the end.

4:16. Here Paul probably refers not to the detention of Acts 28:30-31, which presumably ended favorably, but to a more recent hearing after his rearrest. This would have been a preliminary hearing, a *prima actio*, before a Roman magistrate (in practice, probably not the emperor himself).

4:17-18. Paul may allude to David's or Daniel's exploits of faith in the *Old Testament (1 Sam 17:37; Dan 6:27; cf. 1 Maccabees 2:60); Daniel was sent to the lions by the decree of a king, albeit a reluctant one. The image of a lion in ancient literature is one of supreme strength, appropriately applied here to Nero's court. Under Nero's persecution in which Paul died, some Christians were literally fed to beasts in the arena, but Paul uses "lion" metaphorically, as often in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps 7:2; 10:9; 17:12; 22:13, 21). The term translated "delivered" meant earthly rescue and safety (v. 17) but was also applied to ultimate salvation (v. 18). Prayers seemed natural in ancient letters, because ancient life was permeated by religious belief and practice.

4:19-22
Conclusion

4:19. Letters often closed with greetings. Aquila and Priscilla, who had left Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26) for Rome (Rom 16:3), had returned to the work in Ephesus—probably recently, because Paul did not comment on their help in 1:16-18 (contrast also 1 Tim 2:11-12 with Priscilla's ministry in Acts 18:26); only Paul's traveling companions, probably mainly single men, are mentioned in 4:10-12 and 20. Persecution in Rome may have invited their relocation. On the household of Onesiphorus, see comment on 1:16-18.

4:20. Letters customarily mentioned news about friends, who included these former traveling companions of Timothy (Acts 19:22; 20:4). For how Trophimus's illness might have been viewed, see comment on Philippians 2:25-30.

4:21. The seas were closed down to traffic in winter; shipping was completely closed down from around November 10 to as late as March 10, but the periods from about September 15 to November 10 and March 11 to May 26 were potentially risky periods as well. Some ships took the risks, even in winter, for the sake of profits, but finding passage in winter would be very difficult. Timothy thus could not sail from Ephesus in winter, but even if he took the overland route north of Greece, as Paul seems to expect (4:13), he would still need to sail across the Adriatic, which would also be difficult. If Timothy delayed, he would not be able to come until spring—and Paul might not still be alive then. If Paul sent this letter by Tychicus in summer, Timothy would have little time to set matters in order and come to him.

"Pudens," "Linus" and "Claudia" are Latin names. Jewish people could have Latin names ("Claudia" would fit a slave woman freed during Claudius's reign); about half of Roman Jews had Latin names. That three out of the four names are Latin might suggest that Christianity was making inroads into new sectors of Roman society. If they are church leaders (although only these are named, Paul appends "all the brethren" as a distinct group), the woman's name is significant. Second-century tradition declares that Linus succeeded Peter as the second bishop of Rome.

4:22. The final "you" is plural in Greek; Paul's final greeting includes Timothy's fellow servants in Ephesus (4:19).

Titus

Introduction

Authorship, Purpose, Commentaries. See introduction to 1 Timothy. Like 1 Timothy, this letter to Titus seems to function more as a letter authorizing Titus than as a personal letter only.

Situation. Paul left Titus behind in Crete to establish *church leadership in each city there (1:5). The description of the opposition (1:10-11, 14) sounds much like what Paul addressed at Ephesus in 1 Timothy, suggesting that the error addressed there is spreading rapidly among Christian congregations. Paul's old opponents, those of the circumcision group he encountered in Galatia, apparently continue to follow on his heels to "correct" his converts (1:10, 14). Although they won over many of his early converts, their views eventually lost ground; but Paul did not live to see his views prevail (2 Tim 1:15).

1:1-4
Introduction

As in 1 Timothy, here Paul omits many features customary to his letters (such as thanksgiving and, less often, mention of prayer) and goes right to the point with his instructions.

1:1. Letters customarily opened with the name of the sender. It could be prestigious to be the slave in a high-status household, and the *Old Testament prophets were often called "servants of God." Many Jewish people believed that they were chosen for salvation by virtue of their corporate participation in Israel; as usual, Paul applies the term to all believers in Jesus (possibly to help ideas mentioned in 1:10).

1:2-3. Jewish sources traditionally employed the phrase "*eternal life" to mean the "life of the world to come," which (according to Jewish teaching) was to be inaugurated by the future *resurrection of the dead. That God could not lie, that he had spoken through the prophets from the beginning and that the future resurrection could be proved from the earliest parts of the Bible fit common Jewish teaching and could not be disputed by his opponents (1:10). (The *Stoics taught the immutability of divine decrees, but the Stoic form of the doctrine allowed God less freedom to interact with human will and prayers than most of Judaism did. By contrast, in Greek myths, deities readily deceived mortals, but such a view of divinity was rejected by most philosophers and ridiculed by Judaism.)

1:4. After naming the sender, letters named the recipient(s) and conveyed an expression of greeting. Philosophers and *rabbis spoke of their *disciples as their children; cf. 1 Timothy 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:2.

1:5-9
Appointing Sound Elders

1:5. In the *Old Testament, cities were ruled and judged by their "elders," those with the greatest wisdom and experience in the community. By the *New Testament period, prominent older men in *Diaspora *synagogues were called "elders." Although their exact role may have varied from one place to another, often a group of elders provided leadership for a synagogue (in Judea, cf. 1QS 6.8-9 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls). Paul followed the convenient, conventional forms of synagogue leadership in his culture rather than instituting entirely foreign leadership structures. "In every city" meant that the different house churches in each city would each have their own leaders. Like much of old Greece, Crete had long been known for intercity rivalry.

1:6. The requirement for being "above reproach" (NASB) was vital for leaders in antiquity (see comment on 1 Tim 3:2). "Husband of one wife" probably meant "a faithful husband"; like the requirement about the children, this one suggests that he be a family man and a leader in his household (see further discussion at 1 Tim 3:2). These were necessary aspects of being respectable in antiquity and were qualities often examined with regard to suitability for public office. (The Old Testament also emphasized filial obedience under normal conditions; cf. Deut 21:20.) Because they are "elders," and "dissipation" (NASB; the term can mean overindulgence but often means wasting money, often on selfish pleasures like drunkenness) was a vice stereotypically attributed to young men, not children, these elders are apparently held responsible for the behavior of their adult children (adulthood being reached in the mid-teens). In the Roman world, sons were to respect their fathers, who had legal authority to rule their sons as long as they lived.

1:7. "Stewards" were household managers, often slaves or freedmen, accountable to the master for how they handled his property; this term fits particularly well the image of leaders of household churches. The drunken worship of Dionysus was known on Crete, and the Christian leaders' behavior must not be confused with it in any way (some people ignorantly confused Judaism with the cult of Dionysus, and Christians were generally viewed as part of Judaism). But avoiding drunkenness was also important for other reasons (Prov 20:1). Those "given to wine" (KJV, NASB) were also often recognized as abusive and given to fighting as well.

1:8. "Hospitality" included housing, feeding and treating graciously travelers needing a place to stay. (Christian travelers, like Jewish ones, would have normally carried letters of recommendation attesting that they could be trusted.)

1:9. Elders had to be trained to refute current false teachings before they were appointed; for the false teachings in view here, see comment on 1:10-16. The "word" in Judaism would be especially the *law, but Paul means the apostolic message (see comment on 2 Tim 4:2).

1:10-16
Evil Legalists

Although the opponents here are probably related to opponents Paul had faced elsewhere, they may have derived some of their appeal from local knowledge of Judaism and possibly a strong Jewish element within the church. Crete was ethically mixed, and a large Jewish colony was there.

1:10. "Empty talk" (NASB) characterized many pseudointellectuals in antiquity; see comment on 1 Timothy 1:6 and 2 Timothy 2:14. The Jewish community in Crete was sometimes exploited by charlatans (e.g., *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.327).

1:11. "Upsetting whole families" (NASB) could mean that, by gaining entrance to families, these false teachers were disrupting entire households (cf. 2 Tim 3:6-7), or that they are "subverting" (KJV) households. Perhaps they are undermining the authority structures current in the culture (Tit 2:4-5, 9-10); less likely, they may oppose marriage or sex within marriage on *ascetic grounds (see comment on 1 Tim 4:1-3; 1 Cor 7:1-7). Neither error was characteristic of Palestinian or *Diaspora Judaism, although many *Essenes advocated celibacy.

On those who taught for "gain," see comment on 1 Timothy 6:3-10; this accusation was commonly leveled against traveling teachers of morality, probably including Paul (1 Thess 2:5). A writer long before Paul charged that the Cretans were known to be more fond of gain and more dishonest than any other people.

1:12. Outsiders complained that Cretans lusted for wealth, leading to violence (Polybius 6.46.9) and were deceptive (8.19.5). (When convenient, Romans sometimes complained that Greeks more generally used falsehood; *Cicero, *For Flaccus* 4.9-10; 5.11-12; Pliny, *Natural History* 37.11.31.) The saying Paul quotes here has been attributed to several sources, the earliest being the sixth-century B.C. teacher Epimenides of Knossos in Crete. (The real source may more likely be Hesiod by way of the third-century B.C. Callimachus's *Hymn to Zeus*. As was widely known, Crete claimed to possess both the birthplace and grave of Zeus; the latter claim drew outsiders' scorn and charge of falsehood. But that the words were often attributed to a Cretan in Paul's day is sufficient for him to make the point for Titus. Paul is clearly not citing his own view, because he would not consider a liar to be a true prophet. Greek logicians played with the claim by a Cretan that all Cretans were liars: if he had told the truth, he was lying; but if he was lying, then they reasoned that all Cretans told the truth—reasonable, except that this Cretan had not!)

By Paul's time Epimenides was reputed to have been a traveling wonderworker, teacher and prophet; as usual in Greek thought, the line between poetic and prophetic inspiration could be thin. Although the saying seems to have become proverbial (one commentator declares that "to cretize" became slang for "to lie"), it is not impossible that Paul knew the works of Epimenides; it seems much more likely, however, that he knew only the attributed saying or at most an anthology containing sayings attributed to Epimenides (see comment on Acts 17:27-29).

Crete also had a bad reputation for arrogance, treachery and greed. "Gluttony" was associated with love of pleasure as opposed to love of knowledge; see comment on Philippians 3:19.

1:13. Ancient ethnographers attributed certain characteristics (both good and bad) to various peoples whose cultures emphasized those traits. (That Paul could cite these negative characteristics of Cretans in a letter that Cretan believers would hear suggests that he must have been on very good terms with them and that Cretans recognized these characteristics of their own culture; he is not offering here a model for crosscultural sensitivity in normal situations.)

1:14. Jewish "myths" would especially be *haggadoth,* stories amplifying or explaining biblical *narratives. *Pharisees and others who tried to expound and apply biblical *law for their own times were forced to surround it with case law, detailing how the *Old Testament rules addressed specific situations;

Paul apparently dismisses such legal traditions here.

1:15. The Old Testament law considered some foods pure and other foods impure (cf. 1:14), but Paul applies the common figurative extension of purity language to moral and spiritual purity (see 1 Tim 4:3-5; cf. Rom 14:14).

1:16. In the Old Testament, "knowing God" was being in covenant relationship with him; on a personal level, this meant an intimate relationship of faithfulness to him. But the claim was false if not accompanied by just treatment of others and obedience to the Scriptures (Hos 8:2-3; Jer 22:16).

2:1-14
Sound Doctrine: Right Relationships

Because the Romans suspected minority religions, especially religions from the East with ecstatic elements to their worship, of subverting traditional family values, minority religions often followed the philosophers in exhorting adherents to follow "household codes." These codes instructed male heads of households how to treat each member of the household, especially wives, children and slaves. Under the broad topic of "household management," such codes also extended to treatment of parents, duties to the state (3:1) and duties to the gods. Because the *church met in homes and was viewed as a sort of extended family around the household of the *patron in whose home the believers met, the instructions naturally quickly extended to categories of relationships in the church.

Early Christian adaptation of Roman social relations was valuable for the church's witness to society and for diminishing preventable opposition to the *gospel (2:5, 8, 10). Modern readers often recognize only the traditional values of their own culture, but one should recognize that Paul addresses instead the traditional Roman values of his day (including the household slavery of his day, which differed from many other societies' models of slavery).

2:1. Because the false teachers were subverting households, the "sound" teaching (cf. 2:15) Paul supplies in this case applies especially to household relationships (2:2-14). Households were defined in terms of hierarchy and dependence (e.g., slaves to masters or *clients to patrons) rather than strictly in terms of blood relationship.

2:2. This description matches the expectation for venerable older men in Roman culture: dignified, serious, sober.

2:3. Older women were often objects of ridicule in comedies and were especially mocked for gossip and foolish talk (see comment on 1 Tim 4:7). Some caricatured older women as drunken and as sexually desiring younger men; many men resented drunkenness especially in women.

2:4. It had long been customary for older women, especially mothers, to instruct their daughters in the ways of life (even in ancient Israel, e.g., Jer 9:20); some philosophers wanting to advise women even wrote *pseudepigraphic letters purportedly from women, telling women how to behave. The Roman mother's chief duty to her daughter seems to have been to help her acquire the appropriate education (especially to be a good mother) and to help her to please a good husband. "Young women" were almost always wives, because Jewish and Greco-Roman society generally frowned upon women's singleness and men seem to have outnumbered women. Both Judaism and ancient moralists stressed that wives should love their husbands and nurture their children; many tomb inscriptions report these characteristics as a woman's crowning virtue.

2:5. The term translated "sensible" (NASB) means "self-controlled" (NIV, NRSV, GNT) or disciplined, one of the central Greek virtues; when applied to women, it entailed "modesty," which included virtuously avoiding any connotations of sexual infidelity. In the traditional Greek ideal (far more than in actual practice, especially by this period), women were also to be secluded in the privacy of their home, because they were supposed to be the visual property of their husbands alone. They ruled the domestic sphere to which they were limited but were expected to obey their husbands in everything (Paul's "submissive" [NRSV] may be weaker than "obedient" [contrast KJV]). Women were also expected to be quiet, docile and socially retiring. To violate such social customs was to lend credence to the charge that Christianity was socially subversive, a charge that would provoke more

persecution for the small but growing faith than most of them, both women and men, would have felt it worth.

2:6-8. The men also are to be self-disciplined, and Timothy was to provide a model for them, as a good teacher should. Paul uses the expression "good deeds" in a variety of ways (see 1:16; 2:14; 3:1, 8, 14; 1 Tim 2:10; 5:10; 6:18; 2 Tim 2:21; 3:17). On seeking to forestall false accusations, see the introduction to 2:1-14.

2:9-10. Although masters legally held absolute authority over household slaves (the sort of slaves addressed in this household context), in most cases household slaves held freedoms that field or mine slaves did not, and they had more adequate provision than most peasants. In the popular stereotype entertained by slaveholders, slaves were lazy, apt to argue with their masters and liable to steal when they could. The stereotype was sometimes true, especially where the work incentive was least, but Paul urges Christian slaves not to reinforce the stereotype. Minority religions were already viewed as subversive, and to counter this prejudice Christians had to work especially hard to avoid the normal causes of slander. For more on slavery in general, see the introduction to Philemon.

2:11. The believers were to live in a respectable way to counter false accusations (2:8-10) so that all would have access to the gospel according to which they lived. On prejudice against minority religions, see the introduction to 2:1-14. That God's *grace had provided (though not automatically effected—cf., e.g., 1:10) salvation for all people ran counter to the Jewish emphasis on God's special redemption of Israel and prevailing sentiments of cultural distinctions held by many people in antiquity (though Judaism allowed that some righteous *Gentiles would be saved, and philosophers and some mystery religions challenged conventional cultural boundaries).

2:12. Two ethical terms Paul employs here were among the four cardinal virtues of ancient Greek philosophers and moralists. A similar list occurs in Philo, a Jewish philosopher who wished to present Judaism favorably to the Greek society of Alexandria, to which he also felt he belonged.

Jewish sources frequently contrasted the present age, dominated by evil and suffering, with the *age to come, when God would rule unchallenged and reward his people. Although some oppressors through history have used such a doctrine to keep the oppressed subdued, it more appropriately found its first hearing among the oppressed themselves. Palestinian Jews felt discouraged by Roman repression and the lack of independence to practice their law fully; *Diaspora Jews and Christians found themselves a moral minority in a morass of paganism, subject to slanders and sporadic violence. Their hope for the future was rooted in their faith in God's justice.

2:13. In Judaism, the ultimate revelation or "appearing" of God would signal the end of the present age and the beginning of the new one (cf. 2:12). Diaspora Judaism commonly called God "the great God" and saw him as a "*savior" (in Greek religion, the latter term often meant deliverer or benefactor). According to the most likely reading of the grammar here, Paul applies this divine title to Jesus; although some Jewish circles thought of semidivine beings (often particular exalted angels) or images (especially Wisdom), Judaism did not portray any other human figure as literally divine (or, from recent history, even figuratively divine, as *Philo did with Moses based on Ex 7:1).

2:14. In the *Old Testament God "redeemed" the people of Israel (i.e., freed them from slavery in Egypt) to make them "a special people" (Ex 19:5; Deut 4:20; 7:6; 14:2; cf. 1 Sam 12:22; 2 Sam 7:24; Ps 135:4); here Paul applies this language to the church.

Judaism strongly praised "zeal" for God. Although zeal was sometimes associated with Jewish revolutionaries (some of whom were or came to be called *Zealots) in this period, more often it simply meant uncompromising zeal for the *law or for God. (Although unlikely, it is possible that the Jewish colony in Crete was affected by the same revolutionary tensions building in Cyrene, which was on the North African coast far to the south but under the same Roman administration. These tensions erupted into violence in Cyrene about A.D. 72 [Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.437-50] and into a full revolt about four decades later. These revolutionary sentiments had been stirred by surviving revolutionaries from Palestine.)

2:15–3:8
The Purpose of a Lifestyle Witness

Paul here provides his reasoning for their lifestyle witness (2:5, 8, 10): God wants everyone to be saved, and he paid a great price to accomplish this salvation. Now the only way to counter the world's negative conception of Christianity is to live irreproachably.

2:15. Paul encourages Titus to pass on the sound doctrine of 2:1-14.

3:1. Allegiance to the state and submission to its authorities were often part of the same sorts of exhortations as the household duties (see the introduction to 2:1-14). They were as important as, or possibly more important than, household duties in undermining slander about subversiveness, because the Romans hated nothing worse than cults they deemed seditious.

3:2. The epitome of right relationships was being kind toward everyone, including one's enemies; this injunction is a fitting climax to Paul's rules on relationships.

3:3-4. Philosophers sometimes exhorted people to imitate God's character; Paul here uses God's kindness toward sinners in saving them to argue why Christians should be kind to all people, even their enemies. Philosophers described the majority of people as "enslaved by passions and pleasure," until they were freed from this bondage by the truth of philosophy; Paul agrees with their evaluation of the human plight but sees a different solution for it (3:5).

Paul's term for God's "love for humanity" here was used by pagan moralists especially for the sort of sympathy humans as humans should have for one another; for Paul, God in *Christ has sympathy for humanity. (Sometimes the term was also applied to the supreme God, but more often it was applied to the benevolence of the emperor.) Paul shows how the most valued genuine virtues of his culture reflected God's own character.

3:5. The *Essenes and some other Jewish people associated the *Spirit with purification, especially based on Ezekiel 36:25-27, where God cleanses his people from their idolatry. Because *baptism was the decisive act of conversion in Palestinian Judaism, it figures as the natural image for conversion here (see comment on Jn 3:5).

3:6. For the Spirit being "poured out," see Joel 2:28 (cited in Acts 2:17).

3:7-8. "Justified" meant "judged righteous" or "acquitted" before God's court; according to the *Old Testament and Jewish teaching, one must condemn the guilty and acquit only the innocent. But in the Old Testament, God by his covenant love had also promised to vindicate his people and declare them in the right for their faithfulness to him; see comment on Romans 1:17. "Heirs" reflects the Old Testament image of inheriting the Promised Land, a picture naturally developed in early Judaism for entering the future *kingdom.

On "*eternal life," see comment on 1:2-3; on "hope," see also comment on 2:13. For Paul, as for Judaism, eternal life would be fulfilled at the *resurrection of the dead at the end of this age and beginning of the next. But for Paul the hope was already inaugurated by Christ's resurrection.

3:9-11
Avoid Divisiveness and Divisive People

Part of maintaining a gentle, nonresistant life among members of the Christian community (3:1-2; cf. Gen 26:18-22) involved dissociating oneself from those who would violate one's witness by their disobedience.

3:9. Genealogies and details about the *law (including arguments of Jewish legal scholars over spellings or vocalizations of Hebrew words) were minutiae that missed the genuinely critical issues in the spirit of the Old Testament (see comment on 1:10; 1 Tim 1:6; 2 Tim 2:14).

3:10-11. The noun related to the term translated "factious" (NASB) or "divisive" (NIV) came to designate different sects of philosophers, and *Josephus used it to designate different schools of thought within Judaism. But the adjective here is normally negative, as here (also Gal 5:20; cf. 1 Cor 11:19), for sectarian or divisive tendencies. Paul might refer to the false teachers or to their *disciples in the congregation (cf. Tit 3:9 with 1:10).

Jewish law required several private rebukes before bringing a person before the religious assembly for discipline; this procedure gave the offender ample opportunity to repent. One severe form of punishment against an unrepentant offender was exclusion from the religious community for a set time or until *re-

pentance ensued. Because Paul uses this penalty only in the most extreme circumstances, the divisiveness in view here must be serious; the person has already excluded himself from the life of the community.

3:12-15
Concluding Business

3:12. Nicopolis was on the Greek side of the Adriatic coast, about two hundred miles east of Italy. Located near the coast and only about a century old, it was not a major city that would be likely to occur to a pseudepigrapher. It was in this city that the *Stoic philosopher *Epictetus, banished from Rome, settled three decades later, so it might have also invited philosophical debates (and hence opportunities for Christian witness) in Paul's day. Apparently wishing to go on to Rome, Paul is going to leave Asia, cross Macedonia and wait in Nicopolis for Titus, who is to come up from Crete after receiving Paul's message. Sea travel was not possible during winter, so Paul would wait there (see comment on 2 Tim 4:21). Titus later walked northward to minister in Dalmatia (2 Tim 4:10), where some work may have been initiated before (Rom 15:19, referring to the same region). Because Paul later sent Tychicus from Rome to Timothy (2 Tim 4:12), it was probably Artemas he sent to Titus. (Although the name "Artemas" was compounded on the name of the Greek goddess Artemis, one cannot draw any conclusions about whether he was Jewish or *Gentile. By this period Jewish names in Egypt and possibly elsewhere were compounded with "Artem-" roots; cf. the analogously Jewish Christian "Apollos," taken from the name of the Greek god Apollo.)

3:13. "Lawyer" could refer to a Jewish legal expert, but in the *Diaspora it could also refer to a jurist of Roman law. Legal cases were more the domain of trained *rhetoricians (like Apollos; see comment on Acts 18:24) than jurists, but the latter could also be prominent men. (In contrast to some other ancient professionals like physicians, who were sometimes slaves, lawyers were generally of higher social status.) Like most names, "Zenas" is attested as a name in Jewish funerary inscriptions, so his name cannot settle his ethnicity; perhaps both he and Apollos were from the educated Jewish elite in Alexandria. (If so, he was likelier an expert in Jewish *law, though an elite Alexandrian Jew could also have studied Greek laws.)

This verse constitutes a miniature "letter of recommendation" to provide hospitality to Zenas and Apollos (see comment on 1:8), who may be the bearers of this letter to Titus. "Help" means to supply their needs, providing for them to continue their voyage to their destination, perhaps to the south in Cyrene or Alexandria.

3:14. Here Paul enjoins charity (see comment on 2 Cor 9:6-8; Gal 6:6-10).

3:15. Such greetings were customary at the end of a letter, at times including expressions like "those who love you" (here to designate to whom general greetings most suitably applied).

Philemon

Introduction

Authorship. Almost all scholars accept this letter as Pauline; the style and substance are characteristic of Paul.

Slavery and the Setting of Philemon. Like other slave laws, Roman law addressed the dual status of slaves: by nature they were persons, but from an economic standpoint they were treated as property. The head of a household could legally execute his slaves, and they would all be executed if the head of the household were murdered. Slaves composed a large part of the agricultural work force in parts of the empire (e.g., Italy); they competed with free peasants for the same work. The mine slaves had the worst life, dying quickly under the harsh conditions of the mines. Male household slaves generally had life better, though female household slaves (and sometimes boys) were vulnerable to sexual exploitation by slaveholders. Household slaves were the only kind of slaves addressed in Paul's writings.

But urban slaves were found in all professions and generally had more opportunity for social advancement than free peasants; unlike the vast majority of slaves in the United States and the Caribbean, they were able to work for and achieve freedom, and some estimate that as many as half of household slaves may have had the opportunity to become free at some point in their lives (at least if they lived long enough). Some freed household slaves became independently wealthy; at least in Roman custom, their former holders became their *patrons and were supposed to help them advance in society. Economically, socially, and with regard to freedom to determine their future, many of these male household slaves were better off than average free persons in the Roman Empire; many—scholars commonly say most—free persons were rural peasants working as tenant farmers on the vast estates of wealthy landowners.

Some philosophers said that slaves were equals as people, but in this period they never suggested that masters should free their slaves. (Earlier *Stoics were more radical, but the movement eventually became more mainstream. *Cynics invited prospective followers to abandon everything because they needed nothing, not to free slaves because slavery was wrong.) Nearly everyone took the institution of

slavery for granted, except early Stoics who said that it was "against nature." Paul's message to Philemon goes beyond other documents of his time in not only pleading for clemency for an escaped slave but suggesting that he be released (to continue working with Paul in ministry) because he is now a Christian. So powerful was this precedent that many of the earliest U.S. slaveholders did not want their slaves to be exposed to Christianity, for fear that they would be compelled to free them; the Christian message had to be domesticated (like early Stoicism) to become neutral or supportive of slavery. Cf. Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

Slaves, especially skilled or educated males, were often sent on errands and trusted as agents with their masters' property. Such slaves could sometimes earn enough money on the side to buy their freedom (although their earnings legally belonged to their master, slaves were normally permitted to control the money themselves); still, a few took the opportunity of an errand to escape. Because a safe escape required them to get far away from where their master lived (in the case Paul addresses here, from Phrygia to Rome), they might take some of their master's money with them. Recapture normally meant severe punishment.

Such theft may be the point of verse 18, but Paul might there account for the possibility that Philemon wants repayment for Onesimus himself. From the standpoint of ancient slaveholders, the lost time of an escaped slave was lost money and was legally viewed as stolen property, to which one harboring him was liable. But more important, slaves themselves were not cheap, and Philemon might have already bought another slave to replace him. Slaves could cost between 750 sesterces (187.5 denarii) and 700,000 sesterces (175,000 denarii), with 2,000 as an average. (Keep in mind that a denarius was close to a day's wage for many farmers in this period.)

*Old Testament *law required harboring escaped slaves (Deut 23:15-16; contrast Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.373), but Roman law required Paul to return Onesimus to his master, with serious penalties if he failed to do so. Paul uses his relationship with Philemon to seek Onesimus's release: in a standard "letter of recommendation," one would plead with someone of equal (or sometimes lower) status on behalf of someone of lower status. Paul was not Philemon's equal socially, but as his spiritual father he had grounds to claim the equality that characterized ancient friendship.

Structure and Form. This letter is a "letter of recommendation," the sort that a *patron wrote to social peers or inferiors on behalf of a dependent *client to ask a favor for him. Some compare it more specifically with a letter that Pliny the Younger later wrote a friend on behalf of an estranged freedman who had pleaded for Pliny's intercession. Somewhat differently, Pliny allowed that the slaveholder had a right to be angry; the principle of a friend's intercession, however, is similar. If one classified Paul's letter *rhetorically, it would be "deliberative rhetoric," the type of speech or writing educated persons in antiquity used to persuade others to change their

behavior or attitudes. Letters were not speeches, but the form of argumentation in speeches can help us appreciate Paul's approach to persuasion here: his *exordium,* or opening appeal (vv. 4-7), is followed by the main argument, consisting of proofs (vv. 8-16), which is followed by the *peroratio,* or summary of his case (vv. 17-22). Paul uses methods of argumentation common in his day to persuade well-to-do and well-educated Philemon, who would find such arguments persuasive. The preservation of the letter suggests that Paul succeeded in persuading Philemon, who would not have kept it and later allowed it to be circulated had he not freed Onesimus. The shortest of Paul's extant letters, this letter to Philemon would have occupied only a single sheet of papyrus.

Commentaries. See under Colossians; additionally, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon,* AB 34C (New York: Doubleday, 2000). For Paul's views on slavery, see S. Scott Bartchy, *First-Century Slavery and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:21,* SBLDS 11 (Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973); compare also Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), pp. 184-224, for some general considerations of Paul's words to household slaves.

1-3. On house *churches see comment on Acts 12:12 and Romans 16:5. Well-to-do owners of homes in which ancient religious groups met were normally granted positions of honor in those groups, as their *patrons. Ancient writers defined households not by blood relations but by hierarchical relationships: the free man and his wife, children and slaves (though only those with sizable incomes could afford slaves). The addressees are located in Phrygia (cf. Col 4:17). (This location is based on more helpful evidence than the character of the names. Although a much more common Phrygian name than "Philemon," "Apphia" is also attested elsewhere, including Palestine.) "Fellow soldier" (v. 2) reflects the military imagery common in Paul's letters (see comment on Rom 13:12; Phil 2:25).

4. Many pious Jews observed times of regular prayer; see comment on Romans 1:10. Thanksgivings were common in letters, and Paul here (vv. 4-7) follows his usual custom of using his thanksgiving the way speakers might use a complimentary *exordium.* Such *exordia* were commonly used in speeches to praise the hearers, thus securing their favor.

5-6. The term translated "fellowship" (NASB, GNT) or "sharing" (NRSV) or "partnership" (NIV) was often used for business partnerships or for sharing possessions (see v. 7). Philemon acts as a patron for the church (v. 2).

7. Hospitality was considered a paramount virtue in Greco-Roman antiquity, especially in Judaism. Well-to-do hosts often gathered those one rung below them on the economic ladder, sometimes members of their own religious group, to their home and provided a meal; Philemon and other well-to-do Christians sponsored the meals in their house churches. Mention of a shared friendship between the writer and recipient was a common feature of ancient letters; it was especially important in letters of friendship or when the writer was about to request a favor from the letter's recipient.

8. Although Philemon has high social status—something particularly valued in his culture—he recognizes Paul's higher spiritual rank in the faith. Philosophers were often sponsored by such well-to-do persons as lecturers at banquets or teachers, but Paul claims a higher role than a mere philosopher would fill. Philosophers could be *clients of wealthy patrons, but Paul implies that he is Philemon's spiritual patron here. Philosophers used the expression "what is proper" (NASB; "what you ought to do"—NIV) as a criterion for ethical judgments.

9. *Rhetoricians (those who specialized in public speaking) liked to argue this way: "I could remind you of this, but I won't"—thus reminding while pretending not to do so. Respect for age was important in his culture, so Paul appeals to his age. (According to one ancient definition, the term Paul uses here ["aged"—KJV, NASB; "old man"—NIV, NRSV] applied to ages forty-nine to fifty-six; but *New Testament writers often use it loosely for anyone no longer "young." On the basis of other New Testament evidence, Paul may be around fifty-seven, give or take five years.) Shared friendship was also used as the basis for a request; friends were socially obligated to grant and return favors.

10. Teachers often called *disciples "sons." The point of Paul's plea is that one could not enslave the son of one's own spiritual patron. Appeals to emotion were a necessary part of most ancient argumentation.

11. Here Paul makes a wordplay on Onesimus's name, which means "useful." It was a common slave name, for obvious reasons. The well-to-do had a stereotype that slaves—explicitly including Phrygian slaves—were lazy and ill-disciplined.

12-14. Slaves were sometimes freed by their masters to become slaves of the temple of some god; here Paul asks that Philemon free Onesimus for the service of the *gospel. He appeals not to his own authority but to Philemon's honor as a friend. Runaway slaves were known to be fearful of being captured and taken back to their masters, and Paul's concern for Onesimus is here evident.

15-16. Roman law saw slaves as both people and property; but a full brother would naturally not be viewed as property. The phrase "receive him back" or "have him back" resembles that found in business receipts, but here it is not a property transaction in which Philemon receives Onesimus back as a slave, but like welcoming back a family member. "Parted from you" (NASB) implies the sovereignty of God, a doctrine accepted by Judaism

and no doubt assumed by Philemon.

17. "Partner" was often a formal business term (see comment on v. 6). In status-conscious Roman society, Paul is telling a social superior who respects his ministry: we are equals, and if you accept Onesimus as my agent (authorized representative), you must accept him as an equal (see, e.g., comment on Mt 10:40). Ancient letters of recommendation commonly appealed to friends to consider the bearer of the letter "as if he were me" (cf., e.g., Oxyrhynchus papyri 32).

18-19. Here Paul employs language normally used for formally assuming debts; letters acknowledging debt normally included the promise "I will repay" and were signed by the debtor in his own handwriting. Because it is in writing, this offer would be legally binding in the unlikely event that Philemon would take Paul up on it. But Philemon also owes a debt to Paul; again Paul uses the *rhetorical technique of "not to mention" something he then mentions (vv. 8-9). By ancient social custom, friends were bound by the reciprocal obligation of repaying favors; Philemon owes Paul the greatest favor—his "self," his new life in conversion. Letters of recommendation could urge the recipient to count any favor toward the recommended as a favor toward the recommender (cf. Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 13.5.3).

20. Compare the "refreshing" of verse 7; Paul asks for the same hospitable character that Philemon shows the church.

21. "Do even more than what I say" (NASB) means that Philemon will free Onesimus (cf. vv. 12-14). Professional speakers often sought favors in such terms: "Knowing your goodness, you will gladly hear me" or "grant me such-and-such a request."

22-25. Well-to-do patrons offered hospitality, which Paul can expect as Philemon's spiritual peer. Indeed, providing lodging for prominent guests was regarded as an honor.

Hebrews

Introduction

Style. Along with Luke-Acts and some of the other "General Epistles," this document displays the most sophisticated Greek style in the *New Testament; its author must have had sophisticated *rhetorical training and literary skills.

Date. Because Timothy was recently freed (Heb 13:23) and the work was apparently written from Italy (13:24), we may guess that Timothy was arrested in Rome during the Neronian persecution (probably some time after he came to see Paul—2 Tim 4:21) and freed when Nero (and his policy) died in A.D. 68. The mention of Timothy but not Paul, who died about A.D. 64, also would make sense about A.D. 68. At this time, when the outcome of the Roman war in Judea would have been assured from Rome's vantage point, it would be quite appropriate to speak of the old temple system as "passing away" (8:13), even literally—a process completed in A.D. 70 with the destruction of the temple. That the writer cannot declare that temple sacrifices are no longer offered (which could have clinched his case if he could have claimed it) suggests a date before A.D. 70.

Authorship. From a stylistic perspective, it is impossible to attribute the letter to Paul; of other New Testament writers, it is closest to Luke's literary abilities, but the style is not Lukan. The writer seems to be an influential person traveling in the same circles as Timothy (13:23) and well heeded by this audience, who are probably in the eastern Mediterranean. Silas would thus be a natural candidate (cf. Acts 16:37, in Rome about 64) and probably a *scribe (1 Pet 5:12) would have the educational level necessary for such a letter. It is more commonly suggested that the writer is Apollos, whose Alexandrian rhetorical and possibly philosophical training would have suited him especially well to write such a letter; he was certainly respected as Paul's peer in the Pauline *churches. (He seems to have been moving from Rome toward the east or south a few years before Hebrews was written—Tit 3:13—but he could have returned.) Other suggestions, like Barnabas or Priscilla, are possible but have less evidence to commend them than the proposals of Silas and Apollos.

Audience. Although some scholars question this, the audience seems fairly obviously predominantly Jewish; they are apparently under pressure to give up their

Christian distinctives (either from the *synagogue or from *Gentile persecution of Christians). Although the *Hellenistic Jewish thought in the letter would fit a number of locations including Corinth and Ephesus, the actual seizure of their property in earlier days (10:34) does not fit Corinth or Ephesus (against one commentator, who perhaps fancifully but nevertheless quite skillfully constructs a case for this letter being written to Corinth and 1 Corinthians responding to some features in it). But 13:23 suggests an audience in the Pauline circle (i.e., not in Alexandria, though Apollos was from there). The early persecution fits Thessalonica and possibly Philippi in Macedonia, although a community in Asia Minor or Syria with more ethnic Jewish representation might fit better. (Some have suggested a Roman audience on the basis of 10:32-34 and 13:23-24; the quality of Greek may fit an audience more to the east, but this argument would hardly be decisive. If we read 13:24 as suggesting a Roman place of origin, however, a Roman audience is unlikely.) Wherever the readers are located, they resonate with the intensely Greek rhetoric and interpretation of Judaism that come naturally to this author; the closest parallels are with *Philo of Alexandria. (That the letter also has parallels with the *Dead Sea Scrolls in Judea and *apocalyptic motifs should not be surprising; we must construct a composite picture of ancient Judaism based on as many diverse sources as possible. But the clear Philonic parallels point to *Hellenistic rhetorical training. The writer is not on the level of Philo but is clearly a *Hellenistic* Jew.)

Genre. Some scholars have suggested that this document is a homiletic *midrash on Psalm 110 (see Heb 13:22); one cannot deny that the interpretation of this psalm dominates the work. (The narrower suggestion that it was specifically a midrash on the readings for the Feast of Pentecost is not strictly impossible, but evidence for the triennial readings later adopted in Mediterranean synagogues is lacking in this period.) It is more like a treatise than a normal letter, apart from concluding greetings. But one ancient letter-writing form was the "letter-essay," which in early Judaism and Christianity would naturally have resembled a written homily or sermon; Hebrews could be such a "letter-essay."

Structure. Comparison was a central feature of much ancient argumentation. *Christ is greater than the angels (1:1-14) who delivered the *law (2:1-18); this contrast contributes to the writer's argument that Christ is greater than the law itself. He is greater than Moses and the Promised Land (3:1–4:13). As a priest after the order of Melchizedek, he is greater than the *Old Testament priesthood (4:14–7:28) because he is attached to a new covenant (chap. 8) and a heavenly temple service (9:1–10:18). Therefore, his followers ought to persevere in faith and not go back, regardless of the cost (10:19–12:13). The writer follows his theoretical discussion, as many letters did, with specific moral exhortations tied into the same theme (13:1-17). Interspersed throughout the letter is the repeated warning against apostasy, noting that the penalty for rejecting the new covenant is greater than that for rejecting the old

had been (cf. 2:1-4; 3:14; 4:1-2, 11; 6:1-8, 11-12; 10:26-31; 12:14-17, 25; though cf. expressions of confidence with reasons in 6:9-10; 10:39).

Argumentation. The writer argues from Scripture the way a good Jewish interpreter of his day would; his methods have parallels in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the *rabbis and especially the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher-interpreter Philo. His arguments sometimes confuse or fail to persuade modern readers, but he is making a case first of all for his original readers, who would be accustomed to the kinds of arguments he makes. Given the forms of argumentation he must use to persuade readers in his own cultural context, he argues his case brilliantly, although some of the arguments would have to be restructured to carry the same conviction in our culture. Because the writer's arguments are often complex, this volume's comments on Hebrews are necessarily more detailed than the comments on many other New Testament books.

Commentaries. Commentaries useful for background include William Lane, *Hebrews,* WBC 47 (Waco, TX: Word, 1991); Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989); F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); James W. Thompson, *Hebrews,* Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). On a less technical level, see, e.g., D. A. Hagner, *Hebrews,* NIBC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990); Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews,* ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997).

1:1-14
Christ Greater Than the Angels

Christ's superiority to the angels made him greater than the *law, which was said to have been mediated by angels (2:2-3). The writer may also offer this comparison to argue against toning down Christ's divinity to mere angelic status, a position the readers may have been allowing to appease non-Christian Jewish critics.

1:1-2. These two verses represent some of the most articulate, Atticizing Greek prose in the New Testament and include literary devices such as alliteration (five Greek words beginning with *p* in v. 1). The author also appears to model some of his language on the opening of the prologue to Sirach, a Jewish wisdom book in wide circulation by this period and almost certainly familiar to his readers (also called Ecclesiasticus and available to modern readers in what is usually called the *Apocrypha).

*Christ is probably presented here as the ultimate Word of God; ancient Judaism identified God's Word with his Wisdom (cf. Sirach 24:1, 23; Baruch 3:28–4:1). That God had created all things through Wisdom or his Word was noted in the *Old Testament (e.g., Prov 8:30; Ps 33:6, alluding to Gen 1) and developed further in Judaism. As the fullness of the Word, Christ was superior to the authentic but partial revelation of God in the law.

"Last days" was Old Testament language for the time of the end (Is 2:2; Ezek 38:16; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1; cf. Deut 4:30, 32; 8:16), now inaugurated in Christ. An "heir" held title to the property of the one who appointed him heir; cf. comment on "inherit" in verse 4.

1:3. The term for his "brightness" appears elsewhere in the *New Testament or *Septuagint only at Wisdom of Solomon 7:26, describing Wisdom as reflecting God's light, a mirror revealing his image (the term applies to the Logos in *Philo, *Creation* 146). Jewish authors writing in Greek sometimes said that divine Wisdom was the exact "image" (so KJV here) of God, the prototypical stamp by which he "imprinted" (cf. NRSV here) the seal of his image on the rest of creation (the way an image was stamped on coins). Sitting down at the right hand of the supreme king was an image of the ultimate honor and alludes to Psalm 110:1, cited explicitly in Hebrews 1:13. "Purification" of sins was the work of priests; mention of it here anticipates a theme that appears later in the book.

1:4. Some *Diaspora Jewish writers attributed to the angels a role in creation, but early Christian writers routinely denied them such a role (Col 1:16), as did many Judean teachers. Here Jesus' exaltation grants him a title that entitles him to much more status than the angels: Son (1:5). (Although some Jewish teachers said that God honored Israel more than the angels by giving Israel the law, something greater than comparison with Israel is in view here, because Jesus himself is identified with the divine Word in 1:1-3, and is "son" in a sense in which the angels are not; the title is applied to angels generally [e.g., Job 1:6], but Jesus is distinguished as *the* Son. Those original hearers who wished to compromise their divine view of Jesus but to retain him as superhuman may also have wished to identify him as an angel, as some second-century Jewish Christians did, but if this is the case, the writer rejects this compromise as inadequate—2:5-18.)

1:5. The author cites Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14, contexts that had already been linked in speculations about the coming *Messiah (4Q174 f1 2i11, 18-19 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls). Jewish interpreters often linked texts on the basis of a common key word; the word here is "Son." Like several other messianic texts, Psalm 2 originally celebrated the promise to the Davidic line in 2 Samuel 7; the "begetting" referred to the royal coronation—in Jesus' case, his exaltation (cf. similarly Acts 13:33). The repetition of this verse's *rhetorical question in verse 13 suggests an *inclusio,* or framing device, that brackets off verses 5-14 as a united thought (though Diaspora Jews often introduced quotations from Scripture with rhetorical questions).

1:6. "Firstborn" specified further the inheritance rights of the oldest son, who received double the portion of any subsequent son (Deut 21:17); it is a title of the Davidic king of Psalm 89:26-27. To Jesus' coronation as king and consequent superiority to the angels the author applies a text from the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 32, a favorite mine for texts among early Christian writers and a text Diaspora Jews used

for worship alongside the Psalms. (Although these words are not in the Hebrew manuscripts preserved in the later Masoretic text, their presence in a *Qumran Hebrew copy of Deuteronomy shows that the line was in some Hebrew manuscripts, from which the Greek translation may have derived it.)

The author might read the text according to Jewish interpretive practice: attending to grammatical details, he might distinguish "God" from "him." (Some of his hearers might have also recalled a Jewish tradition in which God ordered his angels to honor Adam at his creation, because he was God's image.)

1:7. Although Psalm 104:4 could mean that God uses winds and fire as his messengers, Jewish writers in the first century commonly took the text the other way and often thus suggested that angels were made of fire (for angels and fire, cf., e.g., **1 Enoch* 17:1; *2 Enoch* 1a5 [Rec. A]; 20:1; 29:3 [Rec. A]; **3 Enoch* 47:4; **4 Ezra* 8:22). (This notion also fit some Greek speculations about the elements. For many, the soul was made of fire—like the stars—or breath; for *Stoics, the whole world would be resolved back into the primordial fire from which it had come.) The writer's point is simply that angels are subordinate to God in character, in contrast to the Son (1:8).

1:8-9. Psalm 45 may have been composed for a royal wedding celebration, but part of it speaks of God's blessing on the king and probably (certainly in the Greek version cited here) addresses God directly. Jewish interpreters read as much literal significance into a passage as they could, hence the writer of Hebrews invites his fellow Jewish-Christian readers to recognize the plain language of this psalm. Because God is addressed in Psalm 45:6 (cited in Heb 1:8), it is natural to assume that he continues to be addressed in Psalm 45:7 (cited in Heb 1:9). (Later *rabbis applied this text to Abraham, and a later *targum applied an earlier verse to the Messiah; but probably neither tradition was known to the writer of Hebrews, and the former one may have represented anti-Christian polemic.) But Psalm 45:7 distinguishes this God from a God he worships, so that one may distinguish God the Father from God the Son. The writer of Hebrews explicitly affirms Christ's deity in this passage.

1:10-12. Both Jewish and Greek writers sometimes separated quotations with "And he said" or "and." Interpreters often linked texts by means of a common key word or concept, and the writer cites Psalm 102:25-27 on the basis of God's throne being "forever" in Hebrews 1:8 (in context this Old Testament passage also promised God's faithfulness to his covenant people, even though individuals were mortal).

1:13. It is natural for the author to cite Psalm 110:1 because God's "right hand" is envisioned in terms of a place beside his throne (1:8; cf. possibly Wisdom of Solomon 9:4; 18:15). The full citation also includes God addressing the priest-king (see comment on Heb 5:6) as Lord, similar to the citation in 1:8-9. The writer shows himself a master of Jewish exegetical technique.

1:14. He already proved to his readers that angels were "ministering spirits" in 1:7. That they minister not only on behalf of the one who inherited a greater name (1:4) but also for those who inherit salvation (v. 14) would resonate with Jewish readers, who would be familiar with the concept of guardian angels assigned to the righteous by God (e.g., Tobit 5:22; *Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 59:4; Tosefta *Avodah Zarah* 1:17).

2:1-4
Rejecting Christ's Word

According to common Jewish thought, any Israelite who willfully rejected the *law was excluded from the world to come; according to some teachers, this sin was even unpardonable. In Judaism, deliberate acts always carried more liability than inadvertent ones.

In a widely recognized Jewish tradition, God had given his law through angels (Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.136; and *Jubilees 1:27). (The rabbis preferred to emphasize Moses's mediation and the great number of angels present for the Israelites.) The tradition may have some basis in the interchange between God and his angel in Exodus (cf. Ex 3:2), the association of Psalm 68:17 with the Sinai tradition, and especially Deuteronomy 33:2 (more so in the *LXX, which declares that his angels were with him on his right).

Because *Christ is greater than the angels

(Heb 1:1-14), rejecting his word is a more serious offense than rejecting the word said to have been mediated through the angels (2:2). This is a natural Jewish *qal vahomer,* or "how much more" argument: if the lesser point applies, then how much more does the greater point apply. Some scholars have suggested a nautical image (a drifting ship) in verse 1, as well as significant juridical language in verses 2-4.

2:5-18
Christ Human, Not an Angel

Recognizing Jesus as suprahuman but not wishing to offend their Jewish colleagues who protested that God's oneness disallowed Jesus' divinity, some second-century Jewish Christians portrayed Jesus as a chief angel. The temptation to such a path was probably already present among the audience of this letter (see comment on Gal 1:8; 4:14), so the writer warns forcefully against such a view. *Christ was divine and became human as well; but he was never an angel.

2:5. The *Old Testament and Jewish teaching declared that God's people would reign with him in the world to come, just as Adam and Eve had been designed to reign for him in the beginning. The writer proceeds to prove this point by appealing to a specific Old Testament text, Psalm 8:4-6, in Jewish *midrashic style.

2:6-7. "One has testified somewhere" (NASB) does not mean that the writer has forgotten what part of Scripture he is quoting; this was a way of expressing confidence that the important issue was that God had inspired the words. *Philo used similar phrases in this manner. The writer can introduce Psalm 8:4-6 naturally on the basis of the Jewish interpretive rule, *gezerah shavah,* the principle by which one was permitted to link key words or phrases. This text speaks of everything subdued under someone's feet, as had the text he had cited most recently (1:13).

Psalm 8:4-6 declares that although humanity is nothing in itself, God appointed humans as rulers over all his creation, second only to himself (alluding to Gen 1:26-27). The *Septuagint interprets this passage as "a little lower than the angels" instead of "a little lower than God" (the Hebrew word used there, *'elohim,* sometimes did mean angels instead of God). That angels were more powerful than people in this age was true, but the writer of Hebrews is going to make a different point. In the verses that follow, he expounds the version of this passage with which his readers are familiar in traditional Jewish interpretive style. ("*Son of Man" was simply a Semitic way of saying "human being," and the writer here does not seem to try to get more out of it than this, although he could have had he wished to do so, because he applies the whole text to Jesus. Some scholars have also connected this passage with the binding of Isaac, the tradition known as the *Aqedah,* but the evidence cited may be too sparse and late for the points of contact here.)

2:8. Jewish interpreters often established that a text could not mean what it seemed to mean on face value (or could not mean only that) before proceeding to argue what they believed that it did mean. Here, because the creation is not currently subject to humanity, the author can argue that God's original intention in Adam will be fulfilled again for all the righteous only in the *age to come (2:5)—a doctrine shared with the rest of Judaism. But he can also argue that one representative man has already gone ahead for all humanity, as a sort of new Adam (2:9).

2:9. In Jewish thought, angels ruled the nations in this age. Jesus had obviously been made lower than God and the angels, but after death he was crowned with glory (1:13); therefore this text was not only true of the past Adam and God's people in the future but also had been fulfilled in Jesus. (The author may read "a little lower" as "for a little while lower," which was an acceptable way to read the *LXX of Ps 8; he also distinguishes "a little lower" from "crowned with honor," though the lines are parallel in Hebrew. Ancient Jewish interpreters generally read passages whatever way fit best with their views.)

2:10. That Christ had been made lower but then exalted shows him as the forerunner of the righteous who would inherit the coming world (1:14; 2:5). The term *archegos,* translated "pioneer" (NIV) or "captain" (KJV), means "pioneer" (NRSV), "leader" (cf. GNT), "founder" or "champion." The term was used for both human

and divine heroes, founders of schools or those who cut a path forward for their followers and whose exploits for humanity were rewarded by exaltation. "For whom . . . and through whom are all things" was a phrase *Stoics used to describe the supreme God, but the idea fit Jewish thought about God and divine Wisdom and was widely used by *Diaspora Jewish writers, including Paul (1 Cor 8:6). The Septuagint uses the author's term for "perfect" for the consecration of a priest; some contemporary Jewish texts also speak of a righteous person's life crowned with martyrdom as being "perfected" thereby.

2:11. Again the idea is that the text has been fulfilled in Jesus, who has gone on ahead, but will yet be fulfilled in the rest of the righteous; he is the "firstborn" (1:6) among many brothers.

2:12. To prove the thesis of verse 11, the writer cites Psalm 22:22, which can be applied to Jesus the one who suffered because it is a psalm of the righteous sufferer (the Gospels apply some of its verses to Jesus' crucifixion).

2:13. Here the author cites Isaiah 8:17-18. Isaiah 8:17 refers to the Lord who was a sanctuary to the righteous and a stumbling block to the rest of Israel (8:14-15), a text that, when linked with other "stone" texts by the Jewish interpretive principle *gezerah shavah* (linking of texts with the same key word, e.g., Is 28:16; Ps 118:22), could apply to the *Messiah. In Isaiah 8:18 the prophet explains that his own children have symbolic names to signify things to Israel. The writer can cite it because it immediately follows 8:17 and perhaps because its wording matches his point (see comment on Heb 2:12). He may also make the link, however, because one of Isaiah's children pointed toward Immanuel, God with us (Is 7:14-16; 8:1-4; cf. 9:6-7), and this text declared the other children brothers.

2:14-15. Jesus had to become part of humanity, as in Psalm 8:4-6, to become a forerunner, a new Adam for humanity. Ancient literature often spoke of the terrors of death, although many philosophers claimed to transcend this fear. Jewish literature had already connected the devil and death, especially in the Wisdom of Solomon (which this author and his audience probably knew well; here Wisdom of Solomon 2:23-24); some later texts even identify *Satan with the angel of death. Like Heracles in the Greek tradition and perhaps God the divine warrior of Jewish tradition (cf. Is 26:19-21; 44:24-26), Jesus is the "champion" (see comment on Heb 2:10) who has delivered his people.

2:16. Still expounding Psalm 8:4-6, the writer reminds his readers that Christ acted as forerunner for the world to come for God's people ("Abraham's seed"; cf. perhaps Is 41:8-9), not for the angels. (The Old Testament called Abraham's chosen descendants "children of God"—e.g., Deut 32:19; Hos 11:1; the writer is addressing Jewish Christians, members of a people who have long believed that a great destiny awaits them in the future.) Christ is already exalted above the angels (2:7, 9), as his people will be in the age to come (2:5).

2:17-18. The writer here gives a reason for Christ's becoming human to redeem humanity: identification of the sort that had to characterize a *high priest (see comment on 5:1-3). Such an image might have intrigued many people of antiquity, whose agendas were generally low on the aristocracy's list of priorities; in the cities, the aristocracies merely kept them pacified with gifts of free food, public games and so forth. On "faithful," see comment on 3:2 and 5.

3:1-6
Christ Greater Than Moses

3:1. The mention of a "heavenly" calling would have appealed to philosophically minded Jewish thinkers like Philo, who regarded earthly reality as only a shadow of heavenly reality. The writer of Hebrews probably presents Jesus as superior to Moses, who was *not* a *high priest. (*Samaritan writers saw Moses as an "*apostle," and some Jewish writers saw the high priest as such, although rarely. The author of Hebrews sees Jesus as an "apostle," a commissioned messenger of the Father, in a way greater than Moses or an earthly high priest [for a commissioned "agent," see "apostle" in the glossary]. *Philo regarded Moses as a high priest of sorts, but the *Old Testament and most of Judaism recognized that Aaron filled that role, and the writer of Hebrews probably assumes only the Old Testament perspective on the part of his readers.)

3:2. In verses 2-6 the writer constructs an implicit *midrash on Numbers 12:7-8, ex-

pounding the familiar text without directly citing it (cf. also 1 Chron 17:14 LXX). In this passage, God honors Moses above Aaron and Miriam, claiming him to be greater than a normal prophet and noting that "he is faithful in all my household." Jesus is thus this special kind of prophet "like Moses," of whom there were no others (Deut 18:15-18).

3:3-4. Comparison (*synkrisis*) was central to much ancient argumentation; comparing one favorably with another who was already honorable would increase one's honor further. In many Jewish traditions Moses was the greatest person in history, and in others he was certainly one of the greatest (i.e., next to Abraham). Jewish and Christian writers used the argument that the builder was greater than what was made (v. 3) to note that the Creator was greater than his creation (as in v. 4). This writer identifies Jesus as the Creator. Ancient writers often developed arguments based on wordplays; this writer plays on two senses of "house": God's "household" (3:2) and a building (3:3-4).

3:5. Past symbols could testify to future realities in Jewish *apocalyptic literature, the way that earthly "shadows" testified to heavenly realities in writings by Philo and Jews influenced by Platonism. Jewish readers may have recalled the tradition that Moses foresaw and testified of the messianic era (on his special visionary abilities see Num 12:8). A first-century reader could understand Numbers 12:7 the way later *rabbis also did: God was owner of the house, but Moses was the manager of the estate, and like many managers, was a servant.

3:6. A firstborn son was naturally heir and lord over the house, acting on his father's authority while the father lived and becoming master when his father died. In the Old Testament, God's household was Israel; here it is the faithful remnant, those who have submitted to God's truth in Christ.

3:7-19
Rejecting Christ Like Rejecting Moses

Here begins an explicit *midrash (commentary) on Psalm 95:7-11, which continues until 4:14, where the midrash on Psalm 110:4 begins. Like other Jewish writers, this author gives attention to the details of the text. Israel was to have "rest" in the Promised Land, but the writer points out that this means not only in this age—when the promise was never completely fulfilled (4:8)—but in its completion in the *age to come.

3:7. Ancient Judaism most often associated the "*Holy Spirit" with *prophecy, and later rabbis and some others particularly associated this prophetic Spirit with the inspiration of Scripture (among other activities; e.g., *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 8:16; **4 Ezra* 14:22).

3:8-11. The author cites Psalm 95:7-11, a text that later became familiar through its regular use in the *synagogue liturgy, but that would have been already known to most first-century Jews who recited the Psalms. This psalm refers to Israel's rebellion in the wilderness and calls on its hearers not to be like their ancestors. Later Jewish teachers debated whether the wilderness generation might have inherited the life of the world to come, even though they did not enter the Promised Land (Tosefta *Sanhedrin* 13:10-11); these rabbis believed that God's people could *atone for their sins in this age by suffering. But the psalmist's words seem like firmer rejection, without ethnicity offering the privilege of salvation; the writer of Hebrews thus contends with good reason that they did not enter the world to come.

3:12-13. Like many ancient Jewish interpreters, the writer points out that the psalmist's exhortation for "today" was still valid in his own generation.

3:14-15. The psalm states that God's people could be cut off from the covenant if they refused to heed it; thus the writer warns his readers that they become sharers in Christ's *kingdom (2:5-16) only if they persevere to the end.

3:16-19. Following Greek argumentative practice, the writer produces a series of *rhetorical questions and their obvious answers, reinforcing his point.

4:1-13
Only the Obedient Enter His Promise

4:1-2. The Israelites rebelled in the wilderness because they did not believe the word Moses gave them; those who rebelled against the

word of *Christ were acting like Moses' generation had.

4:3-5. The writer now attends to grammatical details as Jewish interpreters in his day normally did. What could the psalmist mean by "my rest," since God had already rested from his works on the seventh day of creation? (Linking texts by a shared key word was a common Jewish exegetical technique; Jewish liturgy later linked these two texts similarly.) Perhaps he uses this text to point to the future too; some Jewish writers (cf., e.g., *Mekilta Shabbata* 1) believed that the world to come would be the ultimate sabbath rest, the final stage of creation.

4:6-7. All of Moses' generation failed to achieve "rest" (3:16-19), settlement in the land. Indeed, all subsequent generations from Joshua on, with the notable near-exceptions of David and Josiah, failed to subdue all the land promised to Abraham. Thus the psalmist (Ps 95:7-8) could warn his own and subsequent generations to obey God's word or the same thing would happen to them. (By the *New Testament period, with Judea under Rome's authority and no end of the Roman Empire in sight, most Jewish people agreed that the restoration of their *kingdom and consequently rest in the land would come only in the end time, which most hoped was soon.)

4:8-9. "Joshua" and "Jesus" are the same name (these are anglicized forms of the Hebrew and Greek, respectively); perhaps the writer thus intends the first Joshua to point to his later namesake. But his main point is that Joshua was not able to subdue the whole land (4:6-7; Josh 13:1-2); the promise is thus yet to be fulfilled.

4:10-11. Because the *Messiah, the *Spirit and other events that had arrived in Jesus were normally relegated in Judaism to the *age to come, early Christian writers could say that believers in Jesus experienced a foretaste of the future world in their present relationship with God (see comment on 6:5).

4:12-13. God's word, received by Israel through Moses and by the readers of Hebrews in Christ (4:2), left those who heard it no excuses. Judaism recognized the ability of God to search out every detail of one's heart and thoughts (e.g., Ps 139:23), and it was natural to apply this property to his word or wisdom.

The Alexandrian Jewish philosopher *Philo spoke of the power of the universal, divine "Word" (the Logos, divine reason that permeated the universe) to subdivide the soul into smaller and smaller units, especially into its rational and irrational components; but he sometimes identified spirit and soul, as the New Testament writers usually do. The point here is not an analysis of human nature, but that the Word searches the heart in such detail that it is like a sharp sword that divides even what is virtually (but not absolutely) indivisible, whether soul and spirit or joints and marrow.

4:14–5:10
Christ the High Priest

Although *Philo portrays the Logos, the divine Word or reason, as God's *high priest, this is probably not in the mind of the author of Hebrews. (Indeed, the emphasis on Christ's participation in people's humanity contrasts with Philo's attempt to circumvent the high priest's full humanity when he interceded for Israel.) Instead, a more obvious source lies at hand: his interpretation of Psalm 110:4, which becomes explicit in Hebrews 5:6. His citation of the first verse of this psalm in 1:13, applied by Jesus to himself (Mk 12:35-37), may have already called Psalm 110:4 to his biblically informed readers' minds.

4:14. See Psalm 110:4, cited in Hebrews 5:6. *Apocalyptic traditions portray heaven as a place of worship; the imagery of a heavenly temple is especially prominent in the book of Revelation. In later *Samaritan tradition, Moses (who in some Jewish tradition had ascended to heaven to receive the *law) served as heavenly high priest; but the Christian portrait of Jesus fulfilling this role is probably earlier than the Samaritan tradition about Moses.

4:15. The writer continues the theme that *Christ had experienced humanness without compromising his obedience (2:14-18). In the unlikely event that his readers were familiar with the abuses of the high priesthood in Jerusalem, they might have recognized here a contrast with the high priestly aristocracy.

4:16. The ark of the covenant symbolized God's throne in the *Old Testament (e.g., 2 Sam 6:2; Ps 80:1; 99:1; Is 37:16; cf. Ps 22:3) and in the ancient Near East (where kings or deities were often portrayed as enthroned on winged

figures). But the ark was unapproachable, secluded in the most holy part of the temple, which even the high priest could approach only once a year. Christ has opened full access to God to all his followers (10:19-20).

5:1-3. While continuing the theme of 4:15-16, the author also shows Christ's superiority over other *high priests, who sin (Lev 9:7; 16:6).

5:4. The writer follows the Old Testament law on the high priestly succession; in Palestine in his own day, the office of high priest was a political favor granted by the Romans. Outside Judea, however, this was not an issue; the writer speaks of the system God had appointed in the Bible.

5:5. Citing again Psalm 2:7 (see comment on Heb 1:5), the writer proves from it that Christ's royal coronation was God's initiative. In the next verse he links this kingship with the high priesthood.

5:6. Although the Romans had a powerful high priest too (the *pontifex maximus*), the writer's model for this high priesthood and all its nuances derive unquestionably from the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. Melchizedek was a Canaanite priest-king (Gen 14:18); to speak of a "priest like Melchizedek" was thus to speak first of all of a priest who was also king. Israel had known a dynasty of priest-kings only in Hasmonean times, after they threw off the Syrian yoke and before they were subdued by Rome; some Jews opposed this combination. The *Dead Sea Scrolls came to separate the anointed high priest from the anointed king *Messiah, which was a necessary distinction so long as one was from Levi and the other from Judah (cf. 7:14). But Melchizedek was not Levitical; one like him would be a priest-king without being descended from the Jewish priestly line.

Rabbis later contended that Psalm 110:4 meant that God transferred Melchizedek's priesthood from Melchizedek to Abraham; they may have argued this point to counteract Christian claims that it referred to Jesus. Melchizedek appears in some other Jewish traditions (in the 11Q13 Dead Sea Scrolls) as a heavenly figure, perhaps Michael, and is sometimes associated in Jewish literature with the end time. The writer does not appeal to this extrabiblical tradition, however, which could play into the hands of those wishing to reduce Christ to angelic status (Heb 2:5-18); the plain statement of Psalm 110:4 is sufficient for his case.

5:7. Judaism stressed that God heard the pious; God answered Jesus' prayers by the *resurrection, however, not by escape from death. Although the writer's source here could be Psalm 22:5 and 24, it is more likely that he and his readers are acquainted with the tradition of Jesus' struggle and commitment in Gethsemane (Mk 14:36, 39).

5:8-10. Discipline, including beatings, was a standard part of most Greek education. Classical Greek writers stressed learning through suffering, and the Old Testament and later Jewish wisdom traditions portray divine chastisement as a sign of God's love. The Greek paronomasia here, *emathen aph' hon epathen* "learned from the things he suffered," was already a common play on words in ancient literature. But the writer here challenges the Greek philosophic idea that the supreme God (with whom the writer in some sense identifies the Son—1:9; 3:3-4) was incapable of feeling, pain or true sympathy. Jesus' participation in human suffering qualified him to be the ultimate high priest; the *Septuagint applies the word used here for "made perfect" to the consecration of priests (v. 9).

5:11–6:12
Press Deeper or Fall Away

The writer complains that his readers' knowledge of the Bible is inadequate to follow the rest of his argument. But he insists that they must become more biblically informed if they wish to persevere—and he proceeds to give them the rest of his argument anyway (6:13–7:28).

5:11-12. Many Greek writers used "much to say" to indicate how important their topic was. Even philosophers agreed that one must begin with simple matters before leading students to the more difficult; but they were not above complaining about their pupils' slowness to learn. Greek moralists also used "milk" and "solid food" figuratively, contrasting basic and advanced instruction. The "elementary principles" (NASB) or "elementary truths" (NIV) are the rudiments or basics (summarized in 6:1-2); Greek writers often applied the term to the alphabet. Some writers frequently reproved

their readers in similar ways ("You should be teachers by now!") to stir them to learn what they should already know.

5:13. Some philosophers, such as Pythagoras, distinguished between elementary and advanced students, calling them "babes" (NASB, KJV) and "mature" (cf. v. 14; "perfect"—KJV) respectively.

5:14. Whereas Platonists disparaged mere sensory knowledge and Skeptics (another philosophical school) valued it even less, *Stoics believed that one's senses (of which there were five, as in *Aristotle) were useful, and *Epicureans in particular trusted them. Those who thought the senses at all reliable, like *Seneca and Philo, wanted them trained for moral sensibility. The ability to differentiate critically between good and bad, i.e., between truth and falsehood, was important to Greco-Roman writers in general, although the specific application to moral sensibilities is more often Jewish (2 Sam 14:17; 1 Kings 3:9; Ezek 44:23). The writer borrows the language of Greek ethics, which would impress his *Diaspora Jewish readers, and uses it to call them to study the Bible more thoroughly.

6:1. They had to get past the basics to biblical maturity (5:11-14), or they would fall away (6:4-8). The writer probably chooses these items as the "basics" because they were the basic sort of instructions about Jewish belief given to converts to Judaism, which all the author's readers would have understood before becoming followers of Jesus. These items represented Jewish teachings still useful for followers of Christ. Judaism stressed *repentance as a regular antidote for sin, and a once-for-all kind of repentance for the turning of pagans to Judaism; Judaism naturally stressed faith as well. Although "dead" works could echo the common Jewish denunciation of idols as dead, that specific an allusion is unlikely in this context; cf. 9:14.

6:2-3. "*Baptisms" probably refers to the various kinds of ceremonial washings in Judaism, of which the most relevant to Christianity was *proselyte baptism as an act of conversion washing away the former impurity of a pagan life. Jewish worshipers laid hands on certain sacrifices, and Jewish teachers laid hands on *disciples to ordain them; the latter was more relevant to Christian practice. The *resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment were standard Jewish doctrines, though embarrassing to some Hellenized elements in Judaism.

6:4. Early Judaism severely limited possession of the *Spirit. The *Dead Sea Scrolls limit the activity of the Holy Spirit to the congregation of the children of light, that is, those who agree with them; but besides these and Christian texts, others viewed the Spirit as even rarer. Later *rabbis most emphasized the Spirit's rareness; they generally report that the Spirit was so rare that even when someone was worthy to receive it, the unworthiness of his generation prevented him from doing so.

"Illumined" or "enlightened" clearly means converted, as in 10:32; the Dead Sea Scrolls similarly speak of their teachers as the "illuminators" and their adherents as "children of light." "Tasted" also normally meant "experienced" (2:9), and both the use of "heavenly" in the letter (cf. 3:1; 8:1-5) and the limitation of the *Holy Spirit to Christians in early Christian literature also indicate that this person was genuinely converted.

6:5. Most of Judaism regarded the present age as under sin, but believed that God would rule the coming age unchallenged, after he raised the dead and judged them. Christians recognized that they had begun to experience the life of the future world; they were the vanguard of the future *kingdom (see comment on 4:10-11). On the "word," see comment on 4:2 and 12.

6:6. God had a higher standard for those who should have known better (Num 14:22-23). Judaism generally believed that some people could rebel against God so brazenly, aware that they were doing so, that they would become unable to repent; the offense had to be extremely serious, however. (Later rabbis were not unanimous; Rabbi Meir is said to have insisted that the notorious apostate Elisha ben Abuya could repent, for example. But the majority opinion seems to have been that some could go too far, including King Manasseh. The Dead Sea Scrolls also attest that one who had been part of the community for ten years—and thus knew full well what he was doing—and then turned away was never allowed to return. But as some writers have pointed out, this verse refers to intentional apostasy, not a

single sin or drifting away that can be addressed by repentance; drifting away may be covered under Jas 5:19-20.) The point here is not that God does not accept the repentant, but that some hearts become too hard to consider repenting, because they refuse to acknowledge Christ, the only means of repentance. By willfully choosing the kind of belief that nailed Jesus to the cross, they accept responsibility again for killing him.

6:7-8. Others had also used ground choked with thorns and thistles as an image for the wicked and their spiritual destination in barrenness and death (e.g., Is 5:6). Judaism treated apostates as spiritually dead, as did *Pythagoreans and some other groups.

6:9. Greco-Roman moralists often presented their exhortations as reminders, thereby toning down the possible harshness of their words and making them more palatable: "We know, of course, that *you* would never do something like that." When they did think that their readers were likely to pursue such a course, however, they would state matters more harshly, rebuking them. The writer has some reason for confidence in his hearers, stated in 6:10.

6:10. "Ministry to the *saints" (KJV, NASB) probably refers to financial help. Some suggest that it might refer to a continuing effort to help the poor Jerusalem Christians that Paul had initiated (Rom 15:25); by A.D. 68, however, with Jerusalem surrounded and the Christians having escaped safely to the wilderness, such monies would have to be sent elsewhere, even if in Judea. On charity see, for example, comment on Matthew 6:2-4.

6:11-12. Ancient moral exhortation often emphasized imitating positive role models (some of whom this writer will list in chap. 11). As Israel "inherited" the land, so Judaism said that the righteous would "inherit" the world to come.

6:13-20
The Unbreakable Oath to Jesus

The writer compares the promise (continuing the theme of 6:12) God made to Abraham with the promise he had made to one who would be *high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Although he does not quote here Psalm 110:4, which states this promise, he expects his readers to understand this point presupposed by his exposition (cf. Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21).

6:13-17. God swore this "by himself" (Gen 22:16; Ex 32:13), just like the promise to the one who would be high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4).

This oath is one of several by God in the *Old Testament. God had sworn an oath to David (Ps 89:35, 49; 132:11), which Jewish people expected to be fulfilled in the *Messiah; he swore to judge Israel for their sins, and he did so (Ps 106:26). But the greatest human oaths were oaths sworn "by God," and when God swore "by himself" his words were guaranteed, especially in the few instances where the oath included a promise not to change his mind (Ps 110:4; Is 45:23). God swore by himself and would not change his mind that everyone would have to acknowledge him in the day of judgment (Is 45:23); he likewise swore by himself judgment on the royal house of Judah (Jer 22:5), on the Jewish refugees in Egypt (Jer 44:26), on Israel (Amos 4:2; 6:8), on Edom (Jer 49:13) and on Babylon (Jer 51:14). (*Philo claimed that God alone was worthy to bear witness to his own veracity, although he also decided that any of God's words had the force of an oath, hence he had not literally sworn by himself.) The accumulation of standard legal terms in this context is not surprising, given the legal force and common courtroom use of oaths.

6:18. Although God swore more than these two promises, the writer emphasizes here the two he has just mentioned: the one to Abraham and the one to the priest like Melchizedek. Greek philosophers believed that the gods were immutable, unchangeable; most Jewish people believed that their God was absolute and unchangeable in his character, yet he dealt with human beings as they were (Ps 18:25-26). The oath is thus important, although both Jews and Greek philosophers believed that the one who was truly God (as opposed to the mythical antics of Greek gods) did not lie.

6:19. The "anchor" was a frequent metaphor in Greco-Roman literature, often for the secure hold on hope which moral qualities produced. "Inside the veil" means that believers have a secure hope in the "holy of holies" (cf. Lev 16:2), which only the high priest could enter once a year. (Later rabbinic

texts also portray God as "behind the veil," from which he utters his decrees. Although this parallel may illustrate that the readers of Hebrews would have caught the author's Jewish expression for God's presence in heaven, the Old Testament is his direct source.) The writer means not the earthly but the spiritual holy of holies, in the heavenly temple (see comment on 8:1-5).

6:20. Jesus appears as forerunner often in the book (compare the idea in 2:10; 5:9); the term could be applied to a military vanguard, to firstfruits, to the first-place runner and so forth. It always signifies that the rest of the company is coming afterward.

7:1-10
The Nature of Melchizedek's Priesthood

Because Scripture declares David's lord to be a priest like Melchizedek (Ps 110:4, in Heb 5:6), a Jewish interpreter would naturally ask, In what ways is he like Melchizedek? The writer's point is to show that Jesus' priesthood is greater than and so supersedes the Levitical priesthood of contemporary Judaism. Psalm 110 invites the reader to look for traits of the ultimate king in Genesis 14.

7:1. Here the author summarizes Genesis 14:17-24, in which the Canaanite priest-king of the city that later became Jerusalem blessed Abram. (The identification of Salem with Jerusalem is corroborated by Ps 76:2 and Egyptian execration texts, and assumed in *Josephus, the *Dead Sea Scrolls and the *rabbis.)

7:2. *Philo and others commonly interpreted *Old Testament names allegorically. Jews like Philo and Josephus also interpreted Melchizedek's name as the writer of Hebrews does (as *melek,* "king," plus *tsedeq,* "righteousness").

7:3. One Jewish interpretive principle (used when convenient) was that what was not mentioned did not happen. (Philo especially, though not exclusively—cf. the rabbis—exploited this technique. Thus, for instance, Philo argued that the wise man's family consisted of his virtues, because at one point Moses listed virtues instead of listing all ancestors. Similarly, because Cain's death is not mentioned, Cain did not die [for Philo, Cain represents deathless folly]. This technique of arguing from silence was applied selectively, of course, because *most* possible details were not mentioned in a text.) The writer of Hebrews can thus argue that Melchizedek, for the purpose of the comparison, was without parents, because Genesis 14 does not mention them, and Genesis supplies parentage and genealogy for other important representatives of God. To Greek readers, to be without beginning or end was to be divine (e.g., an argument by the philosopher Thales).

7:4. Tithing was already an ancient Near Eastern custom before it was mandated in the Old Testament, and a form of it is also attested in Greco-Roman literature. Here the author refers to Genesis 14:20, its first occurrence in the Bible.

7:5-6. Under Old Testament *law, the tithes went to the descendants of Levi, who was a descendant of Abraham (e.g., Num 18:26; 2 Chron 31:4-6; Neh 10:37-38; 13:5, 12); but Abraham tithed to someone else.

7:7-10. The writer's point is that Melchizedek (and thus the one who has inherited his priesthood—5:6) is greater than Abraham and thus greater than Levi, for Abraham is greater than Levi. Seeking to get around this argument, later rabbis said that God withdrew the priesthood from Melchizedek (for blessing Abram before blessing God) and gave it to Abraham in Psalm 110:4; but Psalm 110 clearly refers to the ultimate priest-king who would rule over the nations, not to Abraham. Like Philo, the writer of Hebrews believes that the perfect priest is eternal; but this writer can prove his case from Genesis 14 (or even better, from Ps 110 on Jewish premises about the future *Messiah and the *resurrection of the dead).

7:11-28
The New Priesthood Supersedes the Old

The writer of Hebrews had a difficult task. Although history was ultimately on his side—as the destruction of the temple not long after proved—he wanted all the Bible on his side too, and the Bible said that the Levitical priesthood was "perpetual" (e.g., Ex 40:15). Although some *narratives in Scripture could undermine a literal construal of that phrase (e.g., Ex 32:10), and one could interpret the old

priesthood allegorically (as some Jewish people in the writer's day did) or recognize eternal principles merely expressed in transitory, culturally relevant forms (as do many interpreters today), the writer of Hebrews had a more useful approach for his own audience. For him, the new and superior priesthood clearly promised in Scripture makes the old priesthood obsolete.

7:11-19. The *Dead Sea Scrolls eventually recognized two "anointed" figures: a warrior *messiah descended from David, hence of Judah, and an anointed priest from the tribe of Levi. But Psalm 110 allows this writer to view both roles as fulfilled by one future figure; a priest "like Melchizedek" need not be descended from Levi, and was, in fact, greater than Levi (7:4-10).

Philo spoke of the "perfection" of Levi as a model of the perfect priesthood; the author of Hebrews disagrees. Like *Plato and his successors, this writer notes that what changes is imperfect, for the perfect by nature does not need to change. Yet God had promised another priesthood, an eternal and hence changeless one (7:17; cf. 7:3), which renders the first, imperfect one obsolete. (The term for "setting aside" in v. 18 was even used in business documents for a legal annulment.)

7:20-21. This priesthood is also greater than the Levitical priesthood because, unlike the latter, it is guaranteed with a divine oath (see comment on 6:13-18). This point constitutes a partial answer for any possible appeal to the *Old Testament claim that the Levitical prescriptions were perpetual ordinances; God changed some points in the *law when such changes were necessary to accomplish his original, eternal purpose in the law (e.g., Jer 3:16; cf. 2 Kgs 18:4), but in this case he had sworn and promised not to change his mind.

7:22-25. On the eternal priest's superiority to temporal ones, see also 7:11-19. In the unlikely event that his readers are familiar with the politics of the Jerusalem aristocracy, they would think of the Romans' appointing and deposing of priests. More likely, however, the only issue here is the priests' mortality. The term for "guarantee" (NASB, GNT) or "surety" (KJV) in verse 22 was used in business documents for a deposit, a security guaranteeing that one would carry through on one's word or obligation, or someone who made such a guarantee.

7:26. Levitical priests were to avoid defilement, and special precautions were taken to avoid the *high priest's defilement before the Day of Atonement. This was the one day a year on which the high priest would enter the holy of holies (although he may have entered several times on that day; cf. Lev 16:13-16). Even though later rabbis' views may be stricter than the actual practice of the Jerusalem high priests, their elaborate care to avoid the high priest's defilement is instructive (he was secluded for the week preceding that day; precautions were taken to avoid a nocturnal emission the night before; etc.). But such earthly high priests could never compare with the heavenly high priest, just as the earthly tabernacle was only a shadow of the perfect one in heaven (see comment on 3:1; 8:1-5).

7:27. High priests did not directly offer up the daily offerings, but they were responsible for the priestly service that did offer them. Fire was to burn on the altar continually; Israel's sacrifices were offered day after day; priests offered daily morning and evening sacrifices on behalf of the whole nation in the temple. The writer may be conflating the duties of the whole priesthood with the duties of the high priest on the Day of Atonement, thus stressing the necessity of repetition in the Levitical cultus. Or he might mean "daily" hyperbolically for "continually," year after year. Under the law, only on the Day of Atonement did the high priest make an offering for his sins and then for those of the nation (Lev 16:6, 11, 15-16).

7:28. By Jesus' *resurrection he naturally qualifies for the "eternal" priesthood like Melchizedek in Psalm 110:4 (Heb 7:17). Many ancient thinkers accepted only what was eternal as "perfect." (The writer cites the promise given after the law, hence a statement that the law could not supersede. Addressing a different line of reasoning in Gal 3, Paul speaks of a promise that came *before* the law and that the law cannot annul. Thus Paul and the author of Hebrews assert promise over law from different directions.)

8:1-5
The Heavenly Tabernacle

Parallels between the heavenly and earthly

were common in some Jewish sources (e.g., the heavenly and earthly court or Sanhedrin), as elsewhere in ancient thought (e.g., the heavenly temple corresponding to the Babylonian temple of Marduk, called Esagila, and the Canaanite temple of Baal). (Some ancient Near Eastern temples and later *Mithraea* were also designed to reflect the structure of the whole cosmos, signifying the deity's universal rule. *Philo naturally applied the principle of heavenly prototype and earthly copy even more broadly, following Platonic models. When specifically comparing the heavenly and earthly temples, Philo allegorized in great detail, regarding the ideal heavenly temple as virtue, its altar as ideas, its linen as earth, etc.) Given the ancient Middle Eastern setting, correspondences between heavenly and earthly temples were probably intended even in Exodus 25:8-9, part of which is cited in Hebrews 8:5.

Much of Judaism, from Hellenized wisdom traditions (Wisdom of Solomon 9:8) to *apocalyptic visionaries and writers and later *rabbis, spoke of the earthly temple as an imitation of the heavenly one. The eternality and value of the old temple are relativized by comparing it with the true temple in heaven.

8:1. Jesus' seat at God's right hand was proved by Psalm 110:1 (Heb 1:13), which clearly addressed the same person as the priest like Melchizedek (Ps 110:4, cited in Heb 5:6; 7:17).

8:2-5. See on the introduction to 8:1-5. Like followers of *Plato (including, on this point, Philo), the writer of Hebrews sees the earthly as a "copy and shadow" of the heavenly reality (8:5). (The word for "copy" means "sketch" [NRSV] or "plan, outline," as in the *LXX of Ezek 42:15, which deals with the temple of the world to come; many of its details the author of Hebrews might interpret symbolically, an approach not necessarily out of harmony with the symbolic language of Ezekiel elsewhere, e.g., 31:2-9.) Unlike Plato, the writer of Hebrews does not see the heavenly reality only as an ideal world to be apprehended by the mind: Jesus really went there. Jewish apocalyptic writers sometimes also spoke of the future *kingdom (which generally included a magnificent temple) as a present reality (at least as a prototype) in heaven.

8:6-13
The New Covenant

The writer produces here an extended citation from Jeremiah 31:31-34 to demonstrate his case that the Bible itself predicted a change in the *law. This text was also stressed by the *Qumran sectarians who probably wrote the *Dead Sea Scrolls; they saw themselves as the people of this "new covenant." But they interpreted Moses' law more strictly, whereas this writer would have been considered a more liberal Jew on this point than Philo was (13:9), valuing the principles as eternal but the forms as cultural and temporary.

8:6-7. The author picks up a hint he dropped in 7:12: the old priesthood was tied with the old law and its covenant, and both were shown to be imperfect if they were superseded.

8:8-9. The phrase generally rendered "new" covenant in Jeremiah 31:31 could also be translated "renewed" covenant. The first covenant was meant to be written on people's hearts (Deut 30:11-14), and the righteous actually had it there (Ps 37:31; 40:8; 119:11; Is 51:7); but according to Jeremiah, most of Israel did *not* have it in their hearts (cf., e.g., Deut 5:29). The difference between the former and the new covenant would be precisely that whereas the Israelites broke the first covenant (Jer 31:32), the new law would be written within them, and they would know God (Jer 31:33-34).

8:10-12. Jeremiah echoes the language of the first covenant: "I will be their God, and they will be my people" (e.g., Lev 26:12). "Knowing" God was also covenant language, but on a personal level it referred to the sort of intimate relationship with God that the prophets had.

8:13. The writer undoubtedly says "about to disappear" because the temple service had not been directly discontinued by Jesus' exaltation, but it was at that time on the verge of disappearing. If, as appears likely, this letter was written in the late 60s A.D. (see introduction), many in the *Diaspora recognized that the Romans might soon crush Jerusalem and the temple. Apart from a few groups not very dependent on the Jerusalem temple (such as the *Essenes), most Palestinian Jews were forced to make major readjustments in cultic practice after the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70.

9:1-10
The Old Tabernacle

On the principle of correspondence between the heavenly and earthly tabernacles, see comment on 8:1-5. The writer follows the *Old Testament carefully in his description in 9:1-10, not conforming it at all to the modifications of his day. (Verses 4-5 were no longer true in his own day, elements having been removed. In many Jewish traditions, they would be restored in the end times.) The altar in 9:4 is connected grammatically to the holy of holies; even though some traditions favor the view that the incense altar was inside the holy of holies, the author probably means instead that it belonged to the holy of holies but was not inside, as the ark was. The Old Testament text plainly places the altar of incense in the sanctuary outside the holiest place. The Old Testament itself elsewhere—the Hebrew of 1 Kings 6:22—can put the matter ambiguously, however; but the author of Hebrews says that these items "belong to" it, not "are in" it.

Most of the details of the original tabernacle were meant to communicate something within its ancient Near Eastern culture. Some features simply informed the Israelites that this was a "temple." The three-part structure of the tabernacle, with the holy of holies in the back approached in a direct line from the front entrance of the tabernacle, was the standard design of Egyptian temples in Moses' day. The placement of the most expensive materials (such as pure gold) and dyes nearest the ark was an ancient way of glorifying the holiness of the deity and signifying that one must approach this deity with awe and reverence. Some other features of the tabernacle signify merely that God was being practical: whereas the later temple was built of cedar wood (like normal Canaanite temples), the tabernacle was built from acacia wood—the only wood available in the Sinai desert. Tent shrines were also known among nomadic peoples.

But the greatest teachings of the tabernacle lay in its contrasts with the shrines of surrounding cultures. Like most ancient Near Eastern temples, God's temple had an altar of sacrifice, an altar of incense (to overpower the stench of flesh burning from the sacrifices), a table and so on. But pagan temples often had a bed and similar apparatus for the image of the god, which was dressed, "fed" and entertained each day. Yet God's house had none of this—he was not an idol. Similarly, larger Egyptian temples often had shrines on either side for tutelary deities, but this feature is missing in God's temple—he was the only true God. The holiest place in ancient Near Eastern temples was what corresponded to the ark, on which would be mounted (sometimes enthroned on winged creatures like the cherubim) the image of the deity. But the climax of God's temple is that, where one would expect an image, there was none, because nothing could adequately represent his glory.

In suggesting that the details of the present, earthly tabernacle are significant (he believes they point to a heavenly tabernacle), the writer of Hebrews is not distorting the text. His modest suggestions are quite in contrast with the allegorizing of Philo, who explains each detail as a symbol of something that none of Moses' original readers would have guessed (linen as earth, dark red as air, the seven-branched candelabrum as the seven planets, etc.). Unlike the writer of Hebrews, however, some popular readers of the Old Testament today follow Philo's more fanciful method of interpretation.

9:11-22
The Final Blood Offering

Under Old Testament *law, sin could technically be expiated—God's anger appeased by substitution—only by bloodshed.

9:11. In typical first-century thought, the heavens were pure, perfect and changeless; the heavenly tabernacle, then, would be the perfect prototype for the earthly and the only one that was ultimately needed. On the temple "not made with hands," see comment on Acts 7:40-41 and 48-50.

9:12. The *high priest on the annual Day of Atonement brought the blood of a bull for himself and that of a goat for the people (Lev 16:6, 11, 14, 15-16). According to the *Qumran War Scroll, "eternal redemption" arrives only at the time of the end, after the final battle; here it is inaugurated through the permanently satisfactory offering of the eternal high priest (cf. Dan 9:24).

9:13-14. Had the author wished to cite a particular proof text for a priest offering himself up, he might have compared the one who sprinkles (as the *Old Testament priests did) the nations in Isaiah 52:15 with the following context of this person carrying the sins of Israel (Is 53:4-6, 8-12); but he is content to argue instead on the basis of his comparison with the Levitical offerings. He reasons by means of a "how much more" argument (a standard argument especially used by Jewish interpreters): if the blood of sacrifices on the Day of Atonement can remove sin (hypothetically; cf. 10:4), how much more effective is the blood of Christ.

9:15. Here the author brings together the "new covenant" (see comment on 8:6-13), redemption and an "eternal" inheritance (as opposed to the temporal inheritance their ancestors had sought in the land—chaps. 3–4; the Old Testament image of "inheriting" the Promised Land was applied in ancient Judaism to inheriting the world to come).

9:16-17. "Covenant" (NASB) can also be translated "testament" (KJV) or "will" (NIV, NRSV, GNT), and ancient writers often argued their points by plays on words. "Testaments" were sealed documents, opened only on the testator's death; "covenants" were agreements between parties or imposed by a greater party on a lesser one. (Some scholars have drawn a connection between the two in terms of the suzerain-vassal treaty form reflected in God's covenant with Israel. Because these covenants would be maintained in force dynastically—the suzerain's son would execute it after his father's death—the covenant could perhaps be understood in some sense as a testament. But this connection involves a different cultural world from the one in which the author of Hebrews usually moves, and it is not likely that he would have this connection in mind.) Regardless of the play on words (puns were used in antiquity for argumentation as well as wit), his point makes good sense: ancient covenants were normally inaugurated with blood (e.g., Gen 31:54).

9:18-20. See Exodus 24:6-8. One of the writer's minor changes in wording is attested elsewhere (Philo), but that may be only coincidence; ancient interpreters normally felt free to modify the text in minor ways to make more intelligible its relation to the writer's point. A more significant change is the addition of water, bright red wool, and hyssop: the writer apparently *midrashically connects Exodus 24 with Leviticus 14:6 or Numbers 19:6, to arouse the association of purification—in the latter case, from sin (Num 18:9).

9:21-22. See, for example, Exodus 29:37, Leviticus 8:15 and 16:16-20. To the Old Testament *Josephus added that even the priests' garments, the sacred utensils and so on were cleansed with blood; while the writer of Hebrews may not go this far, the whole cultus was in some sense dedicated through sacrifice. Blood was officially necessary for *atonement under the law (Lev 17:11); ritual exceptions were permitted for the poorest Israelites (Lev 5:11-13), but the general rule established the principle. (Jewish tradition also interpreted the sprinkled blood of Ex 24:8 as blood for atonement.)

9:23-28
A Sacrifice Sufficient for the Heavenly Sanctuary

9:23. The writer returns to the parallel between earthly and heavenly tabernacles (see comment on 8:1-5; 9:1-10): if the earthly sanctuary could be dedicated only by blood (9:11-22), so also the heavenly sanctuary. But a perfect sacrifice was necessary for the perfect sanctuary.

9:24-26. The "eternal" priesthood of one like Melchizedek (7:17; Ps 110:4) was not based on annual sacrifices; had "eternal" involved perpetual sacrifices, they would have had no beginning as well as no ending. But his priesthood is based on a once-for-all, finished sacrifice on the cross. Jewish people frequently divided history up into many ages (they proposed a number of different schemes), but the most basic was the division between the present age and the *age to come. The "consummation of the ages" (NASB) thus refers to the goal of history, climaxing in the coming of God's reign; in the decisive act of Christ, the writer recognizes that the future age has in some sense invaded history (cf. 6:5).

9:27-28. The author's point here is that just as people die only once (a commonplace even of Greek classical literature, though *Plato taught reincarnation), *Christ had to offer

himself for sin only once. When he appears (cf. v. 24) again, it will be to consummate the future salvation (just as the emergence of the priest into the outer court traditionally assured the people that the sacrifice had been accepted and their sins forgiven; cf. 1:14). "Bear the sins of many" is from Isaiah 53:12.

Although Josephus and probably some other Jewish thinkers dabbled with the language of reincarnation in Plato's writings (in Josephus's case, seeking to make the Pharisaic belief in *resurrection intelligible to Greeks), the vast majority of first-century Judeans expected instead one death, then resurrection and judgment (the sequence of the latter two varied in different Jewish accounts). Like the *Old Testament (Ezek 18:21-32), Jewish people often felt that death was the cutoff point for judgment. (Thus a late-first-century *rabbi warned *disciples to repent one day before death; those being executed should say, "May my death *atone for all my sins" [but cf. Ps 49:7-9, 15]; those who were dying often expected to be judged immediately—e.g., the story of Johanan ben Zakkai's pious fear when he was on his deathbed; one tradition said that the righteous were escorted by good angels and the wicked by evil ones; etc. But other Jewish traditions did allow for temporary punishments that expiated one's remaining sins: the view that the corpse's decomposition helped atone for sin, the placing of a rock on a coffin to symbolize the execution of one who died before being executed, and the view that no Israelite could spend more than a year in *Gehenna. These views of posthumous expiation have no clear parallel in the Old or *New Testament.) This writer follows the frequent Jewish and unanimous New Testament consensus (among those sources that comment on the question) that death ended one's opportunity for reconciliation with God.

10:1-18
The True Sacrifice of the New Covenant

Only *Christ could be a sufficient sacrifice for the heavenly sanctuary (9:23-28).

10:1. *Plato spoke of the earthly world, perceived by sensory knowledge (by the earthly senses), as consisting merely of shadows of the real world, apprehended by reason alone. By the first century, even many Jewish writers (in the *Diaspora) spoke of the heavens above as pure and perfect, and the earthly as bound by corruption. Such writers often spoke of the need of the soul to escape back to the upper regions from which it originally came. Without adopting a thoroughgoing Platonic worldview, the writer of Hebrews agrees that the earthly tabernacle, at least, is a shadow of the heavenly one (he has scriptural proof for this thesis—8:5), but he also echoes the view of Jewish *apocalyptic writers: heaven reveals what the world to come will be like. For this writer, however, the first stage (9:24, 28) of that future time had already invaded history (6:5).

10:2-3. The author again plays on the idea that what is perfect need not be changed or supplemented. *Rhetorical questions were commonly used in ancient reasoning. "Reminder" may mean that the annual Day of Atonement sacrifices remind people of their sins the way Passover reminded them of God's redemptive acts (Ex 12:14; cf. Lev 16:21)—in contrast to the policy of the new covenant (8:12).

10:4. Palestinian Judaism argued that the Day of Atonement, conjoined with *repentance, was necessary for the forgiveness of most violations of the *law.

Many philosophers had revolted against the idea of blood sacrifice, which they felt was unreasonable in a perfect temple focused on the mind. That is not the premise of this writer, however, who like people in a wide range of cultures in human history recognized the need for blood sacrifice (10:19); he merely felt that animal sacrifices were inadequate for human redemption in the heavenly sanctuary (9:23), and thus unnecessary now that Christ had come. He has plenty of *Old Testament precedent for relativizing the actual value of animal sacrifices (e.g., 1 Sam 15:22; Ps 51:16; Prov 21:3; Is 1:11; Jer 11:15; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-27), as he points out in his sample citation (Heb 10:5-7).

Before A.D. 70, many Diaspora Jews and some Palestinian Jews emphasized the spiritual, figurative use of sacrificial imagery, but only a few denied the necessity of sacrifices altogether. Everyone in the ancient world, whether they had visited Jerusalem's temple or not, was familiar with animal sacrifices, which were a standard part of religion; some philoso-

phers opposed it, but most ancient temples included it. This writer saw their past value as symbolic, pointing to the perfect sacrifice of Christ (9:23).

10:5-7. Here the author cites Psalm 40:6-8, following a common Greek version.

10:8-9. The author proceeds to expound the text he has just cited. Not only has God not desired sacrifices, but the offering of sacrifices can be distinguished from God's actual will; the latter is what the psalmist came to do.

10:10. Although the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and some *Aramaic, most first-century Jews scattered throughout the Roman world read the Old Testament in its Greek translation. Where the extant Hebrew text says "you have opened my ears," most Greek versions read "you have prepared me a body" (to do God's will). Jewish interpreters generally chose whichever reading they needed to make their point (some interpreters even changed readings slightly to make their point); both the writer of Hebrews and his audience are using the Greek version here. Consequently he expounds: "Not sacrifices, but rather a body to do God's will"—the ultimate sacrifice of Christ's body. Such argumentation fit ancient Jewish exegetical standards and is carried out quite skillfully.

10:11-14. The author returns to his basic text, Psalm 110:1, presupposing also 110:4. An eternal priest like Melchizedek (Ps 110:4) who was to remain seated until his enemies were put down (and the enemies were yet to be put down—Heb 2:8), must have already offered his once-for-all sacrifice; priests did not offer sacrifices in a seated position.

10:15-17. Like Christians, Jewish writers attributed the inspiration of Scripture to the "*Holy Spirit," who was viewed in most circles of ancient Judaism as the Spirit of *prophecy. The author returns here to one of his earlier texts, Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Heb 8:8-12), a practice commonly used to expound more recently cited texts.

10:18. If the new covenant (8:6-13) involves forgiveness of sins and sins being remembered no more (8:12; 10:17), then there is no longer a need to *atone for sins. The writer does not address the image of sin offerings or guilt offerings in Ezekiel's future temple (Ezek 40:39; 42:13; 43:18-27; 44:29). He would presumably have interpreted it symbolically, in view of the sufficiency of Christ's death (Is 53, etc.), Christ offering even more than Ezekiel's vision of hope.

10:19-25
The New Worship

10:19-20. The sanctuary was reserved for the service of the priests, but the most holy place (the Semitic expression is "holy of holies")—which is probably in view here—could be entered by the *high priest alone, and even he could enter only one day a year. But Jesus the forerunner (6:20; cf. 2:10; 5:9) had dedicated the heavenly sanctuary (9:23-28), so that his followers could join him in the full presence of God (cf. comment on Rev 21:16). The veil (see comment on 6:20; cf. Mk 15:38) had separated even the priests from the full holiness of God symbolized by the most holy place, but now believers in Jesus had complete and perfect access to God's presence (Heb 4:16). God dwelling among his people in the tabernacle had pointed to a personal relationship available to those who sought him even then (Ex 33:11), despite some limitations (Ex 33:23; 34:30-35).

10:21. This verse alludes to Jesus' superiority over Moses (Num 12:7); see comment on Hebrews 3:6.

10:22. "Drawing near" could be sacrificial or moral language in the *Old Testament; here it means entering the presence of God (10:19-20) and into relationship with God (7:19, 25) through Jesus the great high priest. "Hearts sprinkled" (9:13; see, e.g., Lev 14:7; cf. Ex 24:8 quoted in Heb 9:19-20) and "bodies washed" (e.g., Lev 14:9) are imagery from the Levitical order, but the writer has a spiritual cleansing in view (Ezek 36:25-29).

Like many other *Diaspora Jewish writers, the writer of Hebrews may accept the need for both inner and outer cleansing; but the bodily cleansing here is apparently initiatory (a perfect participle here in Greek) and thus presumably refers to *baptism. *Gentile converts to Judaism were baptized to free them from Gentile impurity; the *Qumran sect required everyone to be baptized (as the first of many washings) to forsake former worldly impurities; Christians baptized new believers as a mark of initiation into a wholly new life. The

symbolic value of Christian baptism would not have been lost on Jewish observers.

The conjunction of faith, hope and love as the primary virtues (10:22-24) appears to have been a specifically Christian formulation (e.g., 1 Cor 13:13; Col 1:4-5; 1 Thess 1:3).

10:23. This exhortation to "hold fast" is important given the opposition the readers face. Their critics insist that they return to the ritual observances practiced by other Jews in their city and compromise the absolute sufficiency of Christ. (Paul was not opposed to Christians engaging in sacrifices as a means of cultural identification, worshiping by thank-offerings, etc.—see, e.g., Acts 21:26; but like this author he would no doubt deny that sacrifices were necessary for *atonement—Rom 3:24-26. Because these readers were Diaspora Jews who probably could go to the Jerusalem temple only rarely, and no one in their community had gone to the temple since the war had started in A.D. 66, it is more the principle than the practice that is at issue here anyway. The issue is whether they will regard Jesus as an appendage to their Judaism or as its fulfillment who supersedes previous mandatory forms of practicing the *law.) As the Israelites of old should have trusted God to bring them into the Promised Land, so should this author's hearers. The "faithful" one in this case might be not God the Father (11:11) but Jesus (3:2, 5).

10:24. Some ancient groups like the *Epicureans engaged in mutual exhortation; it was a standard practice of early Christianity (Rom 15:14; 1 Thess 5:14).

10:25. Greek moralists often lectured on "concord" or "harmony," warning against individualism. Jewish teachers also warned against a spirit of separatism, and even Jewish separatists (such as the *Essenes) stuck together among themselves. Diaspora *synagogues functioned as community centers, and Jews gathered there especially on the Sabbath to read Scripture and to pray together. Those rarely in attendance would thereby exclude themselves from the active life of their community; given the hostile reception most Jews in many places received from the Gentile community, community cohesion was an important coping response.

Religious associations in the Greco-Roman world met together at various intervals, normally about once a month. Jewish people in the Diaspora could use their synagogues at any time, but especially gathered on weekly sabbaths (e.g., Acts 13:14, 42; 16:13). Christians seem to have gathered at least weekly (cf. the "fixed day" in Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96, an early-second-century description of Asian Christians from a pagan governor). But persecution (cf. Heb 10:32-39; 12:4) may have dissuaded some people from attending even relatively private house *churches; the Romans were suspicious of private meetings, although they would not be investigated in the East unless brought to the authorities' attention by a *delator* (accuser).

10:26-31
The Danger of Apostasy

Those who do not engage in the true worship, who do not continue to persevere (10:19-25), would ultimately fall away and be lost.

10:26. Judaism had long distinguished intentional and unintentional sin (Num 15:29-31; cf., e.g., Lev 4:2, 22); one who knew better would be punished more strictly than one who was ignorant. Sacrifices *atoned for sins of ignorance, but Judaism taught that no sacrifice availed for the person who knowingly rejected the authority of God's *law. (For such persons, many Jewish teachers insisted that *repentance, the Day of Atonement and death were all necessary. Jewish teachers also observed that those who sinned presuming that they would be automatically forgiven were not genuinely repentant and hence were not forgiven.) In the *Dead Sea Scrolls, slight transgressions required temporary penance, but deliberate rebellion against God's law demanded expulsion from the community. The sin in this context is unrepentant, thorough apostasy (10:29).

10:27. Here the author borrows the language of Isaiah 26:11, referring to the day of the Lord (for which believers hoped to be prepared—Heb 10:25). The context in Isaiah includes the raising of the righteous (Is 26:19).

10:28. The law of witnesses is Deuteronomy 17:6-7 and 19:15; apostasy from obedience to the true God is addressed in Deuteronomy 13:6-11 and 17:2-7. Jewish teachers recognized that everyone sinned in some

ways; but a sin by which a person declared "I reject parts of God's Word" was considered tantamount to rejecting the whole law and was reckoned as apostasy.

10:29. Compare 2:2-3; here the author uses a "how much more" argument. Garbage could be "trampled down," but what was sacred was to be approached only with reverence, and trampling it underfoot was the ultimate disrespect (e.g., Is 63:18; Mt 7:6). It was a great sin to treat the holy as merely profane or as unclean; Christians had been sanctified by Christ's blood (see comment on 9:19-22), but other Jews would simply regard Jesus' dead body as an unclean corpse (Deut 21:23). Insulting the *Spirit invited judgment (Is 63:10).

10:30. The author cites Deuteronomy 32:35-36, reading the first line of verse 36 with verse 35 instead of with what follows, to reinforce the contextual point that God had promised this vengeance against his own people. Unlike most of his citations, this one is closer to the original Hebrew form than to that of the extant Greek versions.

10:31. David had preferred falling "into God's hands," depending on his mercy, but the mercy was preceded by severe and rapid judgment (2 Sam 24:14-16; this was the prescribed judgment of the law in Ex 30:12). "Falling into [someone's] hands" and "living God" were both regular Jewish expressions.

10:32-39
Confidence in Their Perseverance

Although apostasy was a genuine possibility (10:26-31), the writer is confident that his readers, who have already endured much, will not apostatize (cf. comment on 6:9).

10:32-33. The athletic language of "conflict" (v. 32 NIV) or "struggle" (NRSV; see comment on 12:1-3) conjoined with "being made a public spectacle" (v. 33 NASB) or "publicly exposed" (NIV) could imply that the readers were subjected to the gladiatorial games. Although the writer probably does not mean this reference literally (since they were still alive—12:4), the image suggests the intensity of their struggle. It is not possible to identify the specific persecution involved without identifying the location of the letters' recipients (a difficult task; see introduction).

10:34. The confiscation of Christians' goods might match a situation presupposed in Macedonia (2 Cor 8:2), where both the Thessalonian and Philippian Christians were persecuted; but we do not know where the particular persecution described here occurred. That it could happen in the Roman Empire is beyond dispute: Jews were expelled from Rome under Tiberius and Claudius, although (apart from those drafted by Tiberius) they could have taken moveable property with them. Disputes over the equality of some elite Alexandrian Jews as citizens led to a Jewish revolt in the early second century, a massacre of the Jewish population there and confiscation of their property; in the first century, many Jews there had been driven out or killed and their homes looted during urban violence. Still considered a small Jewish sect, Christians were even more susceptible to public hostility.

The readers had remained faithful despite this persecution (cf. Tobit 1:20; 2:7-8). On the "prisoners" (no doubt fellow Christians detained in jails), see 13:3; cf. 11:36. For the "better possession," see comment on 11:10.

10:35-36. Both Judaism and Christianity (11:26) spoke of the reward for perseverance for God. On the promise, cf., e.g., 6:13-20; 11:9, 13 and 39-40.

10:37. This is a citation of Habakkuk 2:3, the wording slightly adapted to apply more specifically to the writer's point about the return of *Christ (possibly reworded by combination with part of Is 26:20, from the context of which the author took words in Heb 10:27).

10:38. Here the author quotes Habakkuk 2:4, on which see comment on Romans 1:17. He follows the *Septuagint (which speaks of drawing back) almost exactly, except that he reverses the order of clauses, mentioning the righteous first. (Also, like Paul, he omits the "my" in front of "faith," joining it instead to "righteous one." Although the most common Greek version had "my" faith, i.e., God's faithfulness, the Hebrew had "his" faith, presumably that of the righteous, as Paul and this writer take it.)

10:39. The writer expounds Habakkuk 2:4 (quoted in the previous verse) in inverse order, to end (as was normal in ancient rhetoric) on the desired note: perseverance by faith rather than apostasy. In the following chapter he defines genuine persevering faith.

11:1-31
Heroes of the Faith

After defining faith in 11:1 and introducing his thesis in 11:2, the writer surveys biblical history for samples of the kind of faith he is addressing. Faith as defined by this chapter is the assurance in God's future promises, an assurance that enables one to persevere (10:32-39).

In form, the chapter is a literary masterpiece. It follows the frequent literary practice called historical retrospective, a summary of Jewish history to make a particular point, as in texts like Acts 7, 1 Maccabees 2:49-69 and Sirach 44–50. (Ancient moralists often used examples of people who embodied the virtue they advocated, and sometimes wrote entire biographies for this purpose.) The writer builds the chapter around a literary device called *anaphora* (repetition of an opening word or words), beginning each new account with the same Greek word, "by faith."

11:1. The author defines faith in terms of future reward, as in 10:32-39 (the Greek word often translated "now" in this verse is literally "but" or "and"). Jewish people defined ultimate "hope" in terms of the future day of the Lord. This hope is, however, an unshakable conviction in the present: "assurance" (NASB, NRSV; "confidence"—NIV) appears in Greek business documents with the meaning "title deed." To the Greek reader, what was "not seen" was what was eternal, in the heavens; here it also means what was yet to happen, as in Jewish *apocalyptic expectation (11:7; cf. 11:27).

11:2. "Gained approval" (NASB) is literally "gained testimony," as in 11:4, 5 and 39: the evidence of their lives and God's advocacy guaranteed that they would be declared righteous on the day of judgment.

11:3. The *Old Testament often taught this principle (e.g., Prov 3:19-20), but because the writer starts at the beginning of biblical history, here he refers to the creation in Genesis 1. In Greek cosmology (e.g., Hesiod, Empedocles), as opposed to many of the Jewish sources (e.g., 2 Maccabees 7:28), the universe was formed out of preexisting matter in a state of chaos; *Plato and *Philo believed the visible universe was formed from visible matter. Yet Philo and many Jewish teachers believed that the material universe was formed according to God's invisible, ideal pattern, embodied in his "word" or his "wisdom." Although this view may betray some Greek philosophical influence, it was also rooted in and defended by means of the Old Testament (e.g., Prov 8:22-31).

11:4. Jewish literature praises its martyrs and offers Abel as the first example of martyrdom. (See, e.g., *4 Maccabees 18:10-19; Mt 23:35. In the *Testament of Abraham*, a *pseudepigraphic work of uncertain date, Abel even replaces the Greek Minos as the human judge of the dead [the role belongs to Enoch in **Jubilees*]. The *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Apocalypse of Moses,* also Jewish works of uncertain date, extolled Abel among the righteous. In Philo, Cain's love of self leads him to eternal corruption; other early Jewish traditions, e.g., *Jubilees* and **1 Enoch*, provide him with other punishments.) That he still speaks is evident from the writer's implicit use of Genesis 4:10 in Hebrews 12:24.

11:5. Jewish tradition came to be divided on Enoch. The most Hellenized Jews identified him as Atlas or other figures. More prominently, *Essene and other traditions glorified Enoch as the most righteous saint and one who had never died (e.g., Sirach, *1 Enoch*, *Qumran's *Genesis Apocryphon, Jubilees*). Reacting against this consensus, many *rabbis eventually interpreted "God took him" as "God killed him" so he could die in a righteous state, since (they claimed) he alternated between righteous and unrighteous behavior.

The writer of Hebrews follows the most common Jewish interpretation, which was also the most natural interpretation of Genesis 5:21-24: God took Enoch alive to heaven, because he "walked with him"—i.e., was pleasing to him. Like some writers (such as *Pseudo-Philo), the writer of Hebrews follows the biblical account here exactly, omitting later elaborations.

11:6. Moralists characteristically drew morals from the examples they cited; here, if Enoch was pleasing to God, it is clear that he had faith. The moral that the author of Hebrews draws from the Enoch story (v. 5) is well adapted to the context in his own letter: besides faith, cf. "draws near" (10:22), "reward" (10:35; 11:26) and possibly "seeks" (13:14; cf. 12:17).

11:7. Noah was likewise a renowned hero of early Judaism, although later rabbis empha-

sized him less than early storytellers did, transferring the stories about his miraculous birth to Moses.

11:8. Judaism always extolled Abraham's faith (see the introduction to Rom 4:1-22). Historically, Abraham may have been part of a larger migration (cf. Gen 11:31-32), but his own obedience to God's call, leaving his home and relatives behind, was an act of faith (Gen 12:1, 4). Abraham's obedience was applied as a model of faith as early as the writing of Genesis, when Moses called his people to turn their backs on Egypt; the writer of Hebrews calls his readers to be ready to forsake the favor of their own families.

11:9-10. *Diaspora Judaism often described God as "architect" and "builder" (cf. 3:4) of the world. Like philosophers who could compare the cosmos with a city, Philo saw heaven (or virtue or the Logos, the divine Word) as the "mother city," designed and constructed by God; one could not look for the heavenly Jerusalem on earth. Other Jewish people saw the new Jerusalem as the city of God for the future age (*Dead Sea Scrolls, etc.; see comment on Gal 4:26); on its foundations, see comment on Revelation 21:14. Compare also Hebrews 13:14. Old Testament texts like Psalm 137:5-6 and *New Testament texts like this one suggest that Christians' future hope is inseparably connected with Israel's history, and Christians do biblical tradition a great disservice to cut it loose from its historical moorings in ancient Israel.

11:11. Sarah was a woman of faith in the Old Testament just as Abraham was a man of faith; subsequent Jewish texts also came to extol her greatness as a matriarch.

11:12. Here the author quotes Genesis 22:17, often echoed subsequently in the Old Testament.

11:13-16. The Jewish people in the Diaspora saw themselves only as "sojourners" among the nations; the language here has Old Testament precedent (especially Gen 23:4; cf. Lev 25:23). Like Philo, this writer believes that earth is not the home of the righteous; heaven is. But he envisions this idea in more traditionally Jewish terms than Philo, looking for a *future* city (see also comment on 11:9-10; cf. Rev 21:2).

11:17-19. The offering of Isaac, after years of waiting for the promise of this son, was Abraham's ultimate test of faith (Gen 22), and is often stressed in Jewish sources. This act was regarded as a model of faith to be emulated when necessary (see 4 Maccabees 14:20; 15:28; 16:20). Although Jewish tradition also noted Isaac's willingness to be sacrificed (as early as Pseudo-Philo), the writer of Hebrews does not add to the biblical *narrative, except to expound the nature of Abraham's confidence (that God would raise him from the dead if need be; God's power to raise the dead was celebrated daily in Jewish prayers). "Only" son (cf. Gen 22:2, Hebrew text and Jewish traditions) was sometimes used, especially with regard to Isaac, to mean "specially loved" (*LXX, other Jewish traditions), even though Isaac was never Abraham's only son.

11:20. Jewish readers recognized that Isaac's blessings were inspired and that they included predictions of the future (Gen 27:28-29, 39-40).

11:21. Genesis 49 was also regarded as prophetic, and Jewish writers later expanded the predictions (also writing testaments for each of the twelve patriarchs to the patriarchs' children).

11:22. See Genesis 50:24-25. Joseph's faith provided a hope in a promise that transcended his own mortality.

11:23. The writer of Hebrews follows the biblical account here (in its LXX form—the Hebrew mentions only the mother's decision to rescue him—Ex 2:2-3), but many Jewish writers expanded the story of Moses' birth, especially his beauty, into reports that his glory illumined the room at birth and so forth. These stories became very popular as time went on.

11:24-25. Although the author here draws a moralist application, he does not go beyond the biblical account. Many Jewish stories of this period, especially Diaspora Jewish stories, portrayed Moses as an Egyptian military hero and stressed his great learning and knowledge (see comment on Acts 7:22). Yet the writer of Hebrews might allow the view affirmed by Philo—that Moses as son of Pharaoh's daughter was his heir. If this is the case (following a Roman understanding of adoption), Moses' rejection of this status to maintain his identification with his oppressed people (11:26) is all the more significant. (Of course, his sacrifice is significant enough in any case.)

Greek philosophers and moralists commonly stressed the superiority of enduring hardship over succumbing to the rule of pleasure, as Jewish tradition stressed honoring God above all else.

11:26. Forsaking riches for something greater, like piety or wisdom, was a common moral in Jewish and Greco-Roman stories, and the biblical story of Moses' life certainly illustrated that motif.

11:27. Exodus 2:14-15 indicates that Moses was afraid of the king; if this text refers to Moses' first flight from Egypt after slaying the Egyptian, perhaps the writer means a particular kind of fear (i.e., Moses was not afraid enough to deny his people), or perhaps he relativizes that fear by emphasizing Moses' faith in the unseen God (other writers, like Philo and *Josephus, minimize or eliminate fear as the cause of Moses' escape). But he may refer to Moses' second departure from Egypt, with Israel following him; verse 28 also speaks of him (singular) keeping the Passover, although it is clear that all Israel kept it. Diaspora Judaism often called God "the Invisible."

11:28. Compare Exodus 12, with which all Jewish people were familiar, especially from the annual Passover celebration. Because the nature of his account is biographical, the author yields only reluctantly to describing the general experience of Israel, as opposed to Moses (v. 29).

11:29. Compare Exodus 14:29 and Nehemiah 9:11. Exodus reports the completion of Israel's faith after the miracle (Ex 14:31), but Moses and his people had to act in some faith to enter the basin (cf. Ex 14:10-22). Jewish teachers debated the immediate cause of the exodus, some affirming Israel's faith but many attributing the miracle to the faith or merit of their ancestors (see, e.g., *Mekilta Pisha* 16.165-68; *Mekilta Beshalach* 4.52-57).

11:30. Compare Joshua 6. Some scholars have complained that the site of Jericho was uninhabited in Joshua's period, because, in the areas excavated, little remains of the city from that time. But the excavator reasonably attributed the loss of this level of the city's ruins to erosion; mounds are normally formed, and ruins preserved, only when city walls exist. If Jericho's walls fell down, one would expect most of that stratum of ruins to have eroded away.

11:31. Later Jewish literature often praises Rahab's beauty and sometimes sees her as a prophetess and as a model convert to Judaism; but although Josephus speaks favorably of her, Philo and most earlier Jewish literature comment little on her. Hebrews, like James 2:25, follows the biblical account.

11:32-40
A Summary of Other Exploits of Faith

11:32. The writer's theme is still "by faith," but like Philo, *Seneca and other *rhetorically trained writers, he remarks that he could go on but will not do so, settling instead for a quick summary. This remark gives the impression (in this case quite accurate) that he could provide much more evidence or many more examples; but he determines not to strain the readers' patience by continuing long after he has made his point (as some ancient rhetoricians were known to do even in law courts, displaying their eloquence for several hours without a break). By mentioning what he protests he cannot describe, however, he outlines what he would have covered. This too was a standard rhetorical device, allowing him to hurry while mentioning what he claims he cannot mention.

He names several of the judges (commanded to shepherd Israel—1 Chron 17:6): David, the ideal king; Samuel, founder of the schools of the prophets and overseer of the transition from judges to monarchy; and he mentions other prophets. That Barak replaces Deborah in the list fits later rabbinic tradition's tendency to play down biblical prophetesses (contrast Pseudo-Philo 30-33), although the *Old Testament mentions neither Deborah nor Barak outside Judges 4–5. From the perspective of some first-century readers, Barak would be official victor even though Deborah was the main leader of faith.

11:33. The first three statements in the verse are general, but the fourth applies specifically to Daniel (Dan 6:16-24; cf. 1 Maccabees 2:60); although this story was amplified in early tradition (Bel and the Dragon 31-32), the writer of Hebrews follows the biblical account. Other Jewish writers also presented the endurance of Daniel and his friends before the lions and the flame as models to be emulated

(for martyrs see *4 Maccabees 13:9; 16:3, 21-22).

11:34. Quenching the power of fire refers especially to Daniel's three friends (Dan 3:23-27; 1 Maccabees 2:59; *3 Maccabees 6:6; cf. Is 43:2), although Jewish tradition also transferred elements of that story to Abraham (*Pseudo-Philo and later rabbis). "Were strengthened from their state of weakness" may refer particularly to Samson's regaining his strength (Judg 16:28-31), or it may be a general statement like several that follow. Much of the language of this verse comes from 1 Maccabees, which contains much historical material about pious Jewish defenders of the *law after the Old Testament period and before the New Testament period. It was widely known among Jewish people throughout the ancient world.

11:35-36. Women received their dead back to life under Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:21-24; 2 Kings 4:35-37). "And others" marks a transition: faith does not always bring deliverance (cf. Dan 3:18), as the author's readers already knew (Heb 10:32-39) and might learn further (12:4). Nearly all Jews knew the stories of Maccabean martyrs, who were tortured in various ways: scalded to death, having skin flayed off, stretched on the wheel and so on. Regular torture practices of the Greeks included fire, thumbscrews and (what is probably meant by "tortured" here) stretching on a wheel to break the person's joints, then beating the victim to death (sometimes pounding the stomach as if it were a drum) in that helpless position. The Maccabean martyrs were scourged, a punishment that the Romans had continued to use as well. All Jewish sources that addressed the issue agreed that martyrs would receive preferential treatment at the *resurrection, and 2 Maccabees declares that this was the hope that enabled the martyrs to endure.

11:37. "Sawn in two" fits a Jewish tradition that was popular in the second century A.D. and later but probably already known in the writer's time. According to this story, when Isaiah hid in a tree the wicked king Manasseh had it—and Isaiah—sawed in half. Those stoned to death include a prophet named Zechariah (2 Chron 24:20-22; Mt 23:35); some Jewish traditions added Jeremiah. Prophets who lived outside society sometimes wore coarse animal skins (see the *LXX for Elijah's "mantle"); Elijah and similar prophets also wandered in the wilderness, and the *Maccabees were later forced to live in such circumstances.

11:38. The Maccabean guerrillas hid out in caves in the Judean mountains, as David's band had in the time of Saul long before. Elijah and other prophets were sometimes forced to live in the wilderness. The idea of righteous persons of whom the world was unworthy has many partial parallels, although this formulation appears to be the author's own.

11:39. This verse is the concluding summary of 11:3-38, part of it rehearsing the author's thesis in 11:2. Concluding summaries of one's thesis were standard *rhetorical practice.

11:40. "Made perfect" here refers to the consummation of salvation (1:14), the resurrection of the dead (11:35). All the righteous would be raised together at the very end of the age (Dan 12:2, 13).

12:1-3
The Ultimate Hero of Faith

The image in 12:1-3 and possibly in 12:12-13 is that of runners disciplining themselves for the race. Athletic contests were a common image in Greco-Roman literature, often used for the moral battle waged by the wise person in this world; the *Hellenistic Jewish work *4 Maccabees sometimes applied the image to martyrs. This passage (Heb 12:1-3) is the climax of the narration of past heroes of the faith (chap. 11).

12:1. "Witnesses" can function as those watching a race ("cloud" was often applied figuratively to a crowd), but the particular witnesses here may be those who testified for God or received his "testimony" that they were righteous (the Greek of 11:2, 4, 5, 39). (The image could be that of a heavenly court made up of faith heroes of the past, who would judge those now vying for the same honors; the image of the heavenly court appears elsewhere in ancient Jewish sources. The idea does not correspond to the picture sometimes found in some writers such as, for example, the second-century *Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius [cf. Philo], where souls of the departed floated around for awhile after death before being resolved into the fire.) "Laying aside weights" (KJV) may refer to removing artificial weights used in training but not in races, but more

likely it refers to the Greek custom of stripping off clothes to run unencumbered. The image would represent anything that would hinder his readers from winning their race (ancient writers sometimes used "weights" figuratively for vices); this encouragement is significant, for like Israel of old in the wilderness, they may be tempted to turn back.

12:2. On "author" or "pioneer," see comment on 2:10; for "perfecter," see 9:9, 11 and 10:14. Like most ancient moralists, the writer uses human models to illustrate his chosen virtue, but his climactic illustration of the virtue of faith is the initiator and fulfiller of faith, who suffered in the hope of future reward, as these readers are to do (10:32-39). Maccabean martyrs were said to have "looked to" (same word as here, NRSV) God, thus enduring tortures to the point of death (4 Maccabees 17:10). The cross was an instrument of "shame" in both Roman and Jewish (cf. Deut 21:23; Josh 10:26-27) thought.

12:3. The verbs translated "grow weary" and "lose heart" were sometimes used for the exhaustion a runner could face. (The call to endurance in 12:1 reflects the language of long-distance races.)

12:4-13
Accepting Suffering as God's Instruction

Rather than questioning their faith when they are persecuted, the readers are to embrace the suffering as a gracious opportunity to learn God's heart better.

12:4. Although some Jewish teachers said that one could violate most biblical laws if necessary to save one's life, provided that one did not profane the name of God, the earlier martyrs felt that compromising the commandments to save one's life constituted public profanation of God's name. Jesus, the ultimate hero of their faith, had shed his blood (12:2-3; cf. 9:12); his followers have to be prepared to do the same. The ultimate test of Greek athletic contests (12:1-3) was boxing, which often drew blood; but the language here indicates the ultimate test that Jesus portrayed as an expected part of Christian discipleship (Mk 8:34-38): martyrdom.

12:5-7. This quotation is from Proverbs 3:11-12 but has many biblical (e.g., Deut 8:5; Ps 94:12) and postbiblical (e.g., **Psalms of Solomon* 3:4; 7:3; 8:26; 10:1-3; 13:9-10; 14:1-2; 18:4) Jewish parallels; *Philo and some *rabbis used Proverbs 3 similarly. In the context of Jewish wisdom literature, discipline was a sign of a father's love for his children, his concern that they would go in the right way; some Jewish teachers felt that God purged the sins of his children by sufferings designed to *atone and to produce *repentance. Although this writer would deny that any person's sufferings could have atoning value, except for those of God in the flesh (7:25-28; cf. Ps 49:7-9), he undoubtedly agrees that they can help lead one to repentance or to a deeper relationship with God (Ps 119:67, 71, 75).

In the Greek world, the term translated "discipline" (NIV, NASB) was the most basic term for "education" (although this usually included corporal discipline), so the term naturally conveyed the concept of moral instruction. Some philosophers like *Seneca also used the image of God disciplining his children for their good, just as Jewish writers did.

12:8. In antiquity, calling someone an "illegitimate child" (not born from a married union) was a grievous insult; "illegitimacy" negatively affected one's social status as well as one's inheritance rights. Fathers were more concerned for their heirs and usually invested little time in sons unable to inherit.

12:9. God was often called "Lord of spirits" (i.e., Lord over the angels); here he is called "Father of spirits" in contrast to "earthly fathers." Jewish people developed the *Old Testament image of God as Israel's father (e.g., Ex 4:22), often speaking of him in these terms. This argument is a standard Jewish "how much more" argument: if we respect earthly fathers, how much more should we respect the superhuman one?

12:10-11. Jewish teachers recognized that God's discipline, even the suffering experienced in martyrdom, was temporary, and that he would afterward reward the righteous greatly (e.g., in the *Apocrypha: Wisdom of Solomon 3:5; cf. 2 Maccabees 6:13-17; 7:18, 32-33). They also believed that whereas he disciplined his people, he punished the wicked more severely (Wisdom of Solomon 12:22) or would do so in the time to come (most rabbis, *apocalyptic visionaries and writers, etc.).

12:12. "Weak hands" and "feeble knees" were common descriptions of weakening and slackness (cf. Is 13:7; 35:3; Jer 47:3; 50:43; Ezek 7:17; 21:7; Zeph 3:16), applied to moral or religious concerns in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, in Sirach 25:23 and elsewhere. It may apply to the imagery of the race in Hebrews 12:1-3.

12:13. "Make straight paths for your feet" suggests the quickest course in a race; the words are taken from the *Septuagint of Proverbs 4:26 with few changes.

12:14-29
Rejecting the Greatest Revelation

Turning away from Jesus was worse than Esau's shortsighted apostasy (12:16-17) and more serious than rejecting the revelation of God at Sinai (12:18-21), for Jesus is greater than Moses and greater than Abel (12:24)—he is the true and rightful leader of Israel (12:23). The vast majority of ancient Jews sought to keep the *law and were embarrassed by the rebellion of many of their ancestors in the wilderness; the writer warns that if his readers turn their backs on Christ, they are even worse than their ancestors.

12:14-15. The image of a bitter root that can spread to infect many is from Deuteronomy 29:18, although many texts use similar images (1 Maccabees 1:10; a *Qumran hymn; the rabbis). The text in Deuteronomy is quite appropriate, for it refers to apostasy, as the writer of Hebrews does.

12:16. Here the author refers to Genesis 25:31-34. Philo regarded Esau as enslaved by sensual and temporal desires because of actions such as this one. Esau did not act as if he viewed life from a long-range perspective, much less an eternal one (the rabbis inferred from this text that he denied the future *resurrection of the dead). "Immoral" here is literally "sexually immoral" (NIV; cf. "fornicator"—KJV), the view of Esau that prevailed in Jewish tradition, undoubtedly based on his initial preference for *Gentile wives (Gen 26:34-35; cf. 28:9), which dismayed his parents (26:35; 28:8).

12:17. Despite the "tears," which reflect Genesis 27:38, Esau was unable to persuade his father Isaac to change his mind, probably because the first blessing could not be annulled. (One commentator points out that the expression "place for *repentance" was used in Roman legal documents as "an occasion to reverse a previous decision." Although neither the author nor his readers would be thinking in terms of legal terminology, it might reflect a more general idea, which could apply to Isaac's choice [although the commentator applies it to Esau].) Esau's disinheritance from the promise (cf. Heb 6:12-18) was settled. (According to one nonbiblical Jewish tradition, Jacob later killed Esau in a war [**Jubilees* 38:2], but the writer of Hebrews does not go beyond the biblical account.)

12:18. Here the author describes Mount Sinai at the giving of the law (Ex 19:16; Deut 4:11-12).

12:19. In Exodus 20:18-21, when God had given the Ten Commandments, the people were afraid of God's awesome holiness. They wanted Moses to mediate for them, fearing that if God spoke to them directly, they would die (Ex 20:19; Deut 5:25-27), for he came as a consuming fire (Deut 4:24; 5:24-25). But God's purpose was to scare enough sense into them to get them to stop sinning (Ex 20:20).

12:20. Here the author uses Exodus 19:12-13. God was so unapproachably holy that violation of his command not to approach the mountain from which he gave the law was punishable by death, even for animals that happened to wander that way unwittingly (cf. Num 17:13).

12:21. When God became angry at Israel for violating his prohibition of idolatry, even Moses was afraid of God's anger (Deut 9:19).

12:22. Mount Zion (Jerusalem or the Temple Mount in Jerusalem), as opposed to Mount Sinai, was to be the place of the giving of the new law in the end time (Is 2:1-4). On the heavenly Jerusalem see comment on 11:9-10; everyone in antiquity would regard a heavenly place of revelation as superior to an earthly place, no matter how glorious (12:18-21) the latter was.

Jewish tradition stressed the vast number of angels present at the giving of the law (eventually claiming thousands per Israelite); the writer of Hebrews probably takes the angels from Deuteronomy 33:2 or Psalm 68:17, a text that probably refers to the giving of the law, as later Jewish tradition also understood it.

12:23. Long before the first century, the *Septuagint applied the term translated

"*church" to the "assembly" (NRSV) or "congregation" of Israel in the Hebrew Old Testament; thus the writer of Hebrews here contrasts the congregation led by Jesus with the one led by Moses (12:19). (On the "firstborn," see comment on 1:6; because the reference is in the plural, it may refer to God's people as a whole here—e.g., Ex 4:22). "Enrolled" (NASB, NRSV) means that their names were "written" (KJV, NIV, GNT) on the list in heaven; the Jewish images of heavenly tablets and the book of life were common (see comment on Phil 4:3; Rev 20:12). In *apocalyptic texts such as **1 Enoch*, "spirits" or "souls" referred to the righteous dead in heaven (various texts apply it even more commonly to angels, but that connection would not make sense in regard to "spirits of righteous men," which was a usual designation for the righteous dead, not for guardian angels). Many *Diaspora Jews believed that the righteous finally attained perfection in death (or in resurrection; cf. Heb 11:40; it has been suggested that the righteous of 12:23 include the heroes of chap. 11).

12:24. Moses was considered mediator of the first covenant. As mediator of a new covenant (9:15; see comment on 8:6-13), Jesus had to inaugurate it through the sprinkling of blood (see comment on 9:15-22). Abel's blood spoke, bringing condemnation against his murderer (Gen 4:10; cf. Prov 21:28; see comment on Heb 11:4). (In rabbinic tradition, the blood of all the descendants who would have been born from Abel cried out to God against Cain, and Cain thus had no share in the world to come. Blood crying out is also found in the **Sibylline Oracles*, 2 Maccabees 8:3 and elsewhere; cf. Deut 21:1-9. See comment on Mt 23:35 for the traditions about Zechariah's blood testifying; other rabbinic stories also suggested that they believed the blood of a murdered person kept seething till it had been avenged.) Jesus' blood, dedicating a new covenant of forgiveness, thus speaks "better things" than Abel's blood.

12:25. The comparison between Mount Sinai and a heavenly Mount Zion returns to the writer's standard *qal vahomer* or "how much more" argument (a fortiori arguments, "from lesser to greater"—here worked in converse—were common, especially in Jewish argumentation, but also appear in Greco-Roman and other argumentation; cf. Prov 15:11). If the law was glorious, and profaning it was something to fear, "how much more" to be feared is profaning the more awesome glory of the new covenant given from heaven (12:25-29).

12:26. The land quaked when God came to give the law on Mount Sinai (Ex 19:18; cf. **2 Baruch* 59:3); later Jewish tradition amplified this point to say that God shook the whole world. The idea of a great end-time earthquake has Old Testament (Is 13:13) and later Jewish parallels (e.g., *2 Baruch* 32:1), but the writer quotes Haggai 2:6 (cf. 2:21) directly.

12:27. The author expounds the text he has just cited. Because Haggai 2:5 mentioned a promise God made when he brought Israel out of Egypt, and "once more" in 2:6 refers to a particular previous shaking, it was natural to read the first shaking of 2:6 as what happened at Sinai. The second shaking was clearly the future one when God would subdue the nations and fill his temple with glory (2:7). The writer of Hebrews adds to this text an interpretive perspective he shares with his readers, a perspective stressed in Greek philosophy but not incongruent with the Old Testament: what cannot be changed is truly eternal.

12:28. Like many Jewish writers, the author of Hebrews uses the language of sacrificial offerings figuratively for the appropriate attitude of worship (cf. 13:15; see comment on Rom 12:1). For the unshakable *kingdom, cf. perhaps Psalm 96:10 (especially in the *LXX, numbered 95:10).

12:29. The author takes over Deuteronomy 4:24 directly; cf. also Deuteronomy 9:3 and Exodus 24:17. Deuteronomy 4:24 goes on to call God "a jealous God"; Hebrews 12:29 is clearly a warning against taking his ultimate revelation for granted.

13:1-17
Closing Exhortations

Parenesis, an ancient *rhetorical and literary style especially consisting of moral exhortations loosely fitted together, could be conjoined with other literary elements. Moral exhortations often followed argumentation, as in many of Paul's letters (e.g., Rom 12–14; Gal 5–6; Eph 4–6).

13:1. See comment on 10:25; cf. 12:14. The

bonds of Christian community would also hinder apostasy from that community.

13:2. Hospitality normally involved housing and caring for travelers; the greatest example of this virtue cited in Jewish texts was Abraham, who welcomed the three visitors (Gen 18). Because at least two of them turned out to be angels, this account is the most natural referent of the present exhortation. (Other stories, like the early Jewish story of Tobit or Greek stories about gods visiting people in disguise, are of more secondary value, but illustrate how readily ancient readers might have received the exhortation.)

13:3. By the second century, Christians were known for their care for the imprisoned. Some philosophers regarded visiting those who were in prison as a virtue, although Palestinian Judaism was largely silent on the issue, compared to its emphasis on visiting the sick or helping the economically oppressed (except for visiting Jews captured or enslaved by pagans). "The prisoners" probably refers to some Christians imprisoned for their faith or for practices related to it (as in 13:23). Roman law used prison as detention until punishment rather than as punishment itself; sometimes prisoners had to depend on outside allies for food.

13:4. Many ancient writers spoke of honoring the "(marriage) bed" (the "bed" was a euphemism for intercourse); one story goes so far as to emphasize a virgin's purity by noting that no one had ever even sat on her bed. Male sexual immorality was rife in Greco-Roman society, which also accepted prostitution. Pedophilia, homosexual intercourse and sex with female slaves were common Greek practices until a man was old enough for marriage. A few Greek philosophers even thought marriage burdensome but sexual release necessary. The writer accepts not typical Greek values, but God's values represented in Scripture and also upheld by Jewish circles in his day.

13:5. The author draws this quotation especially from Deuteronomy 31:6, 8 and Joshua 1:5, although the idea was common in the *Old Testament (cf. 2 Chron 15:2; Ps 37:28). Moses spoke it to all Israel in the third person, but the writer, who regards all Scripture as God's inspired Word, uses Joshua 1:5 (an assurance oracle, one form of Old Testament *prophecy, to Joshua) to adapt it to the first person. The reference to love of money is characteristic of general parenesis (moral exhortation) of the day but may be particularly related to the economic consequences of following Jesus in a hostile culture (Heb 10:34; 11:26).

13:6. Here the author cites Psalm 118:6; cf. Psalm 56:11. The author may add this quotation to Deuteronomy 31:6 and 8 as an implicit *gezerah shavah* (linking of texts with a common key word or phrase), because Deuteronomy 31:6 and 8 say that the hearers should not be afraid (although the writer of Hebrews does not quote that line).

13:7. Public speakers and moralists generally cited examples for imitation, especially those most closely known to both writer and readers. The past tense of the verbs here may suggest that some of them have died (though apparently not by martyrdom in their location—12:4). "Led" probably refers to local leaders rather than someone like Paul, who was likely martyred a few years before this letter was sent.

13:8. *Philo and probably many *Diaspora Jews particularly emphasized the Old Testament picture of God's changelessness (Ps 102:27; Mal 3:6; cf. Is 46:4), because they had to communicate the truth about God to Greeks, who felt that only what was changeless was truly eternal.

13:9. Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:3-20 listed "unclean" foods that Jewish people were to avoid, thus differentiating them from the nations around them. Philo allegorized these food laws but argued that one should still keep them literally; at the same time, he also testifies that some extremely Hellenized Jewish people in his day viewed them as only symbolic and did not practice them. The writer of Hebrews does not reject them by interpreting them nonliterally; he simply believes that a new time has come, and the foods previously forbidden did not directly benefit those who abstained, making the prohibitions no longer necessary.

13:10. Now the author addresses a special kind of food in the Old Testament: the priests' portion in the tabernacle/temple (see comment on 1 Cor 9:13). Believers, he says, serve as priests (13:15) at a different kind of altar (cf. 7:13).

13:11. Burning sacrifices outside the camp

was part of several different rituals (cf. Lev 9:11; Num 19:3; the phrase is common in Leviticus and Numbers and appears in the *Dead Sea Scrolls), but the reference here is to the Day of Atonement, when the priest went into the holy of holies with the blood of the sacrifice (Lev 16:27). This is the sacrifice Jesus fulfilled for the heavenly altar mentioned previously in Hebrews.

13:12-13. Blood was sprinkled to "sanctify" (set apart as holy) or "cleanse" things under the *law (9:22). (That Jesus could cleanse by his own blood may indicate his superiority to the Old Testament *high priest, who had to wash himself before returning to the camp after the sacrifice—Lev 16:28.) That Jesus was crucified and buried outside Jerusalem's walls fits both the Gospel accounts and the Jewish requirement that the dead be buried outside the city (so as to avoid contracting ritual uncleanness caused by contact with graves; cf., e.g., Lev 24:14; Num 15:35-36; Deut 17:5; 22:24). Roman law also required that crucifixions occur "outside the gate." (Some commentators have also noted that the sin offerings of the Day of Atonement were burned outside the camp—Lev 16:27—but it should be observed that they were also sacrificed in the temple or tabernacle—Lev 16:5-19.) Leaving the camp for these Jewish-Christian readers may imply being willing to be expelled from the Jewish community whose respect they value, to follow the God of Israel wholeheartedly (cf. Heb 11:13-16).

13:14. See comment on 11:10 for the hope of the eternal Jerusalem in ancient Judaism.

13:15-16. The Dead Sea Scrolls often use sacrificial language for praises, as do other ancient writers (see comment on Rom 12:1); Hebrews is probably especially dependent, however, on Hosea 14:2 here (cf. also the Hebrew text of Is 57:19). For spiritual sacrifices, cf. also Psalm 4:5; 27:6; 40:6; 50:7-15; 51:17; 54:6; 69:30-31; 119:108 and Proverbs 21:3. *Pharisees also stressed God's acceptance of piety as a spiritual offering, a factor that may have helped Pharisaism survive the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70; only a few of the special Palestinian Jewish movements, such as Pharisaism's successors and the Jewish Christians, survived without the temple.

13:17. The writer urges his readers to submit to present leaders (probably as they did to former ones—13:7), whom he presents as "watchmen" (see Ezek 3:17; 35:7; cf. Is 21:8; Hab 2:1). A theme of Greco-Roman moralists had long been advice to peoples on how to submit to rulers; this author gives a brief exhortation that functions as a sort of "letter of recommendation" (on these, see comment on 2 Cor 3:1), placing his own authority behind that of their *church's leaders. This author is not as leader-centered as some other groups like the *Qumran community were, however; the Dead Sea Scrolls report that the leaders of the community would determine members' progress or lack of it, affecting members' standing in the community, hence before God (cf., e.g., CD 13.11-12; 4Q416-17).

13:18-25
Conclusion

13:18-19. This might be the prayer request of one unjustly imprisoned; but cf. 13:23.

13:20-21. On Jesus as the "shepherd," see comment on the introduction to John 10:1-18. The *Septuagint of Isaiah 63:11 says that God "brought up the shepherd of the sheep" (Moses) from the sea. The prophets had also prophesied a new exodus (which could include coming up from the sea), which was fulfilled in *Christ (on comparing coming up from the sea and the *resurrection, see comment on Rom 10:7).

The first covenant was inaugurated by "the blood of the covenant" (Ex 24:8), sometimes called the "eternal covenant" (**Psalms of Solomon* 10:4; Dead Sea Scrolls). But the new covenant would also be called "eternal" (Is 55:3; Jer 32:40; Ezek 37:26), and it was the blood of this covenant to which the author of Hebrews refers (9:11-22).

13:22. Philosophers and moralists provided "messages of exhortation." Such spoken messages could also be given in writing, especially in letter-essays like Hebrews. Professional public speakers (*rhetoricians) often remarked that they had spoken briefly or poorly when such was clearly not the case, to claim for themselves less than was obvious.

13:23. If, as is likely, Timothy was arrested under Nero in Rome, he may well have been released on Nero's death, because the Praetorian Guard and the Roman aristocracy had

long before lost faith in Nero's policies. This background would set the letter in the late 60s (see introduction).

13:24-25. "Those from Italy" could mean people from Italy now living elsewhere, possibly sending greetings back to Italy; most commentators who take this view think it refers to Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2). More likely—especially given the probable place of Timothy's imprisonment (13:23)—is the view that the author sends greetings from *saints in Italy, and that the letter is written from Rome to a different location, probably to a city in the eastern Mediterranean region.

James

Introduction

Authorship. That "James" need not further specify which James he is in 1:1 probably suggests that he is the most prominent and well-known James of the early *church, James the Lord's brother (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:17-26; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 2:9, 12), as in church tradition. (James was a common name, and when one spoke of a less commonly recognized individual with a common name, one usually added a qualifying title, e.g., "*Plato the comic poet," "James the lesser" in the apostolic list, and many people in ancient business documents.) Who else would have the status in the church to write to the "dispersed twelve tribes" (James 1:1)?

The main objection to this proposal is the polished style of the Greek language of the letter, but this objection does not take account of several factors: (1) the widespread use of *rhetoric and more than sufficient time for James, the main spokesperson for the Jerusalem church, to have acquired facility in it; (2) that as the son of a carpenter he had probably had a better education than Galilean peasants; (3) the spread of Greek language and culture in Palestine (e.g., *Josephus, *Justin Martyr); (4) excavations showing that most of Galilee was not as backward as was once thought; (5) the widespread use of amanuenses (*scribes) who might, like Josephus's editorial scribes, help a writer's Greek. This last point would be especially appropriate for the leader of the mother church, in the one overwhelmingly Jewish city that also provided advanced education in Greek works (cf. the Greek in Acts 15:23-29).

The situation depicted in the letter best fits a period before A.D. 66 (the Jewish war with Rome), and James was killed about A.D. 62 (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.200). It is also possible that James's followers edited his material relevant to the war and re-released it in collected form after his death, in the wake of the war or tensions leading up to it. This could explain the *Diaspora audience of James 1:1 even though the material in the letter is quite relevant to a Judean setting. In any case, the material in the letter probably should be viewed as genuinely from James; *pseudepigraphic letters usually circulated long after the death of the person the author claimed to be, and a date between A.D. 62 and 66 would allow insufficient time for this letter to be a pseudepigraphic composition.

James the Just. Josephus and some later Jewish-Christian writers reported the great esteem that fellow Jerusalemites, especially the poor, had for James. Non-Christian as well as Christian Jerusalemites admired his piety, but his denunciations of abuses by the aristocracy (as in 5:1-6) undoubtedly played a large role in the aristocratic priesthood's opposition to him. About the year A.D. 62, when the procurator Festus died, the *high priest Ananus II executed James and some other people. The public outcry was so great, however, that when the new procurator Albinus arrived, Ananus was deposed from the high priesthood over the matter (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.200-203).

Genre. Greek writers, including Jewish writers enamored with Greek thought, often listed loosely related exhortations in a style called parenesis. Some modern writers have argued that James is this sort of work (some even view the letter as a *New Testament collection of proverbs), but they fail to observe the close literary connections running throughout the book. It may be that James or one of his followers has adapted his sermonic material into a letter, but the connectedness of the material demonstrates that the letter in its present form is a polished, unified work.

James reads more like an essay than a letter, but one kind of ancient letter in which moralists and skilled rhetoricians engaged was a "letter-essay," a general letter intended more to make an argument than to communicate greetings. Writers like *Seneca and Pliny sometimes used literary epistles of this sort, which were published and meant to be appreciated by a large body of readers (1:1). The messenger(s) who delivered it would presumably provide appropriate words of explanation; like letters from Jerusalem *high priests to Diaspora *synagogues, a letter from a respected leader in the Jerusalem church would carry much weight. The letter draws on Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions, Jewish wisdom and Jesus' teachings (especially as now found in Mt 5–7). Because its present form includes a brief epistolary introduction (Jas 1:1) this commentary will call James a "letter," though with the recognition that apart from that introduction it reads more like an essay.

Situation. Although James's teaching can apply to a variety of situations (and was probably so applied by the letter's Diaspora audience), this commentary can provide the most specific background by giving special attention to how the teachings would have applied concretely in James's immediate environment in Judea. This environment shaped the issues James had to address toward the end of his life. More than a century before this time, the Roman general Pompey had cut Judean territory and made many Jewish peasants landless; the exorbitant taxes of Herod the Great must have driven more small farmers out of business. In the first century, many peasants worked as tenants on larger, feudal estates (as elsewhere in the empire); others became landless day laborers in the marketplaces, finding work only sporadically (more was available in harvest season). Resentment against aristocratic landlords ran high in many parts of the empire, but nonpayment of

promised goods to them was hardly an option; a few landowners even had their own hit squads of hired assassins to deal with uncooperative tenants. The situation was less extreme in the cities, but even there the divisions were obvious (e.g., the aristocracy in Jerusalem's Upper City versus the poor living downwind of that city's sewers). When the aristocratic priests began to withhold tithe income from the poorer priests, their only means of support, economic tensions increased.

In Rome, grain shortages often led to rioting. Social and economic tensions in Palestine were contained longer but eventually yielded to violence. Pursuing peace with Rome through practical politics, the Jerusalem aristocracy became an object of hatred to *Zealots and other elements of resistance, who felt that God alone should rule the land. (Josephus, who wished to minimize the anti-Roman sentiment that prevailed in Judea just before the war, tried to marginalize the Zealots as a fringe group; but other evidence in his *narrative shows clearly that revolutionary sympathies in general were widespread.) Various outbreaks of violence eventually culminated in a revolt in A.D. 66, followed by a massacre of priests and the Roman garrison on the Temple Mount. Aristocratic and proletarian patriots clashed inside the city as Roman armies surrounded it, and in A.D. 70 Jerusalem fell and its temple was destroyed. The final resistance stronghold at Masada fell in A.D. 73.

Audience. James addresses especially Jewish Christians (and probably any other Jews who would listen) caught up in the sort of social tensions that eventually produced the war of A.D. 66–70 (see comment on Acts 21:20-22). Although the situation most explicitly fits James's own in Judea, it also addresses the kinds of social tensions that were spreading throughout the Roman world (1:1). During the Judean war of 66–70, Rome violently discarded three emperors in a single year (A.D. 69), and immediately after the Judean war resistance fighters continued to spread their views to Jews in North Africa and Cyprus. But as in the case of some other general epistles, this letter reflects especially the situation of the writer more than that of any potential readership elsewhere.

Argument. James addresses the pride of the rich (1:9-11; 2:1-9; 4:13-17), persecution by the rich (2:6-7; 5:6) and pay withheld by the rich (5:4-6). He also addresses those tempted to retaliate with violent acts (2:11; 4:2) or words (1:19-20, 26; 3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:9). He responds with a call to wisdom (1:5; 3:14-18), faith (1:6-8; 2:14-26) and patient endurance (1:9-11; 5:7-11). Once understood in the context of the situation, his supposedly "disjointed" exhortations all fit together as essential to his argument.

Commentaries. Among commentaries with helpful background are Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James,* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James,* AB 37A (New York: Doubleday, 1995); Sophie Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James,* HNTC (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980); Ralph P. Martin, *James,* WBC 48 (Waco, TX: Word, 1988); and Scot McKnight,

The Letter of James, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). On a less technical level, see also Peter Davids, *James* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1989). For more specialized works, see, e.g., Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Ralph P. Martin, "The Life-Setting of the Epistle of James in the Light of Jewish History," in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies: Essays in Honor of William Sanford LaSor,* ed. Gary A. Tuttle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 97-103.

1:1-11
How to Face Trials

In this opening section James introduces the major themes of his letter, by which he responds to the trials of poverty and oppression faced by many people in his day, including peasants in Judea and Galilee.

1:1. The three basic elements of a letter's introduction were (1) the author's name; (2) the name of the recipient(s); (3) a greeting (usually the same greeting as here). Because this work is, if a genuine letter of sorts, a "general letter" (cf. comment on "letter-essays" in the introduction to James under "*genre"), it proceeds immediately to the argument, without other epistolary features.

Because "James" is an English substitution for the original "Jacob" (as always in the *New Testament), some writers have surmised here a symbolic "Jacob" addressing the twelve tribes of Israel, as Jacob addressed his descendants in the testament in Genesis 49. This suggestion is often associated with the assumption of pseudonymity, but it is also possible that James would play on his own name. Plays on names were common (e.g., Mt 16:18). On the author and audience, see the introduction.

Most Jewish people believed that ten of the twelve tribes had been lost for centuries, and they would be restored only at the end of the age. They were thought to exist somewhere, however, so James's address may just mean, "To all my Jewish brothers and sisters scattered throughout the world." The "dispersion" or Diaspora included Jews in the Parthian as well as the Roman Empire, and James would meet Jews from many nations at the pilgrimage festivals to Jerusalem. Some commentators believe that he means the term symbolically for all Christians as spiritual Israelites, on the analogy of 1 Peter 1:1, but given the letter's contents, James probably particularly addresses Jewish Christians.

1:2. The specific trials he addresses in this letter are the poverty and oppression experienced by the poor (1:9-11; 5:1-6; cf. 2:5-6). Addresses like "friends," "beloved" and "brothers" were common in ancient moral exhortation; "brothers" was used both for "fellow countrymen" and for "fellow religionists."

1:3-4. Jewish tradition repeatedly stressed the virtue of enduring testings and occasionally stressed joy in them due to faith in God's sovereignty. (*Stoic philosophers also stressed contentment in them, because they affirmed that one could control one's response to them, but one could not control Fate.) Lists of vices and virtues were a conventional literary form.

1:5. Jewish wisdom traditions often stressed endurance and gave practical advice concerning how to deal with trials. The prime *Old Testament example of asking God (cf. 4:2-3) for wisdom is 1 Kings 3:5 and 9 (cf. also in the *Apocrypha: Wisdom of Solomon 8:21; 9:5; Sirach 51:13-14), and God was always recognized as its source (e.g., Prov 2:6). In Jewish wisdom, upbraiding or reproaching was considered harsh and rude under normal circumstances, although reproof was honorable.

1:6. The image of being driven on the sea was common in Greek literature and occurs in Jewish wisdom texts; cf. especially Isaiah 57:20 and the saying about the insincere in Sirach 33:2. In the context of James, asking for wisdom in faith means committing oneself to obey what God reveals (Jas 2:14-26).

1:7-8. Jewish wisdom texts condemn the double-minded or double-tongued person (cf. also 1 Chron 12:33; Ps 12:2); like philosophers, Jewish sages abhorred the hypocrisy of saying one thing and living another, and speaking or living inconsistently. (See comment on Jas 4:8 for the function of this warning in James.)

1:9-11. Wealthy landowners regularly exploited the poor throughout the empire, and Palestine was no exception; such economic tensions eventually provoked a war against Rome, in the course of which less well-to-do Jewish patriots slaughtered Jewish aristocrats.

The Old Testament and Jewish wisdom literature stress that riches fade, that God vindicates the oppressed and the poor in the end, and that he judges those who keep their wealth and do not share with the poor. James's final statement here resembles Isaiah 40:6-7 and Psalm 102:4, 11 and 16, although the idea was by this time common. The "scorching wind" (NASB) might refer to the sirocco, an especially devastating hot wind blowing into Palestine from the southern desert. But the summer sun by itself was also quite effective in wilting Palestinian flowers, which were then useless except as fuel.

1:12-18
The Source of Testings

1:12. James uses the beatitude form common in ancient literature, especially Jewish literature: "How happy is the person who . . . " Distresses were viewed as temptations, providing opportunities to sin. The term translated "trials" (NASB, GNT; cf. NIV) or "testing" did not necessarily mean "temptation" (KJV, NRSV) in the modern sense, however; the tester could be interested in the distressed person's perseverance, rather than his or her defeat. Famines, poverty and oppression were among events viewed as testings.

1:13-16. One point leading to another, yielding a list of multiple items (as here in 1:14-15; Rom 5:3-5; 2 Pet 1:5-7), was a *rhetorical form known as concatenation. God clearly "tested" people in the Bible and later Jewish literature (Gen 22:1; Deut 8:2; 13:3; Judg 2:22), but he never tested them in the sense that is implied here: seeking for them to fail instead of persevere. Jewish texts distinguished between God's motives in testing people (in love, seeking their good) and *Satan's motives in testing them (to make them fall). In most Jewish texts, Satan (also called Belial and Mastema) fills the role of tempter. Although James does not deny Satan's indirect role (4:7), he emphasizes here the human element in succumbing to temptation. Many scholars think that James personifies "desire" (NIV, NRSV, GNT) or "lust" (KJV, NASB) as enticing a person, then illegitimately conceiving the child "sin," which in turn brings forth "death"; Jewish teachers occasionally applied the rhetorical technique of personification to the "evil impulse" all people had.

That people "tested" God in the *Old Testament is also clear (Num 14:22; Ps 78:18, 41, 56; 95:9; Mal 3:15), but again these examples mean that they tried to put him to the test, not that they led him to *succumb* to temptation. James could adapt the term in the light of the Greek philosophical idea that God could not be affected or changed by human actions, nor could he cause evils in the world. But more likely James is simply working with a different nuance of the term for "test"; in the Old Testament God is clearly the direct cause of judgment (e.g., Amos 4:6-11), and he listened to human pleas (Gen 18:23-32; Ex 32:10-13). The meaning is thus as in Sirach 15:11-12 and 20: people choose to sin, and they dare not say that God is responsible for their response to testing (by contrast, Greek literature was full of people protesting that their temptation was too great to resist).

1:17. Rather than sending testing to break people (1:12-16), God sends good gifts, including creation or rebirth (v. 18). That God is author of everything good was a commonplace of Jewish and Greek wisdom. That what is in the heavens is perfect was a common belief in antiquity, and Jewish writers sometimes used "from above" to mean "from God."

"Father of lights" could mean "Creator of the stars"; *Gentiles often viewed the stars as gods, but Jewish people viewed the stars as angels. (Scholars suggest that Canaanites at Ugarit had long before called El the "Father of lights"; the *Dead Sea Scrolls call God's supreme angel "Ruler of lights." Various ancient Jewish texts call stars "the lights"—cf. Gen 1:14-19; Jer 31:35.) Ancient astronomers used words like "moving shadows" to describe the irregularities of heavenly bodies; but philosophers viewed what was perfect, what was in the heavens, as changeless and without direct contact with earth. Belief in astrology and fearing the powers of the stars were on the rise in this period. James is not supporting astrology; rather, like other Jewish writers, he is declaring God lord over the stars while denying God's inconsistency. To ancient readers his words could thus proclaim: testings are not the result of arbitrary fate; our lives are the faithful workings of a loving Father.

1:18. Whether he refers to believers' rebirth through the *gospel (cf. 1:21; 1 Pet 1:23; see comment on Jn 3:3, 5) or to humanity's initial creation by God's word (Gen 1:26) is disputed; "message of truth" and "firstfruits" may favor the former meaning (the beginning of the new creation). The point is clear either way: God's giving birth is contrasted with desire's giving birth (1:15), and it illustrates God's *grace toward people (1:17).

1:19-27
True Religion

James now turns to appropriate ways to *deal* with testing (1:2-18). The revolutionaries'

model, which was gaining popularity in Jewish Palestine and would ultimately lead to Jerusalem's destruction, was not the appropriate response. James condemns not only violent acts but also the violent *rhetoric that incites them.

1:19. These are by far some of the most common admonitions in Jewish wisdom, from Proverbs on (e.g., 14:29; 15:18; 16:32; 19:11); Greek parallels are no less easy to adduce. James contrasts this biblical and traditional wisdom with the spirit of revolution sweeping his land.

1:20. The militant Jewish resistance emphasized striking out at the Romans and their aristocratic vassals, supposing that they would be acting as agents of God's righteous indignation. But James associates righteousness with peace (3:18) and nonresistance (5:7).

1:21. "Wickedness" (NASB) in this context must refer to unrighteous anger (1:20); "meekness" (KJV) is the virtue of the nonresistant.

1:22. Receiving the word (1:21) meant more than hearing it; they had to live accordingly (1:19-20). (The proposal that "the ingrafted word" refers to the Stoic concept of "innate reason," using similar language, falters on this point: "innate" reason need not be "received.") Although most Jewish teachers (some disagreed) valued learning the *law above practicing it—because they held that practice depended on knowledge—they all agreed that both were necessary to fulfill the law. That one must not only know but must also obey truth was common moral wisdom (pervasive in ancient sources, e.g., Diodorus Siculus 9.9.1; Diogenes Laertius 6.2.64; **Letter of Aristeas* 127; Mishnah *Avot* 1:17; 3:17; 5:14; *Avot of Rabbi Nathan* 24 A), which the readers would not dispute. Hearing without obeying indicated self-delusion (cf. Ezek 33:30-32).

1:23-24. The best mirrors were of Corinthian bronze, but no mirrors of that period produced the accurate images available today (cf. 1 Cor 13:12). Those with enough resources to own mirrors used them when fixing their hair; if James alludes to such people, he portrays the forgetful hearer as stupid. Alternatively, he refers to many people who had no mirrors and saw themselves rarely, who might more naturally forget their own appearance. In this case the reference is to the ease with which one loses the memory of the word, if one does not work hard to put it into practice. (Some moralists recommended use of a mirror to emphasize moral reflection. Perhaps one who heard in the word how a new creation should live—1:18-20—but failed to practice it was forgetting what he or she had become. But the mirror analogy may imply only the quick forgetting of the word, as above.)

1:25. The mirror is an analogy for the law (as at least once in Philo; *Contemplative Life* 78), which was thought to bring liberty. Philosophers believed that true wisdom or knowledge freed them from worldly care; the liberty here, however, as in many Jewish sources, seems to be from sin (1:19-20). (On conceptions of freedom, see comment on Jn 8:33.)

1:26. James again (cf. 1:19) condemns uncontrolled speech, which would include recent impassioned denunciations of Roman rule likely to lead to violence.

1:27. In contrast to the violent and unruly religion of the Jewish revolutionaries, true religion involves defending the socially powerless (Ex 22:20-24; Ps 146:9; Is 1:17) and avoiding worldliness (i.e., the values and behavior of the world; see comment on 4:4). Orphans and widows had neither direct means of support nor automatic legal defenders in that society. Later Jewish sources suggest that at least in Judea, charity distributors tried to ensure that widows and orphans were cared for if they had no relatives to help them; such charity is also part of the visiting envisioned here. Greek society did look out for freeborn orphans, but not other ones. Jewish people visited the bereaved especially during the first week of their bereavement but also afterward, and they likewise visited the sick. Many Greco-Roman writers also valued visiting the sick and bereaved.

2:1-13
No Favoritism Toward the Wealthy

In Judea, as in most of the empire, the rich were oppressing the poor (2:6-7). But the temptation to make rich converts or inquirers feel welcome at the expense of the poor was immoral (2:4). The language of impartiality was normally applied especially to legal settings, but because *synagogues served both as houses of prayer and as community courts,

this predominantly legal image naturally applies to any gatherings there.

2:1. Jewish wisdom stressed that those who respected God should not show "favoritism" toward (literally "accept the face of") people. The title "Lord of glory" (KJV, NASB; it means "glorious Lord"—NIV, NRSV) was normally applied to God (e.g., in **1 Enoch*; cf. Ps 24:7-8).

2:2. Moralists and satirists mocked the special respect given to the wealthy, which often amounted to a self-demeaning way to seek funds or other help. Illustrations like this one could be hypothetical, which fit the writer's *diatribe style of argument. In Rome the senatorial class wore gold rings; some members of this class sought popular support for favors shown to various groups. But rings were hardly limited to them; in the eastern Mediterranean gold rings also marked great wealth and status. Clothing likewise distinguished the wealthy, who could be ostentatious, from others; many peasants had only one cloak, which would thus often be dirty (this was true at least in Egypt; but even two cloaks would wear thin).

"Assembly" (KJV, NASB, NRSV) or "meeting" (NIV, GNT) is literally "synagogue," either because James wants the whole Jewish community to embrace his example, or because some Jewish-Christian congregations (cf. 5:14) also considered themselves messianic synagogues.

2:3. Jewish legal texts condemn judges who make one litigant stand while another is permitted to sit; these hearings often took place in synagogues (2:2), which doubled as community centers. To avoid partiality on the basis of clothing, some second-century *rabbis required both litigants to dress in the same kind of clothes.

2:4. Roman laws explicitly favored the rich. Persons of lower class, who were thought to act from economic self-interest, could not bring accusations against persons of higher class, and the laws prescribed harsher penalties for lower-class persons convicted of offenses than for offenders from the higher class. Biblical *law, most Jewish law and traditional Greek philosophers had always rejected such distinctions as immoral. In normal times, the urban public respected the rich as public benefactors, although many of the revolutionaries recognized in the Jerusalem aristocracy pro-Roman enemies. The *Old Testament forbade partiality on the basis of economic status (Lev 19:15) and called judges among God's people to judge impartially, as God did.

2:5. For God hearing the cries of the poor, who were also the most easily judicially oppressed, cf. texts like Deuteronomy 15:9. One line of Jewish tradition stresses the special piety of the poor, who had to depend on God alone.

2:6. Roman courts always favored the rich, who could initiate lawsuits against social inferiors, although social inferiors could not hope to win lawsuits against them. In theory, Jewish courts sought to avoid this discrimination, but as in most cultures people of means naturally had legal advantages: they were usually able to argue their cases more articulately or to hire others to do so for them.

2:7. Judaism often spoke of "the sacred name" or used other expressions rather than using the name of God; James may apply this divine title to Jesus here (cf. 2:1). In the Old Testament, being "called by someone's name" meant that one belonged to that person in some sense; it was especially applied to belonging to God. Some of the Galilean aristocracy (such as those settled in Tiberias) were considered impious by general Jewish standards. But this accusation may apply specifically to anti-Christian opposition: much of the opposition Christians faced in Jerusalem came especially from the Sadducean aristocracy (Acts 4:1; 23:6-10).

2:8. A "royal" law, i.e., an imperial edict, was higher than the justice of the aristocracy, and because Judaism universally acknowledged God to be the supreme King, his law could be described in these terms (cf. *Philo, *Posterity of Cain* 102; *Life of Moses* 2.3-4). Christians could naturally apply it especially to Jesus' teaching; like some other Jewish teachers, Jesus used this passage in Leviticus 19:18 to epitomize the law (cf. Mk 12:29-34).

2:9-10. Jewish teachers distinguished "heavier" from "lighter" sins, but felt that God required obedience to even the "smallest" commandments (e.g., Mishnah *Avot* 2:1; 4:2; Mishnah *Qiddushin* 1:10; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 76.1.1), rewarding the obedient with *eternal life and punishing transgressors with damnation. That willful violation of even a minor transgression was tantamount to rejecting the

whole law was one of their most commonly repeated views (e.g., R. Meir in Babylonian Talmud *Bekhorot* 30a). (Ancient writers often stated principles in sharp, graphic ways but in practice showed more mercy to actual transgressors in the community.)

Traditional *Stoics (against the *Epicureans) went even farther in declaring that all sins were equal (e.g., *Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.21.1-7), a Stoic view widely known even among non-Stoics (e.g., *Cicero, *On the Ends* 4.27.74-75; Pliny, *Epistles* 8.2.3; Diogenes Laertius 7.1.120). Some Jewish writers agreed: rejecting the smallest commandment was equal to rejecting the largest, because in either case one rejected God's law (*4 Maccabees 5:19-21). The point here is that rejecting the law of economic impartiality in Leviticus 19:15, or the general principle of love behind it (Lev 19:18), was rejecting the whole authority of God (Jas 2:8). Jewish teachers often used "stumbling" as a metaphor for sin.

2:11. Jewish tradition sometimes compared oppression of the poor with murder (cf. also 5:6). But James might here allude to religiously conservative revolutionaries, too religious to commit adultery, who would nevertheless not scruple at shedding the blood of Jewish aristocrats. At the time this letter was written, these "assassins" were regularly stabbing aristocrats to death in the temple (see comment on Acts 21:20-22).

2:12. Ancients could summarize a person's behavior in terms of words and deeds; see comment on 1 John 3:18. Some scholars have pointed out that many philosophers believed themselves alone wise, free and kings, and they connect "law of liberty" here with "royal law" in 2:8. Jewish teachers believed that the law of the heavenly king freed one from the yoke of this world's affairs. "Law of freedom," as in 1:25, probably implies deliverance from sin.

2:13. James's point here is that if his readers are not impartial judges, they will answer to the God who is an impartial judge; his impartiality in judgment is rehearsed throughout the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. Jewish teachers defined God's character especially by two attributes, mercy and justice, and suggested that mercy normally won out over justice. They would have agreed with James that the merciless forfeited a right to mercy, and they had their own sayings similar to this one.

2:14-26
Faith Must Be Lived Out

James could be reacting partly against a misinterpretation of Paul's teaching, as some commentators have suggested, but even more he might react especially against a strain of Jewish piety that was fueling the revolutionary fervor that was leading toward war (cf. 1:26-27; 2:19). James uses words like "faith" differently from the way Paul does, but neither writer would be opposed to the other's meaning: genuine faith is a reality on which one stakes one's life, not merely passive assent to a doctrine. For James, expressions of faith like nondiscrimination (2:8-9) and nonviolence (2:10-12) must be lived, not merely acknowledged.

2:14-16. God commanded his people to supply the needs of the poor (Deut 15:7-8); to fail to do so was disobedience to his *law. "Go in peace" was a Jewish farewell blessing, but Jewish people were expected to show hospitality to other Jewish people in need. "Be warmed" (NASB) alludes to how cold the homeless could become (especially relevant in a place of high elevation like Jerusalem in winter). Moralists often used such straw examples ("if someone should claim") as part of their argument; the reader is forced to admit the logical absurdity of the conclusion of a particular line of reasoning and to agree with the author's argument. Jewish people held Abraham to be the ultimate example of such hospitality (cf. 2:21-23 and comment on 13:2).

2:17. Writers such as *Epictetus could use "dead" the same way as here; this is a graphic way of saying "useless" (see comment on 2:26).

2:18. "Someone will say" was a common way to introduce the speech of an imaginary opponent, the answer to whose objection merely furthered the writer's argument. The force of the objection is "One may have faith, and another works"; the answer is "Faith can be demonstrated only by works." "Show me" was a natural demand for evidence and appears in other moralists (e.g., Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.4.13; 1.11.8; 3.24.75).

2:19-20. The oneness of God was the basic confession of Judaism, recited daily in the

Shema (Deut 6:4 and associated texts). Thus by "faith" James means monotheism, as much of Judaism used the term (*'emunah*). He thus says, "You acknowledge correct basic doctrine—so what? That is meaningless by itself." That *demons recognized the truth about God and trembled before his name was widely acknowledged, even in the magical *papyri (which specialized in what from a biblical perspective was illicit demonology; cf. also **1 Enoch*). Jewish teachers would have agreed with James that the oneness of God must be declared with a genuine heart; his oneness implied that he was to be the supreme object of human affection (Deut 6:4-5).

2:21-24. James connects Genesis 15:6 with the offering of Isaac (Gen 22), as in Jewish tradition. This event was the climax of Abraham's faith in God, not only in Jewish tradition but in the Genesis *narrative itself. (God entered into covenant with Abraham's descendants because he loved him and made a promise to him—Deut 7:7-9—which Abraham embraced in faith and thus obeyed; God accepted this obedient faith—Gen 26:4-5. This view was not quite the same as the second-century rabbinic view that God parted the Red Sea on account of the merits of the patriarchs, but neither is it the same as one common modern conception that faith is a once-for-all prayer involving no commitment of life or purpose and is efficacious even if quickly forgotten.)

Abraham was "declared righteous" at the *Aqedah,* the offering of Isaac, in the sense that God again acknowledged (Gen 22:12) Abraham's prior faith, which had been tested ultimately at this point. The *Old Testament called Abraham God's friend (2 Chron 20:7; Is 41:8), and later Jewish writers delighted in this title for him. Abraham's initial faith exhibited in Genesis 12 and 15 was incomplete (cf. Gen 16) but matured further over the years as part of a living relationship with God.

2:25. Like the example of Abraham, the example of Rahab would not be controversial among James's Jewish readers. Like Abraham (see comment on 2:14-16), Rahab was known for hospitality; but her act of saving the spies saved her as well (Josh 2:1-21; 6:22-25).

2:26. Most ancient people, including most Jewish people, accepted the necessary cooperation of body and spirit or soul; all who believed in the spirit or soul agreed that when it departed, the person died.

3:1-12
The Violent Tongue

James now returns to his warnings against inflammatory speech (1:19, 26): one ought not to curse people made in God's image (3:9-12).

3:1. Jewish sages also warned against teaching error and recognized that teachers would be judged strictly for leading others astray. Some who wanted to be teachers of wisdom were teaching the sort of "wisdom" espoused by the Jewish revolutionaries, which led to violence (3:13-18).

3:2. That everyone sinned was standard Jewish doctrine; that one of the most common instruments of sin and harm was the human mouth was also a Jewish commonplace (as early as Proverbs, e.g., Prov 11:9; 12:18; 18:21).

3:3-4. Controlling horses with bits and ships with rudders were common illustrations in the ancient Mediterranean, because everyone except the most illiterate peasants (who would also miss many of the other allusions if they heard James read) understood them. Jewish texts often cast wisdom, reason and God in the role of ideal pilots, but James's point here is not what *should* control or have power. His point is simply the power of a small instrument (v. 5).

3:5-6. Others also compared the spread of rumors to the igniting of what would rapidly become a forest fire. Here the image is that of a tongue that incites the whole body to violence. The boastful tongue plotting harm (Ps 52:1-4) and the tongue as a hurtful fire (Ps 39:1-3; 120:2-4; Prov 16:27; 26:21; Sirach 28:21-23) are old images. That the fire is sparked by "hell" suggests where it leads; Jewish pictures of *Gehenna, like Jesus' images for the fate of the damned, typically included flame.

3:7-8. Made in God's image (v. 9), people were appointed over all creatures (Gen 1:26). But although other creatures could be subdued as God commanded (Gen 1:28; 9:2), the tongue was like the deadliest snake, full of toxic venom (Ps 140:3; cf. 58:1-6; 1QHa 13.29 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls; and other Jewish texts). *Stoic philosophers also occasionally reflected on humanity's rule over animals.

3:9-10. Some other Jewish teachers also noted the incongruity of blessing God while cursing other people, who were made in his image; even more often, they recognized that whatever one did to other humans, it was as if one did it to God himself, because people were made in his image. James's readers could not easily miss his point. This text makes clear the sort of perverse speech that 3:1-12 addresses: antagonistic speech, which fits the situation the letter as a whole addresses. Whether by incendiary *rhetoric or in other ways, cursing mortal enemies was incompatible with worshiping God, no matter how embedded it had become in Jewish patriotic tradition (since the Maccabean era).

3:11-12. James produces two other common examples of impossible incongruity. Figs, olives and grapes were the three most common agricultural products of the Judean hills, and alongside wheat and barley they would have constituted the most common crops of the Mediterranean region as a whole. That everything brought forth after its kind was a matter of common observation and became proverbial in Greco-Roman circles (cf. also Gen 1:11-12, 21, 24-25).

3:13-18
Peaceable Versus Demonic Wisdom

The paradigm of violent retaliation, urged by *Zealots and other Jewish revolutionaries, claimed to be religious and wise; James urges the poor to respond by waiting on God instead (5:7-11). That James was wiser than advocates of revolution was proved in the aftermath of the Judean revolt of A.D. 66–70, when Judea was devastated, Jerusalem destroyed and Jerusalem's survivors enslaved.

3:13. Those who wished to teach others as wise sages (3:1) needed to show their wisdom by gentleness: this is the antithesis of the advocates of revolution, who were gaining popularity in the tensions stirred by poverty and oppression in the land.

3:14. The term translated "jealousy" (NASB) or "envy" (NIV, NRSV) here is the term for "zeal" also appropriated by the Zealots, who fancied themselves successors of Phinehas (Num 25:11; Ps 106:30-31) and the *Maccabees and sought to liberate Jewish Palestine from Rome by force of arms. "Strife" (KJV; "selfish ambition"—NASB, NIV, NRSV) also was related to disharmony and had been known to provoke wars.

3:15-16. "Above" was sometimes synonymous with "God" in Jewish tradition; as opposed to heavenly wisdom, the wisdom of violence (3:14) was thoroughly earthly, human and demonic (cf. similarly Mt 16:22-23). The *Dead Sea Scrolls spoke of sins as inspired by the spirit of error (1QS 3.25-26; 4.9) or spirits of Belial (CD 12.2), and folk Judaism increasingly believed that people were continually surrounded by hordes of *demons. James's words suggest a more indirect working of demons through stirring up their own ungodly values in the world system.

3:17. Wisdom "from above," i.e., from God (1:17; 3:15), is "pure," not mixed with anything else (in this case, not mixed with demonic wisdom—3:14-16); it is thus also "unhypocritical." Many Jewish wisdom texts spoke of divine wisdom coming from above. God's genuine wisdom is nonviolent rather than given to lashing out: "peaceable," "gentle," "open to reason," "full of mercy" (cf. 2:13); it was also "unwavering" (NASB), better rendered "impartial" (NIV), or "without prejudice or favoritism" (cf. 2:1-9). In Judea, such wisdom is neither that of those like *Zealots nor of those supporting the aristocracy.

3:18. The image of virtues as seeds and fruits has many parallels (e.g., Prov 11:18; Is 32:17), but James's point in the context is this: true wisdom is the wisdom of peace, not of violence. Although many Pharisaic teachers extolled peace, many populists were advocating violence, and James's message was in many regards countercultural.

4:1-12
Choose Between God and the World's Values

God's wisdom was not the populist wisdom of the revolutionaries (3:13-18); thus those whose faith was genuine (2:14-26) could not waver between the two options. James addresses here many of the poor, the oppressed, who are tempted to try to overthrow their oppressors and seize their goods.

4:1. Most Greco-Roman philosophers and many *Diaspora Jews repeatedly condemned people who were ruled by their passions, and

described these desires for pleasure as "waging war." Many writers like *Plato, *Plutarch and *Philo attributed all literal wars to bodily desires. In a somewhat similar vein, Jewish people spoke of an evil impulse, which according to later *rabbis dominated all 248 members of the body.

4:2. *Diatribe often included *hyperbole, or graphic, rhetorical exaggeration for effect. Most of James's readers have presumably not literally killed anyone, but they are exposed to violent teachers (3:13-18) who regard murder as a satisfactory means of attaining justice and redistribution of wealth. James counsels prayer instead. Later he has much harsher words for the oppressors, however; they were guilty of exploiting their hungry workers and violently silencing those who spoke for justice (cf. 5:1-6).

4:3. Jewish prayers typically asked God to supply genuine needs; see comment on Matthew 6:11. James believes that such prayers will be answered (cf. Prov 10:24), even though the oppressed will always be worse off than they should be (cf. Prov 13:23). But requests based on envy of others' wealth or status were meant to satisfy only their passions (see comment on 4:1).

4:4. In the *Old Testament, Israel was often called an adulteress for claiming to serve God while pursuing idols (e.g., Hos 1–3). Those who claimed to be God's friends (Jas 2:23) but were really moral *clients of the world (friendship often applied to *patron-client relationships)—that is, they shared the world's values (3:13-18)—were really unfaithful to God.

4:5. Here James may refer to the evil impulse that, according to Jewish tradition, God made to dwell in people; on this reading, he is saying, "This human spirit jealously longs," as in 4:1-3. Less likely, he could mean that one's spirit or soul longs and ought to long—but for God (Ps 42:1-2; 63:1; 84:2).

A third possibility is that he may be citing a proverbial maxim based on such texts as Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 32:21 and Joel 2:18, summarizing the sense of Scripture thus: "God is jealous over the spirit he gave us" and will tolerate no competition for its affection (4:4). (Like Jewish writers, *New Testament authors sometimes *midrashically meshed various texts together.) This view seems to fit the context somewhat better than other views, given that Scripture did not speak this "in vain" (4:5), though the "greater *grace" of 4:6 could support the first view above.

4:6. James cites Proverbs 3:34 almost exactly as it appeared in the common form of the *Septuagint. This idea became common in Jewish wisdom texts. Humility included appropriate submission, in this case to God's sovereign plan for a person's life (4:7, 10).

4:7. Ancient magical texts spoke of *demons' fleeing before incantations, but the idea here is moral, not magical. One must choose between the values of God and those of the world (4:4), between God's wisdom and that which is demonic (3:15, 17). The point is that a person who lives by God's values (in this case, his way of peace) is no part of *Satan's *kingdom (in contrast to the religious-sounding revolutionaries).

4:8. Old Testament texts exhorted priests and people in general to "draw near to God." Purification was also necessary for priests (Ex 30:19), but the image here is not specifically priestly; those responsible for bloodshed, even if only as representatives of a corporately guilty group, were to wash their hands (Deut 21:6; cf. Jas 4:2). "Purification" often came to be used in an inward, moral sense (e.g., Jer 4:14).

Using ideas like "sinners," James employs not only the harsh diatribe rhetoric that Greco-Roman writers used against imaginary opponents when demolishing their positions; he also uses the rhetoric of Old Testament prophets. "Double-minded" again alludes to the general ancient contempt for hypocrisy: one must act from either God's peaceful wisdom or the devil's hateful wisdom (3:13-18; 4:4).

4:9-10. Old Testament texts often connected mourning and self-humiliation with *repentance (Lev 23:29; 26:41), especially when confronted by divine judgment (2 Kings 22:11; Joel 1:13-14; 2:12-13). The exaltation of the humble was also a teaching of the prophets; see comment on Matthew 23:12.

4:11. James returns to the specific worldly behavior his readers are following: harsh and even violent speech (3:1-12). (He either addresses social stratification within the Christian community or, more likely, uses "brothers" in its more common Jewish sense of "fellow Jews." Jewish revolutionaries had already begun killing aristocrats, and inflam-

matory rhetoric was certainly even more common.) His general principle was standard Old Testament and Jewish wisdom opposing slander, which many of his readers may not have been considering in this context. The *law declared God's love for Israel and commanded his people to love one another (2:8); to slander a fellow Jew was thus to disrespect the law.

4:12. That God alone was the true judge was a common Jewish and New Testament teaching. In Jewish teaching, earthly courts proceeded only on his authority, and those who ruled in them had to judge by the law. Investigations had to be conducted thoroughly, with a minimum of two witnesses; acting as a false witness, slandering someone to a court without genuine firsthand information, was punishable according to the judgment the falsely accused person would have received if convicted.

4:13-17
The Pride of the Rich

Having counseled the oppressed, James quickly turns to the oppressors, denouncing their self-satisfied forgetfulness of God. Most of the wealth in the Roman Empire was accumulated by one of two means: the landed gentry, of high social class, made their wealth from land-based revenues such as crops raised by tenant farmers or slaves; the merchant class gathered great wealth without the corresponding social status. James addresses both merchants (4:13-17) and the landed aristocracy (5:1-6).

4:13. Many philosophers (especially *Stoics) and Jewish sages liked to warn their hearers that they had no control over the future. "Go now" (5:1) was a fairly common way of proceeding with an argument (e.g., Athenaeus), addressing an imaginary opponent (e.g., *Cicero, *Epictetus) or prefacing harsh words in satire (Horace, *Juvenal).

The primary markets for manufactured goods were towns and cities; projecting commitments and profits was also a normal business practice. Traders were not always wealthy, but here they are at least *seeking* wealth. The sin here is arrogant presumption—feeling secure enough to leave God out of one's calculations (4:16; cf., e.g., Jer 12:1; Amos 6:1).

4:14. Here James offers common Jewish and Stoic wisdom to which few readers would theoretically object, although many were undoubtedly not heeding it.

4:15-17. "If God wills" was a conventional Greek expression (e.g., Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.4.17; 5.1.14) but fit Jewish piety well (cf., e.g., *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2.333; 7.373; 20.267); it appears elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 18:21; see comment on 1 Cor 16:7).

5:1-6
Judgment on Wealthy Oppressors

Throughout most of the rural areas of the Roman Empire, including much of rural Galilee, rich landowners profited from the toil of tenant farmers (often alongside slaves) who worked their massive estates. That feudalism, with its serfs working rich landowners' property, arose only in medieval times is a misconception. This arrangement is simply less prominent in literature of Roman times because Roman literature concentrated on the cities, although only about ten percent of the empire is estimated to have been urban.

Most of James's denunciation takes the form of an *Old Testament prophetic judgment oracle, paralleled also in some Jewish wisdom and *apocalyptic texts. The difference between his denunciation of the rich and the violent speech he himself condemns (1:19, 26; 3:1-12; 4:11) is that he (like some Jewish visionaries of his era) appeals to God's judgment rather than to human retribution (4:12; cf. Deut 32:35; Prov 20:22). His *prophecy was timely; a few years later the Jewish aristocracy was virtually obliterated in the revolt against Rome.

5:1. Exhortations to weep and howl were a graphic prophetic way of saying: You will have reason to weep and howl (Joel 1:8; Mic 1:8; cf. Jas 4:9). On "come," see comment on 4:13.

5:2. Clothing was one of the primary signs of wealth in antiquity; many peasants had only one garment.

5:3. Some other ancient writers ridiculed the rust of unused, hoarded wealth. For "rust" and "moth" (v. 2) together, compare perhaps Matthew 6:19. As Jewish sources often noted, wealth would be worthless in the impending day of God's judgment.

5:4. The *law of Moses forbade withholding wages, even overnight; if the injured worker cried out to God, God would avenge him (Deut 24:14-15; cf., e.g., Lev 19:13; Prov 11:24; Jer 22:13; Mal 3:5). That the wrong done the oppressed would itself cry out to God against the oppressor was also an Old Testament image (Gen 4:10). In first-century Palestine, many day laborers depended on their daily wages to purchase food for themselves and their families; withholding money could mean that they and their families would go hungry.

The income absentee landlords received from agriculture was such that the wages they paid workers could not even begin to reflect the profits they accumulated. Although the rich supported public building projects (in return for attached inscriptions honoring them), they were far less inclined to pay sufficient wages to their workers. At least as early as the second century, Jewish teachers suggested that even failing to leave gleanings for the poor was robbing them (based on Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut 24:19).

Most crops were harvested in or near summer, and extra laborers were often hired for the harvest. Many *Diaspora Jewish texts (literary texts, amulets, etc.) called God "Sabaoth" or "Lord of Sabaoth," transliterating the Hebrew word for "hosts": the God with vast armies (an epithet especially prominent in the *LXX of Isaiah). If it was a bad idea to offend a powerful official, it was thus a much worse idea to secure the enmity of God.

5:5. The rich and their guests consumed much meat in a day of slaughter, i.e., at a feast (often at sheep-shearing or harvest; cf. 1 Sam 25:4, 36); once an animal was slaughtered, as much as possible was eaten at once, because the rest could be preserved only by drying and salting. Meat was generally unavailable to the poor except during public festivals.

The picture here is of the rich being fattened like cattle for the day of their own slaughter (cf., e.g., Jer 12:3; Amos 4:1-3); similar imagery appears in parts of the early apocalyptic work **1 Enoch* (94:7-11; 96:8; 99:6). As often in the Old Testament (e.g., Amos 6:4-7), the sin in verse 5 is not exploitation per se (as in v. 4) but a lavish lifestyle while others go hungry or in need.

5:6. Jewish tradition recognized that the wicked plotted against the righteous (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 2:19-20), as the sufferings of many Old Testament heroes (such as David and Jeremiah) showed. Judicial oppression of the poor, repeatedly condemned in the Old Testament, was viewed as murder in later Jewish texts; to take a person's garment or to withhold a person's wages was to risk that person's life. James "the Just" himself was later martyred by the *high priest for his denunciations of the behavior of the rich.

5:7-12
Endure Until God Vindicates

The oppressors would be punished (5:1-6), but the oppressed have to wait on God (cf. 1:4) rather than take matters violently into their own hands. This exhortation did not mean that they could not speak out against injustice (5:1-6); it only forbade violence and personally hostile speech (5:9) as an appropriate solution to injustice.

5:7-8. Harvest here (cf. v. 4) becomes an image of the day of judgment, as elsewhere in Jewish literature (especially **4 Ezra*; Mt 13). Palestine's autumn rains came in October and November, and winter rains (roughly three-quarters of the year's rainfall) in December and January. But residents of Syria-Palestine eagerly anticipated the late rains of March and April, which were necessary to ready their late spring and early summer crops. The main wheat harvest there ran from mid-April through the end of May; the barley harvest was in March. The main grain harvest came in June in Greece, July in Italy. Farmers' families were entirely dependent on good harvests; thus James speaks of the "precious" (or "valuable"—NIV) fruit of the earth.

5:9. On this kind of speech, see comment on 4:11-12.

5:10. Most *Old Testament prophets faced great opposition for their preaching; some faced death. Jewish tradition had amplified accounts of their martyrdom even further, hence no one would dispute James's claim. Virtuous examples were an important part of ancient argumentation (*Stoic philosophers often used like-minded sages as models of endurance).

5:11. The entire structure of the book of Job may have been meant to encourage Israel after

the exile; although God's justice seemed far away and they were mocked by the nations, God would ultimately vindicate them and end their captivity (cf. the Hebrew of Job 42:10). *Hellenistic Jewish tradition further celebrated Job's endurance (e.g., the **Testament of Job,* and Aristeas the Exegete). (Various later *rabbis evaluated him differently, some positively, some negatively. The *Testament of Job* includes Stoic language for the virtue of endurance and transfers some earlier depictions of Abraham to Job; this transferral may have been the source of one later rabbi's rare conclusion that Job was greater than Abraham.)

5:12. Oaths were verbal confirmations guaranteed by appeal to a divine witness; violation of an oath in God's name broke the third commandment (Ex 20:7; Deut 5:11). Like some groups of Greek philosophers, some kinds of *Essenes would not swear any further oaths after they had completed their initiatory oaths (according to *Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.135, in contrast to the Essenes who wrote the *Dead Sea Scrolls); the *Pharisees, however, allowed oaths. On swearing by various items as lesser surrogates for God, see comment on Matthew 5:33-37. Oaths generally called on the gods to witness the veracity of one's intention and had to be kept, or invited a curse on the one who had spoken the untruth. Vows were a more specific category of oaths to undertake some duty or abstain from something for a particular period of time.

The difficulty is ascertaining what sort of swearing is in view in the context. Some scholars have suggested a warning against taking a *Zealot-type oath (cf. Acts 23:12); while this could fit the context of James very well, his readers may not have recognized something so specific. The idea may be that one should not impatiently (5:7-11) swear; rather one should pray (5:13). One should pray rather than swear because the fullest form of an oath included a self-curse, which was like saying "May God kill me if I fail to do this" or (in English preadolescent idiom) "Cross my heart and hope to die."

5:13-20
Depending on God

5:13. Nonresistance did not mean pretending that things did not matter (as the *Stoics did; see comment on Eph 5:20) or simply waiting unconsoled until the end time (as some Jewish *apocalyptic writers may have done); it meant prayer.

5:14. Wounds were anointed with oil (cf. Is 1:6; Lk 10:34), and those with headaches and those wishing to avoid some diseases were anointed with olive oil for "medicinal" purposes (from the ancient perspective; cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.172; *Jewish War* 1.657). Oil was also used to anoint priests or rulers, pouring oil over the head as a consecration to God. Christians may have combined a symbolic medicinal use with a symbol of handing one over to the power of God's *Spirit (Mk 6:13).

A general prayer for healing was one of the blessings regularly recited in *synagogues; on "elders," see comment on Acts 14:23; on "*church" in a Jewish context, see the glossary. Visiting the sick was an act of piety in early Judaism that Christians probably continued (cf. Mt 25:36, 43, for ailing missionaries).

5:15-16. The *Old Testament prophets often used healing from sickness as an image for healing from sin, and Jewish literature often associated sin and sickness; for instance, the eighth blessing of a Jewish daily prayer, for healing (although the emphasis is not physical healing), followed petitions for forgiveness and redemption. James does not imply a direct causal relationship between *all* sickness and sin, any more than Paul or the Old Testament does (see comment on Phil 2:25-30).

Jewish wisdom also recognized that God would hear the sick (Sirach 38:9) and connected this hearing with renouncing sin (38:10). But although only a very few pious Jewish teachers were normally thought able to produce such assured results in practice (cf. Jas 5:17-18), James applies this possibility of praying with faith to all believers.

5:17-18. Although all Palestinian Jews prayed for rain, few miracle workers were thought able to secure such answers to prayer (especially Josephus's Onias, called Honi the Circle-Drawer in the many later rabbinic traditions about him; Hanina ben Dosa, in later rabbinic texts; in later traditions about earlier pietists, occasional pious men like Honi's grandson Abba Hilkiah or Hanan ha-Nehba, Johanan ben Zakkai, Nakdimon ben Gorion,

Rabbi Jonah and occasionally an anonymous person). The miracle of securing rain eventually came to be viewed as equivalent to raising the dead. The piety of these miraculous rainmakers always set them apart from others in Jewish tradition, but here James affirms that Elijah, the greatest model for such miracle workers, was a person like James's hearers and is a model for all believers (1 Kings 17:1; 18:41-46; cf. 1 Sam 12:17-18; for Elijah's weakness cf. 1 Kings 19:4).

The "three and a half years," not mentioned in 1 Kings 17, reflects 1 Kings 18:1 and later tradition (cf. Lk 4:25 and a rabbinic tradition of three years), perhaps through associations with ideas about famines in the end time, which were sometimes held to last for this period of time.

5:19-20. In Jewish belief, the former righteousness of one who turned away was no longer counted in his or her favor (Ezek 18:24-25), but (in most Jewish formulations) the *repentance of the wicked canceled out his or her former wickedness (Ezek 18:21-23), if conjoined with proper *atonement. Some Jews (Dead Sea Scrolls, some rabbis) regarded some forms of apostasy as unforgivable, but James welcomes the sinner back. In this context, he might among other things invite revolutionaries to return to the fold.

"Covering a multitude of sins" comes from Proverbs 10:12. In that text, it probably refers to not spreading a bad report (cf. 11:13; 20:19), but Judaism often used similar phrases for securing forgiveness. One may compare the Jewish idea that one who converted another to the practice of Judaism was as if he or she had created that person.

1 Peter

Introduction

Authorship. Although some commentators question Petrine authorship, others have argued forcefully for it; the situation presupposed in the letter fits Peter's lifetime. The tradition of Peter's martyrdom in Rome is virtually unanimous. By the late first century 1 Clement accepted this tradition, and excavations indicate a second-century memorial in Rome to Peter's martyrdom. Other early Christian traditions also support this tradition as well as the view that Peter was the author of the letter, which is cited by authors from the beginning of the second century.

Given this tradition of his martyrdom in Rome, the likelihood that letters he wrote would be preserved, and the fact that most letters were either authentic or written long after the purported author's death, the burden of proof is on those who deny that Peter wrote the letter. One commentator (Selwyn) thought he could detect parallels to Silas's (5:12) style in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. This argument alone is not conclusive, but arguments against Petrine authorship are even weaker (for those based on Greek style, see introduction to James).

Date. Three basic periods of persecution have been suggested as the background: the time of Trajan (early second century), the time of Domitian (see introduction to Revelation) and the time of Nero, which would be the time of Peter's martyrdom. First Peter implies an atmosphere of severe repression, but not the official court prosecutions of Trajan's time. Church leadership in the epistle (5:1-2) also fits the first-century model better than a later date. A pseudonymous letter attributed to Peter as early as the Flavian period (after Nero but still first century) is unlikely.

Unity. The first section of 1 Peter (1:1–4:6) does not explicitly indicate that fatal persecution has begun; the second part (4:7–5:14) is more explicit. Some writers have therefore divided the letter into two parts, usually arguing that the former was a baptismal homily (due to abundant parallels with other parts of the *New Testament). But the difference of situation presupposed between the two sections is not significant enough to warrant such a division, and there appear no other compelling reasons to divide them.

Provenance and Audience. It is widely agreed that "Babylon" (5:13) is a cryptic

name for Rome (linked early in Jewish views on the four kingdoms), as in some Jewish works and undoubtedly in the book of Revelation. The situation of persecution described here fits Rome, and it would be appropriate for Peter to send advance warning of that situation to believers in Asia Minor, the stronghold of emperor worship. An audience in Asia Minor would probably include Jewish Christians, but Peter's audience probably includes *Gentile Christians (cf. 1:18; 4:3-4).

Situation. A fire devastated Rome in A.D. 64 but suspiciously left unscathed the estates of Nero and his older boyfriend Tigellinus. Like any good politician, Nero needed a scapegoat for his ills, and what appeared to be a new religion, understood as a fanatical form of Judaism begun by an executed teacher three and a half decades before, filled the need perfectly.

Romans viewed Christians, like Jews, as antisocial. Certain charges became so common that they were stereotypical by the second century: Romans viewed Christians as "atheists" (like some philosophers, for rejecting the gods), "cannibals" (for claiming to eat Jesus' "body" and drink his "blood") and incestuous (for statements like "I love you, brother," or "I love you, sister"). Judaism was a poor target for outright persecution, because its adherents were numerous and it was popular in some circles; further, Nero's mistress, Poppaea Sabina, was a *patron of Jewish causes. By contrast, Christianity was viewed as a form of Judaism whose support was tenuous even in Jewish circles, and therefore it offered an appropriate political scapegoat.

According to the early-second-century historian *Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44), who disliked Christians himself, Nero burned Christians alive as torches to light his gardens at night. He killed other Christians in equally severe ways (e.g., feeding them to wild animals for public entertainment). In all, he may have murdered thousands of Rome's Christians, although most Christians there escaped his grasp. Thus, even though the Greek part of the empire loved Nero, Christians saw him as a prototype of the antichrist. Nero died in disgrace several years later, pursued by fellow Romans who hated him.

Genre. First Peter appears to be a general letter, influenced more by the situation in Rome than by the current situation in Asia Minor (what is now western Turkey); thus Peter can address it as a circular letter to many regions of Asia Minor (1:1). Peter does, however, seem to expect that the sufferings of Rome will eventually materialize in other parts of the empire. On events in Asia Minor three decades later, see the discussion of background in the introduction to Revelation. Leaders of the Jerusalem priesthood sent out encyclicals, letters to *Diaspora Jewish communities, by means of messengers; Peter's letter is similar to these but on a smaller scale of readership.

Commentaries. One of the most helpful for those who do not work with the Greek text is J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981). More technical works that are helpful for

background include Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); John H. Elliott, *1 Peter,* AB 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000); Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter,* BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); J. R. Michaels, *1 Peter,* WBC 49 (Waco, TX: Word, 1988); and E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter,* 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1947). Two of the best specialized works are David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter,* SBLMS 26 (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981), and William J. Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6,* Analecta Biblica 23 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965).

1:1-12
Present Testing, Future Hope

Verses 3-12 constitute one long sentence in Greek; such long sentences could be viewed as skillful in antiquity, when hearers of speeches were accustomed to following the train of thought for a longer time than North American and some other television-trained readers are today.

1:1. Jewish people spoke of Jews who lived outside Palestine as the "*Diaspora," or those who were "scattered"; Peter transfers this term to his audience (cf. 1:17; 2:11). On "resident aliens," see comment on 1:17; cf. 2:11. The five Roman provinces he mentions were geographically connected; he omits the southern coastal regions of Asia Minor, some of which could be grouped with Syria in this period instead of as a political part of Asia Minor. It has been suggested that the sequence in which Peter lists the provinces of his intended readers reflects the route a messenger delivering the letter could take if he started from Amastris in Pontus. (Although messengers from Rome were more likely to start at the province of Asia, Peter may start in his mind with the province farthest from him and work his way around.) On encyclical or circular letters, see the discussion of *genre in the introduction.

1:2. In the *Old Testament and Judaism, God's people were corporately "chosen," or "predestined," because God "foreknew" them; Peter applies the same language to believers in Jesus. Obedience and the sprinkling of blood also established the first covenant (Ex 24:7-8).

1:3. Peter adopts the form of a *berakhah,* the Jewish form of blessing that regularly began "Blessed be God who . . ." The rebirth may allude to language Jewish people normally used for the conversion of *Gentiles to Judaism (see comment on Jn 3:3, 5), with the meaning: you received a new nature and identity when you converted. Earlier Jewish sources speak of receiving a new heart (Ezek 36:26; **Jubilees* 1:20-21; 4Q393 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls) or becoming like a new person (1 Sam 10:6; *Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 20:2; 27:10; **Joseph and Asenath* 8:9-11). Believers were reborn to a living hope by Jesus' *resurrection, an inheritance (v. 4) and future salvation (v. 5), three ideas connected in Jewish views of the end of the age.

1:4. *New Testament writers followed Jewish teachers in speaking of "inheriting" the future world; the original source of the idiom is probably Israel's "inheritance" of the Promised Land subsequent to their redemption from Egypt. Some Jewish texts (such as **4 Ezra* 7:77, probably late first century) also spoke of a treasure stored up in heaven for the righteous, but whereas the emphasis for receiving that treasure is normally on one's obedience, the emphasis here is on God's work.

1:5. The Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g., 4QpNah 3.3) and other Jewish texts speak of everything being "revealed" in the "last time"; the deeds of the wicked would be made known, but the righteous would be "saved," delivered, from all that opposed them.

1:6-7. God was sovereign over testings, but his purpose both in the Old Testament and in Judaism was to strengthen the commitment of those who were tested (it was only *Satan whose object in the testing was to bring apostasy—5:8). See comment on James 1:12-16. (The Old Testament and Judaism also taught that sufferings could be discipline to bring persons to *repentance or punishments to fulfill justice and invite repentance; contemporary Judaism developed this concept into the idea of *atonement by sufferings. Although this view does not reflect Peter's emphasis, he does allow that the persecution believers face may function also as God's discipline to wake his people up—4:17.)

Many Jewish traditions also presented the end as preceded by times of great testing. The image of the righteous being tested like precious metals purified in the furnace comes from the Old Testament (Job 23:10; Ps 12:6; Prov 17:3; cf. Is 43:2; Jer 11:4) and continued in subsequent Jewish literature (e.g., Sirach 2:5). Ores of precious metals (the most precious of which was gold) would be melted in a furnace to separate out the impurities and produce purer metal.

1:8-9. Testing could be joyous rather than grievous because these readers knew in advance the goal of the testing: when they had persevered to the end, the final deliverance would come, as in traditional Jewish teaching.

Unlike the testing in James, a primary test in 1 Peter is persecution (see introduction).

1:10-12. Many Jewish interpreters (especially attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls) believed that the Old Testament prophets had told especially about the interpreters' own time, and that their meaning for this time had thus remained cryptic until sages of their own generation were given special insight by the *Spirit. Peter here seems to assert that the prophets recognized that their prophecies applied to the *Messiah who would suffer and be exalted, and that they knew that many details would make sense to the readers only once they had happened. It sounds as if Peter would, however, have agreed with the interpreters in the Dead Sea Scrolls that the Old Testament prophets did not know the "time or kind of time."

That Old Testament servants of God could have the Spirit of God in them is clear (Gen 41:38; Num 27:18), although the Old Testament usually preferred the Hebrew idiom for the Spirit resting "upon" God's servants, empowering them (as in 1 Pet 4:14). According to some Jewish traditions, some secrets were so important that God kept them even from angels until the end time; in other traditions, angels respected *rabbis' esoteric teachings and came to their lectures to listen; in still other traditions, angels envied Israel, who received God's *law.

1:13–2:3
Live the New Life

1:13. Men wore long robes and would tuck them into their belt, and thus "gird up their loins," so they could move more freely and quickly. Although the image also occurs elsewhere in the *Old Testament, here Peter may specifically allude to the Passover (Ex 12:11): once God's people had been redeemed by the blood of the lamb (1 Pet 1:19), they were to be ready to follow God forth until he had brought them safely into their inheritance (cf. 1:4), the Promised Land. Thus they were to be dressed and ready to flee. "Sobriety" in ancient usage meant not only literal abstinence from drink but also behaving as a nonintoxicated person should, hence with dignified self-control.

1:14. "Obedient children" picks up the image of 1:3: born anew, they were no longer what they had been before, and they should obey God (cf. 1:2, 22) as children obeyed their fathers. The obedience of minors to their parents was highly valued, and Roman and Jewish law expected it.

1:15-16. Israel was called to be holy as God was holy and thus to live in a manner distinct from the ways of the nations (Lev 11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26). The daily *synagogue prayers also stressed holiness to God, hence the idea would have been one of the most familiar to Jewish readers and to Gentiles who had learned Scripture from them. If Peter continues the image of father and children between 1:14 and 1:17, he may allude here to another feature of a child's relationship with a father that was stressed in antiquity: imitation.

1:17. The image of God as an impartial judge was standard in Judaism, which also addressed him as "heavenly Father" in most of its prayers. "Resident aliens" ("foreigners"—NIV; "the time of your stay"—NASB) were distinguished from local citizens, but as legal residents of an area they were viewed more highly than newcomers. Jewish communities throughout the empire generally enjoyed a resident alien status, and although some Jews could achieve citizen status, in other places like Alexandria the Greeks met their attempts to do so with hostility.

1:18. Jewish people often spoke of idolatry as "futile" or "empty." To them idolatry was the most basic characteristic of Gentiles' lifestyle, thus the former way of life of Peter's hearers ("passing down" of the ancestors' way of life by itself could refer either to paganism or to Judaism). Jewish sages contrasted the perishable wealth with the eternal, true wealth, (cf. 1:4, 7, 23) of righteousness or wisdom; here it refers to the price of the hearers' redemption, for which money was insufficient (1:19). (That gold was devalued in this period due to inflation under Nero may have occurred to some of Peter's original hearers but is probably not relevant to Peter's point about perishable gold; cf. 1:7.)

1:19-21. Redemption by the blood of a lamb recalls the annual Passover celebration, by which Jewish people commemorated their redemption (freedom from slavery) in Egypt, through the blood of the Passover lamb (cf. 1:13).

1:22. In Old Testament purity laws, people purified themselves from defilement by cere-

monial bathing; although Judaism continued to practice literal ceremonial washings, it often used the image of washing figuratively for spiritual or moral purification (as occasionally in Old Testament prophets, e.g., Is 1:16; Jer 2:22; 4:14).

1:23. The new life of obedient love (1:22) is natural for the person with a new nature; it was axiomatic in antiquity that children inherited the nature of their parents. (Many writers even remarked that adulterers gave themselves away because children bore their image.) The father's seed was especially important; followers of Jesus had been reborn through the living word, the *gospel (1:3; 2:2), and it was imperishable (1:24-25). (A variety of parallels could be adduced, including Philo's perspective on the divine word as not only imperishable but as "seminal," or a seed; but most of these examples are individual and distinct cases rather than based on general tradition. The parallels may thus all draw from the same sort of natural imagery as Peter's [except that Philo, unlike Peter, might draw on *Stoicism's seminal Logos]. That the Word of God was imperishable, however, was agreed throughout all of Judaism; cf. Is 40:6-8. The present image was more widespread in early Christianity; see 1 John 3:9 and cf. Luke 8:11.) God's word could be depicted as seed elsewhere (e.g., *4 *Ezra* 9:31, 33).

1:24-25. Here Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6-8 (following the *LXX, which is more concise than the Hebrew text here), where the word is the future message of salvation in the time when God would redeem his people (e.g., 52:7-8).

2:1. Ancient writers sometimes employed "vice lists," indicating what people should avoid; Peter employs a miniature vice list. "Putting aside" (NASB) the old ways also follows rebirth in James, Ephesians and Colossians; together with other parallels to those letters, this similarity has suggested to some scholars a common baptismal tradition in the early *church. It might also follow some teaching by Jesus no longer available to us; on possible background to "putting aside," see comment on Romans 13:12 and Ephesians 4:20-24.

2:2. This verse continues the image of rebirth (1:23). Babies were dependent on their mothers or nurses for nourishment by their milk; use of cows' milk was rare. It was believed that children were very impressionable at this nursing stage, and those who allowed them to be tended by nursemaids were advised to select the nurses with care. "Pure" milk meant that it had not been mixed with anything else; the term is used in business documents for sales of unadulterated foods. Pure "spiritual" (NIV, NRSV, GNT) milk is a possible translation (especially if we think in the sense of "nonliteral"), but the adjective here more often means "rational" and could well be rendered "milk of the word" (*logikon;* cf. NASB, KJV), i.e., the "word" of 1:25.

2:3. Here Peter alludes to Psalm 34:8. The term translated "kindness" (NASB) or "good" (NIV, NRSV) was sometimes used to mean "delicious" when applied to foods (as here, milk—v. 2).

2:4-12
Being Built Up as God's People

The *Qumran community (the Jewish monastic sect who wrote the *Dead Sea Scrolls) also portrayed themselves as a new temple. Whereas many of Peter's exhortations to this point are the sort of moral instructions philosophers could give for individual behavior, this section concerns the church's corporate identity and hence corporate witness.

2:4. Peter derives this image from Isaiah 28:16 ("choice," "precious"), which he cites in 2:6.

2:5. The Dead Sea Scrolls portray the Qumran community as a living temple, and one text speaks of the temple's components (pillar, foundations, etc.) as animate beings. "House" could refer to a building, like the temple, or to a household (4:17), even to a large family like the "house of Israel"; both senses may be played on here, as sometimes in the *Old Testament (2 Sam 7:5-7, 12-16). The image of God's people as a "holy priesthood" is from Exodus 19:5-6 (cf. Is 61:6) and appears more explicitly in 1 Peter 2:9 (Israel as a priesthood also appears in some contemporary Jewish texts based on Ex 19:6, including an insertion into the LXX of Ex 23:22). As priests (as well as stones) in this new temple, they would offer sacrifices; others in Judaism also used the image of a spiritual sacrifice (see comment on Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15).

2:6. The Qumran community applied Isaiah 28:16 to their own leadership; early Christians applied it to Jesus (Rom 9:33).

2:7-8. The Jewish interpretive principle *gezerah shavah,* which linked texts that had a common key word, makes it natural for Peter to cite Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14. Although this interpretive technique suggests that he need not be dependent on Paul, both Peter and Paul may have depended on Jesus for the cornerstone image (Mk 12:10-11). Psalm 118 was sung during the Passover season (cf. 1 Pet 1:19), normally, at least among some Jews in this period, after thanking God for delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt into freedom, "from darkness to great light" (cf. 2:9).

2:9. Roughly half this verse is a direct quotation of Exodus 19:6, implying that all Christians, including *Gentile Christians, share in God's covenant with Israel. Jewish people on the Passover described their deliverance from Egypt as a call "from darkness into great light" (Mishnah *Pesahim* 10:5). Old Testament prophets taught that God had redeemed his people for his praise (e.g., Is 60:21; 61:3; Jer 13:11).

2:10. Peter cites Hosea 1:10 and 2:23, which reverse God's earlier verdict against Israel (Hos 1:6, 8-9), promising the restoration of God's people in the end time. Like Paul, Peter believes that Gentiles converted to Israel's true faith, the message of Jesus, are part of this end-time people of God (Rom 9:24-26). Had he wished, he could have cited more direct Old Testament passages to support his conclusion (e.g., Is 19:24-25; 56:3-8).

2:11. On "resident aliens" (the normal sense of the terms usually translated "aliens and strangers"), see comment on 1:17. *Philo spoke of souls as being "strangers" (using a term technically more foreign than "resident aliens"; *Confusion of Tongues* 81; *Who Is the Heir?* 267) in their bodies, belonging instead to heaven. The image here is of God's people (2:4-10) dispersed among the nations; God's people in the Old Testament were sometimes portrayed in such terms (Lev 25:23), because of their mortality (1 Chron 29:15; Ps 39:12), because of zeal for God (Ps 69:8; cf. 119:19) or because of their wanderings (Gen 23:4; 47:9). Greek philosophers often viewed fleshly passions as "waging war" against the soul and emphasized the need to war against them (cf. also Philo, *Creation* 81). Peter uses the same image, although not for the same reason that philosophers often did (freeing the soul from earthly distractions); he demands proper living (2:12).

2:12. Jewish people living in the *Diaspora (1:1) always had to be concerned about Gentiles' anti-Jewish slanders, for their safety and for their witness to the one true God. Just as Gentiles were more than happy to slander Jews living among them, they were happy to slander Gentile converts to what they viewed as a Jewish sect, Christianity (2:4-10). The behavior advocated in the following household codes (2:13–3:12) would undermine some of the most traditional slanders against such faiths, slanders that they subverted the public order and traditional family values. "Day of visitation" (KJV, NASB) was good Old Testament language for God's coming day of judgment (e.g., Is 10:3); many texts reported that the Gentiles would recognize God's glory in the end time (e.g., Is 60:3).

2:13-17
Responsibilities Toward the State

Many ancient household codes were set in the context of discussions of city management and included instructions on how to behave toward the state (as well as toward parents, elders, friends, members of one's household, etc.). According to contemporary aristocratic ideals, the household mirrored the government of a city-state, so public obligations and obligations within the household (2:18–3:7) were commonly treated together.

*Stoic and other philosophers commonly used these ethical codes to delineate proper relationships with others. Jewish people and members of other slandered religious groups sometimes adopted these codes to demonstrate that their groups actually supported the values of Roman society; this demonstration was important in combating persecution. See comment on Romans 13:1-7.

2:13. Vassal kings in the East ruled their people with Rome's permission but were required to act in Rome's interests. Because most of Peter's hearers (1:1) would instead be directly under governors (2:14), by "king" Peter may refer especially to the Roman emperor. Although the emperor's title was technically *princeps,* i.e., "the leading citizen" or the first among equals (to preserve the myth of the re-

public in the early years of the empire), everyone knew that he was the supreme earthly king in the Mediterranean world.

2:14. The term translated "governors" covers both legates (who governed imperial provinces as representatives of the emperor—2:13) and proconsuls (who governed senatorial provinces). Such representatives of Rome ruled most of the empire. Governors of imperial provinces were "sent by" the emperor and were expected to administer justice. "Praise" would include the many inscriptions of praise dedicated to benefactors who provided wealth or services for municipalities.

2:15. "Ignorance" includes the false understanding of Christianity spread among outsiders (more than in 1:14); Roman aristocrats were much quicker to malign minority religions, whose worship did not assimilate to Roman values, than to seek to understand them. The *Old Testament taught God's sovereignty over rulers (Prov 16:10; 21:1).

2:16. Here Peter modifies a common exhortation of ancient philosophers: for them, freedom from the world's values meant not only authority to do as one pleased but also freedom to pursue virtue, freedom from desire and freedom to do without. Most philosophers (such as contemporary *Stoics) regarded the wise man as the ideal ruler but still advocated obedience to the state. For Christians, freedom meant freedom to be God's slaves rather than slaves of sin; it meant freedom from the tyranny of the state but also freedom to uphold the laws of the state as God's servants (v. 15).

2:17. Such brief lists of these kinds of duties appear in other ancient moralists (e.g., Isocrates, Marcus Aurelius, Syriac Menander). The Old Testament also associated honoring God with honoring those in authority (Ex 22:28; 1 Kings 21:10; Prov 24:21).

2:18-25
Duties of Servants

This passage addresses household slaves, who often had more economic and social mobility than free peasants did, although most of them still did not have much. Field slaves on massive estates were more oppressed; given the regions addressed (1:1) and the nature of household codes (see comment on 2:13-17), they are probably not addressed here and at *most* are peripherally envisioned. The most oppressed slaves, who worked in the mines, were segregated from the rest of society and would not have access to Peter's letter; they are not addressed here at all.

It should also be kept in mind that Peter does not address the institution of slavery per se, although his sympathy is clearly with the slave (2:21). No ancient slave war was successful, and abolition was virtually impossible in his day except through a probably doomed bloody revolution. In this situation, it was far more practical for a pastor to encourage those in the situation to deal with it constructively until they could gain freedom. On slaves and household codes, questions of subsequent application and so forth, see comment on Ephesians 6:4-9 and the introduction to Philemon.

2:18-20. Except those slaves who were able to save enough money on the side to buy their freedom (which many household slaves could do), slaves were not in a position to achieve freedom. (Often the holders freed their slaves as a reward or to keep from having to feed them in old age, but slaves could not refuse that arrangement.) Although slaves and masters cooperated in many households as members of a common family, laws viewed slaves as property as well as people, and some slaveholders abused them as property; nearly all slaveholders treated them as socially inferior. (An aristocrat eating together even with his freedmen was considered unusual.) Philosophers (especially the popular Stoics) generally counseled that slaves do their best in the situation in which they found themselves; this was also the view of *Epictetus, a Stoic philosopher who had been a slave earlier in life.

2:21. Moralists commonly cited models for imitation. Philosophers also often prided themselves in their ability not to be bothered by insults or deprivation (e.g., one said that Socrates, when advised that he suffered unjustly, protested, "What—would you rather I suffer justly?" Diogenes Laertius 2.35). Although ancient society was very status-conscious and associated power with greatness, Peter identifies *Christ with unjustly treated slaves.

2:22. Here Peter quotes Isaiah 53:9, the first of several allusions to Isaiah 53 in this passage.

The passage describes "the suffering servant," a role fulfilled by Jesus (cf. comment on Mt 12:17-18).

2:23. This verse may reflect the idea of Isaiah 53:7: though oppressed, he did not open his mouth. In a society based on respect and honor, refusing to reply in kind was a painful experience; subordinates like slaves were accustomed to it, but it could not have failed to hurt many of them. Many philosophers also advocated enduring reviling without responding in kind.

2:24. Here Peter reflects the language of Isaiah 53:4-5. In this context (1 Pet 2:24, 25), Peter takes the "healing" as healing from sin, as it often was intended in the prophets (e.g., Is 6:10; Jer 6:14; 8:11) and sometimes in later Jewish literature (as probably in the eighth benediction of the Amidah, a regularly recited Jewish prayer).

2:25. This verse echoes Isaiah 53:6. The image of Israel as sheep was common in the *Old Testament (e.g., Is 40:11), and the image of Israel as scattered sheep wandering from the shepherd also appears elsewhere (Jer 50:6; Ezek 34:6; cf. Ps 119:176). An "overseer" (NIV; "guardian"—NASB, NRSV) was one who watched over, protected and had authority; Diaspora Judaism sometimes applied the term to God. In the Old Testament, God is the chief shepherd of his people (see comment on Jn 10:1-18).

3:1-7
Wives and Husbands

Although Peter upholds societal norms for the purpose of the *church's witness in society (see the introduction to the household codes in 2:13-17), his sympathy here is clearly with the woman, as it was with the slaves in 2:18-25. He continues to advocate submission to authority for the sake of witness (3:1) and silencing charges that Christianity is subversive; husbands were always in the position of authority in that culture. Peter addresses wives at much greater length than husbands; if proportions of converts were comparable to Judaism, women may have largely outnumbered men in the churches. (The proportion may have been greater for Jewish converts, however, since *Diaspora churches did not require circumcision, one factor that discouraged male conversion.)

3:1. "In the same way" refers back to the passage on slaves (2:18-25). Like Judaism and other non-Roman religions, Christianity spread faster among wives than husbands; husbands had more to lose socially from conversion to an unpopular minority religion. But wives were expected to obey their husbands in Greco-Roman antiquity, and this obedience included allegiance to their husbands' religions. Cults that forbade their participation in Roman or other local religious rites, including prohibiting worship of a family's household gods, were viewed with disdain, and Jewish or Christian women who refused to worship these gods could be charged with atheism. Thus by his advice Peter seeks to reduce marital tensions and causes of hostility toward Christianity and Christians. Silence was considered a great virtue for women in antiquity.

3:2. "Chaste and respectful" (NASB) is the behavior that was most approved for women throughout antiquity.

3:3. Hair was braided in elaborate manners, and well-to-do women strove to keep up with the latest expensive fashions. The gaudy adornments of women of wealth, meant to draw attention to themselves, were repeatedly condemned in ancient literature and speeches, and Peter's hearers would assume that his point was meant in the same way (challenging excess, not clothing per se). See comment on 1 Timothy 2:9-10.

3:4. Ancients considered a meek and quiet spirit a prime virtue for women, and many moralists advised this attitude instead of dressing in the latest fashions to attract men's attention, a vice commonly attributed to aristocratic women but imitated by others who could afford to do so.

3:5. Moralists often added examples of such quietness to their exhortations; they especially liked to appeal to matrons of the distant past, who were universally respected for their chaste behavior in contrast to many of the current models in Roman high society. Jewish readers would think especially of the great matriarchs, extolled for their piety in Jewish tradition: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, Sarah being most prominent. The readers might think of head coverings that were prominent in much of the East, meant to render the married woman inconspicuous

(see comment on 1 Cor 11:2-16), but inner adornment is Peter's emphasis here.

3:6. Although Peter explicitly advocates only "submission" (v. 1), he cites Sarah as an example even of "obedience," which was what Greek and Roman male society ideally demanded of their wives. That Abraham also "obeyed" Sarah is clear in Genesis (the term usually translated "listen to" in 16:2 and 21:12 also means "obey," and in both passages Abraham submits to Sarah), but this point is not relevant to Peter's example for wives with husbands disobedient to the word (3:1; see the introduction to this section). (One should not read too much into Sarah's calling her husband "lord" here. The direct address "lord" may have been used in Hebrew to address husbands respectfully as "sir," e.g., Hos 2:16, but apart from Gen 18:12 it is primarily in later Jewish traditions such as the *Testament of Abraham* that Sarah addresses Abraham in this manner. Even in the *Testament of Abraham*, Isaac also addresses his mother with a similarly respectful title, and Abraham so addresses a visitor, unaware that he is an angel [cf. also Gen 18:3]. In another Jewish tale, Asenath calls her father "lord" yet answers him boastfully and angrily, although Peter certainly does not suggest such behavior here. In the patriarchal period, it was a polite way to address someone of higher authority or one to whose status one wished to defer, e.g., Jacob to Esau in Gen 33:13-14.) Jewish people were considered "children" of Abraham and Sarah; on Christians' fulfilling such a role, cf. 2:9-10.

Peter's advice is practical, not harsh as it might sound in many of our cultures today. Although philosophers' household codes often stressed that the wife should "fear" her husband as well as submit to him, Peter disagrees (v. 6; cf. 3:13-14). Husbands could legally "throw out" babies, resort to prostitutes and make life miserable for their wives, although sleeping with other women of the aristocratic class was prohibited, and reported examples of physical domestic abuse are rare in this region (when compared to the beatings of children and slaves) (known exceptions included the North African region in which Augustine grew up and an earlier abuser named Egnatius). (In a mid-second-century account, a Christian divorced her husband for his repeated infidelity, so he betrayed her to the authorities as a Christian.) Christian wives were limited in their options, but Peter wants them to pursue peace without being intimidated.

3:7. Although his point is to address the many converted wives with unconverted husbands (3:1-6), he includes a brief word for converted husbands as well. Many philosophers, moralists and Jewish teachers complained about the moral and intellectual weakness of women; some referred to the weakness of their bodies. Women's delicacy was considered an object of desire, but also of distrust; even the traditional Roman legal system simply assumed their weakness and inability to make sound decisions on their own. This approach fit the earlier conceptions of *Aristotle, who argued that women were by nature inferior to men in every way except sexually.

Yet this weakness (Peter may apply it only to social position) was often cited as a reason to show them more consideration, and Peter attaches no explicit significance to this common term *except* that requirement; the rest of the verse declares women to be equal before God, which ruined any arguments of their inferiority "by nature." A husband who failed to honor his wife as spiritual peer jeopardized his own prayers, for the reason Peter gives in 3:12.

3:8-12
Be Kind to One Another

Peter concludes his argument of 2:13–3:7 in the verses following 3:8, although this conclusion flows directly into his next argument. It reinforces the sense of mutual consideration Peter wishes to engender in household relationships, within limitations imposed by the culture he addresses.

3:8. Moralists often listed virtues. They also often lectured on the topic of "harmony" between husband and wife. Advocating peace in all relationships in the home would not have offended any Roman moralists (3:13). "Sympathy" recalls the exhortation to husbands in 3:7, which probably means to "understand" their wives.

3:9. Parallels with Jesus indicate that his teaching may be the source of part of this verse; see comment on Romans 12:17.

3:10-12. Having cited Psalm 34:8 in 2:3, Peter now cites Psalm 34:12-16, which instructs

the righteous to pursue peace with others and to speak no evil, thus supporting what he has argued in 2:13–3:7. (Jewish teachers also emphasized that one should pursue peace actively, not just passively.) The citation also indicates that although God hears the righteous, he opposes the wicked and hence does not hear the prayers of those who mistreat others (3:7).

3:13-22
Be Prepared to Suffer for Doing Good

This section flows naturally from 3:8-12.

3:13-14. Peter alludes to the language of Isaiah 8:12, where God assures the prophet that he need not fear what the rest of his people feared, but should trust in God alone (8:13).

3:15. The *Septuagint (standard Greek version) of Isaiah 8:13 begins "Sanctify the Lord [i.e., God] himself"; here *Christ is the Lord. The "defense" (NASB, NRSV; the common translation "answer" is too weak) implies especially (though probably not only) the image of a legal defense before a court, given "judgment" and execution in the context (4:5-6).

3:16. Judaism also tried this tactic to undermine false accusations.

3:17. Ancient writers sometimes communicated points through special literary forms; one of these is called *chiasmus, an inverted parallel structure, which seems to occur here:

A Your slanderers will be ashamed (3:16)
B Suffer though innocent, in God's will (3:17)
C For Christ suffered for the unjust (3:18)
D He triumphed over hostile spirits (3:19)
E Noah was saved through water (3:20)
E' You are saved through water (3:21)
D' Christ triumphed over hostile spirits (3:22)
C' For Christ suffered (4:1a)
B' Suffer in God's will (4:1b-2)
A' Your slanderers will be ashamed (4:3-5)

3:18-19. On "flesh" and "Spirit," see comment on Romans 8:1-11; the idea here is probably that Jesus was resurrected by the *Spirit of God, by whom also he went (presumably after the *resurrection) to proclaim triumph over the fallen spirits. Of the many views on this text, the three main ones are (1) that between his death and resurrection, Jesus preached to the dead in Hades, the realm of the dead (the view of many church fathers); (2) that Christ preached through Noah to people in Noah's day (the view of many Reformers); (3) that before or (more likely) after his resurrection, Jesus proclaimed triumph over the fallen angels (the view of most scholars today). In early Christian literature, "spirits" nearly always refers to angelic spirits rather than human spirits, except when explicit statements are made to the contrary. The grammar here most naturally reads as if, in the Spirit who raised him, he preached to them after his resurrection; further, v. 22 mentions these fallen angels explicitly. The view that these were instead spirits of the dead often rests on 4:6, but the point of 4:6, which caps the section, is that martyrs put to death in the flesh will be raised by the Spirit as Christ was in 3:18.

Except for most later *rabbis, nearly all ancient Jews read Genesis 6:1-3 as a reference to the fall of angels in Noah's day (1 Pet 3:20); after the flood, they were said to be imprisoned (so also 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6), either below the earth or in the atmosphere (cf. 1 Pet 3:22). Then, according to a commonly known Jewish tradition, Enoch was sent to proclaim God's judgment to them; here Christ is the proclaimer of triumph over them.

3:20. Ancient Judaism sometimes used the flood as a prototype of future judgment, as in 2 Peter 3:6-7. The emphasis on the salvation of "few" would encourage Christian readers, who were a persecuted minority. God's "patience" reflects Genesis 6:3 and is mentioned in connection with the final judgment in 2 Peter 3:9.

3:21. The act of faith indicated in *baptism, rather than the physical cleansing, was what was significant; baptism was an act of conversion in ancient Judaism, but Judaism insisted on the sincerity of *repentance for it to be efficacious.

3:22. "Authorities and powers" were angelic rulers over the nations, of which Jewish texts often speak (see comment on Eph 1:21-23). Thus even the evil powers behind the rulers who persecuted Christians had been subdued, and the final outcome was not in question.

4:1-11
Persevere in the New Life

4:1-2. Although the expression was often used figuratively, "arm yourselves" may evoke

the military imagery of soldiers arming, training or otherwise preparing themselves for battle and possible death. The sense might be that those who died with *Christ through faith (cf. 2:24; or, those who have shared in some of his sufferings) are genuinely prepared to suffer with him in any other way, including martyrdom.

4:3. Unlike certain maligned religions, social clubs demanded orderly behavior at parties. Nevertheless, dinners at the homes of *patrons and probably those of social clubs lasted far into the night, with heavy drinking and men often pursuing slave women or boys; religious festivals were similar occasions for immorality. Social clubs, household cults and virtually all aspects of Greco-Roman life were permeated with the veneration of false gods and spirits; hosts poured libations to gods at the beginning of banquets. Although this behavior was not immoral from the general Greco-Roman perspective, Jews and Christians condemned it as immoral. Jewish people rightly regarded this behavior as typical of *Gentile men in their day—most commonly, though by no means exclusively, on pagan festivals.

4:4. Although Jewish people did not participate in the lifestyle characterized in 4:3, their pagan neighbors often portrayed them as lawless and subversive because of their alleged antisocial behavior. The earliest pagan reports of Christians testify that the same prejudices were applied to them, although the authorities never found evidence substantiating these rumors from those they interrogated under torture. Nero's accusation against the Christians he butchered was that they were "haters of humanity," i.e., antisocial. But rumors of Nero's own base immorality offended even the Roman aristocracy.

4:5. These pagans, not the Christians (3:15), would have to give "account" at the final trial, before God. Since the *Old Testament period, the final day of judgment had often been portrayed in courtroom terms.

4:6. Although some commentators regard "those who are dead" as souls of the dead, they seem to be Christians "judged" by earthly courts and executed, who would nevertheless be raised by the *Spirit, as in 3:18. Compare Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-6.

4:7. In many Jewish traditions (including Dan 12:1-2), the end of the age would be preceded by a period of great suffering; the impending end, therefore, calls for exhortations to perseverance in seriousness and prayer.

4:8. Proverbs 10:12 seems to prohibit gossiping about one another's sins or slandering one another (cf. Jas 5:20). The implication here may be that love overlooks one another's faults, although some scholars have suggested that it means that those who love will themselves find *grace in the day of judgment (1 Pet 4:5-6).

4:9. Hospitality was receiving others, especially taking in travelers of the same faith who needed a place to stay. As generally in the ethical ideals of antiquity, lodging and provisions were to be provided generously, not grudgingly.

4:10-11. Like Paul (Rom 12:4-8), Peter emphasized the diversity of gifts in the *church and the need for all of them until the end; this argument was highly unusual in ancient Judaism. Speaking as if one uttered divine "oracles" would no doubt refer to the gift of *prophecy, or at least prophetic inspiration in some form of speaking for God. On prophecy and serving, see comment on Romans 12:6-8 and 16:1.

4:12-19
Christians Judged First

In the Old Testament (Dan 12:1-2) and much Jewish tradition, God's people would suffer greatly just before the time of the end; then the wicked would be judged. Jewish tradition often emphasized that the righteous experienced their sufferings in this age but that the wicked would experience theirs throughout the *age to come. Such persecutions as are mentioned here continued for two more centuries in the Roman Empire and have continued periodically in various times and places throughout history; perhaps for such reasons, believers in each generation have had the occasion to feel close to the end of the age.

4:12. It is possible that Peter alludes to the fate that would befall many Christians captured in Rome in A.D. 64: they were burned alive as torches to light Nero's gardens at night. But he may simply allude again to the image of gold being tried by fire (1:7), and perhaps to the fire of judgment day being experienced in advance; the language of fiery trials was often used figuratively.

4:13. Some Jewish people described the time of tribulation before the end as the "Messiah's travail"; Peter might therefore be saying that those who share the *Messiah's sufferings also hasten the coming of the end. Nevertheless, the regular *New Testament idea of sharing Christ's sufferings is probably adequate to explain the passage.

4:14. The *Old Testament and Jewish tradition often speak of the Spirit resting "on" God's servants, empowering them for their task. In the light of "glory" in verse 13, Peter presumably means, "the Spirit who will raise you [4:6] is already on you."

4:15. Second-century apologists, or defenders of Christianity, argued that the only charge on which true Christians were ever convicted was the charge of being a Christian. The Greek term for "meddler" (NIV, NASB) could refer to sorcerers but some think that it refers to "busybodies" (KJV), those giving unwanted and ill-timed advice. Meddling tactlessly in others' affairs was a vice often attributed to unpopular *Cynic philosophers (to whom some Christian preachers had already been compared). The meaning of term used here, though, remains debated.

4:16. The nickname "Christian" was originally used only by those hostile to Christianity; see comment on Acts 11:26. Here it is parallel to legal charges like "murderer" and "thief." Early Roman descriptions of Nero's persecution use this title for Jesus' followers. Many wise men in Greek tradition pointed out that it was truly noble to suffer scorn for doing good; in Greco-Roman society, obsessed as it was with shame and honor, this was a countercultural insight.

4:17. The image of judgment beginning at God's household is an Old Testament one (Ezek 9:6; cf. Jer 25:18-29; Amos 3:2), as is the ominous expression, "the time has come" (Ezek 7:7, 12). Believers experience the judgment of earthly courts (1 Pet 4:6), but Peter probably sees that suffering also as God's discipline, as Jewish teachers often did. Throughout history, persecution has often refined and thus strengthened the church.

4:18. Peter proves his case in 4:17 by citing the *Septuagint of Proverbs 11:31, which may reflect what had become a prevailing Jewish conception by Peter's day, that the righteous suffered in this life, but the wicked suffered in the world to come.

4:19. Peter again echoes the familiar language of Jewish prayer: the final benediction of one regularly uttered Jewish prayer (the Eighteen Benedictions) included the lines "Our lives are committed to your hand, and our souls are in your care," and some others also uttered similar prayers in the face of possible death (cf. 2 Maccabees 13:14); the prototype for all of them was probably Psalm 31:5 (cited in Lk 23:46).

5:1-5
Faithful Caretakers of the Flock

The behavior of *church leaders in the time of crisis could encourage or discourage the flock. The leaders, once known, would be the first targets of search, capture, torture and execution.

5:1. Elders, older and wiser men skilled in judging cases, ruled in most Israelite towns in the *Old Testament. In the *New Testament period, "elders" held a respected place in the *synagogues, from which the churches took over this form of leadership. Peter ranks himself among them as a fellow elder.

5:2. The image of a "shepherd" most readily connotes a concerned guide rather than a severe ruler (although the image of shepherds had often been applied to rulers in parts of the ancient Near East, to Greek kings and so forth). Charges of illegitimate gain were often made against moral teachers in the ancient world, and it was necessary for Christians to avoid even the appearance of impropriety. (Like certain officials in the Jewish community, these Christian leaders distributed the funds for the poor.)

5:3. Heads of Greek philosophical schools and Jewish schools of law presented their lives as models to their students, but some also exercised strict control. A closer parallel to this text would be elders in *Diaspora synagogues, who were responsible for the services and led the Jewish community but normally had no official power outside settling internal legal disputes.

5:4. In some ancient texts a "chief shepherd" appears to have been an overseer of a group of other shepherds, although they were usually not well-to-do themselves. "Crowns" were garlands given to victors of athletic contests,

benefactors or other heroes, and they were perishable; those faithful to *Christ would receive an imperishable crown. The image was also used in Judaism.

5:5. Respect for parents, elders and, in Judaism, those more knowledgeable in the *law was socially obligatory in antiquity; some Jewish traditions regarded it as an expression of one's respect for God. Such respect included deferring to the wisdom of older men and allowing them to speak first. Peter advocates submission to the ruling elders (5:1), but he also urges—against Greco-Roman society's ideals—mutual humility, based on the teaching of the Old Testament (Prov 3:34).

5:6-11
Persevere by Grace

Although 1 Peter 5:5-9 has sufficient similarities with James 4:6-10 to suggest a common source for the imagery, the application is different. In James, the test is poverty and oppression tempting people to retaliate. In 1 Peter, it is persecution tempting believers to fall away.

5:6. Following on Proverbs 3:34, cited in 1 Peter 5:5, Peter urges believers to "humble" themselves before God. In the *Old Testament, this idea often meant repenting, sometimes when facing impending judgment (4:17), or learning one's complete dependence on God. Here the sense includes embracing and accepting the suffering until God provides the way out (cf. Jer 27:11). On present humbling and future exalting, see comment on Luke 1:52-53 and 14:11; the cries of God's people during unjust sufferings had always moved him to act on their behalf (Ex 2:23-25; 3:7-9; Judg 2:18; 10:16).

5:7. Although the promise of complete relief from persecution is future (5:6), Peter encourages believers to pray and trust God's love for them in the present. Judaism learned to see God's love in Israel's sufferings (as disciplines of love), but most *Gentiles, who bartered sacrifices and vows to get benefactions from the gods, had difficulty with this concept.

5:8-11. In the Old Testament, "*Satan" (in the Hebrew of Job, a title, "the satan") was the accuser, the prosecuting attorney before God—the "adversary," as Peter says. In Jewish tradition, Satan accused God's people before God's throne day and night (except, in later accounts, on the Day of Atonement). The "devil" is literally the "slanderer," carrying the same connotation as the adversarial accuser. Jewish teachers recognized that, as in the book of Job (where he "went about" over the face of the earth—1:7), Satan sought in this present age to turn people to apostasy from the truth, although his power was limited because he ultimately had to answer to God. The *Dead Sea Scrolls called the present evil age the "dominion of Satan" (1QM 14.9).

Lions were viewed as the most ferocious and mighty beasts, and from Psalm 22:13 (probably the background here) they came to be used as figures for enemies of God's people. In the time of Nero, Christians were fed to some literal lions as well. The small, isolated Christian communities could take heart that their other spiritual siblings—starting with the churches Peter knew in Rome—were experiencing the same trials (1 Pet 5:9), until the end (v. 10).

5:12-14
Conclusion

5:12. Silvanus (the full Roman name for which the similar name Silas served as a short equivalent) appears to have been the amanuensis, or *scribe. Most letters were written through the agency of scribes. As a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37), Silas presumably came from a fairly well-to-do Jewish family that provided him a good literary and *rhetorical education; Peter may have given him some degree of freedom in wording the letter. On assertions of brevity, see comment on Hebrews 13:22; it was a polite closing formula in many ancient speeches and letters.

5:13. Jewish people by this period viewed Rome as the fourth of the four kingdoms in Daniel 7 that would oppress Israel, a successor to Babylon. Some elements of contemporary Judaism had readily transferred prophecies of Babylon's demise in the *Old Testament to the new empire of Rome (a transferral readily highlighted after A.D. 70). "Babylon" had thus become a fairly common cryptogram for Rome (although "Edom" was more popular with later *rabbis).

5:14. Kisses were a common affectionate greeting for close friends and relatives.

2 Peter

Introduction

Authorship and Date. Regarding authorship, 2 Peter is one of the most disputed letters in the *New Testament. A number of scholars argue that the style differs so much from 1 Peter that the same person could not have written both unless he were purposely trying to alter his style. But some scholars respond that Peter could have given literary freedoms to his amanuenses, using a different *scribe (1 Pet 5:13) for each, with the second being more accustomed to bombastic Asiatic *rhetorical style. (Although many second-rate rhetoricians preferred flowery Asianism, Atticist style became predominant and ultimately flourished by the early second century. This style might provide a clue to the destination or, more likely, the date [before the second century], although it might reveal only the rhetorical training of the author or scribe. *Quintilian noted that a third style, the Rhodian, less redundant than the Asiatic school but less concise than the Atticist, was sometimes also used.)

The most important argument against Petrine authorship is the letter's clear dependence on Jude, yet defenders of Petrine authorship counter that Peter could have incorporated much of Jude's letter, instructed a scribe to do so or (much less likely) even used Jude as his scribe. (That Jude used 2 Peter is improbable, based on simplifications of imagery, expansions of allusions, etc.) Others argue that a later writer, maybe a close associate of Peter, wove together Petrine material with material from Jude.

The attestation for 2 Peter is weaker than that for most other New Testament books but stronger than that of early Christian books that did not become part of the New Testament, especially those claiming to be Petrine. The early *church did debate its genuineness, although its *existence* is attested early. But *pseudepigraphic documents were generally written in the name of a hero of the distant past; although a second-century date for the letter is possible, no internal evidence necessarily precludes a first-century date. Second-century *Gnosticism is probably not in view, and the end's delay was an issue perhaps as early as the first New Testament document (1 Thessalonians).

Opponents. One suggestion of the heresy combated in this letter is second-

century Gnosticism or a first-century proto-Gnosticism; "knowledge" (a favorite emphasis of the Gnostics, though hardly limited to them) is mentioned seven times in the letter. Gnostics denied the future coming of Christ, and many of them believed that bodily sins did not matter. Gnosticism did not, however, create these ideas from nothing; they developed earlier Greek (plus Jewish and Christian) ideas that were already evident in the first century.

Given the reports of charlatans so prominent in antiquity and parallels to all the ideas in existing Greek and Jewish conceptions in the first century, it is likely that the opponents are simply *Diaspora Jews almost completely overtaken by Greek thought (perhaps even more than *Philo was). Parallels in Diaspora Jewish literature as well as Judean works in the so-called Psuedepigrapha suggest an audience with a strong background in Jewish literature.

Genre. Second Peter is clearly one of those ancient letters intended for a wide circulation (1:1), although the style indicates that it was not directed toward the highest literary circles who normally read such letters. Besides being a "general letter," some scholars have found in it elements of the "testamentary" *genre: testaments were final instructions left by a dying father or leader (cf. 1:14).

Commentaries. Very helpful for background are Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter,* WBC 50 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983); and Gene L. Green, *Jude & 2 Peter,* BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). On a less technical level, see, e.g., J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981); Steven J. Kraftchick, *Jude, 2 Peter,* ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002); and Ruth Anne Reese, *2 Peter & Jude,* Two Horizons (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

1:1-2
Introduction

The Greek text here reads "Simeon" (NRSV) rather than "Simon" Peter; this form of the name is less common but closer to the original Semitic form of the name than "Simon" is (also in Acts 15:14). Although "*Savior" was a divine title in Judaism and antiquity as a whole, it could be applied more generally; but applying the title "God and Savior" (the most natural translation) to Jesus was a clear statement of his divinity and would have offended typical Jewish readers who were not Christians. Writers often established the intimate relationship between themselves and their readers at the beginning of a letter (thus, "faith like ours"). "*Grace and peace" adopts a standard ancient greeting form but with *Christ at the center; see comment on Romans 1:7.

1:3-11
How to Persevere to Salvation

This section is sometimes said to adapt the literary form of a civic decree known from inscriptions honoring benefactors, but the evidence for this thesis is hardly compelling. Although the parallels demonstrate ideas in common between this passage and some decrees, such ideas were relatively widespread and can be identified in other literary forms as well. They do illustrate that Peter praises God and his benefactions lavishly.

1:3-4. "Divine power" and "divine nature" had been important phrases in Greek thought for centuries; they had also become standard in many *Diaspora Jewish writers. Many Greeks in this period wanted to escape the material world of decay around them, believing that their soul was divine and immortal and belonged in the pure and perfect heavens above; some Greek thinkers and cults provided this idea as a hope for the masses.

Many Greek writers, some Jewish writers like *Philo and generally later *Gnostics argued that one could become "divinized," a god, either in life or at death; in some systems this divinization involved absorption into the divine. But most of ancient Judaism rejected the idea of divinization; there was only one God (cf. Gen 3:5; and even Philo meant divinization in a very qualified sense). Many Diaspora Jewish texts used language like Peter's but nearly always only to indicate reception of immortality, not divinization. (Peter applies this language to the Christian view that a believer in Jesus receives a new nature; see comment on 1 Pet 1:23.) In the context of monotheistic early Christianity, embattled by polytheistic culture, Peter's subdued language might help to refute claims of those who expected full divinization.

That Peter's immediate cultural context is Diaspora Judaism rather than Greek paganism may be indicated by how he defines physical "corruption" or "decay": its source is lust (v. 4; cf. 2:14; 3:3). Immortality was available, as the Greeks wished, but it was made available only through purification from sin (1:9); and the Greek concept of immortality is qualified by the biblical hope in the *kingdom and hence future *resurrection (cf. 1:11).

1:5-7. Lists of vices and virtues appear elsewhere in ancient literature. Adding one virtue, vice or some other next step to a former one, as here, was also a standard literary form that appears in Jewish, Greek and Roman texts (such progressions were sometimes called sorites); cf., e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 6:17-20. "Moral excellence" (NASB) or "goodness" (NIV, NRSV, GNT) was the catchall Greek "virtue" (KJV) representing nobility of character.

1:8. Greek philosophers saw philosophical knowledge as the key to changing people's behavior; Peter may, however, intend "knowledge" to include the sense of a personal relationship, as often in the *Old Testament.

1:9. Jewish texts also speak of moral corruption and defilement from which one must be "purified" (cf. 2:20).

1:10-11. Judaism often spoke of Israel's "calling" and "chosenness." Peter applies these terms to all who would persevere to *eternal life. The future transformation of the world and an eternal kingdom established in the future were Jewish and Christian ideas foreign to pagan Greek thought.

1:12-21
Peter's Eyewitness Traditions

1:12. "Reminding" was a common part of ancient moral exhortation, especially when softened by the qualification "though you already know this."

1:13. A number of ancient texts compared the body to a tent, as here; Peter chooses an image that his readers would readily grasp.

1:14. Various Jewish writers believed that the righteous often were warned of their impending death in advance. In ancient Jewish stories, heroes often gave final exhortations to their heirs in "testaments" as their death approached. Some suggest that by announcing his imminent death (undoubtedly his execution in Rome), Peter may inform his readers: These are my final instructions to you, so pay close attention. Cf. John 21:18-19.

1:15. Reminders were common in testaments (1:14), although they were also common in moral exhortations in general (1:12). "Departure" here is literally "exodus," a term occasionally used in ancient texts for death (e.g., Lk 9:31).

1:16. The term translated "myths" (NRSV) was usually used negatively for untrue stories, such as slanderously false accounts about the gods; "myths" were contrasted with reliable accounts. Eyewitness testimony was important in establishing a case historically or legally, although Greek and Roman *rhetoricians did not always give it as much weight as it bears today. (Some scholars have drawn attention to the point that the same term Peter uses for "eyewitnesses" here was used for initiates in the final stage of initiation in some pagan *mystery cults, such as the Eleusinian and Samothracian mysteries; but a related term was also applied to the higher philosophy by *Plato and *Aristotle, and it was a *frequent* term for eyewitnesses, applied even to God himself in *Diaspora Judaism. Because Peter describes not his initiation into the faith but an eyewitness experience distinct from that initiation, the eyewitness element is the central point. Like Peter here, the Gospels are at pains to point out that the glory which Jesus' companions would see before death was the transfiguration, not the Second Coming; but the transfiguration prefigured the Second Coming; cf. 1:19.)

1:17. Some "testaments" (see comment on 1:14) cited special revelations (often heavenly journeys) of the hero; Peter provides a more down-to-earth revelation: what he experienced at the transfiguration (Mk 9:2-13). Early Judaism often referred to God speaking from heaven (see comment on Mk 1:11 for the texts excerpted here). "The Glory" was sometimes a Jewish circumlocution for God; Peter probably intends an allusion to Sinai, where God revealed his glory to Moses.

1:18. Israel also experienced a revelation of God at a "holy" mountain, and Peter probably parallels his own witness of Jesus' glory with Moses' witness of God's glory on Mount Sinai (an allusion also probably present in the Gospel accounts of the transfiguration). (The *Old Testament usually applies the "holy mountain" title to Zion, but Zion was to be the site of the new Sinai, or *law giving, in the end time; cf. Is 2:2-4.) Both revelations led to divine Scriptures (cf. 2 Pet 1:20 with 3:16), although later Jewish teachers generally agreed that the law had more authority than any mere voice from heaven.

1:19. The apostolic revelation in *Christ confirmed the revelations of the Old Testament prophets. Some *Dead Sea Scrolls texts present the "star" of Numbers 24:17 as messianic, and an Old Testament text describes the coming day of the Lord in terms of a sunrise (Mal 4:2) because God would come like the sun (cf. Ps 84:11). The point here seems to be that the morning star (Venus) heralds the advent of dawn; a new age was about to dawn (cf. 2 Pet 1:11), but the Old Testament plus what was revealed by Jesus' first coming was the greatest revelation the world would experience until his return in the day of the Lord. The lamp provided light until dawn. "You do well" was a common way of suggesting that a person do something (i.e., "You *ought* to do this").

1:20-21. Ancient Judaism and Greek thinkers generally viewed prophetic inspiration as a divine possession or frenzy, in which the prophet's rational mind was replaced by the divine word. (The remark on the Jewish perspective is especially true of Diaspora Jewish ecstatics, such as Philo and authors of the **Sibylline Oracles*.) The various literary styles of different Old Testament prophets indicates that this was not quite the case; inspiration still used human faculties and vocabulary (cf. 1 Pet 1:10-12; 1 Cor 7:40; 14:1-2, 14-19), although there may have been different levels and kinds of ecstasy (cf. 1 Cor 14:2; 2 Cor 5:13; 12:4; 1 Sam 10:10-11; 19:20-24). On either model, however, inspiration could protect the inspired agents from error; contrast 2 Peter 2:1.

2:1-22
Damnation of Immoral Teachers

2:1. In contrast to the inspired prophets of 1:20-21, false prophets were those who spoke visions from their own mind instead of from God's heart; in many *Old Testament texts that define them as such, they falsely promise peace for sinners destined instead for judgment (e.g., Jer 23:16-32; Ezek 13:3-10).

2:2. Sincere philosophers complained that philosophy was ridiculed on account of pseudo-philosophers; Jewish people and representatives of other minority religions also suffered from the negative publicity following wayward, profiteering members of their groups (cf. Rom 2:23-24). The same was true of early Christianity.

2:3. Traveling diviners, false prophets and moral teachers typically charged fees, found rich *patrons or begged funds and were thus frequently accused of having monetary motives unworthy of their professed callings (see comment on 1 Thess 2:5). False teachers in the *church were likewise exploiting Christians.

2:4. One of the most prominent themes of ancient Jewish tradition, though usually suppressed by the later *rabbis, was the idea that the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:1-3 were angels who lusted after women and so fell (e.g., *Dead Sea Scrolls CD 2.16-18; 4Q180 f1.7-8; **1 Enoch* 6–7; 16:2; 69:5; 106:13-15; **Jubilees* 4:22; 5:1; 7:21; **2 Baruch* 56:10-15; *Testament of Reuben* 5:6; *Philo, *That God Is Unchangeable* 1). The term for "cast into hell" here is from the Greek name Tartarus, a place not only of holding for the wicked dead (and especially the Titans, the pre-Olympian supernatural beings), but of the severest conceivable tortures; it occurs elsewhere in Jewish literature (e.g., *Sibylline Oracles* 4.186; 5.178), including as the place where the fallen angels were imprisoned (*Sibylline Oracles* 1.101-3; most manuscripts of *Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* 60:3; cf. the "burning valley" in *1 Enoch* 67:4, 7). Jewish writers also generally affirmed a current hell as a holding place for the wicked until the final judgment. For God not "sparing" the offspring of the angels in Noah's day or (later) Sodom (as in 2 Pet 2:4-6), see also Sirach 16:7-8.

2:5. Noah stories, like fallen angel stories, were also popular in nonrabbinic Judaism. Judgment on the fallen angels was usually linked with judgment on Noah's generation because Genesis 6 recounted both. Jewish traditions also portrayed Noah as a preacher of *repentance (e.g., *Sibylline Oracles* 1.129, 168; *Jubilees* 7:20). Jewish teachers liked to use the flood generation as an example of impending judgment to warn their own generation to repent, and they believed that the flood generation was particularly wicked and would not have a share in the world to come.

2:6. Jewish teachers often coupled Sodom with the flood generation as epitomes of wickedness ("an example"—*3 Maccabees 2:5; the rabbis frequently, e.g., Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 10:3; etc.); the Old Testament prophets also used Sodom repeatedly as an image of ultimate sin, often imitated by their own generations (cf. Deut 32:32; Is 1:9-10; 3:9; 13:19; Jer 23:14; 50:40; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46; Zeph 2:9).

2:7-8. Jewish tradition was quite divided on whether Lot was righteous (most of the rabbis and some others said that he was not). Genesis portrays him as personally righteous (Gen 18:25; 19:1-16); though not as wise as Abraham (13:10-11; 19:29, 32-35), he was too righteous for Sodom (19:9, 15).

2:9. In most Jewish traditions, the wicked were tortured in *Gehenna until the day of judgment (or until their annihilation, depending on which tradition one follows). In the Wisdom of Solomon 10:6, Wisdom "rescued the righteous one," Lot, when the ungodly perished in the fire of Sodom; 2 Peter probably alludes to this tradition.

2:10-11. A wide variety of Jewish texts mention those who reviled the stars of heaven or cursed *Satan or *demons (Dead Sea Scrolls 1QM 13.1-4; 4Q280 f2.2; 4Q286 f7ii.2-7; Babylonian Talmud *Menahot* 62a; cf. Sirach 21:27 LXX; *Life of Adam and Eve* 39:1). Peter's opponents have presumably adopted this practice, perhaps as a form of "spiritual warfare." (By contrast, the Sodomites [2:6] tried to molest angels but were unaware that they were angels.) Although Christians had to be concerned for their public witness—charges of subversion in the Roman Empire led to severe persecution and repression—these false teachers apparently reviled earthly authorities and the angelic authorities behind them (see comment on Eph 1:19-23).

2:12. Ancient writers regarded some an-

imals as existing only to be killed for food; here the animals are objects of the hunt. The image would not be purely rural; many urban arenas displayed the hunting of animals for sport as public entertainment. Philosophers (e.g., *Epictetus and the second-century *Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius) characterized animals as creatures ruled by instinct as opposed to humans, who were ruled by reason, and considered unreasoning humans "wild beasts."

2:13. Reveling was part of all-night parties; accusing these people of partying in the daytime was portraying them as worse than the pagans. (The common suggestion that Peter's wording here depends on the early Jewish work called the Assumption of Moses [cf. **Testament of Moses* 7:4] is quite possible, but it is also possible that the Assumption of Moses depends on 2 Peter; the direction of dependence depends on the respective dates assigned to the two documents. It is also possible that both depend on some other source, or that the verbal parallel is coincidental.)

2:14. Some Jewish writers also spoke of adultery of the eyes; see comment on Matthew 5:27-28. Whereas philosophers spoke of moral "training" and avoidance of greed, these false teachers were "trained in greed" (NASB, NRSV). "Accursed children" (NASB, NRSV) could either represent the Semitic figure of speech for accursed ones or refer to disinherited children who received curse instead of blessing from parents.

2:15. According to Jewish tradition and the most likely interpretation of the Old Testament, Balaam was a dishonorable character. For the sake of money, Balaam had led the Israelites into cultic prostitution with the Midianites, bringing God's judgment on them and leading to his own death (Num 31:8, 16; Josh 13:22). Jewish literature considered him the ultimate prophet (and sometimes philosopher) of the pagans but did not reduce his role in Israel's sexual offense. His attempt to make Israel sin was considered worse than any other nation's military attack on them because it brought *God's* judgment against them. The contrast between "the way of Balaam" and the "right way" reflects the common ancient image of two paths, one leading the righteous or wise to life, the other leading the foolish to destruction.

2:16. Ecstatic prophets were often called "mad" or "possessed" (in the ancient Near East and ancient Israel as well as in Greco-Roman antiquity; cf. 2 Kings 9:11; Jer 29:26). But Balaam's insanity is even more evident: despite a miraculous warning through an animal that proved to be smarter than he was (cf. the implications in 2 Pet 2:12), he proceeded with his folly (Num 22:20-35). *Philo used Balaam as an allegory for foolish people; the rabbis said that people who followed in Balaam's paths would inherit hell. Jewish tradition added to the donkey's speech, in which it reproved Balaam's folly in greater detail.

2:17. Barren wells were worse than useless; they promised water in the arid East yet did not deliver on their promise. Hell was sometimes described in terms of darkness.

2:18-19. Greek philosophers often warned against being enslaved by one's passions; the image could extend to those who exploited those passions (such as prostitutes). Those defeated in battle and taken captive were enslaved. Most philosophers spoke of freedom from passion rather than freedom to indulge it; the *gospel spoke of freedom from sin, not freedom to engage in it.

2:20-21. Jewish texts often spoke of the "way of righteousness"; see comment on 2:15.

2:22. One of the proverbs Peter cites here is from the Bible (Prov 26:11, referring to a fool returning to his folly); the other proverb was extrabiblical (from a recension of the ancient story of Ahiqar) but would have been a familiar image. Both dogs and pigs were considered unclean (cf. Mt 7:6) and would have been regarded contemptuously by Jewish readers; they were also associated in other analogies like this one.

3:1-7
The Certainty of Coming Judgment

Like many Hellenized Jews and like later *Gnostics, the false teachers here played down future judgment, thus leading people to sin like the false prophets of old (chap. 2; see comment on 2:1). Now Peter turns to address the root of their immoral error directly; like many Jewish teachers, he recognizes that lack of expectation of future judgment usually led to immoral behavior or even moral relativism (see also comment on Jude 3-4). Some commentators regard chapter 3 as a letter distinct from the one in chapters 1–2, but this is un-

necessary: the transition is natural, especially in view of Peter dropping his dependence on Jude at this point.

3:1-2. On "reminder," see comment on 1:12. For Jesus' commandment here, cf. Matthew 24:42-44 (especially for 2 Pet 3:9).

3:3. Some philosophers charged that *Epicureans, who denied future judgment, lacked a basis for morality. Likewise, in much Jewish literature, those who deny the *age to come have no basis for morality (cf., e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 2:1-24; Pharisaic accusations against the *Sadducees). Ridiculing the righteous was also understood to be characteristically wicked behavior; for example, **1 Enoch* speaks of sinners who mock God, denying his revelation; the *Dead Sea Scrolls complain about those who mocked their community's righteous teacher.

3:4. Ancient writers vested "the ancestors" (NRSV) or "the ancients" with great prestige.

*Aristotle and his adherents (the Peripatetics) believed that the universe was eternal. His view caught on even outside Peripatetic circles, and *Philo had to address the idea. Epicureans denied that God acted in the world; they also believed that matter was indestructible (on the atomic level) and that the universe was infinite. The *Stoics believed that fire was eternal, that the universe would periodically be resolved into the primeval fire (see comment on 3:7) and that eternity was a cycle of ages. Whether matter was created out of preexisting substance in chaos (as in most ancient thought) or from nothing (as many find most likely in Gen 1) was debated in *Diaspora Judaism.

3:5. In Genesis 1, God created the world through his word (also Ps 33:6-9). (Some later Jewish traditions counted ten commands in Gen 1 and suggested that they represented the Ten Commandments, the word of the *law on which God founded the world.) The Greek philosopher Thales saw water as the primal element (though Peter's wording is much more ambiguous).

3:6-7. God had promised after Noah's flood (Gen 6–9) never to destroy the earth by water again (Gen 9:15; Is 54:9), but the prophets did speak of a future fiery judgment and renewal of the present world (cf. Is 65:17; 66:15, 22); they were followed on this point by later Jewish writers (e.g., Dead Sea Scrolls, **Sibylline Oracles*), some possibly influenced by Stoic conceptions. Jewish tradition thus declared that the present world would be destroyed not by water but by fire (e.g., *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.70; Rabbi Meir, second century, Tosefta *Ta'anit* 2:13; *Life of Adam and Eve* 49:3). Jewish literature sometimes used the flood as a symbol for the future judgment by fire. Unlike the Stoics, who believed that the universe (including even the gods) would be periodically resolved into fire and formed again, Jewish people commonly hoped for a future day of judgment and then a new creation that would stand forever (2 Pet 3:10, 12-13). Though their source was the *Old Testament, on this point their view was closer to that of *Plato, who thought that the world would end once by flood and once by conflagration, rather than Aristotle.

3:8-13
The Timing of the Final Judgment

Delay should never be taken to indicate that Jesus is not coming back after all (3:4; cf. Ezek 12:27-28; Hab 2:3). Although many modern scholars think that 2 Peter addresses a second-century disillusionment with the earliest Christian *apocalyptic hope, questions over the delay of Christ's coming arguably surfaced as early as Pentecost, and the book of Revelation, at the end of the first century, still cherished apocalyptic fervor. The Dead Sea Scrolls also attest unexpected, continued deferment of hope for the day of God among the *Essenes, producing similar exhortations to endurance.

3:8. Peter appeals to Psalm 90:4 to make his point, as did many other Jewish writers of his day (who often took "the day as a thousand years" literally and applied it to the days of creation). Some apocalyptic writers lamented that God did not reckon time as mortals do and consequently urged perseverance.

3:9. The Old Testament emphasized that God delayed judgment to allow opportunity for the wicked to repent (cf. 2 Kings 14:25-27; Ezek 18:23, 32; 33:11). His patience with regard to the world's end was further emphasized in later Jewish texts like **4 Ezra* (7:74; cf. 4:33-37); in Jewish texts, one could no longer repent once the day of judgment had come. Some Greco-Roman writers also praised the mercy of God or that of the gods in delaying divine vengeance.

3:10. The day of the Lord is a familiar Old Testament image for the ultimate day of God's judgment, his final day in court when he settles the injustices of the world (e.g., Is 2:12; Joel 1:15; Amos 5:18-20). That day's "coming as a thief" refers to a saying of Jesus (extant in Mt 24:43). Different ancient thinkers had different lists of elements (the Stoics, who believed the world would be resolved into fire, had four, like most writers: earth, water, air and fire), but Peter's point is that everything will be destroyed. The destruction or purifying renewal of heaven and earth was also common in apocalyptic tradition.

3:11. As usually in the *New Testament, Peter's discussion of the future is practical and suggests how to live in the present. This focus corresponds with the motives of some apocalyptic writers but contrasts with what appear to be those of many others: impatient curiosity about the future. Those who suffered in the present order especially embraced apocalyptic hope, which gave them strength to persevere in the midst of seemingly insurmountable tests in this age.

3:12. Rabbis disagreed among themselves as to whether the end of the age was at a time fixed by God or whether it could be hastened by Israel's *repentance and obedience. In this context, Christians may hasten the coming of the end by missions and evangelism (cf. Mt 24:14), thereby enabling the conversion of those for whose sake God has delayed the end (2 Pet 3:9, 15).

3:13. This hope is from Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, and was frequently reiterated in later Jewish literature. The Old Testament and Judaism agreed that righteousness would characterize the world to come (e.g., Is 9:7; 32:16-17; 62:1-2; Jer 32:40).

3:14-18
Preparing for the Final Judgment

3:14. Here Peter urges his hearers not to be like the false teachers (2:13). See comment on 3:11.

3:15-16. God's patience allows salvation for those on whose behalf he delays; cf. 1 Peter 3:20 on Genesis 6:3, returning to the judgment image of the flood (2 Pet 3:5-7). Calling a writer's work "hard to understand" in antiquity was not an insult (as it often is today); it could mean that it was complex and brilliant. Jewish teachers said that the message of the Scriptures could be "distorted" by misinterpreting them. Second-century *Gnostics and, in the first century, many Jewish and probably Christian groups were distorting the Scriptures, some even to play down a future judgment (perhaps by allegorizing it).

By the late first century, another early Christian writer (*1 Clement*) asserted the inspiration of Paul's letters; although Paul's early writings had undoubtedly not been collected before Peter's death, Peter may have known of some of them from his travels among the *churches. Even though Josephus and other writers asserted that Judaism had a closed *canon, some Jewish groups (such as the *Qumran community and Diaspora communities that used various recensions of the *Septuagint) seem to have had a fluid idea as to where Scripture ended and other edifying literature began. Although some scholars have reasonably used this statement identifying Paul as Scripture to argue for a post-Petrine date for 2 Peter, it would not have been impossible for the real Peter to view Paul's writings as Scripture if he accepted Paul's apostolic status and hence the possibility that some of his writings were prophetically inspired. Much that was prophetically inspired, however, never became Scripture (see "canon" in the glossary). Thus if Peter wrote these words, they reflect a remarkable insight for his day.

3:17-18. Peter's hearers are to resist the false teachers by growing in Christ. Even groups that separated humanity starkly into righteous and unrighteous or wise and foolish normally recognized the importance of the righteous or wise making progress.

1 John

Introduction

Authorship. The style of 1 John is so close to that of the author of the Gospel of John that no one questioned that they were written by the same person until the twentieth century. Some writers have pointed to minor stylistic differences and have proposed that 1 John was written by a different member of the "Johannine school." Sometimes *disciples of famous teachers would seek to imitate their teachers' works (often even their style), so this proposal cannot be ruled out on a priori literary grounds.

One can account for the minor stylistic differences, however, simply by recognizing the difference between an epistle and a Gospel; the latter *genre is literarily related to ancient biography, which went through several stages in the writing process before it was complete. Conversely, this epistle probably does not represent a major literary production (although literary epistles did exist).

One can explain the purported differences in theology and outlook by the different situation each addressed; by the standards used to suggest that the same person did not write both, different sermons of the average preacher today would often have to be attributed to different authors as well! Most important, the author claims to be an eyewitness (1:1) but does not claim to write in another's name (he provides no *pseudepigraphic preface).

Genre. The form is generally more like a homily than a letter (except 2:12-14). That the epistolary prescript (opening) and conclusion are missing need not surprise us; they were sometimes removed when letters were incorporated into collections (although 2 and 3 John retain standard elements of letters). But the document as a whole flows more like a sermon, albeit one not structured by the *rhetorical conventions of the day. It thus resembles the form of letter known as a "letter-essay," although it nevertheless addresses the specific situation of the readers.

Situation. If the setting of 1 John is the same as that of the Fourth Gospel, it is meant to encourage Christians expelled from the *synagogues, some of whose colleagues have returned to the synagogue by denying Jesus' *messiahship (2:19, 22; 4:2-3). The letter can be read in this way and makes sense on these terms.

But John was concerned about situations in cities other than those addressed in his Gospel. While Christians apparently were expelled from synagogues and betrayed by the Jewish community in Smyrna (Rev 2:9-10) and Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-9), they were tempted with the heresy of compromise elsewhere, including compromise with idolatry advocated by false prophets (Rev 2:14-15, 20-23; cf. 1 Jn 4:1; 5:21). One form of idolatry of particular concern may have been the imperial cult, to which people in the East needed to show their loyalty or, in some cities, pay serious consequences (cf. Rev 13:14-15), possibly including death (1 Jn 3:16). First John could address a community like Ephesus, where the *church had expelled the false teachers but needed love for one another (Rev 2:2-4).

On the one hand, the issue in view might be simply some false prophets (1 Jn 4:1-6) advocating compromises, perhaps even with the imperial cult to save one's life. On the other hand, the issue might be one of the movements of false teaching that was developing toward full-blown second-century *Gnosticism. Docetists believed that *Christ was divine but only seemed to become human (cf. 4:2); Cerinthians (followers of Cerinthus) believed that the Christ-Spirit merely came on Jesus, but denied that he was actually the one and only Christ (cf. 2:22). Gnostics also tended to define sin in various ways, hence some Gnostics believed that they were incapable of committing real sins, although their bodies could engage in behavior non-Gnostic Christians considered sinful. Any of the above backgrounds fits the letter itself; thus the commentary mentions all of them at relevant points below. But one point is beyond dispute: the primary troublemakers are clearly "secessionists," people who had been part of the Christian community John addresses but who had withdrawn from that community. John advocates testing the spirits by two main tests: a moral-ethical test (keeping the commandments, especially love of the Christian community) and a faith test (the right view of Jesus).

Commentaries. Among those useful for background are I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John,* WBC 51 (Waco, TX: Word, 1984); D. Moody Smith, *First, Second and Third John,* Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminter John Knox, 1991); and Robert W. Yarbrough, *1–3 John,* BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). The most detailed commentary is Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John,* AB 30 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), although its reconstruction of the situation overreaches the evidence. A sample of my primary source material appears in Craig Keener, "Transformation Through Divine Vision in 1 John 3:2-6," *Faith & Mission* 23, no. 1 (2005): 13-22.

1:1-4
The Basis for True Fellowship

The basis for fellowship as Christians (1:3) is precisely what divided John's readers from those who had withdrawn from the community. If (as many scholars think) 1:1 alludes back to the opening of the Fourth Gospel, John speaks of God's Word that had always been (see comment on Jn 1:1-18). Although philosophers and Jewish teachers alike spoke of the divine Word, none of them spoke of the Word's becoming human. By saying that Jesus' witnesses had touched and felt him, John indicates that Jesus had been fully human; he was not simply a divine apparition like the current "manifestations" of the gods in which the Greeks believed (though merely "testifying" what one saw "with one's eyes" could be used more broadly, e.g., 2 Maccabees 3:36).

1:5-10
The Reality of Sin

It is possible that the secessionists believe, like some later *Gnostics, that they have achieved a state of sinlessness. Given the emphasis on God's holiness in this passage and later statements about the secessionists, however (3:6, 9), it is perhaps more likely that they believe, like some later Gnostics, that they are sinless in a different sense—they do not regard the sins they commit as sinful. (On the sins they are especially committing, see comment on 3:6, 9.)

1:5. Other Jewish texts (especially the *Dead Sea Scrolls, e.g., 1QM 1.1, 11) also used the light-darkness image to contrast the followers of righteousness with those of sin, regarding God as wholly righteous. The *Old Testament also affirmed that God was wholly righteous (e.g., Ps 92:15).

1:6. The Old Testament often described "obeying" God's commands as "walking" in them—so often that Jewish teachers called their view of the way Jewish people should behave *halakhah,* "walking." The image of walking about in darkness connoted the danger of stumbling (2:10-11). The Old Testament condemned mixing up light and darkness, right and wrong (Is 5:20; cf. 2:5).

1:7. Although water, not blood, cleansed in a physical sense, blood also purified in an Old Testament ritual sense (see comment on Heb 9:21-22). Sacrificial blood set apart what was sacred for God, purifying from sin by making *atonement (Lev 16:30).

1:8-10. The Old Testament prophets had often condemned false protestations of innocence as self-deception (e.g., Jer 2:35; Hos 8:2; cf. Prov 30:12); God required instead both admission of the sin and *repentance (cf. Lev 5:5; 16:21; Ps 32:1-5; Prov 28:13; Jer 3:13). (Some *synagogue prayers for forgiveness were also preceded by confessions of sin, indicating that Jewish people in the first few centuries A.D. generally recognized the idea; cf. also **Psalms of Solomon* 9:6, etc.) On cleansing, see 1 John 1:7. On the sins of the secessionists, see comment on 3:6 and 9.

2:1-11
The Moral Test

Jesus' followers were new people, and while they might not be living absolutely sinless lives yet (1:8-10), the newness of their life in *Christ would affect their lifestyles; because sin was real (1:5-10), moral behavior was a valid way of testing real commitment to Christ. This moral examination especially emphasizes the test of love (2:5, 9-11). For paradox, cf. 2:7-8. Judaism also stressed that true participants in God's covenant obeyed his commandments.

2:1. Philosophers and Jewish teachers sometimes addressed their *disciples as "children." "Advocate" often meant "intercessor" or sometimes "defending attorney." In the *Old Testament, God could plead his people's case before the nations (Jer 50:34; 51:36); in ancient Judaism, such advocates as God's mercy or Israel's merit pleaded Israel's case before God. Jesus is naturally the advocate, as elsewhere in the *New Testament (cf. Rom 8:34), because of his position, his righteousness and his work (see 1 John 2:2).

2:2. A "propitiation" (KJV, NASB) was an *atonement, a way to appease or satisfy the wrath of a God whose standard had been violated; it alludes to the sacrifices offered for atonement in the Old Testament. In Judaism, the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement was for Israel alone; but Jesus' sacrifice was offered not only for Christians but even for those who chose to remain God's enemies, leaving them without excuse.

2:3-4. In the Old Testament, Israel "knew"

God—were in covenant relationship with him—when they obeyed his commandments (e.g., Jer 22:16; 31:33-34).

2:5. One was to demonstrate love for God by obeying his commandments (Deut 6:5-6); this idea was understood throughout ancient Judaism.

2:6. Moralists commonly appealed to imitation of God or of a famous teacher in ancient moral exhortation. John here alludes to Jesus' example of sacrificial love to the point of death (Jn 13:34-35).

2:7-8. In antiquity, paradox was one graphic way of forcing an audience to think through the meaning of one's words; John uses it here ("old, not new," "but new"). The love commandment was old, always part of God's word (Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18, cited by Jesus—Mk 12:30-31), but also new, based on a new and ultimate example (Jn 13:34). Jewish sources that used the light-darkness imagery for good and evil portrayed the present age as ruled mainly by darkness but the *age to come in terms of the triumph of the children of light (e.g., 1QM 14.17 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls).

2:9-11. Part of John's application may be that the secessionists who have withdrawn from the Christian community that John addresses have broken fellowship with true Christians, thus showing that they "hate" rather than "love" them. The Old Testament and Judaism forbade "hatred of brothers and sisters" (Lev 19:17); in a Jewish context, this language referred to fellow Jews (though cf. also 19:34); in a Christian context, it refers to fellow Christians.

2:12-14
Exhortations to Different Groups

"I am writing" is probably not intended to convey a sense different from "I wrote"; it was common to vary style to make one's writing more interesting. One could write "I have written" in a letter one was presently writing; grammarians call this convention an "epistolary aorist."

Some argue that "fathers," "young men" and "children" (John does not exclude women from consideration here but employs the language categories of his day, which used masculine forms for mixed groups) could refer to different stages of progress in the Christian faith; see comment on 2:1. More likely is that John offers age-appropriate instruction; in antiquity, some writers addressed different kinds of moral instruction to different age groups to which particular points were most relevant (e.g., Isocrates, *Ad demonicum* 44; the Greek philosopher Epicurus in Diogenes Laertius 10.122; cf. Prov 20:29; 2 Tim 2:22).

Fathers (a title often accorded older persons) held positions of honor and authority, and were respected for their wisdom (e.g., Diodorus Siculus 1.1.4; Tosefta *Avodah Zarah* 1:19). Children were in positions of learning and lacked status and authority. Young men were generally associated with strength and vigor (cf. Jn 20:4; 21:7-8; Job 33:25; Prov 20:29); here they had overcome the evil one by participating in Christ's victory (1 Jn 4:4; 5:4) over sin (3:10-12). Although some ancient writers often considered young men more vulnerable to particular temptations (passions such as anger and especially sexual immorality), John expresses his confidence in them.

2:15-17
Do Not Love the World

2:15. "The world" could refer to everything but God; here it means the world system in competition with God. Just as Israel in the *Old Testament repeatedly had to decide between allegiance to God and allegiance to the values of the pagan nations around them, the Christians scattered among the nations had to choose *Christ above whatever in their cultures conflicted with his demands. In the case of John's hearers, refusal to compromise might be a costly proposition (3:16).

2:16. The Old Testament often related the eyes to desire, especially sexual desire, and pride. Both Judaism and philosophers (e.g., *Aristotle, *Epictetus) condemned arrogant boastfulness. By listing the three vices together, it is not impossible that John alludes, as some commentators have suggested, to Genesis 3:6, although the language here is more general.

2:17. Judaism spoke of the world passing away but of God's word remaining forever (cf. also Is 40:6-8). John's words here could encourage those who preferred death for the sake of Christ over the survival that the world offered (cf. 1 Jn 3:16).

2:18-27
Discerning the Spirits: The Theological Test

John needs to assure his readers that they, not the secessionists, are true followers of God. To the ethical test (2:1-11) John now adds a theological test: they must hold the proper view of Christ. John carries on the thought of the end time (v. 18) from 2:17.

2:18. It was a common Jewish belief that evil would multiply in the end time; the duration of this period immediately preceding the end of the age was often left indeterminate (as here), although some Jewish writers assigned a specific duration to it (e.g., forty years, four hundred years). Some Jewish people also appear to have envisioned a particularly evil figure as a *high priest or ruler oppressing God's people, an idea that became much more prevalent in Christian circles (e.g., 2 Thess 2:3-4). John argues that by definition there are many "antichrists" already. (John is the only *New Testament writer to use this term. "Anti-" could mean "instead of," though John might call a substitute *Christ a "false Christ," like "false prophets" in 4:1. Cf. Paul's argument that the "mystery of lawlessness is already at work"—2 Thess 2:7.)

2:19. The Old Testament was clear that the righteous could become wicked (e.g., Ezek 18:24-26) but also that one's deeds could reveal the sincerity or falsehood of one's heart (e.g., 2 Chron 12:14). Both Greek and Jewish teachers condemned *disciples who proved unfaithful or unable to endure the tests of discipleship, frequently assuming that their initial commitment had been inadequate. Judaism recognized that many converts were false, although they regarded even more severely Jewish apostates who had once embraced but now rejected the *law.

Some New Testament texts (e.g., Jn 6:70-71; 1 Jn 2:19) may view the issue from the standpoint of God's foreknowledge, and other texts from the standpoint of the believer's experience (e.g., Gal 5:4; 1 Tim 4:1-2). But unlike many modern interpreters, ancient Jewish interpreters would not see a contradiction between these two perspectives.

2:20-21. In the Old Testament people were literally anointed with oil to perform a specific task, especially for the priesthood (e.g., Ex 29:29; 40:15) or kingship (e.g., 1 Sam 10:1; 2 Kings 9:6); the term translated "anointed" is used figuratively for those ordained by God to particular tasks. Christians had been appointed to discernment (see 1 Jn 2:27).

2:22-23. By themselves, these verses would counter equally well a non-Christian Jewish opposition and a Cerinthian opposition to Christian faith. Compromising the absolute uniqueness of Jesus as the Christ and the only way to the Father would probably permit Jewish believers to remain in the *synagogues, thus protecting them from direct challenges from the imperial cult and threat of persecution. That false prophets would advocate such compromise (cf. 4:1-6) is by no means difficult to conceive (see the introduction to Revelation). Cerinthus, who may have taught around A.D. 100, believed that the Christ-Spirit came on Jesus but was not identical to him; the late-second-century Christian writer Irenaeus also attributed this view to many later *Gnostics.

2:24-27. Many commentators hold that the "anointing" (v. 27) is the *Spirit (cf. Jn 14:17, 26; Acts 10:38); others suggest that it refers in context to the word, the message of the *gospel; in either case it alludes to the Old Testament practice of God setting particular people apart for his calling, which here applies to all believers. The Old Testament used anointing oil symbolically to consecrate or separate people (such as kings) or objects (such as the tabernacle) for sacred use. The ultimate consecration for such use arose when the Spirit came on people (Is 61:1; cf. 1 Sam 10:1, 9; 16:13).

2:28–3:3
Readiness for His Coming

As the readers have been abiding in Jesus (v. 27), so they are to continue to do (v. 28); on abiding (dwelling, remaining), see comment on John 15:1-8.

2:28. In Jewish tradition, the coming of God to judge the world would be a fearful day for those who were disobedient to his will (cf. Amos 5:18-20).

2:29. It was an ancient commonplace that children inherited the natures of their fathers. (So thoroughly was this belief held that many writers even warned that adulterers would give

themselves away, because their image would be stamped on the children of the union.)

3:1. No one who agreed with John that Christians were God's children would have disputed his point here. A younger but roughly contemporary Jewish teacher, Rabbi *Akiba, celebrated, "Beloved is humanity, since they were created in God's image; greater still is the love, that God made it known to humanity that they were created in the image" (Mishnah *Avot* 3:15). Rabbi Meir, later in the second century, proclaimed, "Beloved is Israel, for . . . they are God's children."

3:2-3. In some Greek thought, one's nature was transformed toward that of the divine by contemplating the divine; philosophers like *Plato believed that they accomplished this transformation through the vision of the mind rather than through knowledge derived through the senses. Philo agreed that one attained the vision of God mystically, because he affirmed that God was transcendent; he believed that God endowed Israel and especially the prophets with this vision, that this vision was preceded by virtue and purity of soul, and that the vision would be made complete when one was perfected. The idea also occurs in some Palestinian Jewish texts, especially in Jewish mysticism (cf. transformation through vision of the divine in **1 Enoch* 71:10-11). Perhaps more to the point, this vision of God was often associated with the end time, and some Jewish *apocalyptic thought seems to have envisioned transformation through beholding God's glory.

John may derive most of the image of transformation by beholding glory from the *Old Testament (Ex 34:29-35; see comment on Jn 1:14-18). For him, one who knows God's character purifies himself or herself accordingly, and the final and ultimate purifying will take place when one knows God perfectly at the end.

3:4-24
Which Side Are You On?

In traditional Jewish fashion, John contrasts sin and righteousness, along with those aligned with either side (3:4-9). He then explains why the unrighteous oppose the righteous, appealing to a stock Jewish illustration for this principle: the righteous love one another, but the wicked, like Cain, hate the righteous (3:10-18). This was the test that would make clear who would ultimately triumph in the day of judgment (3:19-24).

3:4. Greeks could view sin as imperfection; the Old Testament and Judaism saw it more concretely as transgression of God's *law.

3:5. Here John may use sacrificial language; cf. John 1:29. The point is that those who are in Jesus have their sins taken away, so they no longer live in them.

3:6-7. This verse again alludes to the transformative power of beholding God (cf. 3:2-3). Some commentators think that the claim to sinlessness here is ideal, "to the extent that" one abides in Christ. (In this way *Plato argued that to the extent one was a craftsman, one's craftsmanship would be perfect; but where one's craftsmanship failed, it was because one was not acting as a true craftsman at that point.) Others think it is potential: one is capable of living sinlessly (cf. Jn 8:31-36). But verse 9 is worded too strongly for either of these options.

More likely, John is turning the claims of the false teachers and their followers (1:8-10) against them: unlike those errorists who merely claim to be sinless, true believers do not live in sin. (Many commentators suggest that the present continuous tense of "sin" suggests "living in" sin, sinning as a natural way of life. This is different from one who lives righteously but sometimes succumbs to temptation or deception and genuinely repents.)

*Stoics, *Essenes and Jewish wisdom literature divided humanity into ideal types: righteous and unrighteous, or wise and foolish. All of these sources, however, recognize the imperfection of the righteous or wise; they might not fit the ideal type in all respects, but their allegiance is clearly decided.

The particular sins that dominate John's portrayal of these secessionists are violations of the two basic precepts John stresses in this letter: the right attitude toward members of the Christian community and the right view about Jesus (3:24). Thus John may mean that they commit the sin that leads to death, i.e., leading out of *eternal life (cf. 5:16-17).

3:8. In the *Dead Sea Scrolls, all sins were influenced by the spirit of error. Given the traditional Jewish view that the devil had intro-

duced sin into the world (cf. John 8:44), all sins were ultimately the devil's works and reflected his character.

3:9-10. On the claim to sinlessness, see comment on 3:6-7. Some scholars have suggested that John borrows the image of "seed" here from his opponents, since the idea is later attested among the *Gnostics; but the image was already widespread in Christian tradition (Jas 1:18, 21; 1 Pet 1:23; see comment on 1 Pet 1:23). Some thought of divine seed in humans (e.g., Ovid, *Fasti* 6.5-6; *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 73.16; *Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.9.4-6), an idea Christians could adapt for those born from the *Spirit. A child was believed to inherit his or her father's nature through the seed, hence John is able to use this image to make his point: those who are born from God through conversion reflect his character now in them, and those who are not reveal this by their nature as well. In the Old Testament one could overcome sin by the word written or dwelling in one's heart (e.g., Deut 30:14; Ps 119:11; Jer 31:32-33).

3:11-13. Cain's murder of Abel is often rehearsed with little adornment in Jewish tradition; at other times, Jewish tradition expounds on Cain's wickedness in great detail. He became a stereotypical prototype for wickedness (e.g., **Jubilees* and **1 Enoch*; *Pharisees sometimes associated Cain with the *Sadducees and their denial of the life to come); one pre-Christian Jewish text calls him "the unrighteous one" (Wisdom of Solomon 10:3). Philo used Cain repeatedly as a symbol of self-love and made him an illustration that "the worse attacks the better," as here (cf. Gal 4:29). Some later antinomian Gnostics took Cain as a hero.

Murder of a brother was considered one of the most hideous crimes possible in antiquity (so, e.g., *Cicero, Horace); John applies "brother" or "sibling" to any member of the Christian community. A murderer was a child of the devil (3:10), for one of the devil's first works had been to bring death to Adam (see comment on Jn 8:44); some later rabbinic texts claim that Cain's father was a bad angel, even the devil himself. Sibling rivalry (Gen 37:8; 1 Sam 17:28) was normally outgrown, but Cain's act did not allow that to happen.

3:14-15. Murder was a capital offense under Old Testament law and thus merited *Gehenna in post-Old Testament Jewish thought. Jesus included as murder the attitude that generated the literal act (cf. Mt 5:21-22).

3:16. John's hearers might anticipate persecution and the possibility of death, although few had actually been martyred so far (Rev 2:13). Refusal to participate in the worship of the emperor would brand them as subversives, and their enemies would be more than happy to betray them to the government as such. Since noncitizen prisoners were sometimes tortured for information, especially if they were slaves, Christians might have to pay a tremendous price to avoid betraying their fellow Christians to death.

3:17. In addition to being ready to sacrifice one's life for fellow believers (3:16), John also demands of them a practical commitment to love in the present. Their opponents, who had withdrawn from the community, perhaps to avoid persecution, are responsible for others' deaths as Cain was; but the true Christians are to live sacrificially on behalf of others daily. As in some Jewish thought, withholding goods from someone in need was equivalent to starving him or her (cf. Jas 2:15).

3:18. Ancient literature often coupled "word" and "deed" (e.g., in Isocrates, Demosthenes, *Quintilian, Seneca, *Lucian, Wisdom of Solomon); one who did both was praised, but one who only spoke and did not act accordingly was viewed as a hypocrite.

3:19. The Dead Sea Scrolls sometimes called the righteous "children of truth" or "the lot of God's truth" (1QS 4.5; 1QM 13.12; 1QHa 17.35; 18.29; 19.14).

3:20-21. Judaism repeatedly stressed that God knew the hearts of all people (cf. Jer 29:23); some texts even call him "searcher of hearts." As one Jewish wisdom writer expressed it, "Happy is the one whose soul does not accuse him" (Sirach 14:2).

3:22-24. John's practical interest in this subject may be because these commandments are precisely those that the secessionists are violating: by leaving the Christian community they have demonstrated their lack of love for their supposed brothers and sisters, and by not believing Jesus as the only true *Christ (2:22) they have failed the faith test as well. On the promise of answered prayer, see John 14:12-14.

Most Jewish people did not believe that the Spirit (1 Jn 3:24) was available to many in the present age (the *Essenes, like the Christians, were apparently rare in this regard).

4:1-6
Testing the Spirits

4:1. Judaism especially associated the *Spirit of God with *prophecy but acknowledged the existence of false prophets, who John says are moved by other spirits. His readers would understand his point; Jewish people were familiar with the idea of other spirits besides the Spirit of God (see especially comment on 4:6). There were many pagan ecstatics in Asia Minor, as well as Jewish mystics claiming special revelations; the need for discernment would be acute.

4:2-3. The issue may be the secessionists' denial that Jesus has come as the Christ (if the opposition is Jewish); or it might be a Docetic denial that Jesus was actually human and actually died (see introduction), a heresy an eyewitness would be well positioned to refute. It may simply be a relativizing of Jesus' role to the position of a prophet like John the Baptist, which allows enough compromise to avoid persecution. Perhaps they deny the Jesus who is known from the eyewitness material in the Fourth Gospel. Whatever the error, the secessionists are claiming the authority of inspiration for it, as do some similar groups today. John does not deny the reality of the inspiration; he merely denies that the spirit working in them is God's Spirit.

4:4-6. The *Dead Sea Scrolls similarly distinguish between God's children and the rest of the world, though they go far beyond John in asserting that every act is determined by either the spirit of truth or the spirit of error. (The language of "two spirits" probably extended beyond the Dead Sea Scrolls, although the best attestation outside the Scrolls is in the *_Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs_. These testaments contain a number of references to spirits of falsehood, but the closest to 1 John 4:6 is _Testament of Judah_ 20, which, with the _Testament of Levi_, is one of the testaments most often suspected of harboring Christian interpolations. Thus the issue is not settled, although the _Testament of Judah_ reference is _probably_ not Christian, reflecting an idea similar to the general Jewish doctrine of the two impulses, which the *rabbis especially developed and expounded; on this doctrine, see comment on Rom 7:15-22.) The promise that the one with them was greater than the one with the world (1 Jn 4:4) recalls an *Old Testament principle (2 Kings 6:16; 2 Chron 32:7-8).

4:7-21
The Test of Love

4:7-10. Again (3:9-10) John argues that one's nature shows one's spiritual lineage; those who are like God are his children, and God's supreme characteristic is his love, revealed in the cross of Christ. The secessionists proved their lack of love by withdrawing from Christian fellowship. On propitiation, see comment on 2:2.

4:11-12. Even true Christians' love had to be perfected, but unlike the secessionists, they had remained within the Christian community, thus maintaining a commitment to love one another. The false teachers may have been claiming to have had mystical visions of God (see comment on 3:2-3; 4:1), but John includes a corrective: God was unseen (Ex 33:20), and the sense in which believers could envision him is in his character of love fleshed out in the cross (4:9) and in Christians' sacrificial love (4:12).

4:13-16. Although the *Qumran community as a group claimed to possess the *Spirit, most of ancient Judaism relegated the Spirit's most dramatic works to the distant past and future, or to very rare individuals. John could speak of the first witnesses, but for him also who prophetically endows them to testify the truth about *Christ (see comment on 4:1).

4:17. In the *Old Testament (e.g., Amos 5:18-20) and Judaism, "the day of judgment" was something to be feared by the disobedient (2:28). But those who continued in love could be confident of acquittal before God's tribunal in that day, for they are agents of his unselfish love.

4:18. It was understood that sin often leads to fear (e.g., Gen 3:8; *_Letter to Aristeas_ 243). Although *Stoic philosophers emphasized not fearing anything, because circumstances cannot ultimately destroy one's reason, in this context John's assurance that true believers need not fear is not explicitly directed toward

all circumstances. His assurance applies specifically to punishment in the day of judgment (4:17).

4:19. The Old Testament also recognized that God's people learned how to treat others from God's gracious treatment of them (Ex 13:8; 22:21; Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19), although the ultimate expression of the principle is the example of Christ (1 Jn 4:10; cf. Jn 13:34).

4:20-21. Principles like arguing on the basis of what was near at hand rather than from something related to the gods (e.g., *Plutarch) and that a new friend would treat you as he had treated others (e.g., the fourth-century B.C. *rhetorician Isocrates) were also recognized by others in antiquity. In the Old Testament, God accounted behavior toward those who could not repay it as if it were done to him (Prov 19:17; cf. Deut 15:9).

5:1-13
Triumph and Life Through Faith in Jesus

5:1. Families were often viewed as a unit, hence one could not love one member of a family while despising other members. (This principle of group allegiance extended even to friendship networks.) This verse may also reflect the idea that children bear their parents' nature.

5:2. On love being demonstrated actively, compare 3:18.

5:3. God's commandments had never been too heavy for those in whose hearts they had been written (Deut 30:11-14). Many Jewish teachers regarded some parts of the *law as "heavier" or "weightier" than others (as in Mt 23:23), but they meant that some were more crucial for daily life, not that any of them were too hard to keep.

5:4-5. The image of achieving "victory" was used in military, athletic, debate and courtroom situations but always involved a conflict or test. John calls his readers to "overcome" or "triumph" in the face of opposition, persecution and possible martyrdom (perhaps including suffering for refusal to compromise with the imperial cult).

5:6-13. Many scholars have suggested that the secessionists, like Cerinthus and some later *Gnostics, said that the Christ-Spirit came on Jesus at his *baptism but departed before his death; or that, like the Docetists and some later Gnostics, the secessionists believed that Jesus was actually baptized but could not actually die, being eternal. It is also possible that some Docetists saw in the "water and blood" of John 19:34 the picture of a demigod: Olympian deities in Greek mythology had ichor, a watery substance, instead of blood. Thus they may have stressed his divinity at the expense of his humanity. The reference could also be more general than any of these suggestions.

In any case, ancient sale documents sometimes included the signatures of several witnesses attesting a sale, and the *Old Testament and later Jewish courts always required a minimum of two dependable witnesses (Deut 17:6; 19:15). John cites three witnesses whose reliability could not be in dispute. (The trinitarian formula found in the KJV of 1 Jn 5:7 is orthodox but not part of the text. It appears in only four manuscripts—of the twelfth, fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [the last in a marginal note]—out of the thousands available, placed there by *scribes who knew it from the Latin Vulgate, which took it from an early marginal note based on a popular early interpretation of the text. The KJV includes it only because that translation was based on a recension dependent on the third edition of Erasmus's Greek text; Erasmus included the verse to fulfill a wager, protested it in a note and withdrew it in subsequent editions of the text.)

5:14-21
Avoiding Sin

5:14-15. For background applying to the general principle in these verses, see comment on John 14:12-14. But the specific issue emphasized here might be prayer for an erring brother or sister, undoubtedly including one attracted to the false prophets' ideas (4:1-6); see 5:16-17 (cf. Mt 18:15-20).

5:16-17. Given the use of "life" for *eternal life and "death" for its opposite in this epistle, a "sin unto death" (KJV) would seem to be a sin leading one away from eternal life (cf. Gen 2:17; 3:24). The two sins John would likely have most prominently in mind would be hating the brothers and sisters (the secessionists' rejection of the Christian community) and

failing to believe in Jesus rightly (their false doctrine about his identity as the divine Lord and *Christ in the flesh); see comment on 3:23.

The *Old Testament and Judaism distinguished between willful rebellion against God, which could not be forgiven by normal means, and a lighter transgression. More relevant here, some ancient Jewish texts (e.g., *Dead Sea Scrolls CD 9.6, 17; **Jubilees* 21:22; 26:34; 33:18; cf. the Hebrew of Deut 22:26) also spoke of a capital offense as "a matter of death," which was normally enforced by excommunication from the community rather than literal execution. Those who were sinned against could secure forgiveness for their opponents by prayer (Gen 20:7, 17; Job 42:8), but a sin of willful apostasy from God's truth nullified the efficacy of secondhand prayers for forgiveness (1 Sam 2:25; Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). John is presumably saying: God will forgive erring believers at your request, but those who have gone completely after this severely false teaching are outside the sphere of your prayers or (on another interpretation) simply must directly repent to receive forgiveness.

5:18. *Satan could not touch Job without God's permission (Job 1:11-12; 2:3-6). Judaism recognized that Satan needed God's permission to test God's people, and that God rejected Satan's accusations against God's own people.

5:19-20. Judaism acknowledged that all the nations except themselves were under the dominion of Satan and his angels. The source of this idea is not hard to fathom; nearly all *Gentiles worshiped idols, and most also practiced sexual immorality and other sins.

5:21. "Idols" could refer to anything that led astray from proper worship of the true Lord (thus "idols of one's heart" might mean falsehoods or sins in 1QS 2.11 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls; cf. antichrist in 1 Jn 4:3). A literal meaning (physical images of false gods) makes good sense to a congregation in Asia Minor. It could include worshiping the image of the emperor, to which many Christians were eventually required to offer incense to show their loyalty to the state (Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96). It could also refer to compromise with idolatry in a broader sense—Asia Minor afforded plenty of temptation for former pagans, such as food offered to idols. Ancient Jewish texts often condemned idolatry as the worst sin—surely a capital offense or a "sin unto death" (5:16-17); if the false prophets in 4:1-6 are like other false prophets affecting Asian *churches in this period (Rev 2:20), the idolatry may well be literal; see comment on Revelation 2:14; 9:20; 13:12 and 15.

2 John

Introduction

Authorship, Date. See the introduction to 1 John and to the Gospel of John; there is little stylistic difference between 1 and 2 John. Although John himself might send a shorter personal letter resembling a longer one he had previously written, it is unlikely that a forger would try to produce such a short document that added so little to the case found in 1 John. Further, a later forgery of 2 John (or 3 John) would have drained it of its authority for the audience, since the contents of 2 and 3 John indicate that the hearers knew the writer personally.

Nature of the Letter. Second John may function as an official letter, the sort that *high priests could send to Jewish leaders outside Palestine. The length is the same as that of 3 John; both were probably limited to this length by the single sheet of papyrus on which they were written. In contrast to most *New Testament letters, most other ancient letters were of this length.

Situation. Second John addresses the problem of the same secessionists that 1 John addressed. The secessionists' inadequate view of *Christ was probably either a compromise with *synagogue pressure (see the introduction to Gospel of John) or a relativization of Jesus to allow more compromise with paganism (see the introduction to Revelation)—probably the latter. For the secessionists, Jesus was a great prophet like John the Baptist and their own leaders, but he was not the supreme Lord in the flesh (cf. 1 Jn 4:1-6; Rev 2:14, 20). Some propose that they may have been affiliated with or forerunners of Cerinthus (who distinguished the divine Christ and the human Jesus, like some modern theologians) or the Docetists (who claimed that Jesus only seemed to be human). All these compromises helped the false teaching's followers better adapt to their culture's values what remained of Christianity after their adjustments, but led them away from the truth proclaimed by the eyewitnesses who had known Jesus firsthand.

Commentaries. See the introduction to 1 John.

1-3. "Elders" were given authority in local Jewish communities by virtue of their age, prominence and respectability; age was respected. John assumes this simple title (cf. 1 Pet 5:1) rather than emphasizing his apostleship here. The "chosen lady" (NASB, NIV) or spiritual mother could refer to a prophetess/elder (cf. 3 Jn 4; contrast Rev 2:23). But it more likely refers to a local congregation here (see v. 13); both Israel and the *church were portrayed as women.

4-6. The commandment John mentions here was an old one because it was in the *law (Lev 19:18), although Jesus' example gave it new import (Jn 13:34-35). In the context of 1–2 John, "loving one another" includes cleaving to the Christian community (rather than leaving it, as the secessionists were doing).

7-9. See discussion in the introduction.

10. Guests were to be accorded hospitality and travelers to be put up in hosts' homes (cf. 3 Jn 5-6; it is possible, though not certain, that the houses in question here may also be house churches); early Christian missionaries had depended on this hospitality from the beginning (Mt 10:9-14). Traveling philosophers called sophists charged fees for their teaching, as some of Paul's opponents in Corinth probably did.

But just as Jewish people would not receive *Samaritans or those they considered impious, so Christians were to exercise selectivity concerning whom they would admit. Early Christian writings (particularly a text of mainly authoritative traditions known as the *Didache*) show that some prophets and *apostles traveled around, and that not all of them were true prophets and apostles. Greetings were an essential part of social protocol at that time, and the greeting ("Peace be with you") was intended as a blessing or prayer to impart peace.

11. In the *Dead Sea Scrolls, one who provided for an apostate from the community was regarded as an apostate sympathizer and was expelled from the community, as the apostate was. Housing or blessing a false teacher was thus seen as collaborating with him.

12. "Paper" is papyrus, made from reeds and rolled up like a scroll. The pen was a reed pointed at the end, and the ink was a compound of charcoal, vegetable gum and water. Written letters were considered an inferior substitute for personal presence or for a speech, and writers sometimes concluded their letters with the promise to discuss matters further face-to-face.

13. It was common to send greetings from those near the sender. For the "sister," see comment on the "chosen lady" of verse 1.

3 John

Introduction

This is a "letter of recommendation" for Demetrius, a traveling missionary (vv. 7-8) who needs to be put up by a local *church while he is evangelizing in their area (cf. comment on Mt 10:11-13, 40-42). For authorship and date, see the introduction to 2 John. For the first three centuries of the church's existence, congregations usually met in homes; for further details on this practice, see Romans 16:5. In this letter to Gaius, a house-church leader, John is apparently attempting to counter the opposing influences of Diotrephes, a different house-church leader who is asserting his own authority and rejecting emissaries backed by John's apostolic authority.

Commentaries. See the introduction to 1 John.

1-2. This is a standard greeting in many ancient letters, which quite often began with a prayer for the reader's health, frequently including the prayer that all would go well with the person (not just material prosperity, as some translations could be read as implying). This greeting might be similar to saying "I hope you are well" today, but it represents an actual prayer that all is well with Gaius (see comment on 1 Thess 3:11). "Gaius" was a common name.

3-4. Rabbis and philosophers sometimes spoke of their *disciples as their "children"; here John probably intends those he brought to *Christ (cf. Gal 4:19 and perhaps the later Jewish tradition that when someone made a convert to Judaism, it was as if the converter had *created* the convert).

5-6. Hospitality was a critical issue in the Greco-Roman world, and Jewish people were especially concerned to take care of their own. Most inns also served as brothels, making a stay there unappealing, but Jewish people could expect to find hospitality from their fellow Jews; to prevent abuse of this system, they normally carried letters of recommendation from someone the hosts might know to substantiate their claim to be good Jews. Christians had likely adopted the same practice.

7-8. Philosophers and sophists (traveling professional speakers, which is how many observers in the Greco-Roman world interpreted traveling Christian preachers) often made their livings from the crowds to whom they spoke, although others took fees or were supported by wealthy *patrons. Like Jewish people, Christians showed hospitality to travelers of their own faith, and these traveling preachers were dependent on this charity. Jewish people spoke of the sacred "Name" of God; John is apparently applying this title to Jesus.

9-11. Diotrephes is apparently leader of another house church; he refuses to show hospitality to the missionaries who have letters of recommendation from the elder. Scholars have speculated whether the issue was doctrinal disagreement, disagreement over church leadership structure or that Diotrephes was simply outright disagreeable; at any rate, he refuses to accept the authority of John that stands behind the missionaries he backs. To reject a person's representatives or those recommended by a person was to disrespect the person who had written on their behalf.

12. This is the recommendation for Demetrius, who has not only John's attestation but that of the rest of his home church(es). (For letters of recommendation, see comment on 2 Cor 3:1.) No one in Diotrephes's house church will receive him, so Gaius's house church must help him.

13-15. Sometimes ancient letters closed as John does here. Most letter writers employed *scribes, and if John is writing by hand, he may well wish to close quickly. See comment on 2 John 12. If "friends" is here a title for a group, it probably refers to fellow Christians in the place from which the elder is writing; these Christians may have borrowed the idea from the *Epicureans, whose philosophical communities consisted especially of "friends."

Jude

Introduction

Authorship. Although a pseudepigrapher would want to clarify which Jude he was (i.e., Jesus' brother) or to write in the name of someone more prominent, this author does not specify which Jude he is, making it probable that the letter was genuinely written by Jude. At the same time, his lack of clarification as to which Jude he is and the fact that he seems to be already known to his audience (vv. 3, 5) suggest that he is the most prominent Jude, brother of the most prominent James—the younger brother of Jesus (Mk 6:3). Early *church tradition varied on which Jude wrote the letter, but this is the only Jude specifically known to us whose brother was called James. His Greek is sophisticated, but the thought world he shares with his readers is that of popular Judaism; for a Palestinian Jew's knowledge of Greek or the availability of scribal help, see the introduction to James.

Situation. The letter clearly opposes false teachers whose sexual lifestyles are immoral and who are teaching arrogantly. The thought world of Jude and his readers is popular Judaism; his opponents may be rooted in the same Jewish-Christian tradition that Jude is, but they have also sought to assimilate many values of immoral pagan culture. Given Jude's heavy use of **1 Enoch*, that book may represent a tradition cited by his opponents, who apparently appeal to their own mystical visions as divine revelations like Enoch's (v. 8).

Genre. This may be a letter-essay, a letter used as a sermon. Letters were meant as substitute speeches or surrogates for the presence of the writer.

Commentaries. Excellent commentaries include R. J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter,* WBC 50 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), and (easier for those without Greek) J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude,* BNTC (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1981).

1-2
Introduction

Jude's lack of elaboration on his office suggests that he is the well-known Jude, brother not only of James but of Jesus as well. Although a son of Joseph and Mary, he now describes his half-brother Jesus as "Lord" rather than as brother. On "slave," see comment on Romans 1:1.

3-6
Falling from Grace

3-4. At least part of the error that Jude addresses resembles that proclaimed by false prophets in the *Old Testament: judgment would not come on God's people because of his special favor for them—a teaching that led to sin (Jer 6:14; 8:11; 23:17; Ezek 13:10, 16; Mic 3:5). Biblical *grace means forgiveness and power to overcome sin, not permission to act immorally. Ancient writers often applied the language of battle or athletic contests ("contend") to spiritual or moral battles.

5. All Jewish hearers and even most recent *Gentile converts to Christianity knew the exodus story. That people had experienced God's redemption did not guarantee that they could not fall away and be destroyed.

6. In Jewish tradition (except most of the *rabbis), the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:1-4 were fallen angels who left their assigned place to have intercourse with women (see comment on 2 Pet 2:4). In the earliest of these traditions, *1 Enoch*, the fallen angels were imprisoned and bound (e.g., 10:11-14; 18:15-16; 21:3-6); Azazel was thrown into "darkness" (10:4), which was applied to the realm of the dead in much ancient tradition. First Enoch (22:11; 54:6; 84:4) uses "great day" for the day of judgment. Cf. Wisdom of Solomon 17:17 (and 17:2).

7-16
Sin and Judgment

7. Already in the Old Testament and even more so in later Jewish tradition, Sodom came to be viewed as the epitome of wickedness. "Strange flesh" (KJV, NASB) here could mean angelic bodies, but because Jewish tradition would not call angels "flesh" and the Sodomites did not realize that the guests were angels (Gen 19:5), Jude may have their attempted homosexual acts in view. ("Strange" flesh is literally "other" flesh, but this may mean "other than what is natural," rather than "other than their own kind." Then again, "in the same way" as those of v. 6 might imply angels and people having intercourse with each other. Apart from Philo, few ancient Jewish writers stressed the Sodomites' homosexual behavior; most instead stressed their lack of hospitality, arrogant sin or sexual immorality in general, which in the Jewish perspective included but was not limited to homosexual acts.)

8. "Dreaming" probably refers to the dreams of false prophets, who produce falsehood while claiming to speak truth (Jer 23:25); angelic "majesties" (literally "glories"; cf. NRSV) refers to the various ranks of angelic hosts, to which God has assigned authority over nations, nature and so on in Jewish tradition. Disrespect for earthly authorities and the spiritual powers behind them appointed by God would cause Christians to be labeled as subversive and encourage widespread persecution of them in the Roman Empire. (Some scholars have also suggested that they reviled these angels as the angels through whom God gave the *law, because of their antilaw stance, but it is not clear that they argued for their immorality primarily on the basis of their rejection of the law.)

9. Michael (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1) and Gabriel (Dan 8:16; 9:21) are the only two angels named in the Old Testament (though others were soon added, e.g., Tobit 5:4; 2 Esdras 4:36), and they naturally became the two most popular angels in contemporary Jewish lore, with Michael as Israel's guardian and generally the most prominent archangel.

Jewish traditions about Moses' death (or lack of it, despite Deut 34) varied widely, and this report seems to have been one of these versions. In the Old Testament and Jewish literature, the devil acted as an accuser; here the great archangel Michael did not challenge his accusations; he deferred the issue to God the supreme judge. God's angelic messenger also cries, "The Lord rebuke you" in defending the *high priest in Zechariah 3:2.

10. The false teachers, however, were ridiculing angelic powers, probably including *Satan. The *Dead Sea Scrolls show that some people cursed Satan (see comment on 2 Pet 2:10-11), but Jude does not approve of that. In-

stead, he seems to agree with the moral embodied in a later rabbinic story: a man named Pelimo went around making fun of the devil until one day the devil showed up and chased him into a bathhouse, whereupon he learned his lesson (Babylonian Talmud *Qiddushin* 81ab); cf. also the saying in Sirach 21:27 LXX. Christians also should not speak authoritatively on secret or esoteric matters God has not chosen to reveal (cf. Deut 29:29).

11. More than in the Old Testament, in Jewish tradition Cain (see comment on 1 Jn 3:12) and Balaam (see comment on 2 Pet 2:15) had become symbolic for leaders of wickedness. Balaam was regarded as one of the most powerful prophets, as prophet of the *Gentiles, but he used his powers for evil, enticing Israel to sin so they would be judged. Korah revolted against the leadership of Moses (Num 16) and became a standard figure for rebelling against the law in Jewish tradition.

12. The Last Supper was a full Passover meal, and the early *church had continued the tradition of celebrating a meal ("the Lord's Supper") of which bread and wine were only a part. Communion as a full meal was apparently also called a "love feast."

"Concealed rocks" (or "hidden reefs"—NASB) were deceptive and killed sailors who failed to navigate their vessels away from them; empty clouds promised rain to needy farmers but delivered nothing (Prov 25:14). The image of trees may be because harvesting would be complete by late autumn, when many trees shed their leaves before the advent of winter; or it may mean that they did not bear summer fruit and showed no signs of fruitfulness by early autumn; in any case, these trees were plainly dead (on the future second death, see comment on Rev 2:11).

13. In Greek tradition, Aphrodite, goddess of desire, was produced from sea foam at the castration of the Titan Uranos (alluding to the teachers' immorality); probably more relevant, waves appear in the Dead Sea Scrolls as an image of casting up the filth of sin. "Wandering stars" referred to the erratic orbits of planets, sometimes attributed to disobedient angels, who were to be imprisoned under God's judgment and are called "stars" in **1 Enoch*. Judgment as eternal darkness appears in *1 Enoch* and elsewhere. The wicked as raging waves appear in Isaiah 57:20 and in subsequent Jewish tradition (Dead Sea Scrolls).

14-15. Jude quotes from *1 Enoch* 1:9, citing a popular story that is still extant to make his point. This passage in *1 Enoch* represents some themes that run throughout that section of Enoch.

16. "Grumblers" may allude to Israel's murmuring in the wilderness, but especially to the wrong speech ("defiant words"—NIV) of verse 15, expounding the citation from *1 Enoch*. Ancient moralists repeatedly condemned flattery and advocated forthright speech; politicians commonly used flattery to win people over with speeches, and flattery was a necessity for subordinates of many emperors to survive. Jude had already addressed both their lusts (vv. 6-8b) and arrogant speech (vv. 8c-10).

17-25
Call to Persevere

17-19. Later *Gnostics claimed to be spiritual, thinking that others were at best "worldly" (NASB, NRSV) or "natural" (NIV); under the influence of certain kinds of Greek philosophy, some false teachers may have been already moving in this direction. More important, because the false teachers claimed to be prophetically inspired (v. 8), they no doubt laid claim to the *Spirit (cf. comment on v. 20), but Jude says that they are altogether lacking in the Spirit.

20-21. Because the *Holy Spirit was usually viewed as the Spirit of *prophecy, "praying in [or by] the Holy Spirit" probably means inspired prayer (1 Chron 25:3; Psalms), likely including (though not necessarily limited to) tongues (cf. comment on Acts 2:4; 1 Cor 14).

22-23. Some of the language here is from Zechariah 3:2 and 4, but the reference is to those being led astray and others who are already astray or false teachers themselves, who are dangerous.

24-25. Jude closes with praise, as would be common in a *synagogue service; the emphasis is that, for all the danger of falling away (vv. 3-23), God is able to keep believers secure and persevering.

Revelation

Introduction

Authorship. Many scholars attribute the Fourth Gospel and Revelation to a common circle (for circles of literary production around an author, see the introduction to 1 John). Nevertheless, scholars also comonly argue that different authors wrote them; many do not even entertain the *possibility* that both were written by the same person. The style of Revelation is quite different from that of the Fourth Gospel, so some scholars as early as several centuries after their writing denied that they could have been written by the same author. Nevertheless, their connection should not be dismissed. Most of early *church tradition attributes both documents to John the *apostle; the argument that Revelation was written by him is certainly strong (see comment on 1:1; for the Fourth Gospel's authorship, see the introduction to John).

A close examination of the works indicates that much of the vocabulary is the same, though used in different ways; theological communities and schools (see the introduction to 1 John) usually share perspectives more than vocabulary, whereas authors may adapt their style to the *genre in which and the situation for which they write. If one accepts common authorship, one can account for most of the stylistic variations on the basis of the different genres of the two works: Gospel and *apocalypse (Revelation's style borrows heavily from Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, etc.). That a single community could produce and embrace both a Gospel (even one emphasizing the present experience of future glory) and an apocalypse is not difficult to believe; the *Dead Sea Scrolls contain similarly diverse documents. That a single writer could embrace multiple genres is no less possible (compare, e.g., *Plutarch's *Lives* and his *Moralia* or *Tacitus's *Histories* and *Dialogues,* though their differences in genre and style are less pronounced than those between the Fourth Gospel and Revelation).

Date. Some scholars have dated Revelation in the late 60s, shortly after Nero's death, as several emperors in a row quickly met violent deaths (cf. 17:10). In the book of Revelation, however, the emperor's power seems to be stable, and this situation does not fit the 60s. Similarly, the imperial cult in the Roman province of Asia

(western Turkey) directly threatens some of John's circle of churches; this situation fits the period of the 90s better. The church also seems to be entrenched (and sometimes prosperous) in the major cities of Asia; thus a date in Domitian's reign in the 90s of the first century, reported in early church tradition and still preferred by most scholars, seems more likely.

Genre. Revelation mixes elements of *Old Testament *prophecy with a heavy dose of the apocalyptic genre, a style of writing that grew out of elements of Old Testament prophecy. Although nearly all its images have parallels in the biblical prophets, the images most relevant to late-first-century readers, which were prominent in popular Jewish revelations about the end time, are stressed most heavily. Chapters 2–3 are "oracular letters," a kind of letter occurring especially in the Old Testament (e.g., Jer 29:1-23, 29-32) but also attested on some Greek pottery fragments.

Although the literary structure of such documents may have been added later, many scholars argue that many Jewish mystics and other ancient mantics believed that they were having visionary or trance experiences. Like the Old Testament prophets he most resembles, John may have experienced real visions and need not use them only as a literary device. (The apocalypses are usually pseudonymous, thus it is difficult to be certain to what extent they reflect religious experience. But other accounts of Jewish mystics seeking to invade heaven in visionary ascents—see comment on 2 Cor 12:1-4—and anthropologists' reports on the commonness of ecstatic trance states in a variety of cultures around the world today allow that many such experiences were genuine. Early Christians generally accepted the reality of pagan inspiration as a phenomenon but attributed it to the demonic realm, while viewing their own inspiration as continuous with that of the Old Testament prophets. They held that there are many spirits in the world, but not all of them are good—1 Jn 4:1-6.)

Structure. After the introduction (chaps. 1–3), the book is dominated by three series of judgments (seals, trumpets, bowls), probably concurrent (they all culminate in the end of the age), and snapshots of worship in heaven (chaps. 4–16), then oracles against Rome (chaps. 17–18) and prophecies of the end (chaps. 19–22). The judgments may cover the (probably symbolic, but possibly deferred) period of 1,260 days to which the book repeatedly alludes (see especially comment on 12:6—if symbolic, this period might span history between Christ's first and second comings). The book is in logical rather than chronological sequence; John may report the visions in the sequence in which he has them, but every time he notes "And I saw/heard," he is receiving a new image. The new image, while connected with what preceded, need not always report an event that follows it chronologically.

Interpretations. There are several major categories of interpretation of this book: (1) Revelation predicts in detail the course of human history till the Second Coming, (2) Revelation reflects the general principles of history, (3) Revelation addresses only what was happening in John's day, (4) Revelation addresses only the

end time and (5) combinations of the above approaches (e.g., John addresses the principles of history in view of the ever-impending end time until it arrives, and originally articulated these principles to speak to the situation of his late-first-century readers).

Many interpreters of John's day (especially interpreters in the Dead Sea Scrolls) reread Old Testament prophecies as symbols describing the interpreters' own generation, and the book of Revelation has similarly been reinterpreted by modern prophecy teachers in every decade of the past century. (For a sober rehearsal of the continual modification of prophecy teachers' predictions with each new series of events in the past century, see Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1977]; for a longer historical perspective, see Richard Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998]; Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992], pp. 37-63.)

Some prophecy teachers have interpreted and reinterpreted Revelation according to the whims of changing news headlines; thus "kings of the East" (16:12) went from being the Ottoman Empire to imperial Japan to Communist China to Iraq, depending on the political needs of the Western interpreters. But John's images would have meant something in particular to their first readers, and this commentary therefore investigates that sense, following the same procedure for interpretation that it follows elsewhere in the *New Testament. Thus it directly addresses the third category of interpretation mentioned above, although this data can be combined with the second category (as it often is for preaching) and, in a sense that becomes clear in the course of the commentary, the fourth (and thus fifth) category.

Method of Interpretation. John wrote in Greek and used Old Testament, Jewish and sometimes Greco-Roman figures of speech and images; he explicitly claims that he writes to first-century churches in Asia Minor (1:4, 11), as explicitly as Paul writes to first-century churches. Whatever else his words may indicate, therefore, they must have been intelligible to his first-century audience (see comment on 1:3; 22:10). Ancient hearers had no access to modern newspapers, the basis for some popular methods of interpretation; but subsequent generations have been able to examine the Old Testament and first-century history while studying the book. Historical perspective therefore makes the book available to *all* generations.

This perspective does not deny Revelation's relevance for readers today; to the contrary, it affirms that its message is relevant to every generation, although it uses the symbolism familiar to the generation of its first readers. (Thus, for example, future opponents of the church might be envisioned through the image of a new Nero, a figure more relevant to the original readers than to modern ones. But Christians oppressed in all times can take both warning—that such figures exist—and encouragement—that their end is prophesied—from this image, once they understand it.) By examing the original point of the symbols, this commentary provides

readers better access to Revelation's message for applying it today.

Symbolism. As in the Old Testament prophets, much of John's symbolic language is meant as evocative imagery, to elicit particular responses, rather than as a detailed literal picture of events. Readers steeped in the Old Testament and Jewish apocalyptic literature would have understood this method of interpretation; sometimes older symbols could be reapplied to new situations but were meant to evoke the same sort of response. Sometimes John simply explains what the symbols mean (e.g., 1:20); in other cases the first readers would have understood from other clues in his book or because of cultural information or knowledge of how these symbols were used in antiquity, which he and his readers both understood. John plainly expected his readers to understand his points (1:3; 22:10).

Situation Part 1: The Imperial Cult. Only some cities faced persecution, but the threat was wider. The line between human and divine had always been thin in Greek religion, and consequently peoples of the Greek East had built temples to Roman emperors from the first emperor on; the first shrines were in Ephesus and Smyrna. In Rome itself the imperial cult was viewed as a symbol of loyalty to the Roman state, and emperors were deified only after they died. But several emperors—for the most part cursed instead of deified after death—claimed to be gods while still alive (Gaius Caligula, Nero and Domitian). The emperor at the time Revelation was written was most likely the widely hated Domitian, who demanded worship while he was alive. If some considered Christians subversive, cities in the eastern part of the empire could use worshiping the image of the emperor in his temple as a test of loyalty to the state (cf. Rev 13:14; earlier, cf. Dan 3:5).

Domitian repressed the aristocracy, expelled astrologers from Rome (lest they predict his demise) and persecuted philosophers and religions that he perceived as hostile to himself. The sources also show that he repressed Judaism and Christianity, although they were not singled out. Evidence on the imperial cult in Asia and outright persecution of Christians in Asia on the provincial level in the early second century (pre-Trajanic repression continuing in Trajan's time) suggest that Domitian's own claims and behavior stimulated the environment in which provincial persecution of Christians in Asia Minor occurred.

Situation Part 2: Inevitable Conflict. Jewish people were unofficially exempted from emperor worship, but well-off Asian Jews, disliked by Domitian and embarrassed by the relatively recent revolt of Palestinian Jewry (A.D. 66–70), wanted to dissociate themselves from potentially subversive groups. Some Asian *synagogues thus expelled Jewish Christians (2:9; 3:7-9), who could face Roman persecution if their Jewishness were in question. In other cities, possibly the majority, no one targeted Christians for persecution; the temptation there was simply to blend into the larger cultural environment. John's message would comfort some hearers and confront others.

The Romans repressed any groups whose prophets denounced Rome, but John stands well in the Old Testament tradition of uttering oracles against oppressive nations and empires, especially those that oppressed God's people. Some other Jewish writers did pronounce judgment against Rome (often with cryptic names like Babylon, the Kittim or even Edom), and many still wanted to revolt (this revolutionary fervor materialized in Egypt and Cyrene shortly thereafter); but Revelation is among the most explicit oracles of judgment against Rome's rebellion against God. Although Rome may have been the Babylon of John's day, other oppressive empires have followed it. Ancient authors often contrasted characters; Revelation contrasts Babylon, portrayed as a prostitute, with the New Jerusalem, portrayed as a bride. John invites hearers to live not for the empires of this age but for the promised city to come.

Message. Revelation provides an eternal perspective, by emphasizing such themes as the antagonism of the world in rebellion against God toward a church obedient to God's will; the unity of the church's worship with heaven's worship; that victory depends on Christ's finished work, not on human circumstances; that Christians must be ready to face death for Christ's honor; that representatives of every people will ultimately stand before his throne; that the imminent hope of his return is worth more than all this world's goods; and so forth. From the beginning, the Old Testament covenant and promise had implied a hope for the future of God's people. When Israel was confronted with the question of individuals' future, the Old Testament doctrines of justice and hope led them to views like the *resurrection (Is 26:19; Dan 12:2). The future hope is further developed and embroidered with the imagery of Revelation.

Commentaries. For background at an advanced level, see especially David E. Aune, *Revelation,* 3 vols.,WBC 52 (Dallas: Word, 1997); Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation,* BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation,* SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001). For useful commentaries on a more mediating level, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation,* 2nd ed., NCB (1978; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John the Divine,* HNTC (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1966); Craig S. Keener, *Revelation,* NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999); on a more popular level, see, e.g., Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) and especially Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994). Exceptionally useful specialized studies include Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (New York: T & T Clark, 1993); J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse,* JSNTSup 132 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); David A. Thomas, *Revelation 19 in Historical and Mythological Context,* Studies in Biblical Literature 118 (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

1:1-3
Title and Apocalyptic Introduction

Titles of documents often consisted of a statement like "the book of the words of so-and-so" (Tobit 1:1); John's title resembles that of some *Old Testament prophetic books (e.g., Is 1:1; Jer 1:1; Hos 1:1). Titles were normally affixed to the outside of a scroll, although by the mid-second century some people were using the codex, or modern form of book, and titles were put on the inside.

1:1. Most *apocalypses were attributed to meritorious Old Testament characters of the distant past; like Old Testament prophetic books, Revelation is written by a contemporary *apostle who does not need such a pen name; he writes to real congregations that know him (1:4, 11). (Other apocalypses did not name specific recipients or use the epistolary form.)

Some revelations in the Old Testament (Dan 7:16; 10:5-21; cf. Ex 3:2; Judg 6:11-23) and many revelations in apocalyptic literature (e.g., *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra*) were mediated through angels. Old Testament prophets were called God's "servants," a title John aptly claims for himself at the opening of his book.

1:2. "Witness" was especially a legal term, although its sense had been widely extended beyond that. Christians were being betrayed to Roman law courts, but in the context of Revelation, "witness" is the Christian proclamation of knowledge about Jesus, in a sense providing evidence in the light of the court of God's final judgment (cf. Is 43:8-12; 44:8-9).

1:3. Most people in antiquity could not read, and there would not at any rate be enough copies of the book (which would have to be copied by hand) for everyone to have his or her own. Thus the blessing is for the one who reads aloud to the congregation (just as someone would read in a *synagogue) and those who hear (just as the rest of the congregation listened to Scripture readings). The "blessing" form was common in the Old Testament and Jewish literature (see comment on Mt 5:1-12), and here implies that the hearers were expected to understand and obey what they heard. (Revelation contains seven such "blessings" and seven curses or "woes," probably all oracular, i.e., prophetic.) Apocalypses commonly predicted the imminent end of the age, or imminent events heralding that end (especially in the roughly contemporary work *4 Ezra*).

1:4-8
Epistolary Introduction

Works that were not strictly letters but were being sent to readers could include letter introductions, for example, the historical work 2 Maccabees (1:1–2:32, especially 1:1). One could frame a paragraph or larger work with literary brackets; in this case, "the one who is, who was and who is to come, the Almighty" frames 1:1-4.

1:4. "*Grace and peace" adapts a standard ancient greeting and blessing from a deity (here, from Father, Son and possibly *Spirit); see comment on Romans 1:7. On the encyclical nature of the letter (which could not be quickly recopied by hand many times over, and thus was read by the messenger to each *church in sequence), see comment on Revelation 1:11.

The "one who is, was and is to come" is related to an occasional Greek title for an eternal deity, but especially reflects a Greek exposition of the *Old Testament name "I AM" (Ex 3:14; the *LXX has "he who is"), in the same form in which it was also expanded by a *targum. Some argue that the "seven spirits" here might refer to the seven holy archangels recognized by Judaism around the throne (Rev 8:2; see comment on 5:6). More often commentators argue that they evoke the sevenfold messianic Spirit of Isaiah 11:2. (That the sevenfold Spirit imagery of Is 11:2 was current is suggested by *1 Enoch* 61:11; cf. **Psalms of Solomon* 17:37.) Given Revelation's predilection for the number "seven," this number alone should not be decisive for resolving the seven spirits' identity.

1:5. A "faithful" witness (2:13; 3:14) was a reliable one (Prov 14:5, 25; Is 8:2; Jer 42:5). "Firstborn" and "ruler over the earth's kings" allude to Psalm 89:27. Under Old Testament ritual law, the blood of the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement freed Israel from its sins; the Jewish people had also been freed from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb.

1:6. After God redeemed Israel from Egypt he called them "a kingdom of priests" (Ex 19:6), thus indicating that all of them were holy to him. A targum of this verse renders it "a

kingdom and priests," as here (cf. *Jubilees* 16:18).

1:7. Like Matthew 24:30, this verse blends Daniel 7:13 (coming with clouds on the day of the Lord; cf. also, e.g., Ezek 30:3) with Zechariah 12:10 (those who pierced him, i.e., God, will mourn for him). "Tribes of earth" extends the image beyond the tribes of Israel (cf. Zech 12:12) to all peoples; citizens of cities in the Greek East (and even ancient Rome) were divided into tribes.

1:8. Some Greco-Roman writers called the supreme deity the "first," but the Old Testament (Is 41:4) and Judaism (e.g., *Josephus, *Philo, adapting *Stoic language) had already called Israel's God the "first and the last." This is the point of calling him by the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, Alpha and Omega. (Some later Jewish teachers similarly came to call him the *'Alef* and the *Tav,* the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. They further called God "truth," Hebrew *'emeth,* spelled *'alef-mem-tav,* which they said were the first, middle and last letters of the alphabet, showing that God was eternal and ruled over all time.) Greek-speaking Jews often called God "the omnipotent," or "all-powerful," as here.

1:9-20
The Opening Revelation

1:9. Governors of various provinces could exercise their own discretion as to whether those charged and found guilty should be banished to an island, executed or enslaved. Those of higher social status automatically received lighter sentences than others, but John was banished as opposed to executed (cf. 2:13) either on account of his age (as sometimes happened) or the clemency of the local governor. In general, banishments were of two kinds: *deportatio* (including confiscation of property and removal of civil rights) and *relegatio* (without such penalties); technically only the emperor could declare the former, but a provincial governor could declare the latter, as here.

The most common places of Roman banishment were some rocky Aegean islands called the Cyclades (around Delos) and the Sporades, off the coast of Asia, which included Patmos (forty to fifty miles southwest of Ephesus). Patmos was not deserted; it included a gymnasium and temple of Artemis (the island's patron deity). Because Babylon was the major place of exile in Old Testament tradition (Ezek 1:1), John's own banishment puts him in a position to denounce Rome as the new Babylon (chaps. 17–18; see comment on 14:8).

1:10. Because the Old Testament and ancient Judaism especially associated the Spirit of God with *prophecy, "in the Spirit" here may mean that John was in charismatic worship (1 Chron 25:1-6) or (using closer language) a visionary state (Ezek 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; 11:1, 24). Nevertheless, the revelation here, as in the Old Testament but in contrast to much Jewish *apocalyptic literature, is otherwise unsolicited (see comment on Rev 4:2). Some texts compared powerful voices to trumpets, but the "sound like a trumpet" may allude to God's revelation in Exodus 19:16, when the Lord was preparing to give forth his word.

One day a month was dedicated to the honor of the emperor in Asia Minor, but the Christians dedicated one day—probably each week—to Christ's honor, perhaps in view of the coming "day of the Lord." (According to some Jewish schemes for reckoning history, the seventh and final age of history would be an age of sabbath rest [cf. Rev 20]; some second-century Christian interpreters transferred the image to an eighth age, speaking of the Lord's day as the eighth day of the week. But it may be debated how early and how relevant these ideas are to John in Revelation.) Scholars often argue that "the Lord's day" refers to Sunday, as the weekday of Jesus' *resurrection; the early Jewish Christians may have preferred that day to avoid conflicting with sabbath observance.

1:11. The seven cities mentioned here are seven of the eight most prominent cities of western Asia Minor (what is now western Turkey). The Asiarchs met annually in one of seven cities, almost identical with this list; John simply replaces Cyzicus, far to the north of the other cities, with Thyatira, which was more centrally located (and perhaps had a larger church). Word often spread from major cities (cf. Acts 19:10), so messages to the churches in these seven cities would affect the churches of the entire province. A messenger delivering John's book would arrive first in

Ephesus; the other cities are arranged in the sequence a messenger would follow on foot to reach them. The distance between them generally varies from about thirty to forty-five miles. (Those who suggest that John meant the churches symbolically for different stages of church history have to assume that churches before the final stage could not hope for Christ's imminent return; but John's letters to the churches display too much local color to represent merely church ages, and their precise geographical arrangement suggests that he means them literally.)

1:12. On the lampstands, see comment on 1:20.

1:13-15. This scene evokes earlier biblical revelations. Its imagery resembles the picture of God in Daniel 7:9 (the white hair symbolizing the dignity accruing to age), features of the mighty angel in Daniel 10:5-6 and the title "one like a son of man" from Daniel 7:13 (where he would come to rule the nations). The sound of the angel's voice "like a tumult" in Daniel 10:6 is adapted by means of the divine imagery of Ezekiel 1:24; 43:2; extrabiblical Jewish traditions also spoke of waters in the heavens. The "robe" and "girdle" might allude to Jesus' role as *high priest (Ex 28:4). Others could also wear robes and girdles, however; some note that workmen wore their girdles around their waist while working, so a position around the breast would signify that his work is complete. Given the other biblical allusions here, however, an allusion to the Old Testament high priest seems probable. "Feet of bronze" could allude to the bearers of God's throne (Ezek 1:7) as well as to the angel of Daniel 10:6.

The cumulative impact of these images is to present the risen Jesus as the greatest conceivable figure, using biblical imagery. Apocalypses employed some of this imagery (angels that looked like lightning, etc.), although John at this point avoids postbiblical elaborations that became common in such works (angels thousands of miles tall, etc.).

1:16. The mouth of God's spokesperson could be presented as a weapon (Is 49:2) and the *Messiah's just decrees of judgment would be the weapon of his mouth (Is 11:4). Some Jewish texts described angels shining as the sun (cf. also the angel's face like lightning in Dan 10:6).

1:17. Terror was common during visions (Gen 15:12); those who received revelations of God (Ezek 1:28; 11:13) or of angels (Dan 8:18; 10:9, 15) in the Old Testament often fell on their faces, unless the revealer touched and strengthened them (Dan 8:18; 10:10). (The image was continued in many later Jewish texts—e.g., Tobit, **1 Enoch* and **4 Ezra*—as well.) God often had to assure his servants not to be afraid (e.g., Deut 3:2; Josh 8:1; Jer 1:8), sometimes when he spoke to them (e.g., Gen 26:24). For "first and last," see comment on 1:8.

1:18. In the Old Testament (Ps 9:13; 107:18) and Jewish literature, "the gates of Hades" referred to the realm of the dead and thus to the power of death; one who held the keys to these realms thus ruled over them. (Whoever held the keys in a royal house held a position of great authority in that house, as in Is 22:21-22; keys symbolized authority to control whatever they opened, and Jewish texts spoke of God dispensing keys to rain, etc.) *Gentiles spoke of netherworld deities, such as Hades or Anubis, holding the keys of death. Jewish literature said that God had authority over death and the gates of Hades (Wisdom of Solomon 16:13), a role here held by Jesus. Christ's power over death, as the one who had risen, would encourage his followers now facing possible death.

1:19. Prophecy in the Old Testament involved speaking God's message and was not strictly limited to prediction of the future. But the Greek writer *Plutarch defined prophecy as predicting the future that is caused by the present and past; the Jewish Sibyl was said to prophesy the things that were before, were present and would come about (**Sibylline Oracles* 1:3-4). Jewish apocalyptic writers often divided history into ages as a prelude to their prophecies about the future (though often writing under a pseudonym, ostensibly before the history occurred).

1:20. Jewish texts often portrayed angels as stars (see comment on 12:4). Cosmic imagery was frequent; e.g., *Josephus and *Philo identified the "seven planets" with certain symbols in the temple, and Palestinian synagogues later sported zodiacs around Helios, the sun god, on their floors (despite Old Testament prohibitions). Pagans believed that Fate controlled the nations through the stars (which were often

deified)—an Eastern view introduced into Greco-Roman paganism under the guise of the science of the day. By this period many Jewish people concurred that the nations were ruled by the stars, which they took as angels under God's dominion. But if John uses this symbolism—and this is unclear—his point would be that *Christ is Lord over the universe, including Lord over the angels who guide the churches as well as the nations.

A (usually) seven-branched lampstand, or menorah, was one of the most common symbols for Judaism and synagogues in antiquity; by identifying the churches as lampstands, John claims that the Jesus movement is the true form of Judaism, no matter what some hostile synagogue officials were claiming (2:9; 3:9). Because Revelation portrays heaven as a sanctuary (cf., e.g., comment on 4:6-8; 5:8-10; 7:9-12; 8:3), the lampstands may also allude to the spiritual representation of the churches in heaven (Ex 25:31-40).

There are three major views on the "angels" of the churches, of which only the third makes strong sense in the context of Revelation. One is that they are "messengers" bearing the scroll to the churches; although this meaning is not impossible (1 Maccabees 1:44), it is unlikely that John would have seven separate copies of the book or would send seven different messengers (see comment on Rev 1:11). A second view is that they are public readers in each congregation, like a corresponding kind of "messenger" in the synagogues. According to second-century teaching, if such a reader slipped in his reading of the biblical text, the whole congregation was held accountable before God because he acted as their agent. The first and second views falter in that Revelation nowhere else employs "angel" in this manner; as elsewhere in apocalyptic literature, Revelation uses the term for what we call "angels." Thus, third, they may be the guardian angels of each congregation, analogous to the Jewish view (rooted in Daniel) that not only each person but each nation was assigned a guardian angel, and the angels of the evil nations would be judged together with the nations they led astray. Some who hold this view also suggest that they may represent heavenly counterparts to earthly realities (the churches), symbolizing the heavenly significance of the churches as the lampstands did; this view would also fit apocalyptic imagery.

2:1-7
Oracle to the Ephesian Church

Some "prophetic letters" also appeared in the *Old Testament (2 Chron 21:12-15; Jer 29) and other Jewish literature. Each of the oracle letters in Revelation follows the same form, which some have compared to imperial letter edicts posted as inscriptions in the cities of Asia Minor. Other scholars have compared the elements of the form to Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern covenant formulas; if they are correct, the prophecies here may act like the covenant lawsuits common in the Old Testament prophets (e.g., in Amos 2–4). They may also function analogously to series of oracles against the nations common in the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Is 13–23; Jer 46–51; Ezek 25–32; especially the eight brief oracles of Amos 1–2). Compare especially throughout the **Sibylline Oracles* for later examples of oracles against nations, including oracles against some of the cities Revelation lists, such as Smyrna, Pergamum, Sardis, Laodicea and Ephesus. (Some other ancient Near Eastern prophets also included judgment prophecies against other nations, but these were military oracles in the service of nationalism; unlike the Old Testament prophets, they did not condemn their own peoples. The exceptions are Egyptian moralist oracles after the fact, and Mari prophets' rebukes of kings for not supporting the temple better. There is no parallel outside Israel to an intergenerational succession of prophets calling their own people to *repentance for moral sins.)

William Ramsay long ago pointed to some local color in each of these oracles. Although some of his connections may be strained, others appear appropriate. Ancient cities were fiercely proud of their own history and culture and would be more sensitive to local allusions than most readers today would be. Although the *churches in some cities seem to have faced persecution, in other cities the churches faced greater temptations to compromise with a relativistic paganism.

Ephesus had been one of the first Asian centers of the imperial cult, and it was also the most prominent; Domitian had allowed

Ephesus the title of guardian of his temple. On the city's notoriety in *magic and the worship of Artemis, see comment on Acts 19. Inscriptions attest that Ephesus also had a sizable Jewish population, of which Christians had originally been a comfortable part (Acts 18:19-20, 26; 19:8-9). In practice, Ephesus was the leading center of Asia Minor in this period. It was also the first of the seven cities that a messenger voyaging from Patmos (forty to fifty miles to the southwest) would reach.

2:1. "Says this" (NASB) echoes the Old Testament formula that prophets of God borrowed from royal edicts and typical messenger formulas: "Thus says the lord/king." For the description of Jesus here, see comment on Revelation 1:13-16.

2:2-3. *Rhetorical experts (teachers of professional public speaking) recommended that speakers mix praise and blame for their hearers, to avoid closing them to the message while also avoiding populist flattery. Rhetoricians normally began with praise, as do most of the letters in Revelation 2–3. Edicts sometimes included "I know," although the allusion here is to the omniscience of the one who inspires *prophecy, a standard ancient idea.

2:4. Sound doctrine and perseverance are inadequate without love. Interpreters debate whether the text means love for other Christians (as in 1 Jn; cf. "works"—Rev 2:5, 19; "hate"—2:6) or for God (Jer 2:2) or for both.

2:5. Royal emissaries could threaten judgment on cities, but this threat is closer to God's warnings to the unrepentant in the Old Testament. Ramsay noted that eventually only a village remained of what was once mighty Ephesus, several miles from the original site of the city; due to silt deposits, it was already beginning to lose its geographical position as a coastal city in John's day. Still, these oracles address the churches rather than the cities they represented before God.

2:6. This teaching may be related to that of "Balaam" (2:14-15); this sect may have advocated compromise with the imperial cult to avoid persecution. Later church fathers identified them as an immoral *Gnostic sect, but they may have been speculating. As in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, the "hatred" here is hatred of sin, not private revenge (the Scrolls taught that vengeance should be left to God).

2:7. "The *Spirit" in Judaism was especially associated with prophetic enablement; thus the Spirit inspires John's vision and prophecy (1:10; 14:13). On having an "ear," see comment on Mark 4:9; the wording here might echo Jesus' earlier teaching. Some moralists also exhorted hearers to "hear" sages of old they were citing, but the formula here resembles the common Old Testament formula "Hear the word of the Lord" (e.g., Amos 3:1; 4:1; 5:1). "Overcoming" (especially a military or athletic image of conquest or victory) here involves persevering in the face of conflict and hardship. Although the "tree of life" was used to symbolize the *law in later Jewish teaching, this vision alludes to Genesis 2:9 and a restoration of paradise (on which cf. 2 Cor 12:2-4). Each of the promises in these oracles to the churches is fulfilled in Revelation 21–22.

2:8-11
Oracle to the Church at Smyrna

Only Smyrna and Philadelphia (the two most persecuted churches) are fully praised; Ramsay notes that of the seven these two cities held out longest before the Turkish conquest. Ephesus and prosperous Smyrna were the two oldest centers of the imperial cult in Asia. One of the oldest and most prominent cities in Asia, Smyrna sought but failed to achieve honor equal to that of Ephesus in this period. It was also known for its beauty. On the situation in Smyrna and Philadelphia, which apparently includes expulsion from the *synagogues, see the introduction to John. John's Gospel probably addresses this or a related sort of situation.

2:8. On the description of Jesus here, see comment on 1:17-18. Some commentators have argued that Smyrna was likewise dead and living, because it enjoyed only a shadow of its former reputation. This interpretation is unlikely in view of its prosperity, even if it had been overshadowed by Ephesus. According to Strabo, Smyrna had been razed by the Lydians and rebuilt with great beauty many centuries before, but this revival of a city was not commonly understood as death and *resurrection, and the occasion was now so remote in the past that the Smyrneans themselves would probably not have caught such a purported allusion. Furthermore, Sardis was once burned as well,

but 3:1 says the opposite about it. What is most relevant is that Jesus also promised them life for death (2:10) modeled after his own (1:18).

2:9. The strength of the Jewish community in Smyrna is well attested. In denying that his opponents are spiritually Jewish, he seems to return the charge they had made against the Christians; in calling them a "synagogue of *Satan," his rhetoric resembles that of the *Dead Sea Scrolls, where a persecuted Jewish sect that considered the rest of Judaism apostate called its opponents "the lot of Belial" (Satan; cf. 1QHa 10.24). We should remember that this language reflects an intra-Jewish polemic, as in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and was applied only to a particularly hostile local situation in Smyrna and Philadelphia; it does not offer a model for normal dialogue.

People were betrayed to provincial officials by *delatores,* "informers," and by the early second century it is attested that Christians in Asia Minor were usually charged only when accused by such informers. By the early second century, some Jews in Smyrna were reportedly fulfilling this function against Christians (such as Polycarp). But some believe that simply claiming publicly that Christians were no longer welcome as part of the synagogue community could constitute a form of betrayal; Christians who were not seen as Jewish had no protection against expectations for participation in the emperor cult. On a local level, some could use Christians' nonparticipation to question their civic loyalty.

2:10. Prison was merely a place of detention until trial or execution and could therefore be a prelude to execution. "Testing" for "ten days" could be a symbolic allusion to the minor test of Daniel 1:12, which preceded the major trials faced by Daniel and his three companions. "Behold" is common in prophetic literature and occurs repeatedly in Ezekiel (e.g., 1:4, 15).

Many Christians were martyred in Smyrna over the next several centuries. Jewish martyr stories praised those who were faithful to death and thus would be resurrected at the end; "crowns" were victors' (2:11) rewards for athletes or military heroes. (A number of ancient writers and inscriptions also mentioned the "crown of Smyrna," possibly referring to the city's beauty.)

2:11. Other Jewish literature also refers to the "second death," although often meaning annihilation (Revelation uses it of eternal torment—20:10, 14). The text of *4 Maccabees portrays Jewish martyrs as fighting and triumphing by death and thus crowned as victorious athletes by godliness.

2:12-17
Oracle to the Church in Pergamum

There is some evidence for a Jewish community at Pergamum, but it was a strongly pagan city (see comment on 2:13). It was also a famous and prosperous city, and its rulers had been the first to invite the Romans into the affairs of Asia Minor. It was the center of the imperial cult for its province.

2:12. The "sword" in the *Old Testament and *apocalyptic literature often symbolized judgment or war; cf. 1:16, 2:16 and 19:13. Romans thought of the "sword" as the power to execute capital punishment (as in Rom 13:4).

2:13. Pergamum was traditionally known for its worship of Asclepius (whose symbol on Pergamum's coins was the serpent; cf. 12:9) and worshiped other traditional Greek deities, such as Demeter, Athena and Dionysus. Its famous giant altar of Zeus (120 by 112 feet) overlooked the city on its citadel, and some have suggested that this is the background for "Satan's throne" in this verse. Perhaps a more likely allusion for "Satan's throne" is the local worship of the emperor, celebrated on Pergamum's coinage in this period. Local rulers had been worshiped before the Roman period, and Pergamum was one of the first cities of Asia to build a temple to a Roman emperor (a temple to Augustus, also conspicuous on the citadel). A further imperial temple was dedicated there within a decade or two after John wrote Revelation.

All citizens were expected to participate in civic religion; most citizens wanted to participate in imperial festivals and eat the meat of sacrificed animals doled out at many pagan festivals. Once one Christian was legally martyred, the legal precedent was set for the execution of Christians in other provinces.

2:14-15. The false teachers advocate compromise with pagan cults, perhaps including the imperial cult, for humanly appealing reasons (2:13). "Balaam" was the most famous

pagan prophet of the Old Testament and Jewish tradition (see comment on Jude 11) and is thus provided as the pseudonym for the heretical leader of the compromisers, like "Jezebel" in Thyatira (2:20).

Balaam, a prominent ancient figure also attested outside the Bible, led Israel to eat meat offered to idols and to have sexual intercourse with pagans to whom they were not married (Num 25:1-3; 31:16). Other nations could not destroy Israel, but Balaam knew that if he could subvert their morals, God would withdraw his blessing and judge them (see *Josephus and *Pseudo-Philo; cf. Num 25:8). God judged Israel, but Balaam, who acted from mercenary motives, also lost his life (Num 31:8, 16; Josh 13:22). "Sexual immorality" may be meant literally here (it was common in paganism) or may refer, as often in the Old Testament prophets, to spiritual infidelity against God (perhaps including emperor worship; cf. 17:5).

2:16. Although there would be one ultimate end of the world, the Old Testament prophets and Jewish literature occasionally described judgments in history in the language of the final day of the Lord.

2:17. The original ark of the covenant was permanently lost in 586 B.C. (cf. Jer 3:16), and the manna inside it had vanished before then. But a wide spectrum of Jewish tradition declared that Jeremiah (e.g., 2 Maccabees, *4 Baruch*) or an angel (**2 Baruch*) had hidden them and that they would be restored at the end time (a similar view took root among the *Samaritans, who dated the departure earlier). On the symbol of spiritual manna, see comment on John 6:35-40. Scholars propose various possible backgrounds of the white stone. Among the guesses: pebbles of various colors were used for admission to public celebrations; a black stone was the sacred symbol of the infamous Asian goddess Cybele; white stones used for medical purposes were associated with Judea; and perhaps somewhat more significantly, jurors used black stones to vote for a person's guilt but white ones to vote for innocence. Though Pergamum usually used dark brown granite for building materials, they preferred white marble for inscriptions. For a new name, see Isaiah 6:2; for name change and promise, cf. Genesis 17:5, 15.

2:18-29
Oracle to the Church in Thyatira

Thyatira's economy seems to have emphasized trades and crafts. The trade guilds each had common meals (normally about once a month) dedicated to their patron deities. Although Thyatira had a Jewish community, it does not appear to have been influential; Christians who refused to participate in the life of the guilds might thus find themselves isolated socially and economically (cf. 13:17). Thyatira was only beginning to achieve prosperity in this period, hence its citizens probably valued wealth highly.

2:18. Thyatira hosted a major cult of Apollo, son of Zeus and the deity associated with *prophecy and the sun. Some scholars note that the emperor was linked with Apollo and suggest that he may have been worshiped in Thyatira as his earthly manifestation. Although bronze-working was not unique to Thyatira, some scholars have also pointed to the bronze-workers' guild in that city.

2:19-20. The biblical "Jezebel" was not a prophetess, but the name is used here for its related connotations. Jezebel had nine hundred prophets (1 Kings 18:19) and led God's people into idolatry (see comment on Rev 2:14). She was accused of prostitution, a damaging charge against a king's wife (the term was probably meant spiritually, as one who led Israel from their commitment to God), and of witchcraft, no doubt for her occult involvement in pagan cults (2 Kings 9:22). As a prostitute she becomes the prototype of the evil empire of chapters 17–18. Immorality and food offered to idols were common temptations of paganism (see Num 25:1-2; 1 Cor 10:7-8).

Some scholars have suggested that Thyatira was one of the Asian cities with an oracle of the Sibyl; this cult purported to involve female prophetesses in the Greek style, and its literary forms had come to be used by *Diaspora Judaism and eventually later Christians. Because false prophets were not limited to such settings we cannot really be certain whether this proposal provides background for "Jezebel."

2:21-23. Some Jewish writers thought of judgment against children produced by illicit

unions, but the children are meant figuratively here (cf. Is 57:3-4, 7-8); *disciples were sometimes called "children." Jewish texts regularly portray God's omniscience and sometimes call him "searcher of hearts and minds" (based on *Old Testament descriptions of him; e.g., 1 Chron 28:9); here this characteristic of God applies to Jesus. God gave false prophets opportunity to turn from their falsehood and hear the true word of the Lord (Jer 23:22-23). Judgment according to one's works fits biblical expectations (see, e.g., Ps 62:12; Jer 17:10; Prov 24:12; Sirach 16:12, 14).

2:24. *Mystery cults stressed deep secrets shared only among the initiates; Jewish people also spoke of "deep things" about God (e.g., Job 11:7; passages in **1 Enoch; *2 Baruch*). For "no other burden" (NASB), cf. perhaps comment on Acts 15:28-29.

2:25-27. Revelation cites here an enthronement psalm that celebrated the promise to David and pointed to his seed who would reign over the nations that sought to rebel against him (Ps 2:8-9). The *Messiah, to whom the psalm applied par excellence (and to whom it was often understood to apply), here makes his people partakers of his rule over the nations. Most people in the Roman empire considered the emperor the supreme ruler; Revelation declares that Jesus is greater than the most powerful emperor the world had ever known.

2:28-29. The morning star, Venus, heralded the dawn, and great people could be compared to it as well as to the sun shining in glory (Sirach 50:6); cf. Revelation 22:16. Because most of the Greco-Roman world believed that life was ruled by the stars, to be given authority over one of the most powerful of stars (a symbol of sovereignty among the Romans) was to share Christ's rule over creation (2:26-27).

3:1-6
Oracle Against the Church of Sardis

For what it is worth, William Ramsay pointed out that the two *churches condemned most harshly belong to the only two cities of the seven that are completely uninhabited in modern times, Sardis and Laodicea. Sardis hosted many pagan cults; typical Greek deities such as Artemis, Cybele, Demeter and Kore (Persephone) were all worshiped there. Some scholars note that the Greek goddess Demeter, absorbing the character of the old Asiatic goddess Cybele, had also been locally identified with the deified mother of an emperor. But mixing of deities was common in antiquity, and paganism permeated all the non-Jewish cities of the Roman Empire. Despite the city's paganism, the Christian community there seems to have experienced no persecution—and no spiritual life. Sardis had a large, powerful and wealthy Jewish community that had long been a respected part of civic life; their *synagogue was roughly the length of a football field, with some of the city's best real estate. Like the Jewish community, the church was probably tolerated.

3:1-2. On the "spirits" and "stars," cf. 1:4, 16, 20. The past glories of Sardis as chief city of Lydia under Croesus were proverbial; its present prosperity could never regain for it the position it had once held; most importantly, however, the "alive . . . dead" here reverses the imagery of 1:18 and 2:8.

3:3. Sardis's acropolis had never been taken by battle, but twice in its history invaders had captured it by stealth unexpectedly in the night. More importantly, this verse refers to Jesus' saying preserved in Matthew 24:43 (as do 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10).

3:4. Inscriptions in Asia Minor indicate that many temples barred worshipers with soiled garments, whose entry would insult the deity. White robes were worn by priests (and many other worshipers) in the Jerusalem temple, worshipers of most deities (e.g., Isis, Apollo, Artemis), celebrants in cult festivals for the emperor and so on.

3:5-6. All Greek and Roman cities had official rolls of citizens, to which new citizens could be added; in at least some cities, expelled citizens would be removed. (Sardis, with its ancient history of record-keeping, would be familiar with this practice.) The biblically literate, however, would catch an allusion to Exodus 32:32-33. The "book of life" appears in the *Old Testament and figures prominently in Jewish *apocalyptic; see comment on Philippians 4:3. Confessing the believer's name before God's judgment tribunal probably evokes an earlier saying of Jesus; see Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8.

3:7-13
Oracle to the Church in Philadelphia

Philadelphia worshiped typical Greek deities; it is known, for example, to have housed temples of Artemis, Helios, Zeus, Dionysus and Aphrodite. A third-century inscription from the Jewish synagogue there has been recovered. Believers in Philadelphia, like the church in Smyrna, had apparently been expelled from the Jewish community; the background resembles that for the Fourth Gospel (see introduction to John).

3:7-8. These verses clearly allude to Isaiah 22:22, which speaks of one who had David's key to open and shut, indicating full authorization to rule the house. To Jewish Christians excluded from the synagogue, this was Jesus' encouragement that he who rightly ruled the house of David now acknowledged them as his own people.

3:9. See comment on 2:9-10. Exclusion from the synagogue could lead to more direct persecution by the Roman authorities, as in Smyrna. Jesus' claim that their opponents would know that he had loved them might echo Malachi 1:2, where God tells Israel that he loved them—but despised Esau/Edom; cf. Proverbs 14:19. Jewish people expected the kings of the nations to bow before them in the end time (Is 49:23; 60:11, 14; **1 Enoch;* *Dead Sea Scrolls; cf. Ps 72:10-11).

3:10. *Apocalypses sometimes prophesied special deliverance (i.e., protection) for the righteous in the coming times of hardship; the *Old Testament also promised God's faithfulness to his people in such times (see comment on 7:3). Some texts (e.g., the Dead Sea Scrolls) spoke of the righteous being tested by the future time of suffering, although the motif of the righteous being tested in sufferings in general was a common one (see comment on 1 Pet 1:7). ("Keep from" could mean "protect from" [cf. Rev 7:3; cf. Jn 17:15, the only other *New Testament use of the construction] or "preserve from.") Revelation probably contrasts the wicked "earth dwellers" with the righteous "heaven dwellers"; apocalypses (like **4 Ezra, *Similitudes of Enoch* and **2 Baruch*) also announce judgments on the "inhabitants of the earth."

3:11. "Crown" here alludes to the wreath that victors received at the end of a race or sometimes for military exploits.

3:12-13. God's remnant people appear as a new temple in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in various other New Testament texts. Pillars could be used to symbolize the people of God (Ex 24:4; see also comment on Gal 2:9) but were a natural feature of temples and often bore dedicatory inscriptions (also on the pillars of the Capernaum synagogue, just as military standards and other items bore inscriptions). Israel's own temple had pillars (Ex 27:10-17; 38:10-28; 1 Kings 7:2-6, 15-22) and this would be the case also in the end time (Ezek 40:9–41:3; *1 Enoch* 90:29). The primary allusion is probably to Isaiah 56:5, where those whom the Jewish community rejected (cf. Rev 3:8-9) received a place within God's house and a new name. On the new Jerusalem, see 21:2; "coming down" was natural in the vertical dualism common in apocalyptic literature and the Fourth Gospel, which typically contrasts heaven (where God rules unchallenged) and earth (where many disobey him until the day of judgment). Revelation portrays God's throne room in heaven as a temple (see, e.g., comment on 4:6-8).

3:14-22
Oracle to the Church in Laodicea

Laodicea became important only in Roman times. It was capital of the Cibryatic convention, which included at least twenty-five towns. It was also the wealthiest Phrygian city, and especially prosperous in this period. It was ten miles west of Colosse and six miles south of Hierapolis. Zeus was the city's patron deity, but Laodiceans also had temples for Apollo, Asclepius (the healing deity), Hades, Hera, Athena, Serapis, Dionysus and other deities; that is, it was a fairly typical Greek city religiously. Many Jewish people lived in Phrygia.

3:14. "Beginning" is a divine title; see comment on 1:8 and 22:13. (It may also be relevant that the Roman emperor's primary title was *princeps,* "the first," i.e., among Roman citizens.) Jesus is also the "Amen," the affirmation of God's truth; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:20.

3:15-16. Cold water (and sometimes spiced hot water) was preferred for drinking, and hot water for bathing, but Laodicea lacked a

natural water supply. Water piped in from hot springs six miles to the south, like any cold water that could have been procured from the mountains, would be lukewarm by the time it reached Laodicea. Although water could be heated, the natural lukewarmness of local water (in contrast with the hot water available at nearby Hierapolis) was undoubtedly a standard complaint of local residents, most of whom had an otherwise comfortable lifestyle. (Their imported water was also full of sediment, though better, said the geographer Strabo, than the water of Hierapolis.) Jesus says: "Were you hot [i.e., for bathing] or cold [i.e., for drinking], you would be useful; but as it is, I feel toward you the way you feel toward your water supply—you make me sick."

3:17-18. Laodicea was a prosperous banking center; proud of its wealth, it refused Roman disaster relief after the earthquake of A.D. 60, rebuilding from its own resources. It was also known for its textiles (especially wool) and for its medical school and production of ear medicine and probably the highly reputed Phrygian eye salve. Everything in which Laodicea could have confidence outwardly, its church, which reflected its culture, lacked spiritually.

Although Greeks did not share Palestinian Jews' moral abhorrence of nudity, everyone except *Cynic sages agreed that the lack of clothing described here, that of poverty (here spiritual), was undesirable. Phrygian "eye salve" (KJV, NASB) was apparently not an ointment per se but was probably powdered and smeared on to the eyelids (contrast Tobit 6:8). On white garments, cf. Revelation 3:4; here it may be a stark contrast with Laodicea's famous "black wool."

3:19. Compare the many prophetic rebukes of Israel in the *Old Testament.

3:20. Compare John 10:1-4; Matthew 24:33. Table fellowship was a sign of intimacy and committed the guest and host to friendly relations. Jesus here invites the Laodicean Christians to dine (cf. Rev 2:7; contrast 2:14, 20) in the present at the messianic banquet (see comment on 19:9); it is an invitation to a genuinely lavish banquet, implying again their spiritual poverty (cf. 3:17-18). But the door to fellowship is presently closed—from their side (contrast 3:7-8).

3:21-22. The image here is one of sharing God's rule; Jesus shares as coregent or viceroy, whereas his people share because they are exalted to rule over the earth (as in Old Testament and Jewish expectations for Israel's exaltation). As the locus of God's glorious presence, his preexistent and glorious throne was the subject of much speculation among Jewish *apocalyptic writers and mystics; see comment on 4:2.

4:1-11
John's Throne Vision

Many scholars believe that Jewish mystics (many of whom penned *apocalypses, like **1 Enoch*) strove for visions of the invisible God, and modeled their views of what they would find on visions of God's enthroned glory in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1 (cf. also Ex 24:9-11; 1 Kings 22:19; Dan 7:9-10). In time these visions were embroidered with every fantastic magnification of the divine glory the mystics could imagine. In contrast to such elaborate reports of the preexistent throne of God, John's description is simple, like the *Old Testament accounts: just enough description to convey the point of God's majesty. Some also argue that his picture of the throne room, including the activity of those surrounding the throne, may be a parody of the imperial court and the worship in the imperial temples—a daring revelation for a banished Jewish prophet like John.

4:1. "After these things" functions as a transition device to the next vision that John would see (7:9; 15:5; 18:1; cf. 7:1; 19:1; 20:3; Jn 5:1; 6:1; 7:1); it was commonly used as such a transition. "I looked, and behold," is typical visionary language (e.g., Ezek 10:1; 44:4; Dan 10:5; also *1 Enoch, *4 Ezra* and other writings based on this *genre). On the trumpet, cf. Revelation 1:10. Although elsewhere in Revelation John is told, "Come here" (17:1; 21:9; cf. Jn 1:39), in this instance "Come up here" may also allude to God's call to Moses to come up the mountain (in later Jewish tradition, to heaven) to receive revelation (Ex 19:24; 24:12; 34:2); the same language appears frequently in apocalypses. The opened heavens are a figure for revelation as well (Rev 11:19; 19:11; Jn 1:51), again following an important Old Testament pattern for such visions (Ezek 1:1), and also developed in other Jewish apocalypses (including the door, e.g., *1 Enoch*).

4:2. "In the Spirit" means that John is prophetically inspired in his vision (see comment on 1:10); Ezekiel had similarly been carried elsewhere in visions (Ezek 11:1, 24). Some Jewish mystics stressed the mortal dangers of the ascent to see God's throne; in some sources they had to know special passwords, and many did not know enough to survive their purported ascent through the spirit realms (see especially *3 *Enoch* and the *rabbis). But some apocalypses allow that angels could immediately lift one into the heavens (*2 *Baruch,*Similitudes of Enoch, 2 Enoch, Testament of Abraham*). Like Ezekiel, John is simply caught up immediately by God's *Spirit.

4:3. For this description of the throne, see Ezekiel 1:26, 28 and 10:1. (Thrones indicated the ruler's dignity and were generally approached by several steps; their bases could portray peoples subdued by the ruler.) This simple description may contrast with the Roman emperor's pomp. It also contrasts with other elaborations of heavenly palaces (*1 Enoch* 14), the magnitude of majesty (e.g., the later rabbis' crowning angel is a five-hundred-year journey tall), or a tour of earth, heaven and hell (especially in later works); John does not even elaborate by weaving together other available Old Testament throne imagery (cf., e.g., Dan 7 in *1 Enoch* 14).

4:4. "Elders" were those with authority in Old Testament cities and later Jewish communities who could function as representatives for their communities (e.g., Deut 21:6); see Isaiah 24:23. In the art of Asia Minor, a few priests could be used to represent thousands of worshipers. The number "twenty-four" has been related to the twenty-four books Jewish writers assigned to the Hebrew *canon, but more relevantly to the twelve tribes plus the twelve *apostles (cf. Rev 21:12-14), or the twenty-four orders of priests. The orders of priests were fixed in the Old Testament (1 Chron 24–25), continued in the *New Testament period and were still commented on by later *rabbis and in later inscriptions. The faithful dead are thus portrayed as priests offering worship to God (Rev 1:6). (Jewish apocalyptic literature often overlapped images of the future age with the present heaven for the righteous dead.)

Greek accounts sometimes portrayed deities as appearing in white (e.g., Demeter and Kore); at least some ancient thinkers, like Pythagoras and some rabbis, associated white with good and black with evil. This contrast no doubt arose in ancient thought through the contrast between day and night, the latter being more associated with witchcraft and (in Jewish thought) *demons. (Contrary to some modern criticisms, it does not relate to complexion; the same contrast between white and black even appears in some traditional African religions.)

Romans and often Jews buried the dead in white. In Jewish tradition, angels were nearly always garbed in gleaming white. More significant here may be the widespread tradition of worshipers dressing in white (3:4). Jewish teachers portrayed Israel as crowned at the revelation at Sinai; the righteous were sometimes viewed as crowned in heaven. (The *Ascension of Isaiah* has the righteous crowned, robed and enthroned in heaven, but it may well be a Christian work; the *Odes of Solomon*, which has a catching up to heaven by the Spirit—cf. 4:2—is a Christian work. But it is not always easy to distinguish early Christian works from Jewish works revised with Christian interpolations.) But the crowns here are probably victors' crowns for those who persevered to death (see comment on 2:10; 3:11). (Many Jewish traditions speak of a heavenly assembly—in the rabbis, a legislative or judicial body—composed of angels or deceased scholars; the antecedents of the image probably go back to the angelic court of God in the Old Testament and the Canaanite images of El's pantheon of seventy gods, replaced by the angels of the seventy nations in Jewish tradition.)

The arrangement is undoubtedly significant. Greek choruses would often sing or dance in circles; amphitheaters surrounded stages; and the Jewish Sanhedrin sat in a semicircle with the *high priest in the middle.

4:5. The special effects rehearse the glory of God's self-revelation at Sinai (Ex 19:16; cf. Ezek 1:4, 13). Some apocalyptic texts report the sources of lightnings and thunderings in particular levels of heaven.

4:6-7. The "sea of glass" (15:2) alludes to the sea in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:23; 2 Chron 4:2, 6). It had always been natural to speak

figuratively of God's heavenly temple (e.g., Ps 11:4), given the ancient Near Eastern tradition of the earthly temple reflecting the heavenly one. John's emphasis on worship leads to a portrayal of God's throne room in especially temple terms:

- A sea, as just noted (4:6; 15:2)
- the tabernacle of testimony (15:5)
- an altar of incense (5:8)
- an altar of sacrifice (6:9)
- the ark (11:19; cf. 15:5-8), which functioned as God's throne in the Old Testament
- harps for worship (14:2; 15:2), as in the Old Testament temple, and so forth.

(Even the future New Jerusalem appears as a temple; see comment on Rev 21:16.) Heaven is a place of worship, perhaps implying in part that genuine worship on earth offers a foretaste of heaven. The crystal firmament derives from Ezekiel 1:22. The cherubim were covered with eyes in Ezekiel 10:12; the four creatures had four faces in Ezekiel 1:10 (where, however, each creature had all the features). Ezekiel's imagery may be intentionally figurative (cf. 1 Chron 12:8) but may draw on Babylonian throne and temple imagery and indicate a God greater than any pagans could have conceived; cf. also 1 Kings 7:29.

4:8. Ezekiel also spoke of the six wings (Ezek 1:11). The trisagion ("Holy, holy, holy") is from Isaiah 6:3, where seraphim—fiery, holy angels modeled after the cherubim of the tabernacle—surround God's throne in the Jerusalem temple, symbolizing his universal glory (Is 6:3) and demonstrating the impurity of sinful mortals like the prophet (Is 6:5). Later Jewish texts also employ the biblical imagery of these creatures and this song, which came into use in *synagogue and later *church liturgy as well. One may contrast for example the permanently appointed imperial cult choir at Pergamum, where thirty-six members were to sing hymns in honor of the deified Augustus. Such a choir was impressive by standards of the Roman Empire, but paled before the worship of the true God.

4:9-10. Prostration on one's face was a form of homage offered to gods and rulers in antiquity.

4:11. The emperor Domitian demanded worship as "our Lord and God" but never claimed the role of Creator. Jesus receives the same words of honor in John 20:28.

5:1-7
The Passover Lamb and the Scroll

5:1. Legal documents were sealed, often with roughly six seals imprinted with the attestations of the same number of witnesses. (The wax seals would have to be broken to loose the strings beneath them, which wrapped the scroll and guaranteed that it had not been opened and thus altered.) This form was used for contract deeds and wills; it became increasingly common in Roman documents of the period, and some Palestinian Jewish documents of this sort have been recovered. Scrolls were normally written on only one side of a papyrus sheet, reserving the outside for the title or address; but this scroll is unusually full and thus written on both sides (cf. Ezek 2:9-10). The writing side was called the *recto,* where the fibers were horizontal and easier for writing; the *verso* was used only when the *recto* had inadequate space. Documents written on both sides are rare enough to have a technical name, an opisthograph.

5:2-3. Cf. perhaps Isaiah 6:8 for a similar call in the context of a throne vision, except that here the only one fit for the task is the lamb.

5:4. Loud wailing was normally reserved for intense mourning, such as for a person's death.

5:5. Lions were used on Torah shrines (containers which housed Law scrolls) in early Jewish art and were regarded as figures of strength and authority, but a more direct background lies at hand. The "lion of Judah" alludes to Genesis 49:9-10, which predicted the Davidic dynasty and was understood messianically in later Jewish literature (**4 Ezra,* the *rabbis). "Root of David" alludes to Isaiah 11:1 and 10 (Jesse was David's father), which suggests that the *Messiah would come after the Davidic line had seemed cut off. The image is also used messianically in later texts (e.g., Sirach), and both these images are combined in the *Dead Sea Scrolls. *Apocalypses and other texts often included dialogue with heavenly particpants in the scenes revealed (cf., e.g., Dan 7:16; Zech 4:11; 5:2).

5:6. Whereas a lion was the ultimate

symbol of power in ancient views of the animal kingdom (cf. also, e.g., Is 35:9; 65:25), a lamb was considered powerless (cf. Is 40:11); a slaughtered lamb was a dramatic contrast with a reigning lion (cf. Is 53:7). Lambs were associated with a variety of sacrifices, but in Revelation this figure may evoke especially the Passover lamb, who delivers God's people from the plagues of the following chapters (cf. Ex 12:12-13).

Many texts mention lamb's horns, but the imagery of horns as symbols for authority is rooted in Daniel 8. The seven eyes ranging throughout the earth are from Zechariah 3:9 and 4:10. John might understand them as referring to angels (the image in Zechariah is modeled after Persian royal emissaries) in Zechariah 1:10 and 6:5-7, or to God's *Spirit in Zechariah 4:6. At any rate, the eyes in Zechariah are God's eyes; here they belong to the Lord Jesus.

5:7. Various ancient documents, including wills, were sealed with roughly six seals, and sometimes seven; seals on legal documents guaranteed that no one had opened or tampered with them. A will could not be opened until the death of the person whose will it was could be attested; if a will is in view here (as some, but not all, suggest), it is significant that it is the lamb who has been *slain* who is worthy to open it. (The book may well be the lamb's book of life; cf. 3:5; 20:12. Seals were not a book's contents, but attesting marks outside it.) At any rate, under Roman law a document was valid only when the addressee had received it; it is thus ready to take effect.

5:8-14
Worshiping the Lamb

5:8. Prostration was particularly a sign of worship before gods and kings in antiquity; Jewish texts usually reserved it for God himself. The image of prayers as incense was not uncommon (e.g., Ps 141:2); here it alludes to the altar of incense and its censer in the heavenly temple (Rev 8:3). In this context, the harps probably indicate worship as in the charismatic, Levitical temple choir of old (1 Chron 25:1, 3, 6; 2 Chron 5:12; 29:25; Neh 12:27; cf. 1 Sam 10:5).

5:9-10. Offered to congregations presumably gathered in worship (chaps. 2–3), visions of heavenly worship would encourage the *church on earth that they stood in continuity with a much greater chorus than their persecutors in the imperial cult could muster. The Dead Sea Scrolls show that earthly worshipers could envision themselves participating in heavenly worship with the angels. Inspired, spontaneous psalms composed by the temple worship leaders, perhaps in response to new acts by God, had been called "new songs" in the *Old Testament (Ps 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Is 42:10).

The particular praise reflects the redemption of Israel from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb (see Ex 19:6 for kingdom and priests; also comment on Rev 1:6), except that the people of God now explicitly include representatives from every people, celebrating redemption in their multiethnic, diverse styles of worship. Further, they would finally reign over the rest of the earth; Jewish traditions portrayed Israel as receiving the *kingdom and reigning over the nations in the end time. Rome claimed to rule the earth, but knew of many peoples beyond its boundaries, from Iceland and Scythia (much of it in Russia) to the north, Parthia, India and China to the east, and Africa at least as far south as Tanzania. Only by faith in God's revelation could John have conceived of a church from all peoples, such as is forming today.

5:11. Dramatic numbers could highlight dramatic subjects. Some Jewish texts were given to citing fantastically large numbers of people (e.g., they listed more slain in one battle than all the people who have lived in history); more reasonably, such texts estimated even larger numbers of angels. "Ten thousand" was the largest single number used in Greek, so "ten thousands of ten thousands" (myriads of myriads) is the author's way of calling them innumerable.

5:12. An early-second-century Roman governor confirms that Christians worshiped *Christ as a god. Multiple elements in a list of praises emphasized the subject's greatness (cf., e.g., 1 Chron 29:11-12; Dan 7:14; for a king, Dan 2:37). Sets of seven praises (or other numbers) appear elsewhere also (e.g., in what became the later official text of the Passover celebration, praising God for redemption from Egypt; a *Qumran text), though John's predi-

lection for sevens is broader than and independent of such texts.

5:13-14. Although the Old Testament and Judaism believed that the world would submit to God's rule wholly in the end time, they recognized that all the elements of the universe answered to his authority in the present.

6:1-8
The Four Horsemen

The imagery is adapted from the angelic horsemen sent by God to patrol the earth in Zechariah 1:8-11 and 6:1-8, though used in a different way. Although divine judgments in history are a major *Old Testament theme, pagans also recognized and would have understood John's point; most cultures in history have recognized the existence of divine judgments. (Romans in fact kept official records of reports of omens portending disaster.) Jewish *apocalyptic traditions associated some of these judgments, such as war and famine, with the time just preceding the end of the age, though many believe that many early Christians applied that designation to the entire period between the *Messiah's comings; cf. Matthew 24:6-8.

6:1. A document could not be opened until all the seals were broken (i.e., in Revelation, after 8:1); the seals (in this case judgments) witness the validity of the document's contents. (In divine documents, witnesses need not be only human; in the Old Testament covenant, heaven and earth are called to witness; cf. Deut 30:19; Ps 50:4.)

6:2. The Old Testament uses the "bow" as a symbol of judgment by battle. The image of an archer on a white horse might terrify hearers in the Roman Empire. The only mounted archers with which most were familiar were the Parthians, whose tactics and skills had made them Rome's most feared enemies; old Persian armies, whose heirs the Parthians were, included sacred white horses. Parthians had defeated Roman armies in some recent wars; Parthians' skill as archers was common knowledge, and other contemporary apocalyptic writers (**Similitudes of Enoch*) also suggested a dreaded Parthian invasion. But even if based only on the bow, ancient hearers would have readily understood that this horseman meant conquest and war.

6:3-4. The "sword" was often a symbol of judgment by war in the Old Testament and later literature, and red was the color most associated with war and bloodshed (hence the "red planet" is named Mars for the Roman god of war). The bloody unrest of A.D. 68–69, when three emperors were successively killed in Roman civil wars, would have offered one illustration of the principle here.

6:5-6. Famine and pestilence often followed in the wake of war. Basic staples of the ancient Mediterranean diet were barley and wheat, sometimes cheese and olives, and (for those living near water) fish. The "scales" indicate rationing, or at least the caution of merchants to get every cent the food is worth. Barley and wheat were basic staples. Because a quart of wheat was a day's sustenance, and a denarius was a day's wage, a man with a family would have to buy the cheaper barley instead. Even then, three quarts of barley was hardly enough daily food for a whole family to subsist on; in the many peasant families with large numbers of children, several children would die (as often happened anyway in impoverished areas such as Roman-period Egypt). The famine also created a high inflation rate: this wheat costs between five and fifteen times the average price of wheat.

Some mercy may be implied here; conquerors tended to ravage standing crops while sparing fruit trees and vines, since these took long to grow back and conquerors hoped to control the land. (Olive trees took roughly seventeen years to grow.) Nevertheless, the image would hold the attention of John's audience; much of western Asia Minor imported much of its grain, locally focusing on more lucrative products such as wine. Oil and wine were widely used, but were not essential for life like wheat or barley. Olive oil was especially used for anointing the head, washing the body and lighting lamps; wine was mixed with water (one part wine for two to three parts water) for meals. The selective continuance of such items of relatively secondary importance while staples were barely obtainable would reinforce the reality of divine judgment. Because inflation was high at the end of the first century and some readers were no doubt aware of Domitian's unpopular restriction of land for vineyards, many hearers could have readily

identified with the terror such prophecies implied. Asia Minor, though one of the wealthiest areas in the Roman Empire, experienced economic troubles during Domitian's reign.

6:7-8. This final specter may resemble the angel of death of Jewish tradition. Lists of judgments such as this horseman brought are common in the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Jer 14:12; 24:10; 27:8; Ezek 6:11; 7:15; 12:16) and, less related in form, some judgment lists in the **Sibylline Oracles;* this list is closest to Ezekiel 14:21.

6:9-11
The Fifth Seal

Some of the seven *churches (such as Smyrna) were suffering, but others (such as Laodicea) were comfortable. Like many *Old Testament prophecies (e.g., Amos 6:1), this message could disturb comfortable people. By contrast, oppressed and suffering people who trust God could resonate with the promise of vindication.

6:9. The blood of sacrifices was poured out at the base of the altar (Lev 4:7, 18, 25, 34; 5:9; 8:15; 9:9); the martyrs are thus viewed as sacrifices, presumably associated with the Passover lamb of Revelation 5:6. (Paschal lambs had come to be viewed as sacrificial in some sense. Martyrs were also viewed as sacrifices in, e.g., *4 Maccabees; cf. Phil 2:7.) On heavenly temple imagery (such as the altar here), see comment on 4:6. Souls could be "visible" to recipients of *apocalypses, due to the seers' visionary state.

6:10. The very fact of their shed blood (6:9) cries out for the vindication of retribution (Gen 4:10; see comment on Mt 23:35); as in the Old Testament, a prayer for vengeance for corporate sin was ultimately a prayer for the vindication of the righteous and of God's name. Justice could ultimately be done, and the oppressed delivered, only when God arose to judge the earth. "How long?" was common in Old Testament prayers of entreaty (e.g., Ps 6:3; 13:1; 80:4), including prayers for vindication (e.g., Ps 79:5, 10; Zech 1:12); it also could address the duration of a judgment (Is 6:11; Jer 47:6).

6:11. Other Jewish texts also include prayers for vengeance and protests over delays (6:10); the souls of the righteous in **4 Ezra* (probably from the same period as Revelation) ask how long until the end and are told that they must wait until the full number of righteous dead is completed. Jesus and Paul had also earlier stressed that the good news must be preached to all nations—with the attendant suffering for witnesses involved in such proclamation—before the end. On white robes, see comment on 4:4.

6:12-17
The Sixth Seal

Although cosmic, cataclysmic language is sometimes used for God's judgments in history (e.g., an already fulfilled judgment in **Sibylline Oracles;* cosmic exaggerations of Sinai phenomena in *Pseudo-Philo; cf. Ps 18; Jer 4:20-28), the language of this passage lends itself most naturally to the view that it, like the sixth and seventh trumpets and vials, represents the end of the age (as cosmic destruction generally does in the *Old Testament prophets and Jewish literature).

6:12-13. An Old Testament *prophecy associated the end of the age with a powerful earthquake (Zech 14:4-5; cf. Ezek 38:20; Amos 8:8); because severe earthquakes had wrought devastation in first-century Asia Minor (including cities such as Laodicea), this announcement would have special impact on the readers. Darkness was also an Old Testament judgment (Ex 10:21-23; Is 50:3), especially the judgment of the end (Joel 2:31; Is 13:9-10; 24:23; Ezek 32:7-8; Amos 5:18; 8:9; cf. **4 Ezra*). The stars may symbolize angelic hosts (12:4; Is 24:21; Dan 8:10; 10:13), but in this context they probably depict simply the cosmic scope of the judgment (Is 34:4). The graphic language is not meant as literal astronomy: disappearing or shaken stars were used as poetic language for great devastations such as wars (*Sibylline Oracles;* *Petronius; cf. Is 13:10, 17).

6:14. A reader would unroll a scroll with the right hand to read, rolling up again the part just read with the left; the language here reflects Isaiah 34:4, which is also echoed in other Jewish judgment oracles (*Sibylline Oracles*). This sort of language was normally reserved for the end of the age.

6:15-16. The Old Testament and *apocalypses also speak of judgment across social classes; the readers could be encouraged that God would ultimately vindicate them against the emperor and his governors who now

judged them. Hiding in the rocks and crying for the mountains to conceal them from God's wrath reflects Hosea 10:8; cf. Isaiah 2:10 and 19-20. (Christians in Sardis may have thought of the cave-tombs in the necropolis facing their city, though the image is not relevant to them alone.) Lambs were particularly docile creatures; "wrath of the lamb" is thus a jarring image.

6:17. This verse reflects especially Joel 2:11; cf. Malachi 3:2, referring to the day of judgment.

7:1-8
The Sealing of 144,000 Servants

Some take the 144,000 consistently literally (literally twelve thousand male Jewish virgins from each tribe—14:4); others take them consistently symbolically (the spiritual people of God, not literally 144,000). Against taking it literally could be Revelation's usage elsewhere of "servants" (1:1; 6:11), suggesting that they constitute the whole of the saved community (7:3-4). But whether they represent the innumerable multitude of 7:9 or the restored remnant of ethnic Israel remains debated.

"After this I saw" (7:1) means that this vision follows the preceding one, not necessarily that the events it describes do (see comment on 4:1); if 6:12-17 represents the end of the age, 7:1-8 must precede that event chronologically (7:3), perhaps concurrent with the whole of 6:1-11 or simply 6:12-17.

7:1. *Gentiles often personified the elements of nature themselves or recognized gods attached to them; Jewish people believed that God had delegated his authority over various features of nature (including winds) to angels under his command (e.g., in **Jubilees;* cf. Ps 148:1-12). "Four corners" of the earth was meant figuratively, even in ancient times. A few people thought that the world was spherical, but most people viewed it as circular; "four corners" was nevertheless conventional speech, as was the idea of four winds from the four directions of heaven (probably viewed as angels even in Zech 6:5). The winds had both positive and negative effects in ancient sources. According to some views, the wind carried along the sun and moon chariots (**1 Enoch* 72:5; 73:2), or God founded the heavens on the winds (*1 Enoch,* **Joseph and Asenath*), and the stoppage of winds could signal the advent of a new age (*Sibylline Oracles,* on the postdiluvian era). Like writers today, the biblical writers used the language conventional to the *genre in which they were writing; this could include, as here, symbolic imagery.

7:2. In the most popular ancient conception, Helios drove his sun-chariot in a regular course above the earth, rising from the gates of the east and descending into the west to return by its path under the earth; the earth-circle was surrounded on all sides by the river Oceanus. Jewish people naturally modified the sun god into an angel; but any angel that would rise in the orbit of the sun would have been recognized as superior to the greatest of the kings of the earth. The expression here could also simply emphasize that the angel comes from the east (cf. Is 41:25), hence the universal extent of God's rule (cf. Ps 50:1; 113:3; Is 59:19; Mal 1:11).

"Seal" refers to the impress of a signet ring; an official who wished to delegate his authority for a task to a representative would allow that subordinate to use his signet ring.

7:3. Like documents or merchandise sealed and stamped to guarantee their contents and prevent tampering, God's servants were to be marked off as his (cf. Is 44:5). God had previously protected his people in Goshen during the plagues (Ex 8:28; 9:4; 11:7; see comment on Rev 5:6); the idea of a protecting sign is also an *Old Testament image (Gen 4:15; Is 66:19). Here it is taken directly from Ezekiel 9:4-6, where judgment could not begin until the foreheads of the righteous (those who mourned over the sin of their land) were marked. The forehead and the hand (Ex 13:9, 16; 28:38; Deut 6:8; 11:18) were the most natural and obvious parts of the body for this marking because they were most directly exposed to view.

With the possible exception of Genesis 4:15, all these Old Testament passages probably meant the sign symbolically (despite more literal postexilic Jewish practice of *tefillin,* phylacteries); Ezekiel 9:6 certainly did not mean a humanly visible mark, and Revelation presumably means it in the same sense as Ezekiel (cf. other writings in Rev 3:12; 17:5; 19:16; 22:4). In Hebrew, Ezekiel's mark was the Hebrew letter *tav;* in ancient script it looked like, and

*rabbis compared it with, the Greek letter *chi*—similar to English *x*—which some Christian commentators have compared (perhaps wishfully) with the cross sign. Comparisons have also been made with branding animals; with the occasional but well-documented tattooing of slaves and, later, soldiers; with religious tattooing (e.g., in Mithraism); with spiritual circumcision (circumcision was called a seal); and with the divine imprint on humans (Philo), here applied specifically to those who live according to that image. See comment on Revelation 13:16-18 (for the mark opposed to this one) and on Galatians 6:17; cf. **4 Ezra* 6:5; 10:23; **Psalms of Solomon* 15:6-9 (for invisible marks for both the righteous and the wicked); and **Testament of Job* 5:2.

7:4. Because this is the full number of God's servants (7:3), the righteous (1:1; 2:20; 22:6), the number and ethnic designation may be meant figuratively for true followers of Israel's God (followers of Jesus; cf. 2:9; 3:9; 21:2, 14). Whether this number is meant figuratively or literally, however, the allusion is clearly to the Old Testament and universal Jewish conception of Israel's restoration (cf. comment on Rom 11:26-27), which is pictured, as generally, in terms of the restoration of the remnant (survivors) of the twelve tribes. Some suggest that the numbering by tribe evokes the Old Testament custom of a military census, indicating that these represent the end-time army expected in some Jewish circles (e.g., the *Qumran War Scroll), except here as a *spiritual* army (cf. comment in Rev 14:1-5).

7:5-8. The normal Jewish understanding was that the twelve tribes would inherit the land together (Ezek 48). Yet by counting Joseph and Manasseh (the tribe of Joseph was usually broken down into two tribes, represented by his sons Manasseh and Ephraim) without omitting Levi, Revelation has to omit another of the tribes, and omits Dan, the first in Ezekiel's list (48:1), in order to maintain the number twelve. (Jewish commentators as early as the second century associated Dan with idolatry, but no emphasis on that special association has been documented this early. Dan's sins [Judg 18:30; 1 Kings 12:29; Amos 8:14; cf. *Jubilees* 44:28-29] are not the only ones mentioned in the Old Testament, and the association with the serpent [Gen 49:16-17] is too remote here.) Some scholars believe that this omission underlines the symbolic nature of John's point in the whole passage; one tribe might be omitted to indicate the danger of apostasy even among the people of God (cf. Jn 6:70; 1 Jn 2:19). The sequence of tribes itself is probably not significant—it varied considerably in the Old Testament.

The twelve tribes no longer existed as separate entities in the first century; with few exceptions, only Judah, Benjamin and Levi were recognized as ancestors, and today even most of those distinctions are no longer certain. The exact number, twelve thousand from each tribe, is another indication of the symbolic nature of the passage—twelve was the number of the people of God in Jewish texts (e.g., *Dead Sea Scrolls), and 144,000 is 12 x 12 x 10 x 10 x 10. Symbolic numbers were standard fare in Jewish views of the future (see especially comment on the times of Revelation 12).

7:9-17
The Multitude of Overcomers Before the Throne

This section may represent a different group than the one pictured in 7:1-8, or another picture of the same group now in heaven (double versions of visions sometimes occur in the *Old Testament too; cf. Gen 41:25-27; interpretations of visions also appear, e.g., in Daniel, **4 Ezra* and **2 Baruch*).

7:9-12. White robes were appropriate for worship in the temple and were also used for the worship of gods in Asia Minor. Jewish people regularly used palm branches in the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:40; Neh 8:15). In the future, the remnant of all nations would go up to Jerusalem to worship at the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech 14:16); as in *apocalyptic texts, the earthly future realm is in some sense presently fulfilled in heaven (cf. Rev 7:15). Palm branches celebrated the victory of Israel's exodus from Egypt, and the feast commemorated God's faithfulness to them during their wanderings in the wilderness, when they were totally dependent on him. More generally, palm branches celebrated victory, hailing the victors (cf. 1 Maccabees 13:51; 2 Maccabees 10:7). Ironically, if these are martyrs, they triumphed by

being faithful to death (see comment on 2:10), and they hail the slain lamb.

Some scholars have suggested that these multitudes are the martyrs or martyr *church of 6:11, viewed from another perspective. "Innumerable" meant that the crowd was huge, too many to count—not infinite (*3 Maccabees 4:17; it could also represent a number so great that it could be pictured as the sands of the sea in number, as in Judith 2:20).

7:13-14. Jewish teachers sometimes asked questions they knew their *disciples could not answer; the disciples then responded by asking for the answer. The same teaching technique is employed here. Jewish apocalypses and their occasional Roman analogues often included angelic guides (e.g., **1 Enoch* and *3 Baruch*) who asked the mortal observer *rhetorical questions to guide him to a truer understanding (e.g., *4 Ezra* and *Testament of Abraham;* cf. Dan 8:13-14; 12:6-7); in other texts confused visionaries simply had to ask to begin with (Dan 7:16; 12:8; *4 Ezra*) or wait for an interpretation (Dan 8:16).

"The great tribulation" refers to Daniel 12:1, the period of great suffering that God's people were to experience before the end of the age. Making robes white with blood is a ritual rather than visual image: sacrificial blood purified utensils for worship in the Old Testament (see comment on Heb 9:21-22), and white was the color of robes required for worship in the *New Testament period.

7:15-16. God's tabernacle as a refuge over them directly echoes Isaiah 4:5-6, which in turn alludes to a new exodus of salvation in the future time. When God redeemed his people from Egypt and they wandered in the wilderness (the time commemorated in the Feast of Tabernacles; see comment on Rev 7:9-12), he made such a cloud over them as Isaiah describes. Revelation also borrows the language of Isaiah 49:10 (again the salvation of the future age); cf. Psalm 121:5-6. What differs from Isaiah 49:10 here is that God's people now include representatives of many nations (Rev 7:9) and that the lamb fills the divine role. On God's throne room in heaven being portrayed as a temple, see comment on Revelation 4:6-7.

7:17. This verse alludes to Isaiah 25:8 (in the context of the messianic banquet at the *resurrection at the end of the age) and 49:10 (in the *age to come). For the imagery of the shepherd (here graphically juxtaposed with the lamb), see the introduction to John 10:1-18.

8:1-5
Preparing for the Trumpet Plagues

8:1. There are a number of possible ways to interpret "silence" here. In some texts, silence could characterize the end of the present world to form a new world (**4 Ezra* and **2 Baruch;* cf. *Pseudo-Philo). In this context of worship (7:9-12) and intercession (6:9-11; 8:4) in heaven, some suggest that "silence" could mean a brief delay in God's reception of his people's prayers for vindication (Ps 50:3, 21; 83:1) or silencing heaven's praises to receive his people's prayers (Rev 8:4), as in some later Jewish texts.

Perhaps more likely, it could be a form of awed worship (Ps 65:1) or perhaps of fear, grief or shame, as with the muzzled mouths of the guilty with nothing to say in their defense at the judgment (Hab 2:20; Zeph 1:7; Zech 2:13; cf. Ps 31:17-18; 76:8-10; Is 23:2; 41:1; 47:5).

8:2. Trumpets were used for celebrations, to call sacred or military assemblies, and as summons to battle, military signals or alerts, often warning of impending invasions. It is in this last sense that the prophets usually employed the image, and this is probably also why Revelation uses it. Given heavenly temple imagery elsewhere in Revelation, the use of trumpets in the temple might also be relevant (2 Chron 7:6; 29:26; Ezra 3:10). Although John undoubtedly would have used "seven" anyway (given his three sets of seven judgments each), commentators note that series of seven trumpeters appear in the *Old Testament (Josh 6:6, 13), probably regularly in the temple cult (1 Chron 15:24; Neh 12:41). Again, though seven angels would be needed for seven trumpets in any case, it is noteworthy that between the time of the Old Testament and the time of the New Testament Judaism had settled on seven archangels (adding five to the two important angels named in Daniel), who "stood before God."

8:3. The angel fulfills a task assigned to a priest in the earthly temple. For the heavenly temple in Revelation, see comment on 4:6-7; as in some other Jewish texts (including in the

Old Testament, in Ps 141:2), prayers are presented as incense (some texts portrayed them also as sacrifices). For the heavenly temple in Jewish texts in general, see comment on Hebrews 8:1-5.

8:4-5. In this context, the continual prayers of the *saints for vengeance (6:9-11) are the direct cause of their eventual vindication through judgments on the earth (8:6–9:21). On the image of atmospheric phenomena caused by angelic activity, see comment on 4:5; cf. 11:19 and 16:18.

8:6-12
The First Four Trumpet Plagues

The sorts of judgments characterizing the judgments of the trumpets and bowls evoke especially the ten plagues of the exodus (although they are numerically adjusted to seven; see comment on Jn 2:11, the first of probably seven signs in John). As in other Jewish texts (e.g., *Pseudo-Philo, Artapanus), the sequence and even number of the plagues is not important for the point of the image. Some of the plagues are echoed in other judgment texts (especially **Sibylline Oracles*) but never as systematically as here.

8:6. See comment on 8:2.

8:7. This plague echoes the seventh plague in Exodus 9:24-25. The mixture of hail and fire evokes the image in Ex 9:23-24 and Ps 105:32, where the fire probably alludes to lightning. The mixture with blood here probably evokes the plague of blood (see comment on Rev 8:8-9).

8:8-9. Waters running with blood would normally indicate war (e.g., Is 15:9), but these verses also echo the first plague in Exodus 7:20-21. The mountain hurled into the sea characterizes the sort of imagery standard in this type of literature (e.g., the burning star hurled into the sea in what may be a roughly contemporary oracle in *Sibylline Oracles*). The suggested parallel to Babylon as a burning mountain in Jeremiah 51:25, 42 is not as obvious, but it may have informed both Revelation (which elsewhere cites this section of Jeremiah, e.g., in Rev 18:4) and the *Sibylline Oracles*.

This plague addresses contamination of the water supply, effecting not only many swift deaths by dehydration but also long-term devastation by destruction of Egypt's irrigation and fishing (Ex 7:18) resources.

8:10-11. Like the preceding plague, this judgment alludes to the poisoned water of Exodus 7:20-21, but through a sort of poisoning or embittering agent called "wormwood" (Jer 9:15; 23:15; cf. Jer 8:14), often used figuratively (for idolatry—Deut 29:18; fruits of adultery—Prov 5:4; suffering—Lam 3:19). This plague strikes local freshwater supplies and would naturally worry John's readers in Asia, especially in Laodicea (see comment on Rev 3:15-16).

8:12. This plague echoes the ninth plague in Exodus 10:22-23; many ancient texts speak of darkness as a dreaded judgment, and the *Old Testament (see comment on Rev 6:12-13) and some other Jewish texts also associate it with the end time.

8:13–9:11
The Fifth Trumpet Plague

8:13. The announcement of three impending woes indicates that as negative as the first four trumpet plagues were, the worst is yet to come. "Woe" often begins a new oracle in **1 Enoch* and probably serves a similar function here.

The eagle was a symbol of imperial Rome carried by the legions and used on Herod's temple, but that symbolism may be irrelevant here. Perhaps more to the point, eagles were used as messengers in some texts (*4 Baruch*); Romans could view them as omens; they could symbolize God's protection (Rev 12:14); or the term here could mean (as it often does, including in the *LXX) "vulture," indicating a bird of prey (see 19:17), and thus imminent doom. Finally, it might simply reflect God's sovereignty over all his creatures (cf. 4:7). "Midheaven" (NASB, NRSV) is the level of heaven between God's throne and the lowest atmosphere (in the minimal three-heaven scheme of some ancients—on which see comment on 2 Cor 12:2-4—but also in some other schemes, e.g., in *2 Enoch*).

9:1-2. Many Jewish traditions spoke of evil angels imprisoned in dungeons or rivers, awaiting their time to come out and wreak havoc. Some ancient writers assumed that the "abyss" (NIV, GNT; "bottomless pit"—NASB, KJV, NRSV) was a real geographical place that could be found on earth (*1 Enoch*); angels were as-

signed over such sites and given keys. Most pagans held stars to be divinities, and many Jews held them to be angels; stars could naturally symbolize angels in Jewish texts, as in this case. John exploits the standard imagery to make his point.

9:3. In view of the larger context evoking Exodus's plagues, this plague recalls the eighth plague in Exodus 10:12, the locusts. Maintaining the imagery characteristic of much *apocalyptic and prophetic revelation, however, John's vision transmutes these locusts into something far more terrifying. Joel apparently describes an imminent locust plague in terms of armies (e.g., 1:4; 2:11, 20, 25) and also describes a final war (3:9-17). John borrows Joel's imagery here (e.g., Joel 1:6; 2:4-5) to amplify the imagery of a locust plague into a terrible invasion.

9:4. See comment on 7:3. Ordinary locusts would have feasted on the vegetation and left the people alone.

9:5. Scorpion stings were among the most intense pains (1 Kings 12:11; 2 Chron 10:14); but a pain lasting five months (9:10, unless this is simply the duration of the plague; one commentator says that five months fits the approximate lifespan of a normal kind of locust) was unheard of. Jewish texts often included scorpions as one of God's means of judgment.

9:6. Only the severest sufferings prompted a preference for death over life (Jer 8:3); but even death will be withheld during this plague.

9:7. An invasion of locusts could be described as warhorses (Joel 2:4), and horses could be described as being as numerous as locusts (Jer 51:27; cf. 51:14). The crowns might reflect prior military exploits or that they command still other locusts. Peoples such as Greeks and Babylonians envisioned various kinds of composite monsters evoking parts of different creatures (from centaurs and griffins, more positively, to snake-haired Gorgons). The image of human-faced scorpions derived from nightmarish traditions from the East, and Mediterranean zodiacs eventually applied it to Sagittarius, who was often portrayed with long hair (see comment on 9:8). Although the image is not meant literally, it draws on the most terrible, repressed images of that culture's unconscious fears to evoke horror at the impending judgments.

9:8. Joel 1:6 described locusts with "teeth like lions" to emphasize their destructiveness to the crops and everything else. In Joel, the image would terrify an agrarian society; in Revelation, it would remind readers of the lion's proverbial ferocity. The "hair like women" might evoke a particular military threat known to John's audience: everyone in the Roman Empire knew that "barbarians" outside the empire, unlike most people in Greco-Roman society, had long hair. In the context of a military invasion, the readers might immediately think of the Parthians (or, in apocalyptic terms, perhaps the spiritual realities behind them). By way of illustration, the reigning emperor Domitian's father was reported—perhaps fictitiously—to have joked about the Parthians' long hair in view of a long-tailed comet portending his death. Thus Revelation, employing dramatic imagery of its day, communicates a terrible invasion.

9:9. The "noise of chariots" is borrowed from the military imagery for locusts in Joel 2:5; the swarms would be so intense that they would sound like an invading army, a sound great enough to make a land quake (Jer 8:16). The scales of a kind of locust's thorax are compared with scaled armor in a later Jewish text; here John uses a more updated armor image.

9:10. Their tails may be mentioned simply because that was the weapon of scorpions (9:5), but the reverse could also be true; scorpions could be mentioned because of the tails. It may be of interest that the Parthians (9:8) had become famous for their rearward archery: they had retreated up hills mounted on horseback, and when unwary Roman legions had followed them, the Parthians had released a backward hail of arrows, wiping out several legions before the Romans learned not to follow them up hills. Although the lifespan of different kinds of locusts varies significantly, many live roughly three to five months.

9:11. "Abaddon" is a Hebrew name for the lowest depths of the earth, the realm of the dead (cf. Job 31:12; Ps 88:11; Prov 27:20); the *Dead Sea Scrolls also linked the "spirit of Abaddon" with the "angel of the pit." "Apollyon" means "destruction" in Greek. (Some scholars have secondarily connected the name to Apollo, a Greek deity, one of whose totems was the locust patron, but the allusion is disputed.)

The final, terrifying touch to this description of an army with elements from Joel's locusts, from Parthians and from scorpions is that these are the armies of hell, sent by death itself to fill its bowels.

9:12-21
The Sixth Trumpet Plague

Parthians were Rome's most feared enemies in this period. They were portrayed as untrustworthy, and the authority of their monarchs was absolute. Older Greek prophecies about an eastern invasion of the Roman Empire still made some Romans nervous, and the Jewish *Sibylline Oracles* prophesied that Nero would return, leading Parthian hordes in vengeance on Rome. (Many Jewish people lived in Parthian territory, and many Jews in the Roman Empire felt no more allegiance to Rome than they would have to Parthia; in the Jewish-Roman War of 66–70 many Jews expected Parthia to intervene on their behalf, but their hopes were disappointed.)

9:12. See comment on 8:13.

9:13. On the temple imagery, see comment on 4:6-7. Ancient Middle Eastern altars typically had four horns.

9:14. Pervasive references in ancient literature reveal that it was common knowledge that the river Euphrates (16:12) was, above all else, the traditional boundary between the Roman and Parthian empires. Some other Jewish texts speak of fallen angels being bound in the depths of various seas, able to be released only at the command of God or one of his angels.

9:15. For all their recognition of demonic forces in this age, apocalyptic writers recognized also the standard Jewish doctrine that God ultimately rules all of history. Casualty statistics like this one are also familiar in Jewish judgment oracles (see the *Sibylline Oracles*). Some scholars suggest mercy in the statistic (contrasting two-thirds of God's people destroyed in Zech 13:8, and of the world in the *Sibylline Oracles*).

9:16. Parthians were noted horsemen; in contrast to Rome, whose only cavalry contingents were drawn from its auxiliary (non-Roman) units, the Parthians were renowned for their cavalry. "Two hundred million" would be a huge standing army even today (only about one-sixth the population of India, but close to the entire population of Brazil, roughly two-thirds the population of the United States, nearly forty percent more than that of Mexico, a quarter more than that of Nigeria, and nearly six times that of Canada); in the first century it probably represented more than the population of the entire Mediterranean world.

9:17-18. The "dark blue" (NIV; "hyacinth"—NASB; or "sapphire"—NRSV) might allude to the color of the smoke of sulfur's flame. Cf. 9:7-8 for the source of the image of horses and lions; lions were considered the most ferocious and regal of beasts, which no one cared to meet. In a widely read Jewish wisdom book, a writer had declared that God could have punished idolatry by sending lions or newly created, fire-breathing and smoke-belching monsters (Wisdom of Solomon 11:17-20). But again this imagery may be mixed with the threat of a Parthian invasion: Parthian archers often used flaming arrows.

9:19. The power "in their tails" may allude to scorpions or to the Parthian cavalry's rearward archery (see comment on 9:10).

9:20-21. Jewish people commonly regarded the unrepentance of the world in the face of obvious judgments (e.g., Ex 7:22-23) as a sign of stupidity. (Even some pagan philosophers pointed out that divine judgments were acts of mercy, to bring the wicked to *repentance, as well as acts of justice; in this view they agreed with the *Old Testament—e.g., Ex 8:10; 9:14, 29; 10:2; 14:4; Amos 4:6-11.) Old Testament prophets and later Jewish writers frequently ridiculed the worship of idols (cf. Rev 2:14, 20) that were less powerful than those who made them (e.g., Ps 135:15-18; Is 46:6-7). That pagans worshiped *demons was also widely accepted in Jewish circles (e.g., *1 Enoch;* 1 Cor 10:20). Idolatry and immorality were standard parts of Greco-Roman culture; thieves and sorcerers were, however, considered dangerous by common consent.

10:1-7
The Mysteries of the End

10:1. Jewish literature pictures a number of angels as being as high as the highest heavens, often shining like the sun (*2 Enoch; *3 Enoch;* *rabbis; cf. Dan 10:6; cf. the Greek figure Atlas).

Both evil angels (*1 Enoch*) and good angels could be very tall. Sometimes they were crowned (e.g., *2 Enoch; 3 Enoch*), in this case with a rainbow; in *3 Enoch,* even the crown is more than a five-hundred-year journey high. (Sometimes such language was also used figuratively, e.g., for a particular *high priest.) John borrows the imagery of his day for a powerful angel over creation (see comment on Rev 7:1). *Apocalypses typically portrayed such glorious angels to imply the infinitely greater majesty of their creator.

10:2. The seals having been opened (6:1–8:1), the contents of the book may now be examined ("open"). The angel's enormity and his feet on both land and sea may indicate how great his dominion is.

10:3-4. Something remains sealed (cf. 22:10), indicating that some mysteries must remain mysteries until the end (Deut 29:29). On unspeakable revelations, see comment on 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. The text implies that John is taking notes (as rabbinic or especially Greek students sometimes did) or writing down what he hears and sees; one could write down visions or utterances as others were having them (e.g., **Testament of Job* 51, a section admittedly of uncertain date).

10:5-6. Raising one's hand toward a god was used in solemn oath formulas in Greek culture as well as in the *Old Testament and later Jewish literature. Here John alludes to Daniel 12:7, where an angel lifted his hands toward heaven and swore by the one who lives forever that there would be only three and a half more years until the end; here this angel swears that the time has come, and there is no further delay. (Some apocalyptic texts spoke of countable time itself ending, but the point here seems to be "time before the end," given Dan 12:7; cf. Rev 2:21; 6:11; 20:3; Hab 2:3.)

10:7. All the Old Testament promises, both of judgment and of restoration, came to a head in the day of the Lord.

10:8-11
A Bitter Message for the Nations

This account is based on Ezekiel 2:8–3:3, where a hand is extended to Ezekiel containing a scroll, written on both sides (cf. Rev 5:1) with a message of three kinds of judgment. Ezekiel ate the scroll, which tasted sweet to his mouth but was a message of judgment for Israel.

10:8-10. These verses are based on Ezekiel 2:8–3:3; another contemporary *apocalyptic writer (**4 Ezra*) drew more loosely on the same imagery. Sin tasted sweet like honey but was poison because it led to judgment (Prov 5:3-4; cf. Num 5:23-31); but the sweetness here is the word of the Lord (cf. Prov 24:13-14; rabbis), and the bitterness is the bitterness of judgment that John must proclaim. On an angel talking with the visionary, see comment on Revelation 7:13-14.

10:11. Ezekiel's message from the book (see comment on 10:8-10) was for Israel, but John prophesies to many nations (like Jeremiah; Jer 1:10). The Jewish Sibyl in the **Sibylline Oracles* conceived her task as prophesying concerning all nations (cf. Rev 11:2), but this was standard with many *Old Testament prophets, who uttered oracles against the nations, to which John's are much closer (Is 13–23; Jer 46–51; Ezek 25–32; Amos 1–2).

11:1-13
The Two Witnesses

John uses Old Testament language for prophets (Elijah, Moses) and a *high priest and king (from Zechariah) to describe these witnesses. On a literal futuristic reading, they could refer to the new Moses and Elijah expected in Judaism; conversely, Revelation could have recycled these expectations as symbols for the prophetic calling and joint aspects of the *church, as rulers and priests (Rev 1:6; 5:10), especially since this is the meaning of lampstands elsewhere in the book (1:20).

11:1. Measuring the courts of God's house (21:15) was one way of praising the magnificence of the building whose construction was meant as praise to God (Ps 48:12-13; Ezek 40:3–42:20; Zech 2:1-5; cf. **Similitudes of Enoch,* where paradise is measured). A "reed" (NIV, KJV) could be used as a surveyor's rule (hence "measuring rod"—NASB, NRSV, GNT).

11:2. The sanctuary had been trodden down before (Is 63:18; 1 Maccabees 3:45; 4:60), and its desolation was portrayed as the typical goal of pagans (Judith 9:8), but here only the outer court is trodden down. Yet the whole temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, and (with most scholars) Revelation was probably written in the 90s. Even the literal treading

down of the outer sanctuary had taken place more than forty-two months before John's time, perhaps implying that the number was symbolic for the whole period from its devastation in some sense until its restoration (see comment on Rev 12:6).

If the heavenly temple is meant (11:19; see comment on 4:6), the outer court would be meant symbolically. Perhaps as at *Qumran, the temple stands for God's chosen remnant (cf. 21:3). The outer court was the only court *Gentiles were allowed to enter. Although the literal outer court was in ruins like the rest of the temple, the image might refer to some danger such as pagan spiritual domination over the church as Israel's spiritual remnant (cf. 2:9; 3:9) or over the holy land or Jewish people, or to the lack of a temple; even while the temple stood, many felt that it was spiritually impure (e.g., *Dead Sea Scrolls).

11:3. On the 1,260 days, see comment on 12:6; based on a 360-day year, this was the same as forty-two months or three and a half years (Daniel used all three figures). Sackcloth was proper Old Testament apparel for mourning or *repentance; the two witnesses are apparently lamenting the sins of God's people (e.g., Joel 1:13; Jon 3:6; **Joseph and Asenath;* clothing for prophets in *Ascension of Isaiah,* etc.). Two witnesses was the minimum number acceptable under Old Testament *law (Deut 17:6; 19:15).

11:4. The source of the image is clear: Zechariah 4:2-3 presented two seven-branched lampstands and two olive trees, which represented the two anointed ones (Zech 4:14): the king and the priest (Zech 6:13). In Zechariah's day they represented Zerubbabel and Joshua. (Thus *Qumran in some periods in its history stressed two future anointed figures, a messianic king and an anointed priest.) John might connect the image with a kingdom and priests (Rev 1:6; 5:10).

That they "stand" (currently) could indicate, as some (e.g., the second-century North African Christian Tertullian) have suggested, an allusion to Old Testament figures who did not die (cf. also **4 Ezra*)—Elijah, Enoch (according to the most common reading of the Old Testament) and Moses (according to some Jewish storytellers, against the plain sense of Deut 34). They could also simply represent the church, whose heavenly representatives are already before God (Rev 4:4; cf. Mt 18:10). The two anointed ones in Zechariah 4:14 "stand" by the Lord of all the earth.

11:5. Elijah seemed to have a spiritual gift for calling down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:38; 2 Kings 1:10, 12; cf. Lev 9:24–10:2). But what appears to be an allusion to Elijah is slightly modified: the fire comes from their mouths (perhaps symbolic for efficacious proclamations of judgment—Jer 5:10, 14). (Later Jewish texts expand this gift to Joseph, Abraham and others; later *rabbis told stories of earlier pious rabbis, especially Simeon ben Yohai in the second century A.D. and Johanan in the third, who disintegrated disrespectful men by gazing at them spitefully.)

11:6. Elijah had "shut" the sky, bringing drought in obedience to God's word (1 Kings 17:1; 18:41); according to a probable Jewish tradition, this was for three and a half years (cf. also Jas 5:17; Lk 4:25). Authorization to turn water to blood clearly recalls Moses (Ex 7:14-25). Jewish people were expecting both a new prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15-18) and the return of Elijah (Mal 4:5); in the language of their power, Revelation describes the mission of the two witnesses, possibly the church (see introduction to 11:1-13).

11:7. Developing Old Testament pictures of the end (Zech 14:1-3), Jewish texts commonly expected this age to end with a long, climactic battle, which often included suffering for God's people but culminated in their ultimate triumph (cf. both sufferings of the final generation and spiritual battle plans in the War Scroll in the Dead Sea Scrolls).

11:8. Throughout the ancient world, refusing to bury the dead (sometimes a punishment for the worst crimes) was the greatest cruelty one could offer (e.g., Is 5:25) and was usually a mark of grave impiety as well. As Paul contrasts the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:25-26), so Revelation may do here (the place of Jesus' crucifixion); the Old Testament prophets often compared Jerusalem or Israel with Sodom (e.g., Is 1:9-10; Jer 23:14). As Egypt had oppressed Israel, so Jerusalem's authorities had oppressed the true followers of God. The association of Jewish authorities with the persecution of the church held true at least in some cities in Asia Minor (Rev 2:9;

3:9); compare this city with Babylon in chapters 17–18. In contrast, some scholars have pointed to the use of the "city" for Rome elsewhere in Revelation, arguing that the city here is Rome, who martyred *Christ in Jerusalem, or the world system as a whole. All of those hostile to the church might be blended together as the world city. (When used figuratively, "the prostitute" [Rev 17] in the Old Testament was almost always used for Israel or Judah betraying their covenant with God; Revelation reapplies the title to Rome.)

11:9. "Three and a half days" may be mentioned to signify that the dead bodies of the two witnesses were decomposing; it might also correspond to the three and a half years of their prophesying.

11:10. For "earth-dwellers" see comment on 3:10. The giving of gifts characterized some pagan celebrations and (probably not in view here) the Jewish Feast of Purim, which celebrated Israel's deliverance from Persian enemies (Esther 9:19, 22).

11:11. The breath of life entering the two corpses alludes to Genesis 2:7 and perhaps Ezekiel 37 (cf. Jn 20:22; *Testament of Abraham,* recension A).

11:12. Elijah ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11), and as time went on, Jewish tradition multiplied the number of holy servants of God taken directly to heaven without death. Greek traditions pictured a very small number of heroes taken to heaven in death. But ascension after *resurrection refers in other Christian texts to Jesus (Acts 1:9-11) and the church (1 Thess 4:15-16).

11:13. If "seven thousand" is understood as one-tenth of the population, the description fits Jerusalem better than Rome (the latter is estimated to have had a population as high as one million, though some think this inflated). (Some commentators see it as a specific reference to the remnant of Israel—1 Kings 19:18. Mercifully, here the surviving remnant is nine-tenths rather than one-tenth as in Is 6:13.) On a final earthquake, see Revelation 6:12.

11:14-19
The Final Trumpet and the World's End

11:14. See comment on 8:13; cf. 9:12.

11:15. The world system (in John's day, Rome) constituted a *kingdom, but it would be handed over to God's people (Dan 7:17-18). On the eternal reign of Israel's final king, cf. Isaiah 9:7, Daniel 7:13-14 and 1 Maccabees 2:57. Trumpets were always blown on the accession of an Israelite king (1 Kings 1:34).

11:16. See comment on 4:4 and 10.

11:17. Although Judaism acknowledged God's present rule over the earth, it also awaited and celebrated his future rule unchallenged over all humanity, and it usually acknowledged Israel's rule over the nations on his behalf. In Jewish sources, this rule would be inaugurated at the very end of the age.

11:18. The raging of the nations, God's wrath and the rule of Christ over the nations echoes Psalm 2. Judaism held that the righteous were rewarded at the end of the age (or at death). Destroyers of earth could evoke humanity's abuse of its stewardship over the earth (Gen 1:26). This idea was not unknown in John's day (e.g., **2 Baruch* 13:11, although the unrighteous use of creation there may refer specifically to idolatry); many Jewish writers also believed that humanity's sin had corrupted the whole creation (e.g., **4 Ezra*). Most relevantly, however, "destroying the earth" alludes to Babylon's conquests devastating the world (Jer 51:25).

11:19. The ark of the covenant (see comment on 23:17) was the piece of furniture in the tabernacle and temple that corresponded to a throne in ancient Near Eastern symbolism; the inclusion of the ark thus fits the dual image of heaven as a throne room and as God's temple. Jewish hearers of the book would also be aware that the covenant had been deposited in the ark and that the covenant was associated with stipulations and curses (plagues) against the disobedient. The Dead Sea Scrolls and many *apocalyptic writers felt that the old temple had been defiled, but that God would supply a renewed, pure temple at the end of the age; on the heavenly temple here, see 4:6. The ark was kept behind a curtain in the holy of holies in the *Old Testament, seen only by the *high priest one day a year; here it is exposed to open view. (One scholar has suggested that this verse evokes the image of the ark going forth to war, portrayed in terms Roman readers would readily catch: the numen of the state going

forth from the temple of Janus for war, thus the opening of heaven here.) On the lightnings and related phenomena, see comment on 4:5; this exodus language (Ex 19:16; cf. Ezek 1:4) suggests that John's revelation is understood as a revelation on the same level as Moses'.

12:1-6
The Dragon, the Woman and the Child

This vision reapplies imagery that was widely known in ancient mythology. A common Greek story, spread in several forms, presented Leto begetting the god Apollo while opposed by the dragon Python; Apollo then pursued the dragon Python and slew him. In an Egyptian story, the goddess Isis gave birth to the sun god Horus as the red dragon Typhon was pursuing her; Horus eventually killed Typhon. Some argue that people also applied such popular stories to the Roman emperor, whose rule is here linked with the evil dragon (in contrast with Roman tradition, which portrayed him in terms of the hero Apollo). Although these stories omit many details John includes from other sources (his whole account could be reproduced from the *Old Testament and Jewish sources), they indicate that all his readers could identify with a story line that modern readers often find impenetrable. But ancient readers familiar with the Bible would especially recognize here the story of Israel giving birth and *Satan's opposition to God's people.

12:1. Symbolic women occasionally appeared in *apocalyptic visions (e.g., **4 Ezra*). Ancient writers sometimes meant "signs" in heaven astrologically (consider Virgo, the virgin, and Draco, the dragon or serpent), but these signs were also fairly common as props in apocalyptic visions. The sun, moon and twelve stars help identify the woman as the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen 37:9). Judaism in this period (e.g., *Josephus, *Philo; later evident in *synagogue mosaics and the *rabbis) often associated the twelve signs of the zodiac with the twelve tribes, despite biblical prohibitions against astrological speculation; indeed, the romance novel **Joseph and Asenath* borrows twelve rays from typical Greek imagery for the sun god. But the Genesis reference itself is clear enough to show that the allusion is to Israel (cf. also Abraham and Sarah as sun and moon to Isaac in the *Testament of Abraham*).

The Old Testament portrayed faithful Israel (or Judah or Jerusalem) as a virgin or God's bride but their unfaithful equivalent as a prostitute; thus the tale of two cities that contrasts the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21:2) and Babylon the prostitute (17:5). (**2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra* also follow Old Testament models and contrast righteous Zion with its oppressor wicked Babylon.)

12:2. Righteous Israel was portrayed as the mother of the restored future remnant of Israel (Is 54:1; 66:7-10; Mic 5:3; cf. Is 7:14; 9:6; 26:18-19), an image freely mixed with the image of Israel as a bride (Is 62:5). The *Dead Sea Scrolls also spoke of the righteous remnant of Israel travailing to give birth (either to a saved Israel—cf. Rev 12:17—or to the *Messiah; the precise referent is disputed). Cf. John 16:21.

12:3. Ancient Mesopotamian myths portrayed seven-headed monsters; later Jewish tradition linked the worship of dragons to Babylon (Bel and the Dragon 23-27). The image of a seven-headed serpent or dragon was also part of Canaanite mythology that the Israelites symbolically turned to better purposes: God's parting the Red Sea was now symbolized as a defeat of the primeval serpent Leviathan or Lotan (Ps 74:13-15; cf. also Ps 89:9-10; Is 27:1; 30:7; 51:9; Job 9:13; 26:12-13; Ezek 29:3; for the principle, see Ex 12:12; Rahab in some of these texts had become a symbol for Egypt—Ps 87:4); this may be the most relevant background here. The Greek hero Heracles also confronted a seven-headed dragon, the Lernean hydra, in Greek mythology, although in that case the number of heads changed quickly! Serpents were also associated with Asclepius (relevant esp. in Pergamum); their association with Athena is less relevant in Asia Minor. Serpent veneration is common in many cultures and prevailed in a *Gnostic sect called the Ophites in the second century.

Jewish people had many stories about the great evil reptile Leviathan, that he would even be killed and served up as part of the course at the messianic banquet (cf. *2 Baruch* and later rabbis). Here the dragon is identified with the serpent of Genesis 3 and the devil (Rev 12:9).

12:4. The image of stars battling in heaven was used in the Old Testament (Judg 5:20, figurative language for the heavens pouring out rain against the enemy), the **Sibylline Oracles* (catching the world on fire) and some Greek sources. Old Testament texts and later Jewish texts portrayed both Israel or the godly (Dan 12:3; cf. 8:10) and angels (**1 Enoch;* probably also Is 24:21 and *2 Baruch*) as stars. Jewish traditions usually assigned the fall of angels to the period of Adam (refusal to worship God's image in Adam) or, more often, to Noah's time (sexual sins), but Revelation links their fall especially with rebellion against Christ.

12:5. Virgil and other Roman writers also extolled the birth of a divine boy who would bring deliverance to the world, glorifying the first emperor Augustus. If the emperor appears in Revelation, however, he is a puppet of the dragon, whereas Jesus is the divine leader of a group that may be marginalized or persecuted for rejecting the imperial cult.

In the various forms of the Greco-Roman and Near Eastern myth, the divine child was sheltered until he returned to slay the dragon. Here he is kept at God's throne until he comes to destroy the dragon. In the light of Psalm 2:6-9, Isaiah 9:6-7 and Micah 5:3, the "birth" probably indicates Jesus' death, *resurrection and messianic enthronement, not his literal birth (cf. Jn 16:21).

12:6. When God led his people from captivity, they wandered in the "wilderness" until their redemption was complete (i.e., until they possessed their inheritance in the Promised Land). As elsewhere in the *New Testament (see comment on Jn 1:23), the interim between Jesus' first coming and second coming is compared with Israel between Egypt and the Promised Land. The Jewish people were also expecting a new exodus of final deliverance in the wilderness (cf. Is 40:3; Hos 2:14-15).

More than 1,260 days had obviously already passed since Jesus' exaltation (see also comment on 11:2), but symbolic numbers were standard fare for apocalyptic texts. Although "1,260 days" surely alludes to the great tribulation of Daniel (cf. Dan 12:11; also 7:25; 9:27; 12:7), it is possible that Revelation reapplies it as a general symbol for final tribulation to the whole course of the present age. Daniel's own numbers were a reapplication of Jeremiah (Dan 9:2, 24), and some other apocalyptic writers also described other periods of tribulation figuratively. Such designations would characterize the kind, rather than the length, of time they described. This would fit the New Testament understanding that the "last days" involved the time between the Messiah's comings (see, in context, Acts 2:17; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; 2 Pet 3:3); Jesus coming twice required adjusting traditional Jewish expectations about the end.

(The language of older prophecies was commonly reused in Old Testament, later Jewish and Greek *prophecy; sometimes prophecies and other texts sought to evoke the same meaning as the earlier texts, and at other times they simply borrowed earlier language as standard prophetic imagery, without implying that they referred to the same meaning. As to what happened to the literal 1,260 days, Josephus and possibly the Gospels applied them to A.D. 66–70, the Maccabean literature applied them especially to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, and many early Christians probably expected a literal period of that length to precede Christ's return, as became explicit in writings of some of the church fathers of subsequent centuries.)

12:7-17
This Means War

One may read the structure of the context as suggesting that the 1,260 days of 12:6 symbolically covers the whole period between the first and second comings. The period begins with Jesus' exaltation (12:1-6), the coming of salvation (12:10) and believers' justification (no longer prosecuted before God, 12:11). It spans the period of persecution of Christians (12:11-17), and, given the story line Revelation uses (familiar to the first readers), undoubtedly ends with Christ's return to slay the dragon (see comment on 12:1-6).

12:7-8. One of two angels mentioned by name in the *Old Testament, Michael was one of the chief heavenly princes, the guardian angel of Israel (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1; in much ancient Jewish thought, each nation had its own angelic prince). In early Jewish literature and invocations, Michael was the chief prince of the heavenly host, God's main messenger (cf.

Jude 9); in the Dead Sea Scrolls, everyone was either in the camp of the Prince of Light or that of the Angel of Darkness. Common mythical language from Jewish stories about a primeval, heavenly battle leading to the fall of the evil prince and his angels is here transformed: the *ultimate* battle surrounded Jesus' death and exaltation (Jn 12:31; 16:11). Because Michael was sometimes presented as Israel's advocate before God, and Satan was generally presented as Israel's accuser (see 12:10), the image of war here may be one of judicial as well as of violent conflict.

12:9. The dragon is identified with the serpent of Genesis 3, who would be crushed by "the woman's seed" (Gen 3:15).

12:10. From his portrayal in the book of Job on, Satan is presented as an accuser of the righteous, a prosecuting attorney before God's court. In later texts, his role of tempter (gaining incriminating evidence) became more prominent, but he always retained his role as accuser; later rabbinic texts declared that he accused Israel day and night before God, except on the Day of Atonement. (They derived this idea fancifully: the number of Satan's name was 364, so he accused Israel 364 days per year.) This verse declares that Christ's finished work has ended Satan's power to accuse the righteous (cf. Rom 8:33-34).

12:11. The believers' legal "testimony" (offered in this world) counts more before the throne than Satan's accusations, and the object of their testimony is the finished work of *Christ on their behalf (1:2, 5, 9; 2:13). "Loving not one's life to the death" was the language of valor in battle (Judg 5:18), as was "overcoming"; they fought and won by faith to the point of martyrdom.

12:12. In many Jewish views of the end time, Satan/Belial would be unleashed against God's people in the final years (Dead Sea Scrolls). His authority was always delegated by God, permitted for only a particular length of time, to give him and his followers full opportunity to prove themselves wrong.

12:13-14. When God led his people forth from Egypt and into the wilderness, he "bore them on eagles' wings" (Ex 19:4; Deut 32:11), and other Old Testament texts speak of God sheltering his people beneath his wings (Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4; cf. Jer 49:22); later Jewish texts speak of God's protecting his people, including converts to Judaism, under "the wings of his presence." "Time, times, and half a time" refer to three and a half years, as in Daniel (7:25; 12:7; cf. 4:32). The miraculous provision in the wilderness also recalls God's provision of manna for Israel of old there. The Old Testament prophets and Judaism looked forward to a new exodus like the first one in which God would ultimately deliver his people from all their oppressors; the early Christians applied this notion to their salvation by Christ's first coming and entrance into the future era of the *kingdom by his second (see comment on Rom 8:12-17).

12:15. In the most common form of the Greek story about Leto and Apollo (see introduction to 12:1-6), the sea god hid Leto beneath the sea till she could bear the child; in another version of the story, the dragon stirred the waters against her but the earth helped her by raising up the island of Delos. Revelation may reapply such images with new content. "Floods" are a typical image of judgment (e.g., Jer 47:2—war) and tribulation (Ps 32:6; 69:15) in the Old Testament, but God had promised safety for the people of the new exodus, just as he had brought Israel through the Red Sea (Is 43:2).

12:16. In Jewish tradition, creation, loyal to God, sometimes helped the righteous against their wicked human oppressors; thus, for example, a tree hid Isaiah from his pursuers, and the earth swallowed and so hid the vessels of the temple; in the Old Testament, cf. Genesis 4:10 and Numbers 16:31-32.

12:17. The woman's "seed" alludes to Genesis 3:15; the woman's seed would ultimately crush the serpent's head, but only after the serpent had bruised the seed's heel.

13:1-10
The Worshiped Beast

Whereas most of Revelation (including this passage; see Dan 7:3-8) draws on images from the *Old Testament, many scholars believe that this passage also plays on a theme prominent in the thought of John's contemporaries. Although Nero died, reportedly by his own hand, on June 9, A.D. 68, rumor circulated that he was still alive and ready to take vengeance on the Roman aristocracy for rejecting him.

According to writers of the day, the majority of people in the eastern part of the empire expected his return. Several impostors arose claiming to be Nero, hoping to gather followings in the eastern empire, where he was most popular; one of them arose in Asia Minor during the reign of Titus (Domitian's older brother). During Domitian's reign, a Nero figure even persuaded the Parthians to follow him to invade the Roman Empire, but Domitian forced them to back down and execute the impostor instead.

Jewish oracles predicted the return of Nero, and many Christians feared it. Although John clearly does not believe in a literal return of Nero, he may use the image of this popular myth, as many scholars think, to say: "You thought Nero was bad; wait till you see this!" (the way we today might use the image of Hitler, Stalin or Pol Pot). This image so shaped the views of early Christians—thousands of whose numbers had been eradicated under Nero in Rome—that "Nero" even reportedly became a term for "antichrist" in the Armenian language. Many later Christian writers, including Tertullian, Augustine and Jerome, connected Nero with the antichrist. The view that John here uses this Nero redivivus myth has continued through history and is widely held by modern scholars, such as F. F. Bruce, William Barclay and most commentators on Revelation. Politically dangerous oracles were known forms of Greek and Jewish protest, and Rome would have taken serious offense at the implications of this exiled prophet John had the authorities cared to take note of the symbolism of his book. See further comment on the number of the beast in 13:18 and the return of a king in 17:9-11. None of this means that Revelation or its early interpreters expected literal Nero to rise from the dead; emperors often claimed to be a second or new "Augustus" or some other emperor before them, and a new Nero need be no more literally the same person as his model than a new Moses or Elijah (Rev 11:5-6) or new Joshua or Zerubbabel (11:4) would need to be the same people as their models.

13:1. Rome came "from the sea" from the vantage point of the eastern empire, although the image itself is borrowed from Daniel 7:3. (**4 Ezra* 11:1 likewise has a symbol for Rome—an eagle with twelve wings and three heads—come from the sea, although in 13:1 a messianic figure does the same.)

Emperors bore titles such as "divine" ("god," on Asian coins) and "son of a god" (i.e., of the preceding ruler), and Domitian demanded the address "Lord and God," thus "blasphemous names" here (see comment on Rev 13:5-6 for Old Testament background). On seven-headed beasts, see comment on 12:3; on the heads, see comment on 17:9-10.

13:2. Daniel described four beasts, representing four successive empires (7:3-7); the fourth, probably the Greek empire of Alexander, was in John's day often interpreted to represent Rome instead. This passage uses components from several of Daniel's beasts (which were a winged lion, a bear, a winged leopard and a beast with iron teeth) to portray a composite of oppressive evil, evoking the worst feelings his hearers would have toward Rome and all oppressive political powers.

13:3. Much of the passage can be explained by the beast's imitating God as a false god, hence the pseudoresurrection here. But many commentators have also seen reference here to the myth that Nero, who apparently died in A.D. 68, was alive and would return (according to some forms of the story, Nero was dead but would return from the dead; see introduction to 13:1-10).

13:4. The praise here offered to the beast mimics a praise often offered to God (Ex 15:11; cf. Judith 6:2-3; Sirach 33:5, 10).

13:5-6. The proud mouth is the sort of imagery that later fed into the antichrist traditions (originally built around Antiochus Epiphanes and those after him who would be like him—Dan 7:8, 20, 25; 11:36; 1 Maccabees 1:24). On the forty-two months, see comment on Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6. The identifying of the tabernacle with the righteous heaven-dwellers matches the *Essene and early Christian picture of the righteous community as God's holy temple.

13:7. In Daniel 7:21-22, an antichristlike figure (applied first to Antiochus IV Epiphanes but necessarily reapplied to his successors in the role, with which history is replete) waged war against the *saints ("holy ones," God's people—7:18, 25; 8:24) and "overcame" them—until the day of judgment

and the *kingdom arrived. Nero burned Christians alive to light his imperial gardens at night, crucified others and fed still others to wild beasts; they were his political scapegoat for a fire in Rome for which he and his boyfriend Tigellinus were being blamed. Domitian does not seem to have instituted an empirewide policy of repressing Christians, but some later emperors did so. Daniel spoke of all peoples, nations and languages (also mentioned in Dan 4:1; 6:25), including under oppressive rulers and worshiping a false image (Dan 3:4, 7; 5:19); as in Revelation, the oppressive human multicultural empire contrasts with God's own multicultural kingdom (7:14). (Although Daniel's formula usually includes three elements, the *LXX includes four elements, as in Revelation, the first time the formula appears in Daniel at 3:4.)

13:8. Antiochus Epiphanes, one of the earliest candidates for an antichrist sort of figure (second century B.C.), had brought all the nations (in his part of the world) under his authority as one people (1 Maccabees 1:41-43) and demanded the worship normally considered due rulers in the East. The Romans had likewise united much of the ancient world, and most of the ruler-worshiping eastern empire now worshiped the emperor. "All the earth" was used in other texts of John's time to mean all the "civilized" earth, all that was under a mighty empire (e.g., Judith 2:7; 6:4; 11:1; although everyone was aware, from legend, mythology and trade connections, of peoples outside the sphere of Rome, Parthia and the northern barbarians). This verse indicates the Jewish doctrine of predestination, which many Jewish people held alongside the doctrine of free will (many of the early writers never saw enough tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility to contrast them, although the idea of God's foreknowledge may have helped; see comment on Rom 9:19-21). On the "book of life" (cf. Dan 12:1), see comment on Philippians 4:3.

13:9. See comment on 2:7.

13:10. The language is from Jeremiah 15:2 and 43:11, where God promises to exterminate most of the Israelites by various means and to enslave the others in captivity; but the judgment here is against all nations who have rebelled against God. This judgment would encourage the martyred *saints concerning their vindication (Rev 14:11-12).

13:11-18
Enforcing Imperial Worship

Although most of the details of 13:1-10 could apply to the emperor of John's day, and via him to totalitarian regimes throughout history, some of the details of 13:11-18 could suggest that John consciously anticipates its ultimate fulfillment in an emperor yet to come (17:11).

13:11-12. Although the evidence is limited, some think that the beast "from the earth," as opposed to "from the sea" (13:1), represents the local provincial council who supervised the imperial cult in Asia, as opposed to the Roman administration. It was called the *commune Asiae,* headed by the Asiarchs from local towns (see comment on Acts 19:31). John may not imply any great difference between earth and sea (cf. Dan 7:3, 17). The "horned lamb" probably parodies *Christ (Rev 5:6); the two horns might reflect the power of ancient Persia in Daniel 8:6. Fire from heaven parodies and so apparently relativizes the miraculous power of God's witnesses (Rev 11:5), as Pharaoh's magicians tried to do with Moses' miracles as long as they could (Ex 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18; cf. 2 Kings 18:33-35).

13:13. Although the ancient Mediterranean world was full of self-proclaimed wonderworkers (some of whom were friends of emperors), and a few wonders had been attributed to Domitian's father (the emperor Vespasian), such wonders were not regularly associated with the imperial cult. Although some people did pray to Caesar for help (e.g., Lucius in Apuleilus's story of the ass and his transformation), most of the miracle reports are associated with temples like those of the healing deity Asclepius. (It is reported that some emperors in Roman history staged fake thunder or fire, but this was neither common nor central to the emperor's activity.) John apparently envisions a future blending of anti-Christian state religion and occult power, both of which existed mostly separately in his own day. His source for this view is undoubtedly Jesus (Mt 24:24; 2 Thess 2:9), and he has *Old Testament precedent for the occult powers in the service of an anti-God ruler repressing God's people (Ex 7:11, 22).

(As crosscultural studies of shamanism and spirit possession become more available, the once-popular tendency of commentators to rationalize away ancient reports of miracles, whether Christian or otherwise, will probably continue to diminish, although not all the reports, ancient or modern, are of equal value. Christianity has traditionally recognized the reality of other superhuman forces in the universe besides God—e.g., 1 Cor 10:20.)

13:14-15. Some magicians simulated the moving and speaking of idols (the skeptical *rhetorician *Lucian describes in detail the purported methods of a false prophet named Alexander). Hearing the extent to which the world can be deceived by false religion and state propaganda would evoke familiar discomfort in John's first Christian readers (cf. Deut 13:1-2). The demand to worship the image, which to the authorities symbolized appropriate loyalty to the state but to the Christians would symbolize apostasy, resembled the situation the Maccabean martyrs had faced (cf. 1 Maccabees 1:50-51) and especially the conflicts faced by Daniel's three friends (Dan 3:12-18; cf. 6:7).

13:16-17. A Greco-Egyptian king had similarly required Jews to be branded with the ivy leaf, the emblem of Dionysus (*3 Maccabees 2:28-29); this is likewise a mark of ownership, a brand or tattoo indicating to which god or empire one belongs. The term for "mark" is, among other things, the regular term for the imperial stamp on documents and of the image of his head on coins.

Like the other markings in Revelation, this one might be symbolic (see comment on 3:12; 7:3; cf. 14:1; 17:5; 19:12; 22:4); some Jewish texts speak of a symbolic mark of destruction on the forehead of the wicked (**Psalms of Solomon* 15:9) in contrast to the mark of the righteous (15:6). Some interpreters have nevertheless seen a tangible expression of allegiance to the world system; in at least the last two major imperial persecutions of Christians, both in the third century, certificates were issued to those who had fulfilled the mandated rite of emperor worship. But the text may simply imply a figurative slave brand identifying to whom a person belongs—God or the world. Participation in idolatry on at least some level appeared to be almost an economic necessity in many cities in Asia Minor (see comment on 2:18-29), and John warns that commercial discrimination would grow more severe, alongside the graver danger of martyrdom.

13:18. This verse is a typically cryptic *apocalyptic riddle (cf. Mt 24:15). Six hundred sixty-six is a doubly triangular number, which is very rare; though most ancient readers would not know that, some may have taken note of it, given *Pythagorean and other interest in special numbers. It has also been thought a parody on the divine number, seven, given Revelation's use of seven and given other demonic parodies of the divine in Revelation. Scholars more often turn to another explanation. "Counting a name" or word was an easy practice in Greek and Hebrew, which used letters as specific numbers (later Jewish teachers often played with the numerical values of words; this form of calculation was known as *gematria*). Many ingenious proposals have been made for the meaning of "666"; Irenaeus, a second-century Christian scholar, listed among the possibilities "Lateinos" (Rome as the final kingdom). Although the term may be transliterated into Hebrew letters more than one way, *therion,* "beast," can be spelled in Hebrew so as to come out to "666." This may be more than coincidence (though one might wonder why Revelation would treat the literal number of "beast" as a riddle). One might also transliterate *theriou,* "of the beast," as "616," a textual variant in Revelation 13:18. (The variant, however, loses the potential connection with the number seven or triangular numbers.)

But one of the most popular proposals among scholars is "Nero Caesar." Although his name comes out to 1,005 in Greek (which would have been obvious, because a familiar wordplay on that number of his name had circulated throughout the empire's graffiti), his name comes out to "666" if transliterated into Hebrew. If John intends an allusion to Nero here (see comment on 13:1-10), either he expects his readers to know to switch to Hebrew letters (probably with the help of more skilled members of the congregation), or he and they had already used "666" in this manner. Some ancient Christian sources do indeed suggest that this interpretation was already known. The other possible spelling comes out to 616—

which is a textual variant for Rev 13:18, as if *scribes knew the answer to the riddle but calculated the spelling differently. (This calculation requires using the Greek pronunciation Neron-Kaisar in Hebrew letters, with appropriate Hebrew numerical values: *N* = 50, *r* = 200, *n* = 6, *K* = 100, *s* = 60, *r* = 200. Hebrew used only consonants. The **Sibylline Oracles,* a Jewish document composed in Greek, does its *gematria* in Greek, not Hebrew; most of its readers would have been able to read only the former, being unable even to transliterate a name into proper Hebrew letters. Jewish scholars who used Hebrew incorporated many Greek loanwords, but John's readers would need either some help or prior knowledge to discern his point.) If this is the correct explanation, or part of it, it helps explain the image of the deceased ruler returning in 17:9-11.

14:1-5
Followers of the Lamb

14:1. "And I looked, and behold" indicates another vision (Ezek 10:1; 44:4; Dan 10:5). Mount Zion was the Temple Mount (sometimes loosely encompassing all Jerusalem), thus applied to the heavenly temple in the present (Rev 11:19) but pointing to the new Jerusalem of the future (21:2), a hope shared by nearly all ancient Jews, who longed for the restoration of their city and its sanctuary. Mount Zion thus figures prominently in *apocalyptic expectations (it appears by that title in **4 Ezra* and **2 Baruch*). Ancient *rhetoric often contrasted persons, but more relevantly here apocalyptic often contrasted the righteous and the wicked; the name on their foreheads contrasts with Revelation 13:16 (cf. 3:12; 7:3; 22:4). The association of the 144,000 with Zion here may represent their role as New Jerusalemites; on their possible identity, see comment on 7:4-8.

14:2. Ezekiel heard the sound of many waters in heaven (Ezek 1:24; 43:2; cf. Rev 1:15), and thunder was heard at Sinai (Ex 19:16; cf. Ezek 1:4, 13; Rev 4:5; 19:6). Ancient meteorology, as reflected in **1 Enoch,* placed waters (for rain) and thunders in the heavens. Harps had been used by priests and Levites in the worship of the earthly temple; it was natural to expect them in heaven's temple (Rev 5:8; 15:2).

14:3. Only these people could offer the song because it involved only them (5:9-10); on secret revelations in the heavens, see comment on 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. If Revelation portrays them as a spiritual army that has overcome (see comment on Rev 14:4), it may be relevant that warriors celebrated victory (see fuller comment at 15:3-4).

14:4. The Greek term translated "virgin" here is hardly ever applied to men in Greek literature (perhaps partly because men in ancient Greek culture rarely were), but it means never having had sex with someone of the opposite gender, and hence includes not being married. In a literal sense, this virginity was practiced most often among a Jewish group known as the *Essenes. But the image here may here allude symbolically to the purity of priests for the temple service (Lev 15:16-18) or to the purity required by the rules of a spiritual holy war (Deut 23:9-11; 1 Sam 21:5; 2 Sam 11:11; *Qumran War Scroll). The latter suggestion would fit the possible military census that some commentators find in Revelation 7:4-8. Given the link to Zion (14:1), their chastity may also be a male version of that of the image of the New Jerusalem as a bride in contrast to Babylon the prostitute. "Firstfruits" were the beginning of harvest, offered up to God; the term declares their holiness as sacrifices devoted to God (Ex 23:19; 34:26; Lev 2:12; 23:10; Num 28:26; Neh 10:35; Jer 2:3) or perhaps that others like them would come after them.

14:5. The promised end-time remnant would have no lie in their mouths (Zeph 3:13). Truthtelling was important in ancient ethics, although it could be suspended even in the Bible to save life (e.g., Ex 1:19-20; Jer 38:25-27).

14:6-13
Vindication of the Righteous

14:6-7. On "midheaven" see comment on 8:13. The angel's "good news" is the vindication of God's people by judgment on the wicked (14:7; cf. Nahum 1:15). Because the activity of angels in heaven often corresponds to what happens on earth, however (12:7), some commentators have suggested that this picture may refer to the final proclamation of the good news of the *kingdom (including both salvation and vindication/judgment) preceding the end (cf. Mt 24:14).

14:8. In a taunting mockery of a dirge, Isaiah 21:9 announces, "Fallen, fallen is

Babylon" (cf. Jer 51:8), referring to the historical Babylon that would later drag Judah off into captivity. But Jewish writers of John's day saw commonalities among all the empires that subjugated Israel, generally believing that Rome was the final such power (cf. Dan 2:35, 44). "Babylon" and its synonym, "the Chaldeans," were used as ciphers for Rome in Jewish texts such as the *Dead Sea Scrolls, *4 Ezra* and the later *rabbis (although the rabbis use "Edom" more frequently). The *Old Testament normally reserved the symbolic use of "prostitute" for the sins of God's people (with only two exceptions), but the allusion here is to Babylon in Jeremiah 51:7, who made all the nations drunk with its wine (i.e., Babylon was God's judgment on them).

14:9-10. In the Old Testament, God passed around a cup of intoxicating wrath to all the nations (cf. Ps 75:8; Is 51:17, 21-22; 63:6; Jer 25:15; 49:12; Ezek 23:31; Hab 2:16; Zech 12:2; also the Dead Sea Scrolls; for infidelity, cf. Num 5:24). Fire and brimstone were appropriate for a spiritual Sodom (Rev 11:8; Gen 19:24), although the image may be broader than that (e.g., Ezek 38:22). (This text need not imply that they cannot repent if they do so before death or the world's end—Rev 2:21; 11:10-13.) As often in apocalyptic literature, the wicked get to see what they missed (cf. also Ps 112:10); but Revelation omits a common apocalyptic feature, in which the righteous also get to see and gloat over the fate of the damned (e.g., *1 Enoch* 108:14-15).

14:11. The eternal smoking of Edom (night and day; contrast 4:8; 12:10) is described in similar terms in Isaiah 34:10, but there the meaning is desolation, whereas here it is eternal burning and torment. On the alternate views of judgment in ancient Judaism, of which the present view appears among the harshest, see comment on Matthew 3:12 or "*Gehenna" in the glossary.

14:12. Many comfortable people today (understandably influenced in part by historical misapplications of biblical ideals of mercy) dislike the idea of judgment. But salvation/deliverance in the Old Testament picture was not complete without vindication—removing the shame of the oppressed by punishing their unrepentant oppressors. The martyrs are here assured that they will be vindicated to the utmost (cf. 13:10).

14:13. Jewish texts spoke longingly of the day when the sufferings of the righteous would end. Greco-Roman letters of consolation stressed either that the dead were happy or that they were at least not sad, but Judaism especially stressed the peace of the righteous dead. The writer of *1 Enoch* noted that the wicked would have no rest (99:13-14; cf. Rev 14:11), but the righteous dead would have great rewards (*1 Enoch* 103:3), and the idea of rest for the righteous dead occurs throughout Jewish texts (Syriac Menander, Wisdom of Solomon). Jewish funerary inscriptions regularly mentioned peace for the dead; over half the Jewish epitaphs recovered in Rome included the words "in peace" (hence "rest in peace" is not only a modern concept). The image of reward for works is from the Old Testament and is common in Judaism and in the *New Testament (see comment on Rev 22:12).

14:14-20
Reaping the Earth

14:14-16. Commentators debate whether "one like a son of man" here refers to Jesus (1:13; Dan 7:13), or simply means that this figure appeared human, in contrast to some of the other angelic figures in the book (Rev 4:7; *Christ would not need to take orders—14:15-16). The harvest is also an image of judgment against Babylon in the *Old Testament (Jer 51:33); it is specifically appropriate for the final battle when blood would flow, as Joel 3:13 noted: "Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full" (NASB).

14:17-19. Because crushed grapes could look like human blood (Gen 49:11), this image, playing on Joel 3:13 (cf. also Jer 25:30), was powerful for ancients, who were more familiar with viticulture than most modern peoples are (contrast Christ and his people as a vine in Jn 15:1). This harvest image is particularly from Isaiah 63:1-6: God goes on to tread the winepress of his fury and tramples the nations, splattering his garments with their lifeblood. For angels over various elements of nature (including fire), see comment on Revelation 7:1.

14:20. Ancient reports of urban battles sometimes refer to streets flowing with blood due to the massive slaughter that occurred in a short span of time. For example, exaggerating the massacre at Bethar, the rabbis de-

clared that rivers of blood flowed from the city to the distant sea, rolling boulders from their place and submerging horses. Likewise, *1 Enoch* reported God judging people by letting them slay one another till blood flowed in streams (100:1-2), so that horses walked up to their chests in it and chariots were submerged (100:3); cf. similarly other oracles of the end time (**Sibylline Oracles,* several times).

The literal number here, "1,600 stadia" (NIV), which is about 200 miles (NASB, NRSV, GNT), is a square number (40 x 40), probably used roundly for a large quantity (although some also report that some ancients estimated the length of Palestine to about 1,600 stadia). The wine of God's wrath (14:10, 19) turns out to be human blood here, which is drunk in 16:6; other texts also speak of being drunk with blood (e.g., Judith 6:4).

15:1-4
Response of the Saints to Their Vindication

15:1. Ancient texts sometimes began and ended on the same point, thus bracketing it off (this design is called an *inclusio*). The heavenly perspective on the judgments on earth is bracketed by 15:1 and 8.

15:2. The *saints celebrate their vindication in 15:2-4. Jewish texts often spoke of rivers of fire proceeding from God's throne, based on Daniel 7:9-10; this image is mingled here with the imagery of the heavenly temple (on the "sea," see comment on Rev 4:6), in contrast to the lake of fire. Their triumph over their oppressor may also suggest another connotation of the "sea": like Israel delivered from the Egyptians, who were slain in the Red Sea, they offer God praise (15:3-4).

15:3-4. The "great and wonderful" (GNT) works refer to the plagues (15:1; cf. Ex 15:11). The "song of Moses" could refer to Deuteronomy 32 (especially to the part where God avenges the blood of his servants—32:34-43), which was used alongside psalms in Jewish worship. But in this context Moses' song almost surely refers to his song of triumph and praise after his people came safely across the sea, where their enemies were drowned (Ex 15:1-18). "Song of the lamb" recalls redemption from the final plague (Rev 5:6).

The language here recalls psalms, especially Psalm 86:9-10; the *Old Testament often proclaimed the hope of the remnant of the nations turning to God. "King of the ages" (the variant reading) or "of the world" was a common Jewish title for God. God would be universally and solely worshiped as king in the final day of judgment (cf. Zech 14:9).

15:5–16:1
Preparing the Final Plagues

15:5. On the heavenly tabernacle/temple, see comment on 4:6 and Hebrews 8:1-5.

15:6. Ancient Jewish literature often viewed angels as wearing white linen, but such texts also described priests in this manner, and John portrays these angels as servants of the heavenly temple.

15:7. The image of the golden bowls is probably derived from the use of such incense bowls in the temple before its destruction several decades before; cf. 5:8 and 8:3. On the cup of wrath, see comment on 14:9-10.

15:8. The temple filling with glory recalls the dedications of the earthly temple in earlier times (Ex 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11; cf. Ezek 10:3-4 for its withdrawal).

16:1. The *Old Testament commonly used the phrase "pour out wrath" (especially throughout Jeremiah and Ezekiel); the image of the cup may be related to this idea.

16:2-11
The First Four Bowls of Wrath

Like the trumpet plagues, the imagery for most of these judgments is especially borrowed from the judgments on Egypt in the Old Testament book of Exodus, reminding John's hearers that they, like Israel of old, were protected from these judgments that would eventuate in the capitulation of their oppressors and their own deliverance.

16:2. Sores were the sixth plague in Exodus 9:10.

16:3. This plague was the first in Exodus 7:20 (the second plague in the listing in Rev 8:8).

16:4. This judgment also extends the first plague (Ex 7:20; cf. comment on the third plague in Rev 8:10).

16:5. The oppressed often cried to God to vindicate them; and when vindicated, they praised God for his justice (often in psalms; the language was also used for his mercy, e.g.,

Tobit 3:2). In the *Old Testament God often let people destroy themselves (the wicked fell into their own trap), and sometimes punished them in ways obviously related to their crime (see comment on 16:6-7 below). Judaism developed this theme, emphasizing the appropriateness of particular punishments against the wicked. Jewish people believed that angels had charge over different elements of nature, including over the seas (see comment on Rev 7:1).

16:6-7. Early Jewish tradition declared that God turned the water of Egypt to blood to requite them for shedding the blood of Israel's children (Wisdom of Solomon 11:5-7). (On the wicked being "worthy" of punishment, compare Wisdom of Solomon 16:1, 9; 17:4; 19:4; cf. *Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.3.5, 216.) This observation develops a genuine theme in Exodus: in response to Pharaoh drowning Israel's babies in the Nile, God later turned the Nile to blood, struck Egypt's firstborn and drowned Pharaoh's army. The image of drinking blood was sometimes used metaphorically for shedding it, so the justice of the judgment would be apparent even to the few hearers unfamiliar with the exodus story (some recent *Gentile converts). The altar speaks up as a witness to the lives of the righteous sacrificed on it by martyrdom (see comment on 6:9).

16:8-9. The Old Testament mentions being stricken by heat as a common suffering of field laborers and wanderers in the desert (e.g., Ps 121:6; cf. Ex 13:21); although it is not one of the plagues on Egypt, it contrasts with the following plague of darkness. On unrepentance, see comment on 9:21; the purpose of judgments, up until final destruction, was to secure *repentance (Amos 4:6-11).

16:10-11. Darkness was the ninth plague (Ex 10:22; the fourth plague in Rev 8:12); the darkness in Egypt could be "felt" (Ex 10:21).

16:12-21
The Final Bowls of Wrath

16:12. Every informed reader in the Roman Empire, especially in places like Asia Minor and Syria-Palestine near the Parthian border, would understand the "kings of the East" as the Parthians; the river Euphrates was the boundary between the Roman and Parthian empires (although some border states like Armenia kept changing hands); cf. 9:14. Swollen, large rivers could delay the crossing of armies until bridges or rafts had been constructed, but God sees to it that this army will encounter no delays. (The same image of difficulty in crossing major rivers is implied in the new exodus of the Euphrates's parting in **4 Ezra* 13:43-47, but Revelation uses the image for an invading army [a natural usage], not for captivity and restoration.) Some streams dried up during some seasons in the Near East, but the Euphrates would not do so naturally; God, however, could dry up rivers in judgment (Nah 1:4).

16:13-14. The writer of **2 Baruch* mentions the release of *demons to wreak havoc in the final period before the end. Frogs were negative symbols (Ovid, *Apuleius, Artemidorus); one ancient writer (*Plutarch) even suggested tongue in cheek that Nero would be reincarnated as a frog. In this text the frogs may allude loosely to one plague on Egypt that John had not had room to include up to this point (second plague—Ex 8:5-7); here the dragon is compelled to act as God's agent in bringing judgment. In Jewish texts like the *Qumran War Scroll, the army of Belial (the devil), consisting of the nations and apostate Israel, would gather to be destroyed by God and his faithful remnant (cf. *4 Ezra*). Gathering the nations for judgment is the judgment language of the *Old Testament prophets (Joel 3:2, 11; Zeph 3:8; cf. Is 43:9), as is the "day of the Lord" (e.g., Amos 5:18-20).

16:15. Guards were to stay awake at their posts at night. It was common for people to sleep naked at night in the warm season, but most Jewish people would be horrified to be seen naked in public; perhaps the image is of a naked householder chasing a thief. The ultimate roots of the shameful nakedness image are from the Old Testament, perhaps for the shameful stripping of captive Babylon (Is 47:3), one drunk (Hab 2:16), or God's adulterous people (Hos 2:3; Ezek 16:37; cf. Rev 3:18); on the thief image, see comment on Revelation 3:3.

16:16. The Lord had promised to gather the nations (Joel 3:2, 11; Zeph 3:8; Zech 12:3; 14:2; cf. Is 13:4; Jer 50:29, against Babylon); Jewish tradition about the end time continued this image (**1 Enoch,* *Dead Sea

Scrolls). The nations and the dragon who led them might intend their gathering for other purposes, but God was gathering them to their own final destruction.

The Old Testament site of the future battle was the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2, 12, 14), probably the strategic plain of Megiddo in the valley of Jezreel and Esdraelon. It was the corridor between the easily traveled coastal plain and the road to Damascus in Aram, and thus an essential crossing point for armies avoiding the difficult mountains (Judg 5:19; 6:33; 2 Chron 35:22; Zech 12:11; Pharaoh Thutmose III in 1483 B.C., etc.). Megiddo was a plain, not a mountain ("Har-Magedon," which the KJV read as "Armageddon," is literally "mountain of Megiddo"). Nevertheless, so transforming the site (for those who knew some Hebrew) would not be incongruent with John's *apocalyptic geography (13:1; 17:1, 3, 9). John's exact referent is debated, but a site related to the valley of Megiddo remains the most common view and some might recognize that this site would allow the armies of the East to engage Rome in Palestine.

16:17-18. This language suggests preparation for a theophany, a manifestation of God's glory, as at Sinai (cf. Ex 19:16; Rev 4:5); the powerful earthquake may suggest the end of the age (see 6:12; 11:13).

16:19. The oppressed would cry out to God to remember their oppressors' deeds against them (Ps 137:7). On the cup, see comment on Revelation 14:9-10.

16:20. This sort of language normally concerns the "end of the world" (see comment on 6:14)—vast, cosmic devastation.

16:21. This hail is much more severe than that in Exodus 9:24; it would crush everything in its path, leaving no survivors; this language too must be relegated to the end of the age. People's unrepentance indicated how much they deserved the judgment to begin with (Ex 7:22); see comment on Revelation 16:9.

17:1-5
A Vision of the Prostitute

Although the *Old Testament usually reserved figurative use of the designation "prostitute" for God's faithless people (e.g., Lev 17:7; Is 1:21; Jer 3:1-14; Ezek 16; 23; Hos 4:15), it was also appropriately applied to mighty mercantile or military centers. Thus Isaiah 23:16-18 portrayed Tyre as a prostitute who served all the kingdoms of the world; Nineveh as capital of a world empire also was called a harlot and sorceress, who sold nations (into slavery) by both devices (Nah 3:4). Allusions to both passages appear in Revelation 18–19. (Sorcery and prostitution are also linked in Is 57:3; cf. 2 Kings 9:22.) The false prophetess portrayed earlier in the book might appear as an agent of the system (Rev 2:20). See comment on 18:23.

Parallels and contrasts between Babylon the prostitute, in this passage, and the New Jerusalem the bride, in chapter 21, fit the practice in *apocalyptic literature (and other sources, such as wisdom literature) of contrasting the righteous and the wicked. One need not assume that John's prophecies of Babylon apply only to Rome; other evil empires have also come and gone. Because Rome was the Babylon of John's day, however, it supplies the images for John's original audience in the seven *churches.

17:1. Angelic guides were common in apocalypses, especially when the writer was given a tour of heaven or earth. Ancient art pictured cities as their patron goddess, often enthroned on the shore of a river; thus, for example, a coin from the reign of Domitian's father depicted the goddess Roma seated on seven hills. Rome, whose empire spread throughout the Mediterranean coasts, is naturally portrayed here as sitting on many waters (cf. Ps 65:7; Is 17:12-13).

17:2. Rulers of client states in Asia and Syria subservient to Rome were called "kings," even though they had to please Rome and cooperate with its agents; they also raised no objections to the imperial cult. Undoubtedly they did not think they were prostituting themselves, but any rare pockets of nationalistic resistance (such as in Judea, which was monotheistic besides) would have differed with their evaluation. For the nations' becoming drunk on Babylon's wine, see Jeremiah 51:7.

17:3. For being carried away in visions by the *Spirit, see Ezekiel 8:3; 11:1 and 24 (a "strong spirit" in **2 Baruch;* angels in **1 Enoch*). The wilderness was the place of another symbolic woman's new exodus (Rev 12:6, 14), although it was also associated with the demonic in some Jewish tradition; the point here may be that the woman who fancied herself seated on many

waters would actually be "desolate" (using a Greek word related to the word for "desert," i.e., barren like the wilderness—17:16). Some relate the beast (13:1) to the she-wolf of Roman legend associated with the goddess Roma (seated on seven hills) on some contemporary Roman coins (although John had ample Jewish precedent in representing kingdoms as beasts, e.g., Dan 8). The scarlet color of the beast is probably related to the blood of martyrs with which it was stained (Rev 17:6), or to the ostentation of the wealthy or of prostitutes (cf. 17:4; Jer 4:30). On the blasphemous names, see comment on 13:1 and 5-6.

17:4. True purple and scarlet required expensive dyes and were thus worn only by the wealthy, such as queens (18:7), or by well-to-do prostitutes, who used purple attire to attract attention. Many ancient moralists reviled the ostentation of wealthy women, but John also intends a contrast between the earthly splendor of Rome, renowned throughout its provinces, and the true splendor of the heavenly woman (12:1; 21:9-14) and heaven's court (4:3-11; comparison of characters was a major feature of ancient speech and writing).

17:5. As "mother" (cf. 2:23) of "prostitutes" and "abominations" (perhaps idolatries), "Babylon" is pictured as the most terrible of them all. (In the East, where married women generally covered their hair, a "prostitute's forehead" [Jer 3:3; cf. Hos 2:2] might seem an obvious image in this period; of course, most persons in Revelation are identified by their forehead or hand anyway [e.g., Rev 7:3; 13:16]. Older Greek literature reports the slander that Babylonian women were all required to play the prostitute once in life, but it is doubtful that this association was popular in the *New Testament period; the imagery comes instead from the Old Testament.)

17:6-18
The Meaning of the Prostitute

17:6. Given the ancient horror of cannibalism, the image of "drunk with blood" is a terrifying one. Although the verse refers to Christians martyred under Rome in general, Rome's thirst for blood may have brought a special image to many minds. Rome's officials kept the multitudes happy with free grain and public amusements, the latter including especially bloodshed in the arena. Criminals and slaves were special candidates for satiating the public appetite for violent entertainment; once Christians were considered criminals (in the first century, especially clear under Nero), their large numbers would supply an inordinate proportion of victims. See comment on 16:6.

17:7-8. Again using the ancient *rhetorical technique of comparison, Revelation pictures the beast who "was and is not and is to come"—a parody on the eternality of God (1:4). apocalyptic texts often specialized in explaining cryptic revelations, frequently with the aid of an angel. On seven heads and ten horns, see comment on 12:3; 13:1; as it was widely recognized that children often looked like their parents, the beast bears a striking resemblance to the dragon.

17:9. It was common knowledge that the original city of Rome sat on seven hills; this datum appears throughout Roman literature and on Roman coins and was celebrated in the name of the annual Roman festival called Septimontium. Here the hills have become mountains in characteristic apocalyptic *hyperbole. (The seven mountains of paradise in *1 Enoch* 24:2 and 32:1 are probably unrelated, unless by way of radical contrast. But the **Sibylline Oracles* also prophesied judgment against "seven-hilled Rome"—2:18; 11:109-16.)

Various features identify Rome as the Babylon of John's day:

1. It sits on seven hills.
2. In John's part of the world, it was the "city that reigns over the kings of the earth" (17:18).
3. Like Babylon it had conquered God's people and destroyed Jerusalem.
4. Because it had conquered God's people and destroyed Jerusalem, some other Jewish interpreters portrayed Rome as a new Babylon, and it had long been viewed as successor of other evil empires including Babylon.
5. It was a mercantile empire that sat on waters and is known to have traded in precisely the kinds of merchandise listed in 18:12-13.
6. The suggested new Nero imagery (13:1-2, 18; 17:9-11) fits Rome.

Like many Jewish interpreters of his day who construed Old Testament language in multiple ways, John here allows his symbolism to stand for more than one referent (see Rev 17:10-11).

17:10-11. Some commentators count the kings starting from the first emperor (Augustus) but use up the seven before reaching the current emperor, Domitian, although the text itself claims that one of the seven was then reigning (v. 10). An allusion to the legendary kings who preceded the Roman Republic fails because obviously none of them is still living, either.

The real clue is that one king was then reigning, and one of the seven would return. Whether an author writing in the reign of the Flavian king Domitian would count the three brief usurpers between Nero and Vespasian as "kings" is doubtful; hence Nero, probably viewed as less than seven kings before Domitian, would appear as one of the seven. Interestingly, Nero was also expected to return (see comment on 13:1-10).

17:12. Ten horns represented ten kings in Daniel 7:24, possibly successors of Alexander the Great's Greco-Macedonian kingdom; most Jewish people in the Roman era, however, read Daniel's fourth kingdom as Rome. They might thus apply the description to Rome's client states in the East (cf. Rev 17:2).

17:13. The kings' unified conspiracy against God would come to nothing; this conviction had long been part of Jewish hope (cf. Ps 2:2; 83:5).

17:14. "King of kings" had long been applied to supreme rulers of the East (Ezra 7:12; Ezek 26:7; Dan 2:37; cf. 2:47) and was now used as the title of the Parthian king, Rome's most feared earthly nemesis. More significantly, Jewish people regularly applied these titles to God (from Deut 10:17; Dan 2:47). This true ruler over the earth's kings (cf. 1:5) contrasts with Rome's control of mere client kingdoms (17:2).

17:15-16. The Roman Empire and its allies would eventually turn on Rome itself—a threat concerning the self-destructiveness and lack of faithfulness of those who pursue evil. The image is from the Old Testament (Jer 4:30; Lam 1:2; Ezek 23:9). The burning derives from Daniel 7:11. Although fire was the standard method for destroying captured cities in antiquity (Amos 1:4), some knowledgeable readers might have remembered the rumor that Nero burned down Rome in A.D. 64 and blamed it on the Christians: Rome thus ought to be wiser than to embrace one who might be like a new Nero. (The proposed allusion to burning for sexual immorality in Lev 21:9 is less likely; cf. Deut 22:21.)

17:17. Jewish people recognized that the present world was dominated by evil powers but viewed those powers only as angels with limited authority; they recognized that God rules the ages. They also realized that, as in the Old Testament, God raises up one nation to judge another, but his purposes are far different from the purposes of the finite nations themselves (e.g., Jer 51:11, 29; 52:3; Joel 2:11).

17:18. In John's day, no one in the Roman Empire could have doubted that the city that "reigns over kings" meant Rome, any more than anyone would have doubted that the seven hills (17:9) alluded to Rome.

18:1-24
A Dirge over Babylon

Ancients often contrasted weddings (see 19:7-9) with funerals. In contrast to the praises in 19:1-7, Revelation 18:2-3, 10-19 contains funeral dirges over Babylon, following *Old Testament models; prophets sometimes ironically mourned a city's destruction, thereby prophesying its ruin. (More generally, laments over fallen cities were an ancient literary form.) It is difficult for us to catch the impact today: a condemned and probably aged prophet, confined to an island for defying the whims of the mightiest empire the Mediterranean or Middle Eastern world had ever known, prophesied that empire's destruction. Yet the faith he proclaimed has spread throughout the world, and Rome has now been fallen for more than fifteen centuries. Although "Babylon" stood for Rome in John's day, other embodiments of the oppressive world system have risen and fallen since then.

Ancient *rhetoricians and writers often showed off their epideictic (praise) rhetorical skills by praising important cities, as in Aelius Aristides's lavish flattery of Rome. In contrast to such praises, John describes the city's power and wealth to condemn it, as the Old Tes-

tament prophets did with arrogant empires, and to produce a funeral eulogy that curses instead of blesses. Oracles of woe against the nations were common in the Old Testament and continued in some Jewish literature of John's day (particularly *Sibylline Oracles*). Dominant biblical allusions in this passage include not only Old Testament references to Babylon but also to Tyre, a prosperous and boastful mercantile center, in Ezekiel 26–28.

18:1. Powerful angels were frequently described as shining like lightning or the sun (Dan 10:6 and often in later Jewish texts).

18:2. Old Testament prophets often pronounced an event as done even though it had yet to be fulfilled in practice. John takes this taunt-lamentation against Babylon directly from the Old Testament (Is 21:9; cf. Jer 51:8), as well as the description of a barren land possessed only by desert creatures (Is 34:9-15; cf. Jer 50:13; 51:29, 37; other cities—Jer 9:11; 49:33; cf. Baruch 4:33-35). (The mention of "*demons" also appears in the *LXX of Is 34:14.) Although Rome's population was probably close to a million in John's day, five centuries later it may have been as low as thirty thousand.

18:3. Cf. Jer 51:7. Later Jewish resistance oracles (some *Sibylline Oracles*) likewise portrayed Rome as lying with many suitors but headed for judgment. On the nations drinking from her cup, see comment on 14:8.

18:4. In pronouncing judgment on Babylon, Jeremiah warned his people—who were supposed to be at home there in the short term (29:4-10)—to flee from the city's midst, because God would destroy it (51:6, 45; cf. Zech 2:7); even the presence of some of the righteous would not stay the judgment (cf. Gen 19:17). (In the *Dead Sea Scrolls, the righteous were to "separate" themselves from the "children of the pit"; in one *Essene commentary on Nahum, when the iniquity of those who were leading people astray was exposed, the righteous of Ephraim would flee from among them, joining the forces of the true Israel. But *Qumran separatism, unlike early Christian separatism, was geographic.) Getting out of an imminently doomed city was common sense for anyone who believed the *prophecy (cf. Tobit 14:8; Ex 9:20-21); John's largest concern, however, may be worldliness: how much of the spirit of Babylon was inside the *churches (especially in Sardis, Laodicea and the like).

18:5. Jewish people recognized in the Old Testament (e.g., Gen 15:16; 2 Kings 22:20) that if God's full judgment was delayed, it meant only that he was storing up retribution for the sins of many generations to pour them out on an even more wicked generation (also Mt 23:34-36). "High as heaven" may be an idiom (1 Sam 5:12) but certainly implies that God would take notice (cf. Gen 18:21).

18:6. Paying retribution to the wicked according to their mistreatment of others was a fairly common theme in the Old Testament (Neh 4:4; Esther 9:25; Ps 7:15-16; 35:8; 57:6; Prov 26:27; 28:10; Dan 6:24; Jer 50:15, 29—Babylon; Obad 15). Paying someone back "double" indicated that the retribution would be more than complete (Is 40:2); it was also the punishment expected for a thief (Ex 22:4, 7, 9). For the cup with the wine of judgment, cf. Jeremiah 51:7, Psalm 75:8, Isaiah 51:22-23 and other references in comment on Revelation 14:9-10.

18:7. For John, the "queen" might evoke Jezebel (Rev 2:20), but a clearer connection with the Old Testament here is the quotation from Isaiah. Here John cites Isaiah 47:8-9 (also used by the *Sibylline Oracles*), condemning Babylon's arrogance and smug security that it would never fall (cf. also, e.g., Is 32:9; Jer 48:11; 49:31; Ezek 16:49; Amos 6:1; Obad 3). Rome claimed to be the "eternal city" and certainly glorified itself; it allowed subject peoples to worship the goddess Roma, who personified Rome. Rome's luxury (including grain subsidies to keep the local masses happy) came at the expense of other nations, such as the heavily taxed peasants of Egypt. The thoughtless extravagance of the Roman elite invited God's wrath; cf. Amos 4:1-2.

18:8. Beset by problems ignored by its king Nabonidus, ancient Babylon had fallen without battle to its conquerors in a single night, as Jewish people well knew (Dan 5:30). But this new "Babylon," the new site of the oppression of God's people, would be judged with fire (see comment on Rev 17:16). The image of Rome's destruction by fire would be vivid to anyone who knew of the city's burning a generation before, in A.D. 64. In the context of one of the dominant quotations in this context, the God who would vindicate his

people and judge Babylon was "strong" (Jer 50:34; cf. 32:18; Deut 10:17; Neh 9:32).

18:9-10. Although the imagery is not totally consistent here (cf. 17:16; but *apocalyptic imagery did not have to be consistent), genuine mourning might be natural: client kings were normally appointed only with the favor of Rome, and Rome's fall would grant freedom and prestige to political competitors.

18:11. The fleet of merchant ships bringing grain to Rome, by which the fertile soil around the Nile fed the masses of Italy, represented the largest form of transport until modern times. Revelation especially addresses the luxury trade (18:12-16), focusing on nonessential items secured for those who could afford them. Rome's port of Ostia, constructed roughly half a century earlier, had a square with many offices for the merchants overseeing its international trade. With Rome destroyed, wealthy shippers would become no better off than the empire's peasants—whose situation in some regions might improve without heavy Roman taxation. The image of merchants mourning over a great trade center is from descriptions of Tyre in Isaiah 23:1-8 and especially Ezekiel 27, a passage that describes in more detail the city's greatness.

18:12-13. Most of Rome's gold and silver came from mines in Spain, many of them confiscated from their owners; slaves who worked these mines had brief life expectancies. Rome imported precious stones (for use by wealthy men but especially their wives) especially from India. Romans procured pearls (perhaps Rome's heaviest trade with the East) from the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, but particularly from India, where divers risked their lives to secure them. Spain, Asia Minor and especially Egypt supplied most of the fine linen (becoming more prominent than wool by this period). Rome procured the costly purple dye mainly from Phoenicia, and red especially from the kermes oak of Asia Minor. Although some silk was grown on the Aegean island of Cos, Rome imported most silk from China; some Romans thought it grew on trees. This special kind of scented wood ("citron wood"—NIV, NASB) had long been imported from western North Africa as far east as Cyrene, but having depleted most of those forests Rome now imported most of it from Morocco; one table made from this wood was so expensive that one could have bought a large estate with the price. Romans imported marble, especially used for palaces, from North Africa, including Egypt, and Greece. Cinnamon, including both the plant's wood and, more expensively, the spice made from its shoots and bark, came from Somalia; trading ships with East Africa made a two-year round-trip voyage, traveling as far south as Tanzania. Wealthy Romans used incense to perfume their homes (and in religious rituals), and imported most of the aromatic merchandise specified here. One spice here comes from south India; myrrh, from Yemen and Somalia; frankincense, from southern Arabia.

Although not a luxury item, the amount of wheat imported to support the Roman populace (an estimated four hundred thousand tons of grain each year) also suggests exploitation; two hundred thousand families in Rome ate free imported grain while many children in Egypt, one of the empire's most fertile regions, starved. The empire's economy positively generated wealth, but it was inequitably distributed to the advantage of those who held power. In contrast to wheat more generally, "fine flour" was a luxury good imported in largest quantities from Africa. Beef was rarely eaten even by the wealthy, and people rarely ate mutton; Italy used cattle as work animals, and sheep for wool. Italy imported horses primarily for chariot races, used for public entertainment, and to draw the carriages of the very few people who were rich.

The list climaxes with the worst forms of exploitation: slaves ultimately from subjugated peoples but in more recent times mainly from breeding slaves, and sometimes discarded babies raised as slaves. "Human lives" (NASB, NRSV, GNT) comes from Ezekiel 27:13, where it refers to Tyre's wicked trade in slaves (Scripture treated this trade as a capital offense; this was the usual meaning of "kidnapping," a capital offense in Deut 24:7). If distinguished at all from "slaves," it probably refers to people reserved for gladiatorial shows and other forms of death to entertain the public; criminals, prisoners of war, the lowest of slaves and Christians were commonly used in such shows.

John may model his list after Ezekiel 27:2-24, but he condenses and updates it to apply to Rome. One first-century source (Pliny

the Elder) offers a list of Roman imports that contains items very similar to the present list. A second-century writer estimated Rome's imports just from China, India and Arabia at roughly thirty million denarii (a denarius was a day's wage in Palestine). Rome was a center of international trade, and no merchant marine existed like Rome's for a thousand years after its demise.

18:14-15. For "fear" at its fall, cf. the reaction predicted for Tyre's fall in Ezekiel 26:17-18; the merchants' investments are lost.

18:16. On the adornments, cf. 17:4; these represent Rome's extravagance and wealth. Those who had never been to Rome often had an exaggerated opinion of its greatness (some later Mesopotamian *rabbis spoke of 365 sections of Rome, each with 365 palaces, each with 365 stories!). But it was the most powerful city that the ancient Mediterranean had ever known and that most of the world would know for many centuries after it. No one in the provinces could describe the judgment on Rome and not think of the destruction of great wealth (e.g., also the *Sibylline Oracles*).

18:17-19. Throwing dust on one's head was a familiar way of mourning. The merchants themselves had good reason to mourn—they were now out of business, perhaps with outstanding debts on their expensive cargoes that would lead to the loss of everything they had.

18:20. Writers sometimes bracketed a section with a key phrase; 18:20, 24 address vengeance for the blood of God's people. Judgment of the wicked is vindication of the righteous; cf. 6:9-11. The Greek phrase (literally "God has judged your judgment from her") may mean that God convicted Rome by applying to that city the judgment of its own law courts against the Christians. When Rome was later sacked by the barbarians of northern Europe after its acceptance of Christendom, the North African theologian Augustine explained that the judgment was due to Rome's past sins (cf. 18:5) and a church too weak to avert judgment in its own time (cf. 18:4).

18:21. In Jeremiah 51:63-64, the prophet is commanded to hurl a stone into the Euphrates and declare that Babylon would likewise sink, never to rise again. Rome sometimes used drowning as a punishment, recognizing that it was a horrible fate. Here the stone is the kind of millstone turned by a donkey, so heavy that it could never be retrieved from the sea, and probably alluding to Jesus' earlier warning (Mk 9:42).

18:22. The ghastly silence of Babylon here means complete devastation, as it meant in Isaiah 13:20-22: the city is without inhabitants.

18:23. The "voice of the bridegroom and bride" was the ultimate sound of joy; the prophets used the image of its stifling for terrible destruction (Jer 16:9; 25:10; Joel 1:8). Babylon, who would be left a widow (Rev 18:7, following Is 47:8), was a sorceress (Is 47:9) like Nineveh of old, a prostitute who enslaved nations (Nah 3:4, which supplies much of the wording here); the "sorceries" (KJV) here may refer to love potions or to the occult rites of their pagan priests. (Jezebel is associated with both sorcery and spiritual prostitution in 2 Kings 9:22.)

18:24. God dealt vengeance against those stained with the blood of the innocent (Jer 2:34). Although it is not technically true that all the righteous were killed in Rome (cf. Mt 23:35), Rome assumed responsibility for their slaughter as the present embodiment of the oppressive empire, a trait of corporate human sin that recurs throughout history.

19:1-10
Praise over Babylon's Fall

The scene shifts immediately from mourning on earth to rejoicing in heaven (cf. 18:20); the martyrs have been vindicated at last. Although the reference is particularly to Rome, it may look beyond Rome to the oppressive elements of the world system that carry on Rome's role until the return of Christ.

19:1. "Hallelujah" (19:1, 3, 4, 6) is frequent in the Hebrew (and often the Greek) form of the Psalms (cf. Ps 146–50), and is a strong command to praise the Lord (a *piel*—it is the strongest possible command, probably originally uttered by the inspired Levite musicians summoning their hearers to worship). It was appropriate in all worship, especially in praising God for his magnificent acts (e.g., after deliverance—*3 Maccabees 7:13, or in end-time Jerusalem—Tobit 13:18). It functioned as a call to worship in the temple, and so functions in the heavenly courts of worship (Rev 19:1, 3, 6; cf. v. 5).

19:2. Vindication for the righteous included just punishments against their killers; see Deuteronomy 32:43; cf. Psalm 79:10 and Jeremiah 51:48-49 (on Babylon).

19:3. This quotation is from the description of the fall of Edom's leading city in Isaiah 34:10 but naturally applied to all cities that practiced the same wickedness, including the world system (cf. 66:24). (The application from city to society or world would have been as natural in the first century as application from one city to another; philosophers often viewed the whole state as a macrocity.) This language of smoking ruins was natural war imagery, and as an eternal devastation it is also repeated in the **Sibylline Oracles*.

19:4. The *Old Testament pictures God enthroned both in heaven and above the cherubim on the ark in his temple; given the derivation of the four living creatures from Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1, the image may again be one of a heavenly temple as well as of a throne room.

19:5-6. For the "sound of waters" see comment on 1:15. Music and celebration were crucial at a wedding. God was often called "Almighty," and the Old Testament frequently celebrates his reign, especially with regard to his rule over creation (Ps 97:1), great deliverances (Ex 15:18) and the end time (Is 24:23; 52:7; Mic 4:7).

19:7. In Isaiah 25:6-7 God announces a great banquet for all peoples (cf. Rev 19:7), and in Isaiah 25:8 the promise of deliverance from death. In Isaiah 25:9 God's people celebrate their salvation, declaring, "Let us rejoice and be glad" in the salvation God had enacted on their behalf (slightly different in the *LXX). The Old Testament and later Jewish literature often compared Israel to a bride wedded to God; cf. Revelation 21:2. The messianic age or world to come was also often portrayed as a banquet.

19:8. Pure linen was mandatory apparel for the *high priest entering the holy of holies (Lev 16:4), extended in time to all ministers in the sanctuary; angels were often supposed to be dressed in linen too (probably based on Dan 12:6-7). Its symbolic use for purity and (here) righteous deeds would thus be natural. In Revelation it partcularly contrasts with the prostitute's fine linen (18:12, 16).

19:9. The banquet here is from Isaiah 25:6, and the image of end-time reward was often developed in Jewish tradition (see comment on Rev 19:7). Revelation contrasts this marriage supper with a terrible feast in 19:17-18.

19:10. Revelation elsewhere might encourage the view that Christians on earth worship with the angels, in communion with the worship of heaven (a common Jewish view); but the book simultaneously rejects the views of those who prayed to and praised angels (amulets and incantations attest that some Jews invoked angels). Most of early Judaism associated the *Spirit of God with the spirit of *prophecy; for John, witnesses of Jesus dependent on the Spirit (thus, ideally, all Christians) were prophets in the broadest sense of the term. It was, in fact, the proper witness to Jesus that distinguished true prophets from false ones (1 Jn 4:1-6), an important issue among some of the book's hearers (Rev 2:20).

19:11-16
The Final Invasion

This section is the ultimate climax of the book, for which readers have waited since 1:7. All the previous armies and other judgments were mere preludes to the coming of the final King of kings on a white horse.

19:11. Roman princes customarily rode white horses in military triumphs; the emperor Domitian had himself ridden one behind his father and brother in their Judean triumph after the Jewish war of 66–70. But the image of Jesus returning on a white horse, conjoined with the title "King of kings" (19:16), may mean that Jesus is portrayed like the *Parthian* king (cf. comment on 6:2; 17:14), his whole army coming on white horses (19:14). That is, Revelation again employs the most feared imagery of the day to communicate its point. The pretentious claims of the emperor and all who were like him would be nothing before the true divine king from heaven.

The image may allude to God going forth as a warrior on behalf of his people (e.g., Is 31:4; 42:13; 59:16-18; Hab 3:11-13; Zech 14:3; cf. Ex 15:3). This is the ultimate "holy war," anticipated in the *Old Testament, in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, by the *Zealots and by many other Jewish people, although not all these sources expected the deliverance and armies to come directly from heaven.

19:12. On "eyes like a fiery flame," see comment on 1:14 (Dan 10:6); diadems (in contrast to many *New Testament references to "crowns," most of which refer to victors' garlands) were for rulers. That his name is unknown might be meant to imply that no one has power over him (ancient magicians claimed that they could coerce spirits once they knew their names); compare Revelation 2:17.

19:13. The garments of God were stained with the blood of the winepress in Isaiah 63:2-3, when God was avenging his servants by judgment (cf. Rev 14:17-20); a later Jewish tradition naturally connects this text with the idea of Genesis 49:10-11, reading the latter as proclaiming that the warrior *Messiah will be stained with blood. Compare Wisdom of Solomon 18:15-16, where God's slaying the firstborn of Egypt is figuratively described as his Word leaping out of heaven like a mighty warrior; his commandment goes forth as a sharp sword (cf. Rev 19:15).

19:14. The armies of heaven were sometimes revealed in the Old Testament (2 Kings 2:11; 6:17; Is 66:15; Hab 3:8; cf. Ps 68:17; Jer 4:13), although God's "hosts" were usually pictured on chariots there, whereas here they ride horses—the customary means of attack for the Parthians. In each case the portrayal matches the most devastating sort of aggressors known in the writer's time. White horses were often considered superior and associated with royalty, and were connected with the Parthians more than with other peoples. Most Palestinian Jews believed that Israel would participate in the final battle (Dead Sea Scrolls; cf. Ps 149:6-9), but some also envisioned the angelic host as warriors on horseback (e.g., 2 Maccabees, *4 Maccabees). The coming host could involve angels (Zech 14:5) but here include believers (17:14), who have already "overcome" through martyrdom and other tests.

19:15. The words of God's mouth could be described as a sword (Hos 6:5; cf. **Similitudes of Enoch*) and the Messiah's decrees as a rod (Is 11:4); the mouth of Isaiah's servant also resembles a sharp sword (Is 49:2). (The writer of **4 Ezra* 13 also describes a fire going forth from the Messiah to devour the wicked; the fire is said to represent the *law of God. In **Psalms of Solomon* 17:24 and 35-36, the Messiah smites the nations of the earth with the word of his mouth.) God's sword is also described as his instrument of judgment (Is 34:5; Jer 12:12; 47:6), especially in the end (Is 66:15-16). The sword was a Roman symbol of an authority's right over life and death (capital punishment) but appears throughout the Old Testament prophets as an image for judgment by war. Ruling with an iron rod alludes to royal authority in Psalm 2:9 (cf. *Psalms of Solomon* 17:26-27).

19:16. In Roman antiquity, horses and statues were sometimes branded on the thigh, but people were not (cf. Ex 28:36-38). This is a symbolic depiction; everyone in Revelation is identified by a name on his or her person (e.g., 7:3; 13:16). "King of kings" was the title of the king of Parthia but had been applied in Jewish tradition long before that Parthian usage to God himself, the suzerain King who rules over all the kings of the earth (see comment on 17:14; cf. Deut 10:17; Dan 2:47; Zech 14:9).

19:17-21
The Defeat of the Wicked

19:17-18. The *saints have one feast (19:7-9), the birds of the air another (19:17-18). Revelation takes the image and language here from Ezekiel 39:17-20 (esp. 39:17; cf. Is 49:26; Zeph 1:7), which in context occurs after the final battle with Gog (cf. Rev 20:8). Everyone understood that if the corpses of those killed in battle were not buried they would be eaten by vultures, dogs and other animals (1 Sam 17:44-46; Jer 16:4; Ezek 29:5; throughout Greek and Roman literature). The description of such ultimate destruction of their mighty oppressors (cf. also *Sibylline Oracles*) may have been a powerful encouragement to persecuted ancient Christians hearing the book.

19:19. In this depiction of the end, it is the armies, rather than the entire populations of the nations themselves, who are destroyed at this point (cf. 20:8); different Jewish views on the exact character of the final war tried to reconcile different *Old Testament images of the end.

19:20-21. Some of these details (judgment by fire, the defeat of *Satan and his forces, with special attention to the evil leaders) are standard in accounts of the end time; others are unique to John's story line (the evil emperor and his sorcerer/propaganda minister

being thrown into the furnace alive). Cf. Isaiah 30:33 and Daniel 7:11. Brimstone may allude to Sodom, though the destruction here is perpetual (cf. 20:10). Some Jewish texts spoke of fiery *Gehenna (sometimes drawing on Greek images of torment in Tartarus) and of rivers of fire flowing from God's throne (cf. Greek pictures of a fiery river in the afterlife, but esp. Dan 7:10); Revelation contrasts a lake of fire for the wicked with a heavenly sea of glass mingled with fire (15:2).

20:1-6
The Thousand-Year Kingdom

Many Jewish texts pictured an intermediate kingdom between the present and future eternal reign (cf. **4 Ezra* 7:28-30; **2 Baruch* 29:3; 30:1-5; 40:3). Whether this suggests that the period is literal or figurative in Revelation—and if figurative, figurative for what—has been debated since the first few centuries of *church history. "Amillennialists" like Augustine, Calvin and Luther usually have taken it as symbolic for the present age, whereas "premillennialists" like Irenaeus, *Justin Martyr and Isaac Newton have read the period as future and after Christ's return; "postmillennialists" like George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney have predicted a future millennial period preceding Jesus' return (this last view is generally rare today). Those who take Revelation's millennium as in some sense future generally regard it as qualifying the absolute imminence of the final end, which might otherwise be supposed from 1:3. Many read the structure of the *narrative here (19:20; 20:4, 10) as referring to a future period, but some others contend that this reading does not fit other biblical passages and have appealed to the cyclical structure of the rest of Revelation. The commentary follows the narrative as it appears to stand rather than taking sides on whether it should be read literally or figuratively, what the figure means or whether it is merely an *apocalyptic literary device. All three positions could use the presence of intermediate kingdoms in many ancient apocalypses to argue for their own position.

Revelation 20 and what follows especially expound the later chapters of Ezekiel: Israel's *resurrection (chap. 37), the war with Gog and Magog (chaps. 38–39) and the new Jerusalem's temple (chaps. 40–48), though Ezekiel lacks an explicit thousand-year period and Revelation lacks a literal, physical temple.

20:1-3. On the dragon/serpent, see comment on Revelation 12:3 and 9. Many early Jewish texts spoke of wicked angels being "bound," meaning chained and imprisoned, until a particular time, usually the day of judgment (especially **1 Enoch;* cf. Tobit, **Jubilees* and **Testament of Solomon*). Thus, for example, angels could be bound and hurled into the abyss (*1 Enoch* 88:1), and a leader of fallen angels could be hurled into fire on the day of judgment (*1 Enoch* 10:4-6).

Many Jewish texts include an intermediate period between the present and future ages; in some, it is an age of messianic peace, but in others it is the final tribulation, which came to be called the "messianic travail." The length of the final intermediate period varies in those ancient Jewish texts that include it, producing such diverse figures as forty years, three generations, four hundred years and nearly as many other calculations as there are opinions recorded, sometimes counted by "weeks" or jubilees of years. A few Jewish traditions divided history into seven one-thousand-year periods, of which the final period would be an age of peace. (*Plato's figure of one thousand years between death and reincarnation as the intermediate state of the Greek afterlife might have influenced this Jewish figure [cf. also the phoenix of Greek mythology, discussed by *rabbis], but this is not clear; the apocalyptic penchant for dividing history into ages, plus the natural appeal of a round number like one thousand [cf. one hundred in Is 65:20], and especially the Jewish application of Ps 90:4 to the seven days of Gen 1, are sufficient to explain the length of the period on purely Jewish terms.)

20:4. The resurrection of the righteous was a standard part of Jewish hopes; the subsequent reign of God's people with him is less frequent but also appears in Jewish literature (in the *Old Testament, cf., e.g., Is 60:5; Dan 7:14, 18). Roman citizens were normally executed by beheading (with axes in previous times, but with swords by the first century); they were first beaten and blindfolded and then forced to kneel.

20:5-6. The punishment of the rest of the dead after an interim period could be inferred

from Isaiah 24:21-22, even though Daniel 12:2 (like a number of *New Testament texts) does not distinguish the time between the resurrection of the righteous (after the tribulation Daniel mentions in 12:13) and that of the damned. Jewish texts sometimes spoke of the "second death" of the wicked at the judgment. On the reigning priests, see comment on Revelation 1:6.

20:7-10
The Folly of Gog and Magog

20:7-8. Gog, prince in the land of Magog, appears as the final enemy of Israel in Ezekiel 38–39, after Israel's regathering and perhaps the time of the *resurrection (chap. 37). Although scholars dispute whom Ezekiel has in mind, they agree that the enemies are from the north (like most of Israel's enemies in that period); *Josephus identified them with the Scythians. Gog and Magog thus recur often in Jewish texts as the final major enemies of Israel (rabbis, *apocalyptic texts, Dead Sea Scrolls).

Many Jewish teachers expected a mass conversion of pagans to Judaism in the messianic time, to be followed by mass apostasy in the time of Gog and Magog. The army of the nations is called Belial's (*Satan's) army in the *Dead Sea Scrolls (although this text corresponds more to the battle envisioned in Rev 19). The Old Testament often employs the phrase "like the sand on the seashore" for a vast multitude (e.g., Gen 22:17; 32:12; 41:49).

20:9. Some Jewish texts portrayed a wall of fire around Jerusalem (based on Zech 2:5; cf. Ex 13:21), and some depicted fire falling from heaven to consume the enemies (**Sibylline Oracles;* based on such judgments as Gen 19:24-25; Lev 10:2; 2 Kings 1:10); here see especially Ezekiel 38:22; 39:6. In the **Similitudes of Enoch,* angels stir up Parthians to invade the Holy Land, but the ground opens to swallow them up. The Dead Sea Scrolls call the remnant community the "camp of the *saints," a picture that also resembles Israel in the wilderness awaiting its final entrance into the Holy Land. For the gathering of the nations against God's people, see, for example, Zechariah 12:3 and 14:2; see comment on Revelation 16:13-16.

20:10. Judaism also anticipated the ultimate defeat and judgment of Satan, a position in harmony with the Old Testament view that God would reign unchallenged forever after the final day of judgment.

20:11-15
The Final Judgment

In various Jewish end-time scenarios, the day of judgment would be too late for *repentance (see e.g., **1 Enoch* 97:6; **4 Ezra* 7:33).

20:11. Although many writers also stressed a judgment of souls at death (some thoroughly Hellenized writers like *Philo had little interest in a future resurrection and judgment), Judaism had much to say about the day of judgment before God's throne at the end of the age. The image of a new heaven and earth (cf. Rev 21:2) is from Isaiah 65:17.

20:12. The opening of the books before God alludes to Daniel 7:10. Many early Jewish texts refer to heavenly tablets (**Jubilees, 1 Enoch, 2 Enoch, *3 Enoch, Testament of Abraham*) containing records of human history or God's laws; angels were continually writing down people's sins, recording deeds in books for the day of judgment. The "opening" of the books meant that everything was about to be made known (see also, e.g., *4 Ezra*). The final judgment would be a public judgment—there would be no way of hiding one's naked shame.

The image of the "book of life" appears in the *Old Testament (Ex 32:32-33; Dan 12:1; Mal 3:16) and was developed more extensively in later Jewish literature (e.g., Dead Sea Scrolls, *Jubilees*). All would be judged according to their works (Ps 62:12; Prov 24:12; Jer 17:10; 32:19; Ezek 18:30), but former sinful works canceled by true repentance would not count against the righteous (Ezek 18:21-22).

20:13-14. Jewish texts often spoke of the final day on which the wicked would be cast into the abyss of fire (e.g., *1 Enoch*). "Hades" (rendered "hell" in the KJV) was the abode of the dead (named for the Greek deity of the underworld, but not associated with him in Jewish texts), the equivalent of the Old Testament realm of the dead, Sheol. In many Jewish texts, as here, the wicked were held there under judgment until their final destruction or place of torture; in Jewish texts, Hades would return what was entrusted to it. Many *Gentiles questioned whether those who died unburied, especially at sea, had a

part in the afterlife; others questioned how those lost at sea could be resurrected. This passage is clear that even the sea would give up its dead for judgment.

20:15. Most Jewish people believed that all normal Jews (i.e., those who followed Judaism) would be saved, along with the small percentage of the righteous among the nations (Gentiles); the rest would be damned. Israel's faith had always been exclusivistic (worshiping one supreme God; John would add here the further exclusivism that God was truly worshiped only through Christ—cf. 1 Jn 2:23), and the Old Testament prophets had proclaimed a day of judgment that would call the nations as well as Israel to account. It would be too late to repent in that time.

21:1-8
Promise of the World to Come

Some pagan oracles predicted a future age of bliss, but the hope for a future age of peace, ruled by God alone, is a distinctively *Old Testament, Jewish and Christian hope.

21:1. Isaiah had already predicted the new heavens and new earth (Is 65:17; 66:22); the focus of attention in this new creation would be the new Jerusalem (Is 65:18; cf. 66:22). Many Jewish depictions of the *age to come (e.g., in **1 Enoch, Jubilees* and *Pseudo-Philo) emphasized the new heavens and earth. Some Jewish texts spoke of the replacement of the first creation by a new creation; others envisioned the new creation as a renewal of the old. Many texts described the end time in terms of the beginning, as a renewal of paradise (see comment on 22:1-5); so here the new creation recalls the goodness of the first creation before sin marred it (Gen 1:1).

Predictions of the sea's evaporation (perhaps in **Sibylline Oracles* 5:157-59, although in 5:447-49 the drying of the seas for ships does not do away with water) were far less common for *apocalypses. Some commentators point to much earlier Canaanite myths, but these would not have been sufficiently contemporary to be obvious to John's readers. The sea's disappearance here may accommodate a literal (and typically ancient Jewish) reading of Isaiah 65:17, which mentions heaven and earth but does not mention the sea; another explanation may be the symbolic depiction of an end to the mercantile power Babylon (13:1; 17:15; 18:17).

21:2. Like any city, "Jerusalem" meant both the place and the people who lived there; the new Jerusalem is thus a bride because its residents are a bride (19:7). Greco-Roman *encomia* (praises) of cities often turned to describing them as people, and Jewish people were familiar with Old Testament personifications of Jerusalem and the Old Testament depiction of God's people as his bride. Contemporary Jewish writers (e.g., Tobit, 2 Maccabees, Sirach, *Philo and *Josephus) and Jewish coins also called Jerusalem the "holy city" (in the Old Testament, cf. Neh 11:1, 18; Is 48:2; 52:1; 62:12); Jewish people (e.g., the *Qumran Temple Scroll) viewed it as the holiest of cities.

Pious Jews prayed daily for God to restore Jerusalem. The new Jerusalem, an Old Testament image (Is 65:18), had become a standard Jewish hope for the future, whether as a renewed and purified Jerusalem (Tobit, **Psalms of Solomon*) or (as here) a new city from above (probably **4 Ezra*); a city "from above" would be perfect, having been built by God himself (a hope found in some texts). In some apocalypses (**2 Baruch*), the righteous would dwell on high; in early Jewish literature like *Jubilees,* God would descend and dwell with his people.

21:3. The tabernacle had always symbolized God's dwelling among his people (Ex 25:8-9; 29:45; 1 Kings 6:12-13); God had also promised to "dwell" among his people as part of his covenant (Lev 26:11-12), especially in the sinless world to come (Ezek 37:24-28; 43:7-10; Zech 2:11). Ezekiel expected God to dwell with his people in the future temple (Ezek 43:7, 9); here the entire holy city functions as God's temple (see comment on the shape in 21:16; cf. 21:22), even greater than Ezekiel's promise.

21:4. These depictions allude especially to Isaiah 25:8; 35:10; 51:11 and 65:16-19.

21:5. On the promise of a future new creation, see comment on 21:1; for divine Wisdom spiritually "making all things new" in the present, cf. Wisdom of Solomon 7:27.

21:6. On Alpha and Omega, see comment on 1:8. The future age was portrayed as having abundant water (e.g., Is 35:1-2; Ezek 47:1-12; see comment on 22:1); for the offer of free water to the obedient, cf. Isaiah 55:1.

21:7. God had called Israel his children in the Old Testament (the language also continues in subsequent Jewish literature); those who had become his children were part of the covenant community and shared its promises for the future. God promised that his people who endured would inherit the world to come (Zech 8:12). The standard Old Testament covenant motif (also in *Jubilees*) is "I will be their God and they will be my people" (cf., e.g., Ex 6:7; 29:45; Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:33; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23, 27; Zech 8:8), a promise slightly augmented here.

21:8. Part of the promise in the Old Testament (e.g., Is 66:24) and Jewish literature was that the righteous who persevered would not have to share the world to come with their oppressors. Ancient cities forbade some morally or socially despised groups to live inside the city walls; here the exclusion is moral. Ephesus had a widespread reputation for the popular practice of *magic; sexual immorality was pervasive. Some of the sins may relate to issues addressed elsewhere in Revelation or Johannine literature. On the lake of fire, see comment on 19:20.

21:9-27
The Glory of the New Jerusalem

*Rhetoricians often showed off their epideictic (praise) skills by describing and praising magnificent cities like Rome (Aelius Aristides) or Athens (Isocrates); John here describes the greatest of cities. His *encomium* is on a renewed city whose prototype was also loved and praised in the *Old Testament (e.g., Ps 48) and whose future glory was the hope of the prophets (e.g., Ezek 40–48).

Jewish literature after Ezekiel also delighted to describe the glory of the new Jerusalem (e.g., Tobit 13:9-18, which includes streets paved with precious stones; 5Q15, a written blueprint in the *Dead Sea Scrolls modeled on Ezek 40–48; *rabbis), often as part of their praise to God for his coming deliverance. Most writers intended their imagery to praise the greatness of God and his holy city, however, not as literal depictions. Thus Isaiah has not only gates of crystal and walls of precious stones (Is 54:11-12), but walls of salvation and gates of praise (60:18). Zechariah, by contrast, noted that Jerusalem would not need walls because God would be a wall of fire for the city (Zech 2:4-5).

Some Jewish pictures of the end emphasized a return to Israel's pastoral/agricultural beginnings, without ruling out urban existence (*Sibylline Oracles* 3:744-51), but the *New Testament and most contemporary Jewish literature are more urban than most Old Testament depictions of the end (Amos 9:13-15). The symbolic imagery for paradise was adapted to speak most relevantly to the cultures addressed.

21:9. Given the commitment involved in ancient Jewish betrothal, a betrothed woman and thus a bride could be referred to as a wife (as in 19:7).

21:10. The description of the revelation in 21:9-10 parallels exactly that in 17:1-3. Ancient rhetoric commonly taught by means of contrasting characters, and the contrast between Babylon the prostitute and new Jerusalem the bride is explicit and intentional. Those who instructed public speakers emphasized clarity and vividness in descriptions, and this description exemplifies those characteristics.

Apocalyptic texts sometimes used a mountain reaching to heaven to provide visibility (**1 Enoch* 17:2; cf. 18:6-8; 24:1-3; 77:4; Mt 4:8); Jerusalem was also regarded as atop a mountain (**Letter of Aristeas* 83-84, 105-6; often in the Old Testament, e.g., Joel 2:1); the image here is rooted in Ezekiel 40:2.

21:11. The emphasis on the wealth of the new Jerusalem would remind older Jewish readers of the glory of the temple, whose gates had been adorned with gold and silver; John declares that the whole city will share the glory of the temple. God would set his glory among his people in the end time (e.g., Is 60:1-3; Sirach 36:14). Jewish writers spoke of supernatural precious stones that were luminous, or light-giving, by themselves.

21:12-13. The text of *1 Enoch* links the twelve gates of heaven to the twelve signs of the zodiac, but Revelation links New Jerusalem's gates to the twelve tribes, each tribe having its own position, as they did in the Old Testament during the wilderness wanderings and the settlement in the Promised Land. In the Temple Scroll (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls), some Jewish pietists noted that the tribes would be commemorated on the twelve gates

surrounding the new temple (three on each of the four sides). The image is from Ezekiel 48:31-35.

21:14. Jesus had made clear the continuity between the twelve tribes in the Old Testament and the first *apostles in the New Testament by his initial numbering of those apostles (see the introduction to Acts 1:15-26); Asian Christians would easily recognize the symbolism (Eph 2:20).

21:15. The "measuring rod" comes from Ezekiel 40:3; the measurements of the city were to produce awe of God's great promises and thus *repentance (Ezek 40:4; 43:10-11). The Dead Sea Scrolls also emphasize measurements of the future temple to call readers to endure for the future age. John's measurements differ from Ezekiel's, but not in a way that anyone would complain: his New Jerusalem is nearly two thousand times larger, without even counting its height. All such images simply depicted in a symbolic way the much greater grandeur to come (cf. 1 Cor 2:9-10).

21:16. That the dimensions are equal on all sides indicates that the city is shaped like a cube—like the holy of holies in the Old Testament temple (1 Kings 6:20), indicating that the presence of God would always be with them in its fullest intensity. Like some Roman cities of John's era, Ezekiel's city was also square, although not clearly cubed (48:32-34; cf. 45:2; 48:16, 20); but the cubing illustrates the point of Ezekiel 48:35—God's presence—all the more graphically. In some Jewish traditions, the future Jerusalem would expand in all directions (based on Is 54:2-3) and would become so tall that it would ascend to God's throne (based on Ezek 41:7). None of these descriptions is literal; if it is difficult to breathe atop the world's highest mountain (about five miles high), a city fifteen hundred miles high would not be very practical (at least under current laws of physics!). John elsewhere uses "twelve thousand" and 144 symbolically, and the connection may suggest that New Jerusalem is the city of God for the people of God (7:4-8).

21:17. This wall, literally 144 cubits, is quite disproportionate with a city fifteen hundred miles high, but this point reinforces its symbolic use; important ancient cities always had walls, hence John includes one. Although John could have excluded walls (Is 60:18; Zech 2:4-5) as he does the temple (Rev 21:22), emphasizing that they were unnecessary given the lack of aggressors, he would then not have been able to include his symbolic use of gates (see comment on 21:12-14).

Moreover, great ancient cities always had walls, so they were important for John's hearers to understand this image with reference to the greatest of cities. Apocalyptic texts (*2 Enoch*) sometimes called angels "men," and angels often appeared in human form in the Old Testament and Jewish literature.

21:18. Isaiah envisioned walls made of precious stones (Is 54:12); in contrast to Babylon's mere decorations of gold and pearls, every part of the new Jerusalem is precious. Jewish descriptions of the costly stones used to build the new Jerusalem included miraculous elaborations, hence absolutely pure gold that looked like clear glass would have fit the *genre. Metal was used in mirrors, so it could mean that the gold gives a perfect reflection.

21:19-20. Twelve stones were normally used in the Old Testament (Ex 28:17-20; Josh 4:2-3) and Judaism (e.g., *Pseudo-Philo) to signify the twelve tribes. The image is from Isaiah 54:11-12, where every part of the city (walls, foundations, gates, etc.) would be constructed with precious stones. Texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls interpret this passage in Isaiah figuratively and apply it to the righteous, who displayed God's glory (including the twelve leaders of the community). Tobit applies it literally to the future Jerusalem but includes streets that cry out praises to God.

That the *Septuagint of Ezekiel 28:13 lists a variety of precious stones may inform Revelation 17:4, but the use of twelve different precious stones, each signifying a tribe of Israel, is from Exodus 28:17-20; John's list is roughly equivalent to the Hebrew one in Exodus. Thus the image of Aaron's breastplate (Ex 28) evokes the priestly city for divine worship; the precious stones on his breastplate evoked the glory of God's people (Wisdom of Solomon 18:24). The possible allusion to Tyre's wealth (Ezek 28) contrasts the absolute wealth that is God's gift with the limited wealth acquired by Tyre and its imitator in Revelation, Babylon. (Both *Josephus and *Philo also link the twelve stones on

Aaron's breastplate with the twelve signs of the zodiac, but John characteristically avoids the astrological associations that some writers linked with the symbols he employs.)

21:21. In Tobit 13, the new Jerusalem's streets are paved with precious stones, and its walls and towers are of pure gold. Some rabbis expounded that the new Jerusalem's gates would be made of giant pearls and precious stones; in one later story, a man who ridicules a rabbi's exposition about the pearls sinks to the bottom of the sea and sees the angels working on the gates of the new temple; he then pays the price for his mockery when the rabbi disintegrates him with his eyes. But the main source for the image of precious stones in the future city is Isaiah 54:11-12. "Street" (11:8) might be functionally plural but probably refers to the main street (cf. "great street"—NIV) running through well-planned towns on the Greek model. First-century Jerusalem had major east-west and north-south streets, some of them as wide as thirteen meters (more than forty feet) at points, but the glory of the old Jerusalem will not compare with the glory of the one that God has promised.

21:22. One of the most basic hopes of ancient Judaism, recited daily in prayer, was the restoration and renewal of the temple (a hope from Ezek 40–48 onward). Even unlearned *Gentiles would be shocked; ancient cities conventionally had temples. But John offers a greater, not a lesser, vision than Ezekiel: the entire city is God's temple or dwelling place (see comment on Rev 21:11, 16; Zech 14:21), and God is its temple as well.

21:23. The city's light being the Lord's glory rather than the sun or moon is taken directly from Isaiah 60:19-20 (cf. the image of 24:23; 30:26). Many Jewish teachers stressed that God's light would fill the world to come, and that God would shine on his people.

21:24. The nations will gather to Jerusalem to worship and bring tribute in the end time (e.g., Is 60:3-22; Jer 3:17; Zech 14:16-19; cf. Tobit 13:11-12; see comment on Rev 3:9), bringing their glory into it (Is 66:12) and depending on its light (Is 60:1-3). In some biblical and other ancient Jewish depictions of the future, the Gentiles would be destroyed in the end time; in others, they would bring tribute; in still others, they would become part of God's people (Is 19:23-25; Zeph 3:9). Revelation draws on all these images, but clearly all true followers of the lamb from all peoples become New Jerusalemites (see comment on 7:16-17).

21:25-26. Like the gates of ancient cities, the temple's gates in the old Jerusalem were closed at night (cf. also the closing of gates in Ezek 46:1); but in the world to come, Jerusalem's gates will never need to be closed, because tribute rather than aggressors will come to them (Is 60:11). Revelation adds that the gates will also remain open because there will be no night, since the Lord will be the light (21:23; cf. Is 60:19-20). Night was also associated with sorcery, *demons and robbers, and most people considered it a good time to stay inside when possible. Contrast the city of wealth in Revelation 18:11-19.

21:27. Outcast groups (e.g., prostitutes) sometimes lived outside city gates, but an Old Testament allusion is in view here. There will be no more abominations in the house of God (Zech 14:21) or unbelievers in Jerusalem (Joel 3:17). The unclean had always been excluded from God's house so long as they remained in that state; this text refers to spiritual or moral uncleanness. The whole city is God's temple, or dwelling place (21:3, 16, 22).

22:1-5
The New Paradise

The *Old Testament sometimes figuratively described Jerusalem's restoration in paradise language (Is 51:3), but it was later Jewish texts that especially developed the picture of the end time as the restoration or amplification of the original paradise. Such texts present paradise as the home of the righteous, *Gehenna that of the wicked.

22:1. Despite Laodicea's lack, all strong cities should have a water supply. The rivers of paradise in Genesis 2:10 and the waters of Jerusalem (Ps 46:4) may supply some of the background for the image here; the immediate allusion, however, is to the rivers of water flowing from the new Jerusalem's temple in Ezekiel 47:1-11 (cf. Joel 3:18; Zech 14:8). (*Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.1.3, 38, employed the Greek geographical concept of Oceanus and claimed that the garden in Eden was watered by one earth-encircling river that divided into four parts: Ganges, Euphrates,

Tigris and Nile. John might allude to the *Spirit; cf. Jn 7:37-39.)

22:2. The description of the "tree of life" is from Ezekiel 47:12, which speaks of many trees bearing fruit each month (as opposed to one season a year) and leaves for healing. John adds "for the nations," and further modifies Ezekiel's "trees" to incorporate an allusion to paradise: although treated elsewhere in Jewish literature (e.g., **4 Ezra*), the "tree of life" is from Genesis 2:9. Later Jewish traditions further expounded the figure. (Some Jewish texts spoke of twelve trees, one for each month, in a four-river paradise, weaving together features of Ezekiel and Genesis in a manner similar to Revelation. Jewish texts frequently connected the twelve months with the twelve tribes and constellations, but John avoids astrological associations here, as elsewhere.)

22:3. The removal of the curse is from Zechariah 14:11, and in this context it refers to the reversal of the curse in Eden (Gen 3:16-19).

22:4. God's once-hidden face (Ex 33:20) will now be fully disclosed to his people (cf. comment on Jn 1:14-18); many other Jewish people also expected this in the end time. For writing on the forehead, see comment on Revelation 7:3; the point is that it will be clear that God's people belong to him alone.

22:5. Jewish visions of the future sometimes included the righteous shining like the sun or stars (**1 Enoch;* Sirach; *4 Ezra;* *rabbis; cf. Ex 34:29; Dan 12:3); for God shining on his people, see comment on 21:23. The righteous shining and also ruling in the future are combined in Wisdom of Solomon 3:7-8.

22:6-21
Final Announcements

Divine revelation and exhortation could go hand in hand. For instance, Tobit's praise to God (Tobit 13:1-18) includes both a description of the final Jerusalem (13:9-18) and a call to *repentance for Israel (13:6).

22:6-7. "Faithful and true" may represent a testimony oath formula (cf. 3:14; 22:18; Jer 42:5), verifying the veracity of the revelation. "God of the spirits of all flesh" is an Old Testament title for God (Num 16:22; 27:16) attested in subsequent Jewish (e.g., **Jubilees*; inscriptions) and *Samaritan texts; "Lord of Spirits" is also a divine title (**Similitudes of Enoch;* cf. similar expressions in the *Dead Sea Scrolls). Here John especially identifies God with the prophets.

22:8-9. Commentators on Ephesians and Colossians often suggest that some Jewish Christians in Asia Minor had been assigning too prominent a role to angels; if that error is at all in view here, this passage refutes it (cf. also Rev 19:10).

22:10. Daniel had been instructed to seal up his words until the end time (Dan 12:4, 9); some of his visions had applied only to the future (Dan 8:26; 9:24; 10:14; cf. Jer 23:20; 30:24; *1 Enoch* 100:6). By contrast, John's revelation is meant to be understood in his own generation as well as subsequently (which should affect how subsequent generations understand his book). On opening sealed documents, see comment on 5:1.

22:11. The righteous would stand, but the wicked would continue in their wickedness (Dan 12:10). John's exhortation here resembles an ironic invitation: let those who reject God's words do so, but they will pay the consequences (Ezek 3:27; cf. Jer 44:25; Amos 4:4-5; Eccles 11:9; **Sibylline Oracles* 3:57-59).

22:12. The Old Testament and Judaism stressed that God was righteous and would reward his people (e.g., Gen 15:1; Ps 18:20; 19:11; Is 49:4; **4 Ezra*). That God would give each person according to his or her works was also Old Testament teaching (e.g., Ps 62:12; see comment on Rev 20:12).

22:13. In three different forms, this verse attributes to the speaker (Jesus in 22:12) a divine title (see Is 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). A literary device called *inclusio* was used to frame a section of text by starting and ending on the same note; most of Revelation is framed by the announcement that the Lord of history is both Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end (1:8; see comment on that verse).

22:14. On washed robes, compare 3:4-5 and 7:14, and see comment on 3:4; on the tree of life, see comment on 22:2.

22:15. "Dogs" probably refers to the sexually immoral, specifically unrepentant prostitutes (Deut 23:17-18). Elsewhere in Revelation state religion (in John's era, especially the imperial cult), combined with sorcery, martyrs Christians; immorality (both literal and spiritual) characterized the lifestyle of

*Gentile men. See also comment on 21:8 and 27; cf. also Genesis 3:24.

22:16. "Root of David" comes from the "stem of Jesse" (David's father) in Isaiah 11:1—the shoot that would spring up from the stump of David's lineage, after his descendants had lost the throne. Some commentators suggest that "root" reverses the image, making him David's source. The morning star is Venus, herald of the dawn (cf. Rev 2:28); in this case the text probably also alludes to Numbers 24:17, the star descended from Jacob (Israel) and destined to reign and crush the enemies of God's people. (The Dead Sea Scrolls also applied Num 24:17 to a conquering *messiah.)

22:17. Ancient Judaism especially associated the *Spirit with *prophecy. Everyone who hears the invitation is to join in it, and the thirsty may come and drink freely (Is 55:1) of the water of 22:1.

22:18-19. The words of a divinely instituted covenant or book were not to be altered (Deut 4:2; 12:32; cf. Prov 30:5-6). Covenants often included curses against those who broke them; those who followed idols thus invited all the curses of Deuteronomy (29:20, 27). Such claims of completeness or inspiration of books were often made in later times (e.g., *1 Enoch;* Josephus and **Letter of Aristeas* made this claim for the *LXX) to uphold their authority or to secure them against later editors interpolating their own ideas—a practice common in books that were not treated as sacred Scripture or other inspired writings.

22:20. "Come, Lord" translates the *Marana tha* prayer common in early Christianity (see comment on 1 Cor 16:22), acknowledging believers' early recognition of Jesus' deity. For the testimony of witnesses at the end of a document, see comment on John 21:24.

22:21. This was an appropriate concluding greeting, often attached to Christian letters (see comment on Rom 1:7).

Glossary

The most important terms and names are highlighted in the text with an asterisk (*).

Achilles Tatius. A second-century A.D. *rhetorician who wrote *Cleitophon and Leucippe,* a Greek romance novel.

Age to come. Many Jewish people divided history into at least two eras, the present age and the age to come. "*Eternal life" was the life of the coming age.

Akiba. A late-first- to early-second-century *rabbi whose opinions became very influential in rabbinic Judaism. After wrongly supposing Bar Kochba to be the *Messiah, he was flayed to death by the Romans and reportedly died reciting Judaism's basic creed: "The Lord is one."

***Apocalypses, apocalyptic literature.** The broadest use of the term today (usually followed in this commentary) refers to the thought world of literature dealing with the end time, often replete with symbols. The most precise sense of the term refers to a category of ancient Jewish literature growing out of *Old Testament *prophecy (especially Daniel and parts of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, etc.) in which visions or travels through the heavens reveal divine secrets, usually including many about the future. Nonfuturistic Jewish mysticism was probably like a truncated apocalyptic with future expectations played down.

Apocrypha. A group of books accepted as part of the Catholic *canon between the *Old and *New Testaments but not part of the Protestant and Jewish canons. Most of these books circulated in the most common form of the *Septuagint, but ancient Jewish writers (e.g., *Philo, *Josephus and the *rabbis) did not treat them as Scripture. The New Testament never expressly cites these books with Scripture formulas but alludes to them fairly often. The books are 1–2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (also known as Ben Sira or Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh, and 1–2 Maccabees.

***Apostle.** The term applies literally to a sent or commissioned messenger; in Palestinian Jewish custom such a messenger (a *shaliakh,* or agent) acted on the full authority of his sender, to the extent that he accurately represented the sender's message. The closest *Old Testament equivalent to God's "apostles" in this sense was the prophets, although the apostles seem to have added an overseeing and evangelistic function that prophets (both Old Testament and *New Testament) did not always incorporate. Those prophets commissioned with special authority to oversee prophetic awakening (e.g., perhaps Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah) or to lead God's people (e.g., Moses, Deborah, Samuel) thus may provide the best Old Testament models (cf. 2 Cor 3:6-18).

Apuleius. A second-century A.D. *rhetorician who may have dabbled in *magic and was initiated into the cult of Isis. He is most famous for his book *Metamorphoses,* now often called *The Golden Ass.*

***Aramaic.** A language related to Hebrew that was the standard international language of the ancient Near East before Alexander the Great's conquests made Greek the standard in the cities; it was still widely spoken in different

forms in Syria-Palestine (especially in rural areas) and farther east in Jesus' day. Most Jewish people in first-century Judea and Galilee probably spoke both Greek and Aramaic, though most were probably more fluent in one or the other. The Galilean peasants to whom Jesus often spoke were probably often more fluent in Aramaic.

Aristeas, Letter of. The *pseudepigraphic story of seventy wise translators of the *Septuagint (LXX) and how they impressed the ruler of Egypt. An Alexandrian document probably from the second century B.C., it seeks to portray Judaism in a positive light to Greeks.

Aristotle. A fourth-century B.C. student of *Plato who wrote treatises on logic, *rhetoric, nature and ethics. Many of his views became influential; his teachings were preserved especially by the school of philosophy known as the Peripatetics.

Ascetic. Austere and self-denying; some ancient religious and philosophical groups required this discipline as a matter of policy (often to show one's lack of attachment to mortal, bodily pleasures and pains). Asceticism grew in popularity in late antiquity, influencing the shape of later Christian monasticism.

Atone, atonement. The satisfaction of God's anger by venting it on a substitute instead of on the guilty person, attested in a wide range of ancient cultures and literature. Laying down one's life for another was highly regarded in Greek culture; some elements in Judaism came to emphasize that martyrs paid the price for others. But the concept especially derives from one kind of Old Testament sacrifice, in which the death of a sacrifice provides cleansing from sin's impurity and appeases God's anger so the sinner can be forgiven.

***Baptism.** The *Old Testament and the ancient world emphasized ceremonial washings to remove various kinds of impurity; Judaism had developed these washings more fully by the time of Jesus, and some sects (particularly the community that authored the *Dead Sea Scrolls) were especially scrupulous. One once-for-all ritual designed to purify *Gentiles of pagan impurity when they converted to Judaism (attested in the *rabbis, in *Epictetus and elsewhere) may have provided the most significant model for John the Baptist's and subsequently Christian baptism: it indicated an act of conversion, of turning from the old life to the new. This conversion-baptism, like regular Jewish washings in purity pools, involved immersion. Scholars generally presume that this practice was continued by the earliest Christians (though exceptions soon came to be allowed where needed; see *Didache* 7.1-3, probably from the late first century).

2 Baruch. A Jewish *apocalypse from the late first or early second century A.D.

***Canon.** The minimum of books agreed to constitute the absolutely authoritative, divinely inspired body of literature, by which other claims to revelation may be evaluated. Most of ancient Palestinian Judaism accepted the present *Old Testament as canonical; some groups added other works (probably some others works such as **1 Enoch* were accepted at *Qumran, and some *Diaspora Jews apparently highly valued other works now considered part of the *Apocrypha). Early Christians came to accept the books of the present *New Testament in addition to the Jewish canon. Some books were widely accepted very early (such as the four Gospels and most of Paul's letters); others were debated for some time before the majority of Christians agreed on them (such as 2 Peter) or rejected them (such as *1 Clement* or *Shepherd of Hermas*).

Chiasmus. An inverted parallel literary structure, in which the last line or idea corresponds with the first one, the next to the last corresponds with the second one, and so forth. The title for this structure is first attested later than the *New Testament, but scholars find examples of it as early as Homer.

***Christ.** The Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term for "*Messiah." Some *Gentile readers, unfamiliar with the Jewish sense of the term, may have taken it merely as Jesus' surname, a usage that became more common over time.

***Church.** The Greek term used in the *New Testament reflects one of the terms often used in the *Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for the "congregation" (*qahal*) of Israel: "church" (assembly); the other was "*synagogue" (gathering). Although some scholars have suggested that Jesus could not have spoken about the church during his earthly ministry, the *Dead Sea Scrolls used the Hebrew term for God's community; hence Jesus could use this word in talking about his

future community (Mt 16:18; 18:17). The term was in common use in Greek culture for "assemblies," especially citizen assemblies in cities. (The popular modern surmise that the Greek word for "church," *ekklesia,* means "called-out ones" is mistaken; that sense is actually more appropriate for "*saints," i.e., "those separated" or "consecrated" [for God].)

Cicero. A famous Roman orator and statesman who wrote on a variety of subjects and flourished in the first century B.C.

***Client.** A person socially dependent on a *patron in Roman society (see *patron*).

Colony. A city either literally founded by the Romans or given honorary privileges as if it had been; its citizens were thus treated as citizens of Rome itself. In an early period Rome sometimes gave veterans land grants, settling them in these areas as Roman colonies.

Cynic. One type of antiworldly philosopher who expressed independence from social needs by begging. Cynics owned only the barest necessities (e.g., cloak, staff, begging purse) and often greeted passersby with harsh, antisocial words.

***Dead Sea Scrolls.** Writings from a strict Jewish sect (usually agreed to be *Essenes) that lived in the Judean desert, near modern Khirbet *Qumran. (A number of Qumran scholars today doubt whether the scrolls come from Essenes, but the sectarian scrolls do seem to fit the Essenes depicted in *Philo, Pliny the Elder and *Josephus. Some scholars also argue that Qumran was not a residence but merely a library, at least in some periods.) The writings include the War Scroll, the Manual of Discipline (Community Rule), the Damascus Document, the Thanksgiving Hymns, the Genesis Apocryphon, the Temple Scroll and commentaries on and expansions of various biblical books. Many of the most prominent and distinctive scrolls appear to have been written in the second century B.C.; most scholars believe that the site was abandoned during the Judean-Roman War (A.D. 66–70), although a few scholars allow that the site may have been revisited in later times.

Demons. Although the Greek term so translated often had a neutral sense in Greek (for souls or various kinds of spirits), Judeans and Galileans less shaped by Greek thought used especially the negative sense of the term. Negatively, it applied to nonhuman spirits other than God and the angels subservient to him; they were hostile to God's people. Exorcists typically employed various means for their extraction, such as stinky roots and magical formulas.

***Diaspora.** The Jewish dispersion outside Palestine. The technical term "Diaspora Judaism" is thus used interchangeably with "non-Palestinian Judaism" in this commentary.

Diatribe. A style of teaching used in ancient philosophical schools, generally characterized by *rhetorical questions and imaginary interlocutors.

Digression. A change of subject (usually brief) before returning to the previous point; this was a standard technique in ancient speeches and literature.

***Disciples.** Students or adherents of *rabbis or philosophers, normally committed to memorizing and living according to their master's teachings. Members of schools could pass the teachings on as canonical from one generation to the next.

Elect. Predestined, chosen. One of the most important tenets of Judaism was that the Jewish people were chosen in Abraham; the *New Testament applies the term to all of Jesus' followers, who are a chosen people in Christ. The vast majority of Jewish people followed the biblical emphasis that God was sovereign in human affairs; apparently the majority (exemplified in Josephus's depiction of the Pharisees) did not treat God's sovereignty as incompatible with human decisions and responsibility.

1 Enoch. An *apocalypse whose five sections may derive from different authors, *1 Enoch* is mainly (excepting the **Similitudes of Enoch*) from the second century B.C. Probably written in *Aramaic, it circulated especially in *Essene circles and survives in part in the *Dead Sea Scrolls and in full in later Ethiopic manuscripts.

2 Enoch. Although a Semitic original might derive from the first century, the current, edited work is from a later period and preserved in Slavonic.

3 Enoch. An *apocalypse from the perspective of rabbinic mysticism that is no later than the fifth century A.D. (probably from the third century).

Epictetus. A first-century *Stoic philosopher, originally a slave.

Epicureans. A philosophical school that valued pleasure (the absence of pain and disturbance) and disbelieved in the gods of ancient myths; see comment on Acts 17:18.

Eschatological. Dealing with the end time.

***Essenes.** A strict group of pietists, some of whom withdrew into the wilderness as monastics. The *Dead Sea Scrolls are probably from one group of Essenes. *Josephus estimates that there were about four thousand Essenes altogether.

***Eternal life.** In Jewish texts, the term literally means "the life of the world to come," bestowed after the *resurrection from the dead; taken from Daniel 12:2, it became a standard concept in most of early Judaism and was sometimes abbreviated "life." Some *New Testament passages speak of it as a present as well as future gift, because Jesus' resurrection has inaugurated salvation for the present.

4 Ezra. The bulk of this work (chaps. 3–14) is a Jewish *apocalypse from the late first (or possibly early second) century A.D.

Freedperson. A former slave who had been manumitted, legally freed.

Gehenna. A Greek transliteration of the Hebrew *Gehinnom,* which in Judaism had come to describe the abode of the wicked dead in torment. Various Jewish sources differ on the duration of punishment in Gehenna and whether the wicked would eventually be annihilated, continue to be detained or be released; the Gospels, Acts and Revelation are much more united in their picture of a *resurrection to eternal judgment.

Genre. The kind of writing a work is: for example, letter, historical *narrative, poem, science fiction or bomb threat. Although modern genres bearing the same title as ancient ones (e.g., letter, historical narrative, biography) have much in common with their predecessors, they typically differ in some features (see the introductions to the Gospels and Letters).

***Gentile.** Anyone who is not Jewish. In ancient Jewish parlance, this was often roughly the equivalent of how someone today might use "pagan" in a negative sense.

***Gnosticism.** A fusion of Greek, Jewish and Christian ideas that began by the early second century and presented a major challenge to early Christianity. The blanket term actually encompasses a variety of schools and movements that would not have all identified with one another, but some common features include an emphasis on "secret" knowledge outside the widely shared public traditions of other early Christian groups. Some scholars have seen tendencies toward developed Gnosticism in opponents presupposed in Pauline letters (especially in Colossians and the *Pastoral Epistles) and in the Gospel and letters of John. The same Greek ideas that later produced Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism were probably already at work in the first century, but we can reconstruct these from other sources without recourse to Gnosticism per se.

Gospel. The term so translated means literally "good news"; it was the sort of good news heralds would bring, and in Isaiah it refers to the specific message of God's restoration and salvation for his people. ("Gospel" as a literary *genre, a type of book in the *New Testament, is different, although these works do proclaim good news; on this sense of the term, see the introduction to the Gospels.)

Grace. In the *New Testament, the term generally represents the *Old Testament concept of God's unearned covenant love, which was expressed in passages like Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:7-9 and 10:15. The Greek term appears in inscriptions with reference to gifts and benefaction, and in the ancient ideology of reciprocity it invites gratitude.

Hagiography. A highly elaborated account of a holy person, meant to praise him or her.

***Hellenistic.** Although the commentary usually uses the term "Greek," "Hellenistic" is the more accurate technical term for the cultural fusion of classical Greek culture with Near Eastern cultures carried out in the eastern Mediterranean by Alexander the Great and his successors. "Hellenistic" Judaism is thus Judaism heavily influenced by Greek culture, i.e., "Hellenized."

High priests. Although the phrase applied to only the highest priest in the *Old Testament, *Josephus shows that in this period, the plural title applied to the aristocratic priests generally. Many prominent members of these aristocratic families in and around Jerusalem served on its municipal assembly (the Sanhedrin), and many were *Sadducees.

Hillel. A famous Jewish teacher contemporary with *Shammai and with Jesus' early childhood; usually more lenient than Shammai, his school's opinions generally prevailed after A.D. 70.

***Holy Spirit.** Although used only twice in the *Old Testament (Ps 51; Is 63), this term became a common title for the *Spirit of God in *New Testament times. Many people believed that the Spirit had been quenched since the completion of the Old Testament or that *prophecy continued only in muted form; but the Old Testament had promised an outpouring of the Spirit in the end, when the *Messiah would come. Jewish people especially associated the Spirit with prophecy and divine illumination or insight, and many also (especially the *Essenes) associated it with God purifying his people in the end time. The New Testament includes both uses, although it also speaks of the Spirit as a person like the Father and Son (especially in John 14–16), which Judaism did not do.

Hyperbole. A *rhetorical exaggeration or overstatement, a figure of speech often used by Jewish wisdom teachers to underline their point. The point of Jesus' hyperbolic illustrations is generally to grab the hearer's attention and force that hearer to take his point seriously.

Joseph and Asenath. An Alexandrian, *Hellenistic Jewish romance novel, describing the winning of Joseph's bride; probably non-Christian, it may derive from the first century A.D.

***Josephus.** A first-century Jewish historian who lived through the war of A.D. 66–70, which he describes along with the events leading up to it. His works (*Jewish War, Jewish Antiquities* and *Against Apion,* and his autobiography, the *Life*) are useful sources of information concerning first-century Palestine. Intended for a *Diaspora audience, his writings are quite Hellenized.

Jubilees. A theologically shaped *midrashic reworking of Genesis and part of Exodus. It circulated in (and probably derived from) *Essene circles in the second century B.C.

Justin Martyr. A philosopher both before and after his conversion to Christianity. Writer of two *Apologies* and the *Dialogue with Trypho,* he was a prominent Christian apologist (defender of the faith) in the second century A.D., until his martyrdom.

Juvenal. A Roman satirist who wrote especially in the early second century A.D. He is especially known for his invective against women, foreigners and *freedpersons who appeared to be encroaching on rights and privileges once reserved for aristocratic Roman males.

***Kingdom.** This term means "rule," "reign" or "authority" (not normally a king's people or land, as the English term could imply). Jewish people recognized that God rules the universe now, but they prayed for the day when he would rule the world unchallenged by idolatry and disobedience. The coming of this future aspect of God's reign was widely associated with the *Messiah and the *resurrection of the dead. Because Jesus came and will come again, Christians believe that the kingdom has been inaugurated but awaits consummation or completion. "Kingdom of heaven" is another way (Matthew's usual way) of saying "kingdom of God." Jewish people sometimes used "heaven" as a polite way of referring to "God" (as in Lk 15:21).

***Law.** *Torah* (the Hebrew word behind the Greek word translated "law") means literally "instruction" and "teaching," not just regulations. It was also used as a title for the first five books of the *Old Testament (the Pentateuch, the books of Moses) and sometimes for the whole Old Testament. This commentary uses the translation "law" because it is familiar to readers of most translations, even though the English term's semantic range is much narrower than the Jewish concept.

Livy. A first-century B.C. Roman historian.

Lucian. A second-century A.D. Greek satirist and *rhetorician.

LXX. The common abbreviation for the *Septuagint.

Maccabees. A priestly family who led the Jewish revolt against the *Hellenistic-Syrian empire in the second century B.C., they became the Hasmonean dynasty, an aristocracy that ruled Palestine until the time of Herod the Great.

3 Maccabees. A historical novel of Alexandrian Judaism; it may have been written in the first century B.C.

4 Maccabees. A Jewish treatise full of Greek (especially *Stoic) philosophy; probably written by an Alexandrian Jew in the early first century A.D.

Magic. Whether particular acts were attributed to magic or to positive divine power often depended on whether the observer approved of the person and his or her acts. Most people considered sorcery and magic to be secretive, antisocial and selfish, but it was widely practiced though sometimes associated with centers of magic such as Egypt and Ephesus. Popular magic included love charms, curses against opponents (even in sports), manipulation of spirits, and the like.

***Messiah.** The rendering of a Hebrew term meaning "anointed one," equivalent to the original sense of the Greek term translated "Christ." In the *Old Testament, different kinds of people were anointed, and some of the *Dead Sea Scrolls mention two main anointed ones in the end time, a king and a priest. But the common expectation reflected in the biblical Psalms and Prophets was that one of David's royal descendants would take the throne again when God reestablished his *kingdom for Israel. Many and probably most Jewish people in Palestine believed that God would somehow have to intervene to put down Roman rule so the Messiah's kingdom could be secure; many seem to have thought this intervention would be accomplished through force of arms. Various messianic figures arose in first-century Palestine, expecting a miraculous intervention from God; all were crushed by the Romans. (Jesus was the only one claimed to have been resurrected; he was also one of the only messiahs claiming Davidic descent, proof of which would be more difficult for any claimants arising after A.D. 70.)

Midrash. Jewish commentary or exposition on Scripture. The forms varied considerably but often included reading a text in the light of other texts, with careful attention to all nuances of details supposedly filled with divine significance. Because such methods of reading Scripture were common, early Christians could employ them in relating their message to other ancient Jewish Bible readers.

***Mystery cults.** A diverse group of Greek cults entered only by special initiation. The details of the initiation were to be kept entirely secret, although one could join a number of these societies. Apart from secrets and initiations, they varied widely in popularity, antiquity and appeal to different social classes.

Narrative. Story form (applied to both true and fictitious stories), as opposed to other literary forms, like explanatory discourse.

***New Testament.** The common modern term for the early Christian literature finally declared canonical by the *church and accepted by nearly all Christians today. Although it includes information about the new covenant (as does Jer 31:31-34), it is not technically a "testament" in itself; speaking of "Scripture written after Jesus's coming," however, would be cumbersome.

***Old Testament.** The common modern term for the Hebrew Bible (including *Aramaic portions) as defined by the Jewish and Protestant Christian canons; Jewish readers generally call this the Tanakh. Although it includes information about God's covenant with Israel, it is not technically a "testament" in itself.

Papyri. Documents contemporary to the *New Testament, especially business documents and correspondence, written on papyrus scrolls (writing material from the papyrus reed) and preserved especially in the dry climate of Egypt.

***Parable.** Jewish teachers regularly illustrated their teachings with brief stories, similar to the use of sermon illustrations today (though often with less verisimilitude). Jesus' parables, like those of other teachers, were meant to illustrate his points graphically, hence many details in these parables appear there only to advance the story line. Modern interpreters who read too much into such secondary details run the risk of overlooking the parable's real point or points. At the same time, parables sometimes had multiple points of contact with the realities they represented (e.g., the four soils in the parable of the sower); explicit interpretations often followed ancient Jewish parables, and they often contained such multiple points of contact. The Greek word for "parable" normally means a comparison; the Jewish practice behind Jesus' usage included a wide range of meanings (riddles, proverbs, fables, etc.) suggested in the Hebrew term *mashal*.

Pastoral Epistles. Three Pauline letters—1 and 2 Timothy and Titus—that give Paul's advice to young ministers carrying on his work.

***Patron.** The social superior in the Roman

patron-*client relationship, who granted favors to and acted as political sponsor for his clients, or social dependents. The obligations in the relationship were viewed as reciprocal; clients were to grant the patrons honor as their benefactors. In the technical sense, patronage was a Roman political institution; *New Testament scholars today often apply the designation more generally to include what was technically benefaction in the Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean world (and to encompass the English sense of "patron" as well).

Petronius. A first-century A.D. satirist who indulged in pleasure. After incurring the jealousy of Nero's guide and reputed sexual partner Tigellinus, Petronius killed himself when it became obvious what his fate would be.

***Pharisees.** A movement of several thousand (*Josephus estimates six thousand) pious Jewish men who sought to interpret the *law carefully and according to the traditions of previous generations of the pious. They lacked much direct access to political power in Jesus' day but were highly respected and thus influential among the larger population. They emphasized their own version of purity rules and looked forward to the *resurrection of the dead. Although early Christians more often emphasized occasions on which the Pharisees differed from Jesus, many of their other views resembled his.

***Philo.** A first-century Jewish philosopher committed to both the Greek translation of the Torah and to Greek education, especially eclectic Middle Platonic philosophy. He lived in Alexandria, Egypt, and held a position of great influence and prestige in the Jewish community there.

Pilate. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea from A.D. 26 to 36. His position was probably secure as long as his patron Sejanus remained in power in Rome; but after Sejanus's execution on October 19, A.D. 31, he undoubtedly had to act more carefully. *Josephus and *Philo both portray Pilate as insensitive to Judean concerns. He brought Roman standards, which Jewish people viewed as idolatrous, into Jerusalem under cover of night, provoking public protests that forced him to withdraw them. He diverted funds from the temple treasury for an aqueduct and otherwise infuriated Judeans. His massacre of *Samaritans finally provoked his recall to Rome.

Plato. A student of Socrates whose idealism and dualistic worldview became influential in subsequent Greek thought. He flourished in the fourth century B.C., but his thinking influenced Middle Platonists (such as Philo) in the first century A.D. and later; a developed form of Platonism became a dominant philosophic force later in antiquity.

Plutarch. A Greek biographer and moralist whose writings illustrate many of the views prevalent in the first and second centuries A.D.

Prophecy. Speaking forth God's message by his inspiration. It can, but need not, involve prediction. Although "prophet" technically refers to anyone who prophesies, most Jewish people reserved this title for God's spokespeople of the distant past.

***Proselyte.** A convert (as used in this commentary, a convert to Judaism).

Psalms of Solomon. Jewish psalms from the mid-first century B.C., somewhat like the *Qumran hymns. Probably all from one author, they might reflect early Pharisaic piety, or at least the form of early Judaism in which Pharisaism was also at home.

Pseudepigrapha. A broadly defined, modern collection of very diverse ancient Jewish texts outside the Jewish and Christian canons and other collections such as the *Apocrypha, *Dead Sea Scrolls and *rabbinic literature. So named because most of them are *pseudepigraphic. These works include (among others) *2 *Baruch*; *1, 2 and *3 *Enoch*; *4 *Ezra;* **Jubilees;* **Letter of Aristeas; Life of Adam and Eve;* *3 and *4 Maccabees; *Martyrdom of Isaiah;* **Psalms of Solomon;* **Sibylline Oracles;* **Testament of Job;* **Testament of Solomon;* and **Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.*

***Pseudepigraphic.** Purporting to be written by someone other than the real author, something like writing under a pen name today.

Pseudo-Philo. Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* retraces biblical history from Adam to the death of Saul. Possibly from Palestine, the work probably derives from the late first or early second century A.D. but betrays no specific Christian influence.

Pseudo-Phocylides. A probably Jewish work of moral wisdom, influenced by *Stoic ethics. It may date to the late first century B.C. or early first century A.D.

Pythagoreanism. A mystical philosophy attributed to Pythagoras, a Greek thinker of the sixth century B.C. Like other Greek philosophical schools, it had its own unique traits; one of its most basic tenets was the mystical significance of numbers. Pythagoreans also practiced strict vegetarianism.

Quintilian. An influential first-century Roman *rhetorician.

Qumran. The place where the *Dead Sea Scrolls were found (Khirbet Qumran); hence "Qumran community" is used to describe the people who lived there and wrote the Scrolls.

***Rabbi.** Jewish teacher ("my master"). Sometime after A.D. 70 the term became a technical one for those ordained in the rabbinic movement, which probably consisted primarily of Pharisaic *scribes. (To accommodate customary usage this commentary sometimes applies the term to Jewish teachers of the *law in general, although such common usage may have technically been later; it also applies the term to the teachings of Jewish legal experts collected in *rabbinic literature.)

Rabbinic literature. The massive body of literature containing opinions attributed to various Jewish teachers considered part of the rabbinic movement. The earliest written edition of some of this material comes from the early third century A.D. (mostly citing second-century *rabbis). Although all the written sources and most of the rabbis they cite are later than the *New Testament, this literature is useful to illustrate one stream of Jewish tradition. Rabbinic works include the *Mishnah, Tosefta, Mekilta on Exodus, Sifra on Leviticus, Sifre on Numbers and Deuteronomy,* and later (after the third century) the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds and various works in the Midrash Rabbah.

Repentance. In the *New Testament, this term does not merely mean "change of mind" (as some have gathered from the Greek term); it reflects the *Old Testament and Jewish concept of "turning around" or "turning away" from sin. Jewish people were to repent whenever they sinned; the New Testament uses the term especially for the once-for-all kind of turning that a *Gentile would undergo when converting to Judaism or any sinner would undergo when becoming a follower of Jesus.

***Resurrection.** Although some scholars in the early twentieth century associated the idea of Jesus' resurrection with Greek *mystery cults, it is now widely understood that early Christian belief shared little in common with the mysteries' myths, which simply reenacted a seasonal revivification of fertility. Rather, Jesus' resurrection was rooted in a Jewish hope, which in turn was rooted in notions of God's covenant, promise and justice from early in Israel's history. Ancient Jewish sources show that most Palestinian Jews believed that God would resurrect the bodies of the dead (at least the righteous, and many believed also the wicked), at the end of the age, as articulated in Dan 12:2. There was, however, never any thought that one person would rise ahead of everyone else; thus Jesus' resurrection, as an inauguration of the future *kingdom within history, caught even the *disciples by surprise.

***Rhetoric.** The art or study of proper forms and methods of public speaking, highly emphasized in antiquity. Although only the well-to-do had much training in it (as the more popular of the two forms of advanced education in antiquity), the rhetorical forms and ideas they used filtered down to the rest of urban society through public speeches, in a manner similar to that in which television permeates modern Western society.

***Sadducees.** Most belonged to the priestly aristocracy that had prospered due to its good relationship with the Romans; they pacified the people for the Romans and the Romans for the people. They controlled the prosperous temple cult, were skeptical of Pharisaic traditions and apparently supernaturalistic emphasis on angels and other spirits, and most of all were disturbed by talk of the *resurrection of the dead, other end-time beliefs, and anything that could arouse unrest. Messianic beliefs about the end time or revolutionary demands for change could—and ultimately did—challenge the stability of their own position in Palestine.

Saints. Some translations use this term (*hagioi,* singular *hagios*) for the "holy ones," that is, for those who have been consecrated to God. This title for believers indicates their ritual status as set apart exclusively for God's use (even when some of them fail to recognize it).

Samaritans. A people of mixed Jewish and

*Gentile ancestry who claimed descent from Jacob and worshiped the God of Israel, but felt that Mount Gerizim rather than Jerusalem was the holy site for worship. They engaged the Jews in bitter rivalry, often leading to political hostilities in Jesus' day, sometimes requiring Roman intervention.

Sanhedrin. The term designates an assembly; major cities could have their own senates, or assemblies. Jerusalem's Sanhedrin decided local Judean affairs, though they remained answerable to Rome's appointed agents.

Satan. Originally "the satan," "the adversary" (as in the Hebrew text of Job), but used as the devil's name by the end of Israel's exile (2 Chronicles, Zechariah) and standard by the *New Testament period, although many Jewish people also called him by other names. In contrast to some modern theologians, the first readers of the New Testament would have viewed him as a literal, personal, evil spiritual being. Developing *Old Testament themes, early Judaism viewed Satan as accuser (cf. Job 1:6–2:7; Zech 3:1-2), tempter (cf. 1 Chron 21:1) and deceiver.

Savior. A title often used for gods and divine rulers in Greek culture but also used in the *Septuagint for Israel's God as the deliverer of his people (e.g., Is 45:15, 21).

***Scribes.** Throughout the Roman Empire, local executors of legal documents. In Jewish Palestine these presumably would be the people who also taught children how to read or recite the Scriptures; at least some of them were experts in the legal issues contained in the *law of Moses (i.e., they were predecessors of the *rabbis); some of them were *Pharisees.

Seneca. A Roman *Stoic philosopher, an adviser to Nero in that emperor's early days.

***Septuagint.** The Greek version of the Old Testament widely circulated in the *New Testament period. (It is commonly abbreviated *LXX because of the tradition that seventy scholars were responsible for it.) Although various recensions, or versions, of the Septuagint existed, this commentary, for the sake of avoiding technical questions beyond its scope, refers to the most widely accepted standardized form.

Shammai. A famous Jewish teacher contemporary with *Hillel and with Jesus' early childhood; usually stricter than Hillel's, his school's opinions usually prevailed in the time of Jesus.

Shroud of Turin. The purported burial cloth of Jesus. Against its authenticity are the results of its radiocarbon dating; in its favor are its many Palestinian features (including traces of Palestinian plant fibers) and indications of first-century Jewish burial customs. The origin and character of the image have still not been resolved by investigators.

Sibylline Oracles. *Pseudepigraphic Jewish oracles modeled after pagan oracles of the same name, attributed to the ancient prophetess Sibyl and believed to have been collected from Jewish circles in Alexandria, Egypt and Asia Minor. Their composition spans a wide range of time, but most believe them to be mainly pre-Christian.

Similitudes of Enoch. These *parables of *1 *Enoch* (chaps. 37–71) may be from the first century B.C. or as late as the first century A.D. Because this section of Enoch alone is not represented in fragments from *Qumran, it remains disputed whether it is pre-Christian, although the majority of Enoch scholars currently argue that it is.

***Son of God.** The phrase meant many things to many different people in the ancient world, but it could strike some Roman pagans as portraying Jesus as a rival to the emperor. Most *New Testament texts evoke *Old Testament usage, where the term was applied generically to all Israel (Ex 4:22) but specifically to the Davidic king (2 Sam 7:14), especially (after 2 Samuel) the ultimate restorer (Ps 2:7; 89:27). Although most Jewish texts from the time of Jesus do not use it to designate the *Messiah, some do (*Essene interpreters of 2 Sam 7:14).

***Son of Man.** Hebrew and *Aramaic used the expression to mean "a human being," but Jesus used it as a designation for himself, based on the particular use in Daniel 7:13-14. There "one like a son of man," a representative for the *saints who suffer before receiving the *kingdom (7:25-27), receives the right to rule eternally. This passage was not usually applied to the *Messiah in Jesus' day, and not until he clearly cited Daniel 7 at his trial did his opponents fully understand the claim he was making.

Spirit. When capitalized in this commentary, it refers to the Spirit of God, the *Holy Spirit.

Stoicism. The most popular form of Greek philosophy in Paul's day. Although most

people were not Stoics, many Stoic ideas were widely disseminated. For more detail, see comment on Acts 17:18.

Suetonius. A Roman historian whose early-second-century A.D. biographies of first-century A.D. emperors contain much useful information.

***Synagogues.** Assembly places used by Jewish people for public prayer, Scripture readings and community meetings.

Synoptic Gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke; called "synoptic" because they overlap so much, sharing common sources (probably especially Mark and "Q").

Tacitus. A Roman historian whose early-second-century history of first-century Rome is among our most dependable sources for that era (albeit often tainted with Tacitus's cynicism).

Targum. A paraphrase of the Hebrew Bible into the *Aramaic vernacular. Although it is impossible to date the extant written targums, the activity of translation is as old as Nehemiah 8:8 and could have developed into expanded paraphrases at an early date.

***Tax gatherers.** A despised group of Jewish people who collected taxes for the government at a profit. Rome allowed wealthy men to contract with their own cities or districts to see to it that taxes were paid; because they had to cover any shortfall themselves, they were not inclined to have mercy on their clients. Herod the Great had used local taxes to finance not only the Jerusalem temple and his palaces but also pagan temples in *Gentile enclaves in Palestine, an action that had undoubtedly further alienated his people. Tax collectors thus appeared as collaborators with the occupying pagan power. Some tax collectors were customs agents, collecting customs taxes from traveling merchants. "Publican" is a modern English mistranslation of a Greek term that simply meant "*tax gatherer." The Romans did not use literal *publicanoi,* a special kind of tax farmers, in the Palestine of Jesus' day, but there were many tax collectors there.

Testament of Job. A *Hellenistic Jewish account of Job's suffering and triumph, maybe from Egypt and often dated to the first century B.C. or the first century A.D. (though some argue that at least part of the work is no earlier than the late second century).

Testament of Moses. Some think this document derives from the Maccabean era; it could also be dated after A.D. 70 (cf. 6:9), but probably it dates to around the mid-first century A.D. (it describes only *part* of the temple being burned).

Testament of Solomon. Probably a non-Christian Jewish work from about the third century A.D., possibly from Asia Minor; its exorcist rites reflect thorough familiarity with ancient magical texts.

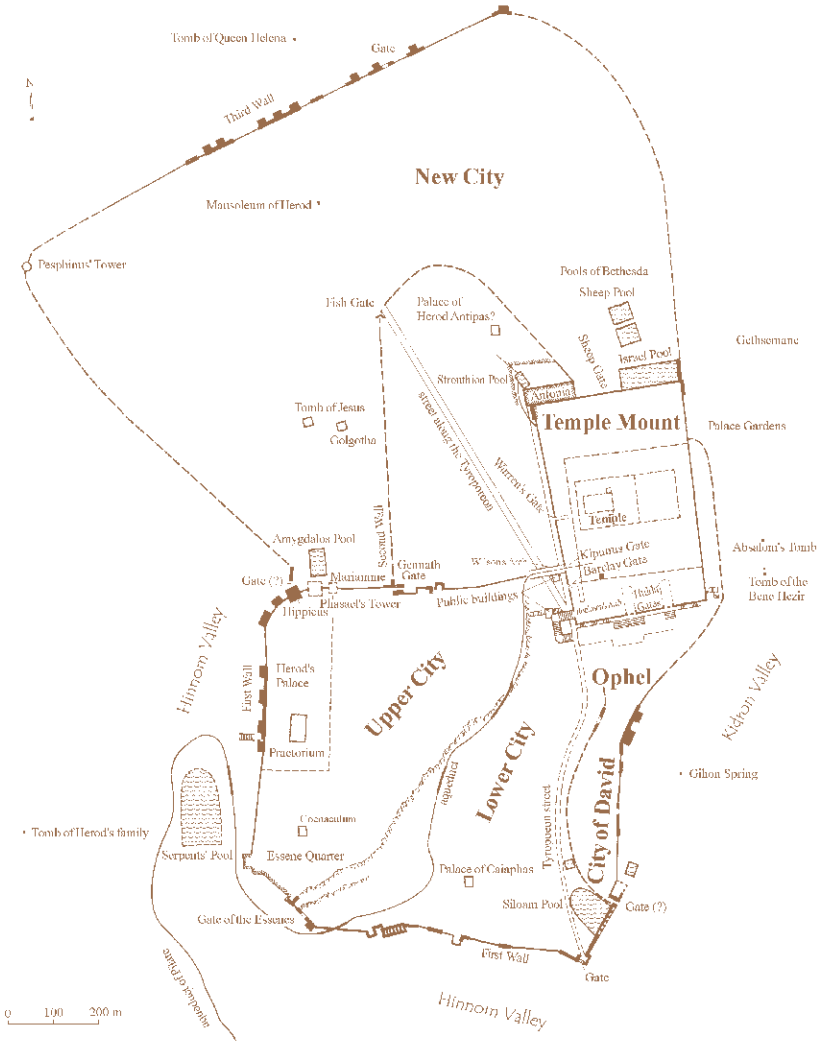
Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Probably a mainly pre-Christian Jewish work with some Christian interpolations. Its date is uncertain. *Pseudepigraphic "testaments," or final instructions, are left by each of Jacob's twelve sons for their children.

Theon. A Greek *rhetorician whose manual of rhetoric is helpful in reconstructing ancient speaking and writing styles (along with handbooks by *Quintilian and others).

***Zealots.** Jewish revolutionaries who became prominent by this name especially shortly before the first Jewish war (A.D. 66–70). Seeking to exonerate his people before the Romans, *Josephus marginalized them as robbers and troublemakers, but Zealot sympathizers were almost certainly widespread, apparently even among many *Pharisees and some younger Sadducees. Although "Zealots" technically refers to only one of the resistance groups, modern writers have often used the term as a convenient title for the entire resistance movement.

Maps & Charts

Map of Jerusalem



PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

MACEDONIA
Amphipolis
Apollonia
Philipi
Neapolis
Berea
Thessalonica
BITHYNIA
and
PONTUS
THESSALIA
Troas
MYSIA
AEGEAN
SEA
Thyatira
ASIA
PHRYGIA
GALATIA
Pisidian
Antioch
ACHAIA
Iconium
Lystra
Corinth
Cenchrea
Athens
Ephesus
TAURUS MTS.
Derbe
Tarsus
PAMPHYLIA
CILICIA
LYCIA
Antioch
Seleucia
Rhodes
CRETE
CYPRUS
Sidon
SYRIA
Tyre
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
SCALE IN MILES
0
100
200
Caesarea
PALESTINE
Jerusalem
ARABIA
PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

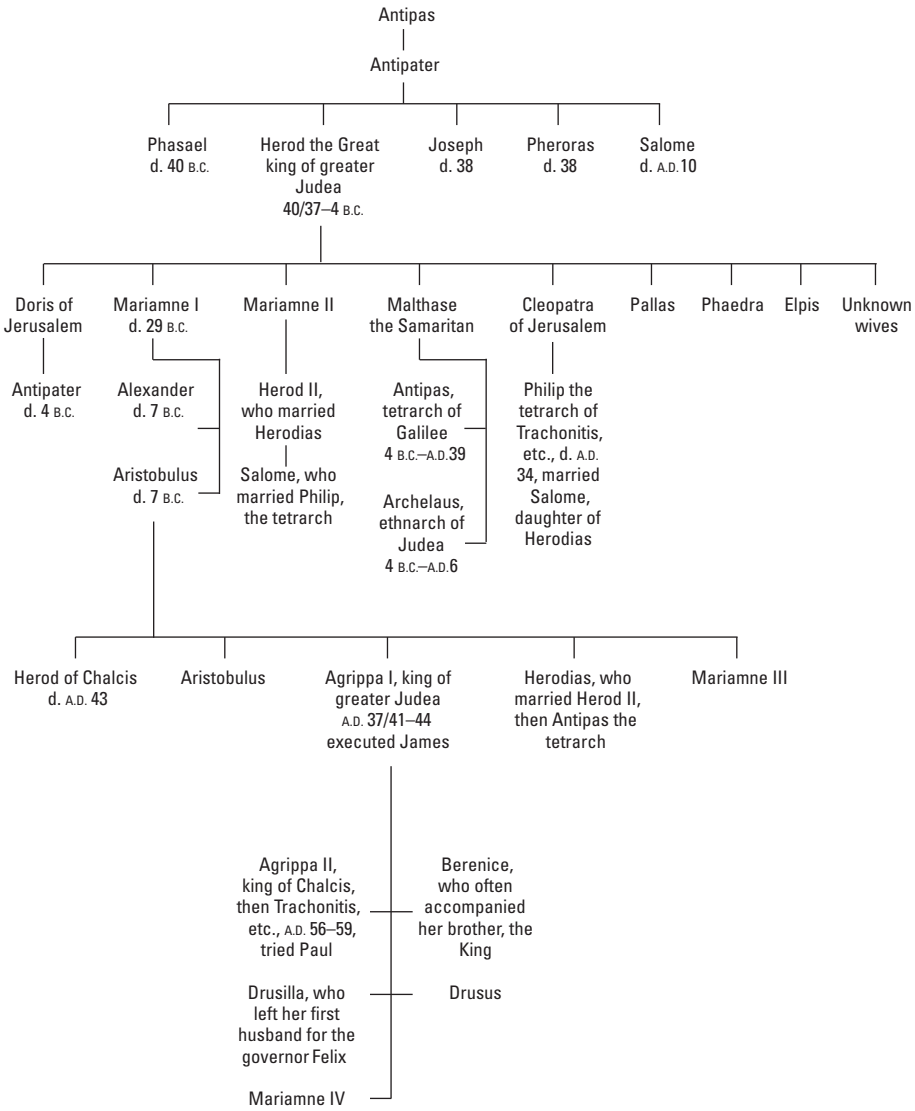
PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

The New Testament World: A Chronology

ROME (rulers)	PALESTINE (government)	JUDAISM	CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS
		■ Dead Sea Scrolls (2nd century B.C. through mid-first century A.D.) Jewish teachers:	
■ Augustus (27 B.C.–A.D. 14) ◊ hailed as "Savior" ◊ Pax Romana	■ Herod the Great (c. 37–4 B.C.)	■ Shemaya, Abtalion ■ Hillel and Shammai	■ Birth of Jesus (c. 7 B.C.?)
	Archelaus, ethnarch (4 B.C.–A.D. 6)		■ Return from Egypt to Galilee
		■ Annas, high priest (A.D. 6–15)	■ Work for carpenters in Nazareth (4 miles from Sepphoris)
	■ Judas's revolt and Sepphoris burned (A.D. 6) ■ Roman procurators over Judea (A.D. 6–37)	■ Caiaphas, high priest (A.D. 18–26)	
■ Tiberius (A.D. 14–37) ◊ patron of Sejanus ◊ expels Jews from Rome	■ Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee (4 B.C.–A.D. 39) ■ Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26 or 27 to 36 or 37); probable client of Sejanus	■ School of Shammai predominates ■ Gamaliel I a prominent Pharisaic teacher (School of Hillel)	■ John the Baptist, Jesus begin public ministry (c. A.D. 27) (Lk 3:1; Jn 2:20) ■ Jesus crucified (c. A.D. 30) ■ Church begins in Jerusalem ■ Hellenist movement (Acts 6) ■ Stephen's stoning ■ Paul converted (c. 32) ■ Church in Antioch, Gentile expansion
■ Gaius Caligula (37–41) ◊ tries to set up his image in the temple	■ Herod Agrippa I, popular king (37–44) ◊ dies in Acts 12:23; Josephus (44)	■ Theudas's revolt (c. 45)	■ Apocalyptic ideas flourish probably due to Gaius (cf. 2 Thess 2:3-4)
■ Claudius (41–54) ◊ patron of Pallas ◊ expels Jews from Rome over "Chrestus" (possibly 49)	■ Procurators (44–66) and Herod Agrippa II (c. 50–92, over various territories)	■ Simeon b. Gamaliel ■ Rich (Sadducean) priests and Galilean landlords oppressing the poor	■ Paul's first missionary journey (45–48) ■ Jerusalem Council (Acts 15; c. 49) ■ Second Journey (50–53): Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth; 1–2 Thessalonians ■ Mid-fifties: 1 Corinthians; Romans
■ Nero (54–68) ◊ murders, orgies, bestiality, matricide	■ Felix: corrupt client of Pallas (52–60)	■ Socioeconomic tensions building; Zealots arise	■ Paul caught in temple, taken to Caesarea (c. 58–60) ■ James written?

ROME (rulers)	PALESTINE (government)	JUDAISM	CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS
	■ Festus: fair procurator (60–62)		■ Paul sent to Rome (c. 60–62)
			■ Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon; c. 60–62)
			■ Paul must address philosophy, Hellenistic and Jewish mysticism, and household codes
	■ Festus dies (62); replaced by corrupt govenors		■ Paul probably released after 2 years (62)
			■ James brother of Jesus martyred (62)
			■ 1 Timothy, Titus
			■ Paul's reimprisonment
■ Fire of Rome (64) ■ Nero burns Christians alive (64)			■ 1–2 Peter; 2 Timothy; Mark? (c. 64)
	■ Massacres in Caesarea, Decapolis		■ Peter and Paul executed (c. 64)
		■ War with Rome (66–70)	■ Jerusalem church flees
			■ Hebrews written (c. 68)?
■ Nero dies; replaced by Galba, Otho, Vitellius (68–69) ■ Vespasian (69–79)		■ Jerusalem falls; temple destroyed (70) ■ Sadducees, other groups disbanded ■ Johanan ben Zakkai reorganizes Pharisaism ■ Gamaliel II, Samuel ha-Katon; troubles with "schismatics" (many possibly Jewish Christians; c. 85)	■ False prophets say the end has come (c. 70) ■Luke-Acts? (Greco-Roman) ■ Matthew? (Syrian-Jewish)
■ Titus (79–81)			
■ Domitian (81–96) ◊ later in his reign, demands worship ◊ Christians and others persecuted			■ John (90s) ■ 1, 2, 3 John ■ Revelation
		■ Akiba, Ishmael	■ Gentile Christianity overshadowing Jewish Christianity in many areas, understanding its roots less
■ Nerva (96–98) ■ Trajan (98–117) ■ Hadrian (117–138)	■ Jerusalem paganized (Aelia Capitolina, 135)	■ Bar Kochba revolt (132–135)	■ *Justin Martyr ■ Irenaeus, Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian
		■ R. Judah ha-Nasi I (c. 200) codifies the Mishnah (later Amoraic rabbis' opinions and rulings codified in the Gemara)	

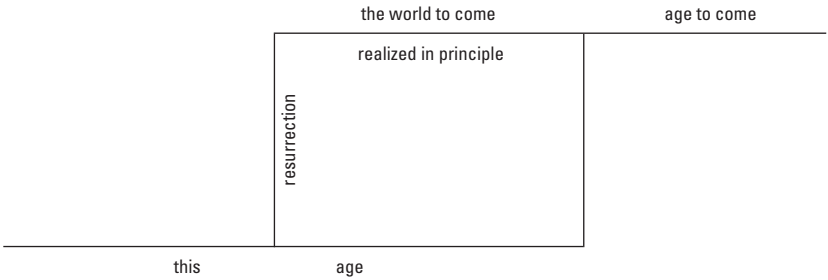
Major Figures in the Herodian Family



From Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992). Used with permission.

Jewish Eschatology

Christian Eschatology



George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 68. Used with permission.

A Chiasmus (Acts 2:22-36)

A This one [Jesus] . . . you crucified and killed

B But God raised Him up, having loosed the pangs of death

C David says . . .
MEN, BROTHERS, IT IS NECESSARY TO SPEAK TO YOU BOLDLY

D That the patriarch David died and was buried
(and his tomb is with us to this day)

E Being therefore a prophet, and knowing

F That God had sworn with an oath to him

G That He would set one of his descendants on his throne

H He foresaw and spoke

I Of the resurrection of Christ

J That He was not abandoned to Hades

J' Nor did His flesh see corruption

I' This Jesus God raised up

H' Of that we are all witnesses

G' Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God

F' Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit

E' He has poured out this which you see and hear

D' For David did not ascend into the heavens

C' David says . . .
ASSUREDLY, THEREFORE, LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL KNOW

B' That God has made Him Lord and Christ

A' This Jesus whom you crucified

From Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant: A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 65-66. Used with permission.

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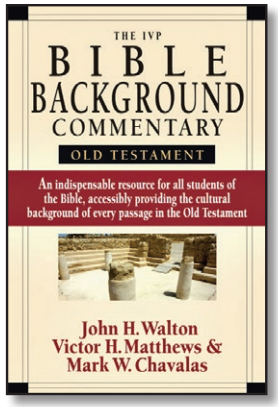

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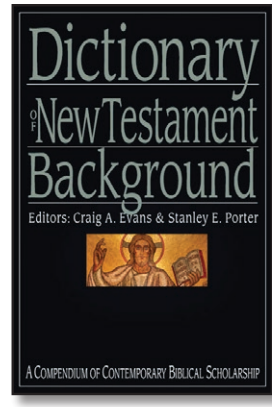

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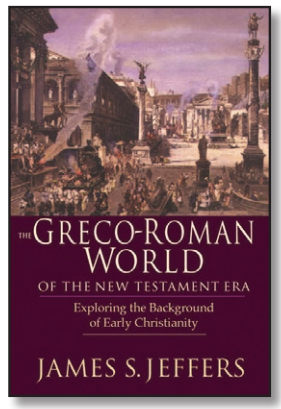

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